

# Interpreting Poetry

Interpret means "to explain, or clarify the meaning of". When you are interpreting poems, you have to talk about what *you* think a poem means. What are the big ideas the author is addressing? Why did the author choose a particular format for the poem? The questions that you can answer in an interpretation are almost endless, but here are three big things you should look at when you begin interpreting a poem:

1. **Meaning**: This is like the theme of the poem. What is the greater significance of the author is writing about. Is there a message? Is the author painting a picture with words? Is the author asking an important question? What do you think the author wants you, the reader, to take from the experience of reading the poem?
2. **Language**: Poetry is about language. When you are interpreting a poem, you should pay careful attention to the author's craft of using language. Is there a rhyme scheme? What are some especially interesting or exciting words, and why do you think the author chose those particular words? Do you notice any figurative language such as similes or metaphors? Does the poet use alliteration or assonance?
3. **Structure**: The form of a poem can be very strict and defined like a haiku or a sonnet, or it can be very loose and free. When you interpret a poem you should look for things like rhyming couplets, stanzas and the overall shape of the poem. How is the poem arranged? Where did the poet choose to put in line breaks? How does the form of the poem affect the overall experience of reading it?