

# Help Centres – English Support



## Poetry Tools for Analysis

Poetry uses immensely compact language, where layers of meaning are compressed into very few words. Exploring this concision may appear daunting, but it's within this bounty of subtle sound play and precise imagery that you will construct, and defend, your interpretation of a poem.

When examining a poem, consider how some of the following components generate meanings, feelings and impressions through the text:

1. **Voice and Tone:** The speaker of a poem, if present, is the *persona*, the voice speaking the poem; it shouldn't be conflated with the poet. The tone suggests the attitude or stance towards the topic of the poem. It could be ironic, detached or even playful.
2. **Diction:** This is the words themselves. The level of diction (formal vs. informal), connotations, and word order are all intentional and can inform an interpretation of a poem.
3. **Form:** The presentation of the words themselves can suggest meaning. This could be in the overall shape of the poem, gaps within a single line, or the positioning of line breaks where the final word could have particular emphasis.
4. **Imagery:** These are the sense impressions of the poem and encompass a host of "pictures", including visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory.
5. **Sound:** Read the poem aloud and consider how rhythm, rhyme, metre, and alliteration produce particular moods and feelings in the text.
6. **Figurative language:** Metaphors and similes are very common in poetry. Digging into their usage is often key to arguing a particular theme or interpretation!
7. **Symbol:** See handout on "Symbolism"