Reading Poetry

Poetry is *opaque*: the writer’s purpose is hidden beneath the language. It takes *effort*, combining many strategies to give the reader what the poem offers.

- **Know how the **words** work**
  - *Denotation* is the dictionary definition of the word
  - *Connotation* is what the author is suggesting in the word with the accompanying emotional overtone
  - The *Tone* is the emotional effect carried across to the reader
  - *Probe* the definitions and syntax (word order and structure) to get at connotations, images, motifs and overall theme

- **Ask questions** such as:
  - What is being dramatized? Are there any conflicts?
  - Who is the speaker; what is the motive and reason to talk?
  - What happens in the poem and when?

- **Pick up on the **imagery**
  - Poetry is meant to create images and impressions
  - Are there appeals to the five senses (sight, smell, hear, taste, touch)
  - *Similes* and *metaphors* establish meaning in one thing by comparing it to another thing that is unlike it.
    - Similes use “like” or “as”
  - What are the impressions created as to images and ideas?

- **Identify symbols**
  - Concrete images that refer the reader to something abstract
  - The meaning of the symbol is figurative and universal
  - Archetypal symbols are universals in our “collective conscious”
    - Hero, saint, quest, darkness, light, death, rebirth

- **Trace the governing **motifs**
  - A recurring subject, theme or idea

- **Finally, draw on your own** beliefs, attitudes, values and experiences
  - A poem becomes meaningful when all of the above makes a “fit”

**Types of Poetry:**
- Narrative: the narrator describes the action
- Ballad: a poem narrating a popular story
- Elegy: a poem of lament
- Lyric: express emotion or share an idea
- Sonnet: 14 line poem; 10 syllables per line; any rhyme scheme
- Ode: lyric poem in form of an address; varied meter
- Dramatic Monologue: a scene created as background for insight
- Free verse: no restraints as to rhyme or meter