

A Step-by-Step Guide to Close Reading Sonnets

Step One: First Read. Read the text over once to get the “gist” or general idea. Circle unfamiliar words along the way.

Questions to consider:

Can you identify the main subject(s) or topic(s) of the text?

Can you tell if the author/narrator is talking to (or about) someone else, or if he/she is reflecting to oneself?

Can you identify the mood/tone of the text?

Tone = author’s attitude toward the subject of the text (i.e. *amused, annoyed, funny, serious, angry, optimistic, pessimistic, sarcastic, respectful, dramatic, matter-of-fact...*)

Mood = the way the text makes YOU (the reader) feel (i.e. *sorrowful, happy, gloomy, suspenseful, overwhelmed, warm, passionate, tense, relaxed, hopeful, grumpy...*)

Step Two: Second Read. Read the text a second time, underlining or highlighting words and phrases that you think may be important. [Bracket sections of the text that cause confusion and place a question mark in the margins]

Step Three: “Chunk” the Text. Break the text up into smaller sections or chunks. This will decrease the risk of becoming overwhelmed. Label the quatrains, couplet, and rhyme scheme.

Step Four: Identify Figurative Language/Poetic Devices. Search each chunk for figurative language, imagery, similes, metaphors, personification, alliteration, etc.

Step Five: Paraphrase Each Chunk. The text will become much easier to understand once you have put it into your own words.

Step Six: Analyze Author’s Choice of Words, Literary/Poetic Devices. The author made these choices on PURPOSE. Ask yourself why he decided to use one word over another (ex. “house” vs “home”). Ask yourself why he decided to use similes or metaphors to compare one thing to another.

Step Seven: Interpret the Text. After constructing meaning from the text, come up with your own interpretation of the text. What do you think the text means? What do you think the author is trying to get you to think about? What do you think is the central message or big takeaway? Provide specific examples from the text to support your answers.

Close Reading Sonnets Checklist

Step One: First Read. Read the text over once to get the “gist” or general idea.

Did you...

- Circle unfamiliar words along the way
- Note the main subject(s) and/or topic(s) at the top of the page
- Consider who the narrator is talking to. Make a note on your paper.
- Identify the mood of the text. (What’s the narrator’s attitude toward the subject?)
- Identify the tone of the text. (How did the poem make YOU feel?)

Step Two: Second Read. Read the text again, underlining or highlighting important words and phrases. [Bracket sections that cause confusion and place a question mark in the margins]

Did you...

- Underline/highlight important words and phrases
- Bracket parts of the text that confuse you. Place a ? in the margins.

Step Three: “Chunk” the Text. Break the text up into smaller sections or chunks. This will decrease the risk of becoming overwhelmed. (Sonnets may already be broken up)

Did you...

- Bracket and label each quatrain and couplet (Q1, Q2, Q3, Couplet)
- Label each line according to the rhyme scheme (*abab cdcd efef gg*)

Step Four: Identify Figurative Language/Poetic Devices. Search each chunk for figurative language, imagery, similes, metaphors, personification, alliteration, etc.

Did you...

- Identify literary devices: similes, metaphors, personification, etc.
- Identify poetic devices: repetition, alliteration, etc.

Step Five: Paraphrase Each Chunk. Put the text into your own words.

Step Six: Analyze Author’s Choice of Words, Literary/Poetic Devices. Ask yourself why he/she decided to use one word over another (ex. “house” vs “home”). Ask yourself how the literary/poetic devices influence the text. (ex. Why did he compare this to this?)

Step Seven: Interpret the Text. What do you think the text means? What do you think the author is trying to get you to think about? What do you think is the central message or big takeaway? Provide specific examples from the text to support your answers.

Did you...

- Write down your own interpretation of the text