



How to Analyse a Poem: A Simple Guide

KS4 ENGLISH LITERATURE

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What Does It Mean to Analyse a Poem?

Analysing a poem means looking closely at how the poet has written it and why they made certain choices. It's not just about understanding what the poem says—it's about discovering how the words, sounds, and structures create meaning and feeling.

Think of it like investigating a magic trick. You don't just watch and be amazed; you pause, rewind, and look at each tiny movement to understand how the magician created the illusion.

Step 1: Read and Understand the Surface Meaning

Start by reading the poem several times. Ask yourself: **What is this poem about?** Who is speaking? What story or idea is being told? Don't worry about deeper meanings yet—just understand the basics. Some poems tell stories, some express feelings, and some describe things or ideas.

Step 2: Look for Literary Techniques

Poets use special tools to make their writing powerful. **Metaphors** compare two different things ("Her laugh was music"). **Similes** use "like" or "as" ("Brave as a lion"). **Personification** gives human qualities to objects ("The angry wind howled"). **Alliteration** repeats the same sound at the start of words ("The silver sun shone").

Finding these techniques is important because they show how the poet is trying to make you feel or think in a certain way.

Think of it like looking at a painting and noticing the artist used bright colours in one corner to draw your eye there. The technique does a job.

Step 3: Examine the Structure and Sound

Rhyme schemes (patterns of rhyming words) and **rhythm** affect how the poem feels. Read it aloud—does it flow smoothly or jolt along? **Punctuation** matters too. A line without a full stop keeps you reading faster, while periods make you pause.

Step 4: Explore Mood and Tone

What feeling does the poem create? Is it sad, angry, joyful, or mysterious? The poet's **tone** (their attitude) and the **mood** (the feeling created) are choices they've made through word selection and imagery.

Step 5: Consider Context and Meaning

Finally, think about **why** the poet wrote this. What message or emotion were they trying to share? What does it mean to you? Good analysis connects the poet's techniques to their purpose.

Remember: **analysing a poem isn't about finding one "correct" answer**. Different readers find different meanings, and that's perfectly fine!