**Explicating Poetry To Describe The Possible Meaning Of A Poem**

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**Abstract**

*Poetry is* *the* [literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/literature) *that evokes a concentrated imaginative* [awareness](https://www.britannica.com/topic/aesthetics) *of experience or a specific emotional response through language chosen and arranged for its* [meaning](https://www.britannica.com/topic/meaning)*, sound, and* [rhythm](https://www.britannica.com/art/rhythm-poetry)*. There are feelings, thoughts, and ideas that can be difficult to explain and analyze. Poetry is a kind of language within languages that allows people regardless of age, sex, religion, sexual orientation, and even time eras to communicate with one another. When some people hear the word "Poetry", images of unfathomable scenes, words and phrases come to mind. Poetry explication is needed to describe the possible meanings and relationships of the words, images, and other small units that make up a poem. Writing an explication is an effective way for a reader to connect a poem’s plot and conflicts with its structural features. Since each poem is unique, there is no one way of going about this, butt the elements of analyzing poetry; to identify the meaning through its parts, give a sense of interpreting a poem: (1) Examine the structure of the poem, And (2) Examine the pattern of the poem.*

**Key words**: *Explicating Poetry, Meaning of a poem.*

**Introduction**

Many people grumble at the thought of reading poetry. They say it is either boring or hard to understand, or both. If it is not old poetry with archaic words and syntax, it is modern poetry stacked with literary allusions and elusive or cryptic phrasing. All of these objections are not invalid; when reading poetry, we are often reading the thoughts of a person who lived in a completely different time and culture, expressed in a manner unnatural to everyday language. Many students and even experienced readers and writers feel a great deal of anxiety about trying to understand the meaning of a poem. Poems can often seem mysterious and confusing. Knowing how to read a poem and where to look for themes and meaning can help make reading poetry and writing about it less intimidating. But poetry can be understood, and its excitement grows from the process of understanding it. For poet and reader alike, poetry is like a puzzle that, when put together, creates a beautiful image of truth and life.

Poetry expresses complex feelings. To understand the multiple meanings of a poem, readers must examine its words and phrasing from the perspectives of rhythm, sound, images, obvious meaning, and implied meaning. Readers then need to organize responses to the verse into a logical, point-by-point explanation. A good beginning involves asking questions that apply to most poetry. A good poem is like a puzzle; the most fascinating part is studying the individual pieces carefully and then putting them back together to see how beautifully the whole thing fits together. A poem can have a number of different "pieces" that need to look at closely in order to complete the poetic "puzzle."

At times, inference must play a large role in interpreting the meaning and purpose of a poem. Yet an inference cannot be made without incorporating the reader's own prior knowledge, experiences or bias. Because of its interpretive nature, poetry nearly begs readers to include pieces of themselves in their conclusions. While these inferences can be a viable part of a poem's interpretation, readers should beware of using them exclusively. When in doubt, stick with the poet's words. Dig deep and learn from them, rather than rushing to a snap judgment that is based too much on your own perspective. One way to attempt an explication of a poem is by examining each "piece" of the poem separately. An explication is simply an explanation of how all the elements in a poem work together to achieve the total meaning and effect.

**Disussions**

**Poetry Explication**

A poetry explication is a relatively short analysis which describes the possible meanings and relationships of the words, images, and other small units that make up a poem. Writing an explication is an effective way for a reader to connect a poem’s plot and conflicts with its structural features. This article reviews some of the important techniques of approaching and writing a poetry explication, and includes parts of two sample explications.

Explicating a poem means to explain, interpret or analyze a poem. It discusses the form, [type of rhyme scheme](http://www.poemofquotes.com/articles/rhyme-glossary.php) (abab, abbacc) and what theme/tone (serious, humorous, meaning) is used. The explication also analyzes [important techniques](http://www.poemofquotes.com/articles/poetry_technique.php) used (alliteration, metaphor, simile) which contribute to the overall poem.

An explication is not a statement of how the poem makes you feel, unless it is supported with analysis of specific lines and is not a personal reaction based on your background or mood.

Explications of poems are sometimes longer than the actual poem. When discussing sonnets or similar length poems, one page is usually enough. However with long, [narrative poems](http://www.poemofquotes.com/articles/narrative-poetry-history-and-use.php), they are naturally longer and the sdetails used are more selective.

Poetry can be a tiresome set of words when analyzing. The elements of analyzing poetry listed below will be helpfull to identify the meaning through its parts and give a sense of interpreting a poem. Since each poem is unique, there is no one way of going about this. Nonetheless, the general advice goes like this:

1. **Read the poem silently**, then read it aloud (if not in a testing situation). Repeat as necessary. All poetry was originally oral, it was sung or chanted; poetic form as we know it is an abstraction therefrom when writing replaced memory as a way of preserving poetic utterances, but the ghost of oral poetry never vanishes. Poems may be read silently to oneself, or may be read aloud solo or to other people. Although reading aloud to oneself raises eyebrows in many circles, few people find it surprising in the case of poetry. In fact, many poems reveal themselves fully only when they are read aloud. The characteristics of such poems include (but are not limited to) a strong narrative, regular poetic meter, simple content and simple form.
2. **Consider the poem as a dramatic situation** in which a speaker addresses an audience or another character. In this way, begin your analysis by identifying and describing the speaking voice or voices, the conflicts or ideas, and the language used in the poem.
3. **Determine the basic design of the poem** by considering the who, what, when, where, and why of the dramatic situation. Who is the speaker? Is the poet speaking to the reader directly or is the poem told through a fictional "persona"? To whom is he speaking? Can you trust the speaker? Who wrote the poem? Does the poet's life suggest any special point of view, such as a political affiliation, religious sect, career interest, musical talent, family or personal problems, travel, or handicap. Is the person male or female? Does the voice speak in first person (I, me, my, mine)? Does the speaker talk directly to a second person? Does the name of a character suggest extra meaning? What happen in the poem? When does the action occur? When was the poem written and in what country? Knowing something about the poet's life, times, and culture helps readers understand what's in a poem. Does the poem belong to a particular period or literary movement? For example, does the poem relate to imagism, confessional verse, the Beat movement, the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights era, the American Indian renaissance, or feminism? Where is the speaker? Why the speaker feel so?

To analyze the design of the poem, focus on the poem’s parts is a must, namely how the poem dramatizes conflicts or ideas in language. By concentrating on the parts, develop the understanding of the poem’s structure, and gather support and evidence for interpretations.

1. Examine the Structure of the Poem

* **Form**: Look at the number of lines, their length, their arrangement on the page. How does the form relate to the content? Is it a traditional form (e.g. sonnet, limerick) or "free form"? Why do you think the poem chose that form for his poem?
* **Movement**: How does the poem develop? Are the images and ideas developed chronologically, by cause and effect, by free association? Does the poem circle back to where it started, or is the movement from one attitude to a different attitude (e.g. from despair to hope)? It is important to read through a poem several times, at least once aloud. If it is a long poem, full concentration on key passages and look for repetition of specific words, phrases, or verses in the poem is really needed. Why is there a repeated reference to the sea in Robinson Jeffers's poetry? Why does the pronoun "we" recur in Gwendolyn Brooks' "We Real Cool"? Why does Edgar Lee Masters reprise epitaphs for Spoon River Anthology? If readers note repetition in the poem, they should decide why certain information seems to deserve the repetition.
* **Syntax**: How many sentences are in the poem? Are the sentences simple or complicated? Are the verbs in front of the nouns instead of in the usual "noun, verb" order? Why?
* **Punctuation**: What kind of punctuation is in the poem? Does the punctuation always coincide with the end of a poetic line? If so, this is called an **end-stopped line**. If there is no punctuation at the end of a line and the thought continues into the next line, this is called **enjambement**. Is there any punctuation in the middle of a line? Why do you think the poet would want you to pause halfway through the line?
* **Title**: What does the title mean? How does it relate to the poem itself? Is the title's meaning obvious? For example, does it mention a single setting and action? Does it imply multiple possibilities?. Does it strike a balance? Is there an obvious antithesis, as with Robert Frost's "Fire and Ice"? Is there historical significance to the title?

To analyze the design line by line, look for certain patterns to develop which provide insight into the dramatic situation, the speaker’s state of mind, or the poet’s use of details.

B. Examine the Pattern of the Poem:

* **Sound, tone, diction, and connotation :** Diction or Word Choice: Is the language colloquial, formal, simple, unusual? Do you know what all the words mean? If not, look them up. What moods or attitudes are associated with words that stand out for you? Analyzing diction and connotation; the meanings of words as well as the feelings and associations they carry is a good place to start for any poem. The use of specific words in the poem serve to create a [tone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tone_%28literary%29), an attitude taken towards the subject. For example, consider the words "slither" and "sneak." When used in a poem, the words conjure up images of a snake. The sibilant *s* sound reinforces the image. The connotations of the words suggest something surreptitious and undercover. From the tone, one can infer that the author is suspicious or fearful of the subject. What is the mood of the poem? Is it cheerful or jolly like limericks? Is it mysterious, provocative, zany, ominous, festive, fearful, or brooding? Does the mood change within the body of the work? Why does the mood shift? Where does the shift begin?

What is the poet's tone? Is it satiric, serious, mock serious, playful, somber, brash, or teasingly humorous? Does the poet admire, agree with, ridicule, or condemn the speaker, as in the touch of mock? Is there an obvious reason for the poet's attitude? Does the poet withhold judgment?

* **Allusions**: Are there any allusions (references) to something outside the poem, such as events or people from history, mythology, or religion? Does the poem have a meaning from another work?
* **Imagery and symbols** :Most poetry can be read on several levels. The surface is not necessarily the essence of the poem although in some cases there is little beyond the immediate. [Allegory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegory), [connotation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Connotation) and [metaphor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaphor) are some of the subtler ways in which a poet communicates with the reader. Before getting seduced into explorations of subtle nuance, however, the reader should establish the theme of the poem. What is the 'story' that is being told? Not the literal story but the heart of the poem. Look at the figurative language of the poem; metaphors, similes, analogies, personification. How do these images add to the meaning of the poem or intensify the effect of the poem? Imagery What images does the poem use; the physical setting or [metaphors](http://www.poemofquotes.com/articles/elements-of-poetry.php) used?
* **Meter and rhyme :** Rhythm or meter: In most languages, there is a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a word or words in a sentence. In poetry, the variation of stressed and unstressed syllables and words has a rhythmic effect. What is the tonal effect of the rhythm here? Rhythm refers particularly to the way a line is voiced, i.e., how one speaks the line. Often, when a reader reads a line of verse, choices of stress and unstress may need to be made. English language poetic meter depends on [stress](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lexical_stress), rather than the number of [syllables](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syllable) It thus stands in contrast to poetry in other languages, such as [French](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_language), where syllabic stress is not present or recognized and syllable count is paramount. This often makes [scansion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scansion) (the analysis of metrical patterns) seem unduly arcane and arbitrary to students of the craft.In the final analysis, the terms of scansion are blunt instruments, clumsy ways of describing the infinitely nuanced rhythms of language. Nonetheless, they provide a tool for discerning and describing the underlying structure of poems (especially those employing closed form). Rhyme scheme: Does the rhyme occur in a regular pattern, or irregularly? Is the effect formal, satisfying, musical, funny, disconcerting?
* **Language of the Poem** : Does the poet stress certain sounds, such as pleasant sounds (euphony) or harsh letter combinations (cacophony? Are certain sounds repeated (alliteration, sibilance? Are words linked by approximate rhyme, like "seem/freeze," or by real rhyme, such as "least/feast"? Is there a rhyme scheme or sound pattern at the ends of lines? Does rhyming occur within a line (internal rhyme) ? Is there onomatopoeia, or words that make a sound that imitates their meaning, such as swoosh, ping pong, ricochet, clangor, plash, wheeze, clack, boom, tingle, slip, fumble, or clip-clop?

## Writing The Poerty Explication

**The First Paragraph**: The Introduction, in this paragraph, you should establish both the primary focus of the poem and the primary focus of your essay. Go in the following order:

* 1. Write a few sentences exploring the central theme apart from the poem. Check the sample essay for an example of how to do this.
  2. Bring the poem into the mix by briefly identifying its connection to the idea you’ve been writing about in the first few sentences. Again, check the sample essay to see how the writer segued from idea to poem.
  3. The final sentence should establish the 2-3 literary devices your essay will be exploring.

**The Second Paragraph**: Body 1#. In this paragraph, you should develop how the poet/poem utilizes the first literary device you outlined in the introduction’s final sentence. Include the following:

a) Two separated examples of the literary device need to be examined in the paragraph.

b) Use direct quotes to make your development more specific.

c) Refer to specific line numbers within your development.

d) Find ways to specifically connect the literary device (each example) to the main idea your first paragraph established.

**Paragraph Three**: Body 2#. In this paragraph, you should develop how the poet/poem utilizes the second literary device you outlined in the introduction’s final sentence. Use a—d from above.

**Paragraph Four** : Body 3# (optional). In this paragraph, you should develop how the poet/poem utilizes the third literary device you outlined in the introduction’s final sentence. Use a—d from above.

**Paragraph Five :** Conclusions. Above all else, avoid restating what already written about. Rather, to explore how the poem and your ideas about the poem can be “useful” to readers. How is what it’s written about “ valuable” to people in the so called real world? readers should paraphrase or restate the poem in everyday words, as though talking to someone on the telephone. A summary of the poem should emphasize a pattern of details, sounds, or rhythm. For example, do various elements of the poem lead readers to believe that the poet is describing an intense experience? Is the poet defining something, such as parenthood, risking a life, curiosity, marriage, religious faith, or aging? Is the poet telling a story event by event? Does the poet want to sway the reader's opinion? Before reaching a conclusion about the meaning of a poem, readers should summarize their personal responses. Are they emotionally moved or touched by the poem? Are they entertained or repulsed, terrified or stirred to agree? Do words and phrases stick in their memory? How has the poet made an impression? And most important, why?

**The Example of Poetry Explication.**

The Fountain

Fountain, fountain, what do you say  
Singing at night alone?  
“It is enough to rise and fall  
Here in my basin of stone.”

But are you content as you seem to be  
So near the freedom and rush of the sea?  
“I have listened all night to its laboring sound,  
It heaves and sags, as the moon runs round;  
Ocean and fountain, shadow and tree,  
Nothing escapes, nothing is free.”

—Sara Teasdale (American, l884-1933)

*As a direct address to an inanimate object “The Fountain” presents three main conflicts concerning the appearance to the observer and the reality in the poem. First, since the speaker addresses an object usually considered voiceless, the reader may abandon his/her normal perception of the fountain and enter the poet’s imaginative address. Secondly, the speaker not only addresses the fountain but asserts that it* speaks and sings, *personifying the object with vocal abilities. These acts imply that, not only can the fountain speak in a musical form, but the fountain also has the ability to present some particular meaning (“what do you say” (1)). Finally, the poet gives the fountain a voice to say that its perpetual motion (rising and falling) is “enough” to maintain its sense of existence. This final personification fully dramatizes the conflict between the fountain’s appearance and the poem’s statement of reality by giving the object intelligence and voice.*

*The first strophe, four lines of alternating 4- and 3-foot lines, takes the form of a ballad stanza. In this way, the poem begins by suggesting that it will be story that will perhaps teach a certain lesson. The opening trochees and repetition stress the address to the fountain, and the iamb which ends line 1 and the trochee that begins line 2 stress the actions of the fountain itself. The response of the fountain illustrates its own rise and fall in the iambic line 3, and the rhyme of “alone” and “stone” emphasizes that the fountain is really a physical object, even though it can speak in this poem.*

*The second strophe expands the conflicts as the speaker questions the fountain. The first couplet connects the rhyming words “be” and “sea” these connections stress the question, “Is the fountain content when it exists so close to a large, open body of water like the ocean?” The fountain responds to the tempting “rush of the sea” with much wisdom (6). The fountain’s reply posits the sea as “laboring” versus the speaker’s assertion of its freedom; the sea becomes characterized by heavily accented “heaves and sags” and not open rushing (7, 8). In this way, the fountain suggests that the sea’s waters may be described in images of labor, work, and fatigue; governed by the moon, these waters are not free at all. The “as” of line 8 becomes a key word, illustrating that the sea’s waters are not free but commanded by the moon, which is itself governed by gravity in its orbit around Earth. Since the moon, an object far away in the heavens, controls the ocean, the sea cannot be free as the speaker asserts.*

*The poet reveals the fountain’s intelligence in rhyming couplets which present closed-in, epigrammatic statements. These couplets draw attention to the contained nature of the all objects in the poem, and they draw attention to the final line’s lesson. This last line works on several levels to address the poem’s conflicts. First, the line refers to the fountain itself; in this final rhymed couplet is the illustration of the water’s perpetual motion in the fountain, its continually recycled movement rising and falling. Second, the line refers to the ocean; in this respect the water cannot escape its boundary or control its own motions. The ocean itself is trapped between landmasses and is controlled by a distant object’s gravitational pull. Finally, the line addresses the speaker, leaving him/her with an overriding sense of fate and fallacy. The fallacy here is that the fountain presents this wisdom of reality to defy the speaker’s original idea that the fountain and the ocean appear to be trapped and free. Also, the direct statement of the last line certainly addresses the human speaker as well as the human reader. This statement implies that we are all trapped or controlled by some remote object or entity. At the same time, the assertion that “Nothing escapes” reflects the limitations of life in the world and the death that no person can escape. Our own thoughts are restricted by our mortality as well as by our limits of relying on appearances. By personifying a voiceless object, the poem presents a different perception of reality, placing the reader in the same position of the speaker and inviting the reader to question the conflict between appearance and reality, between what we see and what we can know.*

**Conclusions And Suggestions**

Since it is so complicated to figure out why an author wrote a poem, it should come as no surprise that it can be equally difficult to determine what a poem means. This is, of course, one reason that reading poetry is enjoyable. It can be like a puzzle trying to figure out a writer's depth of meaning from that which is said or left unsaid. That’s why poetry explication is really needed. By anayzing the main form of the poem such the structure of the poem and the patternt of the poem, will simplify to understand the meaning of the poem. Even, poetry explication also combaine all elements of the poems and the poet itself to stengthen the purpose of the poem. When searching for the meaning of a poem, it is important to consider each word the poet uses. Poets tend to choose their words carefully and to write with precision. Think about every possible meaning each word can have. Think about alternate meanings that phrases could take on. Pick every piece apart, and don't assume anything. That way, when the reader put it all back together in reader’s mind, and will have an accurate assessment of the poem's meanings. The reader can debate with others about those meanings to garner a deeper revelation about the message.

Because poetry is an enigmatic art, it could be said that figuring out a poet's true purpose is impossible. The study about poetry explication is really important to learn, esspecially for applied linguistics students who focus on the literary works such as poem. Short of a face-to-face interview or a written critique of her own work, there is no way to tell with perfect accuracy what the author was thinking at the time. Even with an interview or written analysis as evidence, it could be claimed that the poet changed her mind about her work or that she misremembered. However, poets do leave clues to their intent throughout their poems. If a poem contains humor, at least one of its purposes must be to entertain. If the poet includes a heartfelt call to action, she must be trying to persuade you to act. If the poem has a melancholy tone, the poet is trying to elicit that same feeling from the reader. You will never know for sure, but you can make an educated determination.

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