

A.P. ENGLISH

Audino

Poetry Analysis

"Deboning the Fish"

(. . . 'fish' not coincidentally a symbol, poetry being the most RESURRECTed and SOULful art form of all)

Remember: A poem is usually (with a few modern exceptions) also a 'story.' Something happens in it; in fact, something usually happened before the poem was born to inspire it. It will have a beginning, a middle and an end. Look for these, so that you can lift out the skeleton of the 'fish,' or the meaning of the poem, revealing both the thing that binds and the heart itself.

1. Start with the TITLE, or the 'head.' It will tell you plenty. Brainstorm.
2. Now read the poem for LITERAL MEANING (denotation.) Resist the urge to read for interpretation. If you miss the literal meaning of the poem, who knows what oddball interpretation you might concoct? Look for complete sentences (syntactical units) rather than line by line. READ SEVERAL TIMES.
3. Circle/ look up words you don't know. Underline key/ repetitive words or phrases.
4. Look at the END of the poem, or the 'tail,' and back up to the BEGINNING, and back up to the TITLE. Do you see anything yet? Okay, so there are no beady little white headlights shining up straight into your brain from the poem (i.e. there's no epiphany.) Be patient.
5. Begin reading for INTERPRETATION (connotation.) First, always identify the CONTROLLING IMAGE at the beginning and at the end of a poem. Often, this image is either the same or related.
6. Look for SHIFTS in meaning, action, speaker, attitude, time or place.
 - Especially if the poem is structured into stanzas, look for ORGANIC PROCESS, especially in relation to movement through TIME:
 - a day (morning to night)
 - a year (seasons)
 - a person's life cycle (youth to old age)
 - Look for key words (but, yet)

- Separating punctuation (dashes, periods, colons, etc.)
 - Changes in line and/or stanza length
 - Irony
 - How does structure affect the meaning?
 - What happens *before* the change?
 - What happens *after* the change?
7. Always identify controlling GENDER.
 - Particularly FEMININE. (Sorry gentlemen, but both nature and the muses are feminine -- the sky, fire and wind being notable exceptions.)
 8. Look for the CONTROLLING IMAGE again, and/or any EXTENDED METAPHOR or SYMBOL.
 9. Look for words rich with connotation and make ASSOCIATIONS. (Warning: Do not overinterpret! Oddball interpretations are rather pathetic, especially when they aren't funny.)
 10. Look for IMAGERY and identify the physical sense (there are five, unless you believe in the sixth sense) that it appeals to.
 11. Identify accurately BIBLICAL and MYTHOLOGICAL ALLUSIONS.
 12. Look for odd/playful use of language, words that sound musical or resemble something else. (Onomatopoeia.)
 13. Look for REPETITION of sounds, syllables, words and phrases. (Alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhyme,)
 14. Who is the SPEAKER?
 15. Who/what is being addressed?
 16. What is the occasion?
 17. Identify both the speaker's and the poet's emotional ATTITUDE or TONE.
 - Look for speaker's attitude toward self, other characters, and the subject.
 - Attitudes of characters other than the speaker.
 - Poet's attitude toward the speaker, other characters and finally toward the speaker.
 18. GO BACK AND LOOK AT THE TITLE AGAIN.
 19. READ THE POEM AGAIN.

NOW YOU CAN FASHION A

THEME: First list what the poem is about (subject), then determine what the poet is saying about each of those subjects.