

AP English Literature and Composition

Annotating a Poem

1. **Title:** Make notes beside the title about your initial reactions. After you have annotated the poem, return to the title to reevaluate its significance.
2. **Speaker:** Draw a square around the pronouns in the poem, and choose first, second, or third person as point of view. Consider the speaker not in terms of a name but in terms of character traits. Is this person speaking to someone or something in particular? (Check the title again for clues.) Make some notes about your ideas.
3. **Setting and Situation:** What is the poem's temporal and physical setting? What is the situation described in the poem? At this point, stick to the facts. What do you know for sure? Make notes in the margin.
4. **Diction:** Which of the important words (verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs) in the poem or passage are general and abstract, and which are specific and concrete? Are the important words formal, informal, colloquial, or slang? Are there words with strong connotations, words we might refer to as "loaded"?
5. **Figurative Language:** Circle similes and metaphors and draw an arrow to the comparison. Then, consider and mark possible symbols—elements that might represent something more than just themselves.
6. **Imagery:** Are the images—the parts of the passage we experience with our five senses—concrete, or do they depend on figurative language to come alive? Place brackets around descriptions of how things look, feel, sound, smell, or taste. Mark any patterns of images that are repeated throughout the poem.
7. **Rhyme:** Does the poem have a regular rhyme scheme? If so, what is it? What other types of rhymes does the poem include, such as internal rhymes, sight rhymes, or near rhymes? How does the rhyme scheme affect the poem's sound, tone, or meaning?
8. **Meter:** Does the poem have a regular meter? If so, what is it? Read the poem aloud. How does the meter affect the tone of the poem? For instance, does the meter make the poem seem formal, informal, celebratory, somber?
9. **Form:** Does the poem follow a traditional form? If so, which? If the poem follows a traditional form, but has untraditional content, what might be the poet's purpose in subverting the traditional form? If the poem does not follow a traditional form, what sort of logic structures the poem? For instance, why are the stanzas broken as they are? What is the relationship among the stanzas?
10. **Structure:** Consider the form, meter, rhyme scheme, breaks between lines, length of stanzas as well as dialogue, change in time. Draw lines to separate the poem into organizational sections, and make notes about how the various aspects help to organize the poem's ideas and to identify the "turns."
11. **Poetic Syntax:** What examples of enjambment can you find? How does the enjambment affect the sound and meaning of the line? What examples of caesura can you find? What is the impact of the caesura? If the poem has sentences, are they long or short or a combination of the two? How does the length of the sentences relate to the meaning of the poem?
12. **Sound:** How does the poem use rhyme, meter, form, and poetic syntax to create sound? How does the poem use repetition, such as alliteration and assonance, to create sound? How do the sounds created in the poem connect to the meaning of the poem?
13. **Tone:** Identify the tone of the poem (or tones if there is a shift). Write the tone word(s) in the margin and draw arrows to elements of the poem that support the tone. Use your tone chart for precise vocabulary.
14. What devices or techniques featured in the poem contribute **most** to the tone and meaning? How do they create the poem's tone and meaning? [second column]
15. What are the poet's observations about human nature, the human condition, or human motivation? In other words, what is the author saying about the abstract idea around which the poem centers? [third column]
16. Write a theme statement that follows this framework: In (author's) ("title of poem"), a poem about (abstract idea), (devices/techniques) reveal (author's observation, the human condition, or human motivation).