



## The Betty East Tutoring Center at Victoria College

Johnson Hall, Room 106  
2200 E. Red River St.  
Victoria, TX 77901  
361-571-6473

[www.victoriacollege.edu/tutoringcenter](http://www.victoriacollege.edu/tutoringcenter)

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### Analyzing Poetry

A poem must be read more than once to really understand it. Read the poem straight through the first time to get a general idea of the poem's style and subject. Then, re-read it and try to understand the meaning and organizational structure. Ask yourself the following questions:

#### Interpreting:

- What does the title contribute to the poem? Why do you think the author chose that name for the poem?
- Who is the speaker (persona), and what kind of person are they?
- To whom is the speaker speaking?
- What is the situation or occasion?
- At what time is this occurring? Examples: history, present time, morning, evening, winter, summer, etc.
- Where is all this taking place? Examples: inside, outdoors, in a city, in the woods, Germany, New York City, etc.
- What is the purpose of this poem?

Now, to begin writing about your interpretation of the poem:

#### Brainstorming:

- State the main idea or theme of the poem in one sentence
- Discuss the tone of the poem and how the author achieves that tone through word choice (diction), punctuation, imagery, etc.
- Point out words that are well-chosen for the tone of the poem and explain why they work
- Discuss the imagery, or appeal to the senses, of the poem and how the imagery is used
- Point out examples of metaphor, simile, and personification; explain their appropriateness in the poem and the affects these things have on the reader.
- Look for and explain any symbolism
- Find and explain any examples of paradox, overstatement, understatement, and irony
- Point out any references (also called allusions) and their function
- Identify and discuss any significant sound repetition, rhyme, or rhythm

#### Explication:

Think of an explication as the explanation of the poem. Unless required to go into detail about the poem, be selective and consider only the details of the poem that are significant and vital to explaining the interpretation of the poem. The explication should demonstrate ability to:

- Identify the main idea or theme
- Understand the issues and meanings the poet reveals
- Explain some of the poetic devices used to achieve the author's purpose
- Discuss especially important or unique aspects of the poem