

SSTV MIDST Method for Explicating and Analyzing Poetry

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Instructions: The first couple of times you read through the poem, focus on speaker and story. Working stanza by stanza, note what is literally happening as the poem progresses from beginning to end. Once you have a general feel for the poem and speaker on a literal level, then turn your focus to the specific rhetorical devices that create tone and mood and analyze HOW they affect the meaning of the poem as a whole.

Speaker: What can you infer about the speaker from the poem? Who is he/she/it? (never assume the speaker is the poet) Consider the speaker's language—what does his or her diction, syntax, imagery, reveal about him or her?

Story: What is the speaker talking about? What's going on in this poem?

Tone: Now put the two together—what is the speaker's attitude about the subject/story of the poem?

Vehicles: Now analyze **how** the poet communicates the speaker's tone. What literary and rhetorical devices does the poet use as a vehicle for driving this meaning home to the reader? Consider the following:

Metaphor: (including similes, personification, etc.—all variations of the language of comparison) What comparisons does the speaker make? Why? What effects do they have on the reader (mood)? What do they say about the speaker's tone?

Imagery: What images (visual, aural, tactile, olfactory, gustatory) does the speaker present? What ideas or feelings do they evoke in the reader? What do they reveal about the speaker's tone?

Diction: What specific word choices reveal the speaker's tone? Consider the specific (and possibly multiple) denotations and connotations of word choices. Why one word over another with similar denotations? What effects do those specific choices have?

Structure (& Syntax): Whether a poem is open or closed form, it has structure, and that structure contributes to and helps communicate its meaning. Consider stanza divisions—why are the lines grouped the way they are—what central idea or image forms each stanza; what relates each particular group of lines? Consider also the progression of the poem's ideas, repetition, line breaks, etc. If the poem is closed form, consider the prescribed stanza division, meter, and rhyme scheme. What effects do they have on the meaning of the poem?

Title: Now look back at the title. What significance does it lend to the overall meaning of the poem?

Speaker
Story
Tone
Vehicles
 Metaphor
 Imagery
 Diction
 Structure
 Title