

FACILITATION CONFERENCE FOR ENGLISH LANGAUGE & LITERATURE TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION (ELLTA)

VENUE: LIRA TOWN COLLEGE **DATE:** 07TH OCTOBER 2016

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POETRY

Poetry is a fusion of language and sound, structure and ideas.

A poem is a compressed form of expression, characterized by imaginative language, suggestive sounds and visual appeal. To critically appreciate the poem, you should read the poem at least three times, aloud if possible. Each time concentrate on a different aspect of the poet's technique.

Your approach might be similar to the following:

- **Experience the effect of the poem.**

Ask question such as:

- ✓ What kind of rhythm dominates the poem? Is it regular? Does it remain the same throughout?
- ✓ What kinds of sounds do you hear? Do you recognize sound patterns?
- ✓ What is the subject of the poem? Do the rhyme and rhythm fit this subject? Who is the speaker?

- **Focus on the poetic language.**

The following are some questions to guide you:

- ✓ Which words and phrases are especially striking? Do they fit the subject of the poem? What do they suggest about the speakers feelings? What figures of speech are used?
- ✓ Think about the meaning of the poem. Use questions such as these as a guide. Does the arrangement of the lines suggest meaning? What about the title?

What is the speaker saying about the subject? How is he saying about the subject? How is he saying it? What themes or messages can be inferred?

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WHAT THE QUESTIONS IN POETRY USUALLY ASK

The questions usually set in poetry focus on the following:

1. Title
2. What the poem is about.
3. Feelings: These may be:
 - ✓ the poets feelings
 - ✓ the speakers of persona's feelings
 - ✓ your feelings
4. Characters in the poem.
5. Devices or elements. These may be set through questions like, what makes the poem interesting? Or what has led to your enjoyment of the poem? How has the poet made the poem interesting?
6. Your reactions to the events in the poem.
7. Similarity between the poem and your community.
8. Meanings of certain words and phrases in the poem.
9. Why you like the poem or what makes it interesting.
10. Why you would like a poem. Sometimes you are asked questions like:
 - ✓ What make this poem interesting to read?
 - ✓ How has the poet make a poem interesting?
 - ✓ Why have you chosen this poem?

There could be a number of reasons. Aspects to consider may include:

- i. Title
- ii. Choice of words
- iii. Message of the poem
- iv. Lesson learnt from the poem.
- v. Brevity / length of the poem.
- vi. Simplicity of the language used.
- vii. Easy to understand/ comprehend.
- viii. The tone, mood, atmosphere in the poem.

- ix. Relevance to society.
- x. Personal experience related to the poem.
- xi. Theme/message
- xii. Rhyme and rhythm
- xiii. Repetition
- xiv. Structure/ stanzas

ELEMENT OF PERSONA IN POETRY

The speaking voice in a poem is that of a “persona”. A persona/speaker is the term given to the person who appears to be communicating in a poem. The voice is not of a poet. And whenever you are analyzing a poem, don’t make a mistake of referring to the person as the poet. See the example below:

Infant Sorrow *By William Blake*

My mother groan’d! My father wept
Into the dangerous world I leapt
Helpless, naked, piping loud:
Like a bend hid in a cloud

Struggling in my father’s hands,
Striving against my straddling bands,
Bound and weary I thought best
To such upon my mother’s breast.

In the above poem, the “I” of the poem is the speaker/persona. It is not the poet. It is the child itself speaking. In this poem, the reality of child birth is seen from the point of view of the child itself. It is only when you are talking about style of the poem and the poet’s attitude that you can then refer to the poet. This is because it is the poet who present the poem to us in his/her own chosen style, using stylistic and structural devices which he feels will be very effective in communicating the message he wants to.

Western Civilisation

Sheets of tin nailed to posts
Driven in the ground
Make up the house
Some rags complete

the intimate landscape
The sun slanting through cracks
Welcome the owner

After twelve hours of slave labour
breaking rock
shifting rock
breaking rock
shifting rock

Fair weather
wet weather
breaking rock
shifting rock

Old age comes early

A mat on a dark nights
is enough when he dies
is enough when he dies
gratefully
of hunger

By Agustino Neto

Note the repetition of the line “breaking rock/shifting rock” in the poem. They are repeated deliberately for emphasis. What does the speaker/poet wish to emphasize in the poem? What do these two lines suggest? Analyse these two lines vis-à-vis the title of the poem, “Western Civilisation” Is there any kind of civilization in the poem? Consider the one line stanza “After twelve hours of slave labour.” This will surely help you to sketch your imagination to get the setting, meaning and the analysis of the title and its appropriacy to the poem.

Consider the citation of the poet e.g. South African poets during the apartheid era were usually pre-occupied with racism and the plight of the marginalized blacks.

Also, priestly or devotedly religious people are bound to have a religious message to put across. Politically, active poets in most cases write poems which have elements of politics in them.