

Poetry Intro Quotes

"Poetry makes the ordinary extraordinary."

- Lucien Stryk

"Poetry is one person talking, whispering to another. Connection is one of the most incredible experiences that a human being can have. Connect with your innermost feelings, render them through language in a poem, then give that to someone else."

-Rita Dove, U.S. Poet Laureate (1995)

When power leads man toward arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses.

— John Fitzgerald Kennedy

You will not find poetry anywhere unless you bring some of it with you.

— Joseph Joubert

Poetry is the art of substantiating shadows, and of lending existence to nothing.

— Edmund Burke

With me poetry has not been a purpose, but a passion.

- Edgar Allen Poe

Poetry is boned with ideas, nerved and blooded with emotions, all held together by the delicate, tough skin of words.

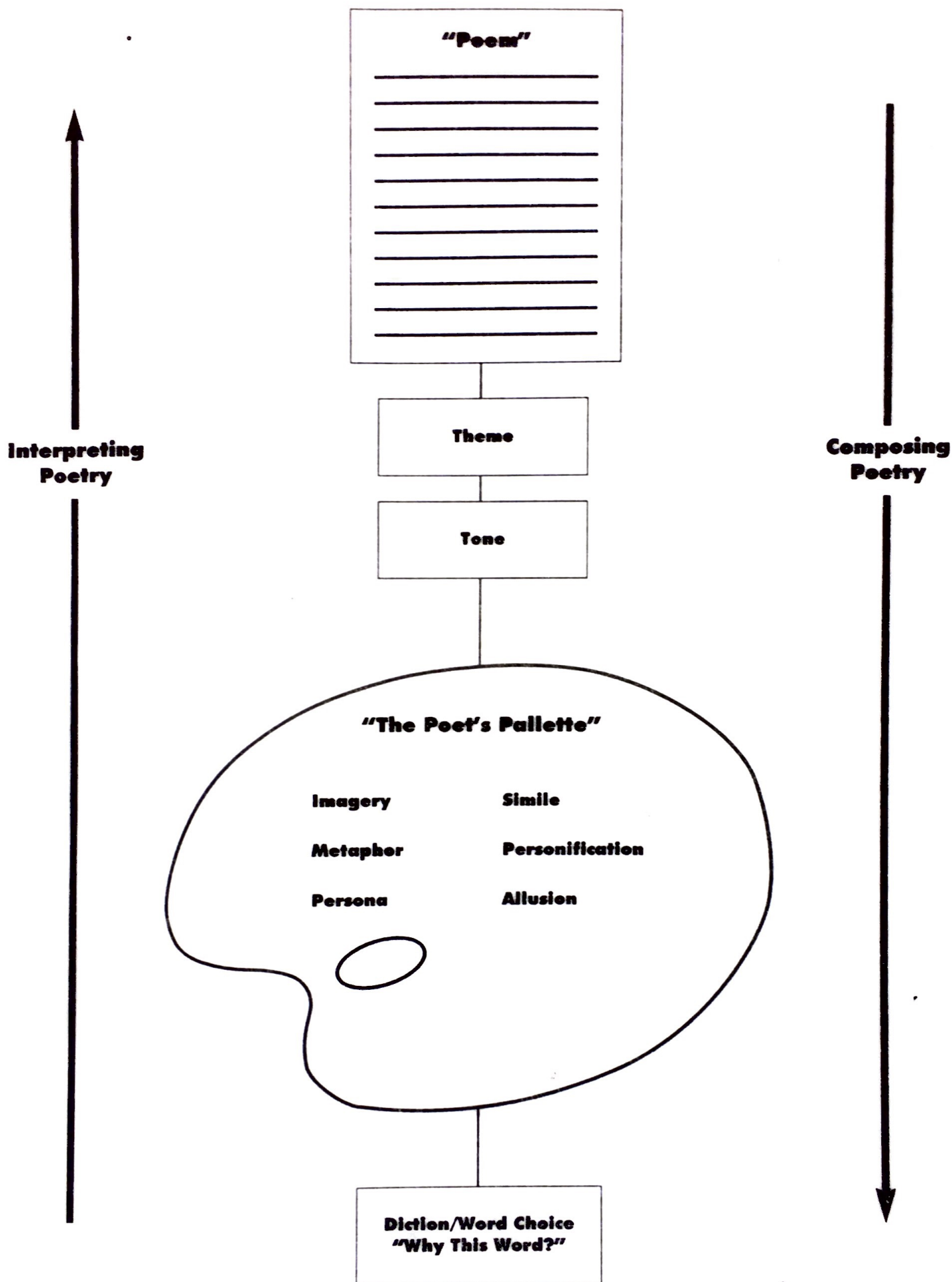
— Paul Engle

Poetry comes nearer to vital truth than history.

— Plato

The job of the poet is to render the world—to see it and report it without loss, without perversion. No poet ever talks about feelings. Only sentimental people do.

— Mark Van Doren



QUESTIONS TO ASK TO "CRACK" AND APPRECIATE A POEM

Poetry is an art. A poem is a deliberately created thing. The materials a poet uses are words, and words alone (with the possible exception of placement on the page). Therefore, read and ponder every significant word in the poem.

1. What words are unusual? Look them up. What words are connotative? What groups of words are linked connotatively--by the emotional associations they carry?
2. What images are presented, either straight out or in metaphor (analogical language)? What senses are appealed to? Are the images pleasant or unpleasant? Do they fit together to make in any way a unified impression, or are they "scattered"?
3. What is the dramatic situation? Who is speaking, the poet himself or an imagined character in an imagined mood? (Don't too quickly assume the use of "I" means that the poem is autobiographical.)
4. What is the "tone" of voice? Formal or informal? Relaxed, tense, angry, exultant, ironic? Something else?
5. What details seem clearly to be symbols? A symbol is a tangible object, usually, used to represent a larger, more universal abstract idea. Examples: elements of nature, such as "winter" for grief or death; man-made objects, such as "plastic" for fake or cheap; an event, such as a journey for the course of man's life on earth.
6. Trace the progress of ideas or series of emotions which the poet leads you as a reader through. Note whether these ideas or emotions are developed by contrasts or opposites (they usually are). Outline the poem if possible. Not all poems present ideas, but most poems deal with human emotions. Try to feel what the poet felt.
7. Notice any sound effects -- in the rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, etc. -- and see whether they fortify the impression or meaning of the poem or give the reader an extra dimension of pleasure.
8. "Put it back together" by reading it over aloud. See it as a whole, living work of art, a truly difficult and complex achievement if it is a good poem.
9. Now you can ask, "Do I like it?" A poem that was so hard that it turned you off at first, may turn out to speak to you much more than an easy one which does little more than express platitudes in jangling rhyme and meter. But also, poetry is personal, and a poem ~~most~~ people like may not fit in with your temperament or experience, or vice versa.

ABSTRACT/CONCRETE

"I no sooner have an idea," said Goethe, "than it turns into an image." That, typically, is the way the poetic mind works. Here are examples, all from Shakespeare, of how abstract ideas are turned into concrete images—images of *things*, simple and familiar.

ABSTRACT IDEAS

CONCRETE IMAGES

We mean you no harm.

To you our swords have leaden points, Mark Antony . . .

Just because you're so proper, does that mean other people cannot enjoy themselves?

Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous,
There shall be no more cakes and ale?

Though he is prosperous and secure, you can annoy him in little ways.
And though he in a fertile climate dwell,
Plague him with flies.

Make the best of it.

Men do their broken weapons rather use
Than their bare hands.

ABSTRACT/CONCRETE

We cannot trust anyone.

Where we are,
There's daggers in men's smiles . . .

Ungrateful children are a source of suffering to their parents.

How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child.

I have much to worry about.

O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!

People who fail lose many friends.

Men shut their doors against a setting sun.

I often change my mind.

I am a feather for each wind that blows.

You are cowardly, stupid, and unreliable.

He that trusts to you,
Where he should find you lions, finds you
hares;
Where foxes, geese; you are no surer, no,
Than is the coal of fire upon the ice
Or hailstone in the sun.

Extra Pound (1885 – 1972)*

IN A STATION OF THE METRO

1916

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Philip Larkin (1922 – 1985)*

WEDDING-WIND

1951

The wind blew all my wedding-day,
And my wedding-night was the night of the high wind;
And a stable door was banging, again and again,
That he must go and shut it, leaving me
Stupid in candlelight, hearing rain,
Seeing my face in the twisted candlestick,
Yet seeing nothing. When he came back
He said the horses were restless, and I was sad
That any man or beast that night should lack
The happiness I had.

Now in the day
All's ravelled under the sun by the wind's blowing.
He has gone to look at the floods, and I
Carry a chipped pail to the chicken-run,
Set it down, and stare. All is the wind
Hunting through clouds and forests, thrashing
My apron and the hanging cloths on the line.

516 LISTENING TO A VOICE

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939)*

THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE

1892

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

James C. Kilgore (1928-1988)

THE WHITE MAN PRESSED THE LOCKS 1970

Driving down the concrete artery,
Away from the smoky heart,
Through the darkening, blighted body,
Pausing at varicose veins,
The white man pressed the locks
on all the sedan's doors,
Sped toward the white corpuscles
in the white arms
hugging the black city.

James Stephens (1882 - 1950)*

THE WIND 1915

The wind stood up and gave a shout:
He whistled on his fingers and
Kicked the withered leaves about
And thumped the branches with his hand
And said he'd kill and kill and kill,
And so he will and so he will.

Countee Cullen (1903 - 1946)

FOR A LADY I KNOW 1925

She even thinks that up in heaven
Her class lies late and snores,
While poor black cherubs rise at seven
To do celestial chores.

Robert Frost (1874 - 1963)*

STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING

1923

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Acquainted with the Night

I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.
I have passed by the watchman on his beat
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
When far away an interrupted cry
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-by;
And further still at an unearthly height,
One luminary clock against the sky

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Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.
I have been one acquainted with the night.

1928

FACING EVIL WITH BILL MOYERS: MAYA ANGELOU RECITES A POEM

(A poem synthesized from Paul L. Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask" and Maya's poems "When I Look at Myself", "For Old Black Men")

We wear the masks, that grins and lies
It shades our cheek and hides our eyes.
This debt we pay to human guile
with torn and bleeding hearts...
we smile and mouth with myriad subtleties.
Why should that world be otherwise
in counting all our tears and sighs,
Nay let them only see us while
we wear the mask!

We smile but oh my God
Our tears to thee from tortured souls arise
And we sing Oh Baby doll, now we sing...
the clay is vile beneath our feet
and long the mile
but let the world think otherwise!
We wear the mask!

When I think about myself
I almost laugh my self to death.
My life has been one great big joke!
X | A dance was walked, a song was spoke;
I laugh so hard...AHA! HA! I almos' choke!
When I think about myself.

Seventy years in these folks world,
the chile I works fo' calls me girl!
I say HA! HA! HA! Yes mam!
For workin sake.

X | I'm too proud to bend and too po' to break.
So...I laugh! until my stomach ache.
When I think about myself,
my folks can make me split my side
I laugh so hard, HA! HA! HA! HA! I nearly died!

The tales they tell sound just like lying
They grow the fruit but eat the rind.
Hummm Huh! I laugh uhuh huh huh...
Until I start to cry, when I think about myself
and my folks and the little children.

My fathers sit on benches,
Their flesh count every plank,
the slats leave dents of darkness
deep in their withered flank,
and they gnarled like broken candles
all waxed and burnt profound.
They say, but sugar it was our submission
and that made your world go ground.

There in those pleated faces
I see the auction block,
the chains and slavery's coffles,
the whip and lash and stock.

My fathers speak in voices
that shred my fact and sound
they say, but sugar it was our submission
and that made your world go round.

They laugh to conceal their crying,
they shuffled through their dreams,
X | they stepped and fetched to country,
and wrote the blues in screams.
I understand their meaning,
it could and did derive
from living on the ledge of death
they kept my race alive
by wearing the mask! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!