

THE ANNOTATION and EXPLICATION OF A POEM

There is no single method of annotation/explication and no single best order for annotating the various elements. The following method and order are reasonable and will serve as a guide. In your annotations, you are to write the following elements in your margin notes and then do your best to answer the questions – as they apply – and then provide examples from the poem to support your observations and analysis.

- 1. Tone.** The tone is the writer's attitude toward this subject, his audience. How is the tone indicated? By the diction? the rhyme? the rhythm? the stanza form? the choice of incident and imagery? the overall pattern? Is the tone complex, or is there a combination of tones? Does the tone shift in the poem? Where?
often related
- 2. Diction.** Describe the diction (see your resources for this). What are the connotations of the words – both in and outside of the poem? What about imagery? Is the whole poem one image? What is it? Do its various parts present separate images? What are they and how are they related? To what effect are images evoked? Can the figurative images be translated into literal terms? What specific ideas do they embody? Are the images as a whole vivid? suggestive? What are the sources of the imagery; the poet's learning experience, the works of other poets, Nature, etc.? Does the poet rely largely on imagery or on general statement? What is the overall effect of the writer's choice of diction? ****
What is the effect of the images on the reader?
- 3. Structure.** Into what divisions of action or idea or mood is the poem divided? If it is a narrative poem, is it developed by scenes? What is the climax? Is the movement slow? rapid? Does it shift during the poem? What effect does the structure have on the reader's experience?
- 4. Rhyme.** What is the rhyme scheme? What is the importance and the effect of the rhyme? (This includes absence of rhyme, as in blank verse and free verse.)
- 5. Sound patterns.** What other sound patterns contribute to the effect? What about alliteration? assonance? onomatopoeia? What is the effect of these?
*consonance
repetition of consonant sound, not just @ beginning of words*
- 6. Figures of speech.** What figures of speech are used and to what effect? Common figures of speech in poetry are simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, hyperbole. Effect?
→ poem addressed to a person whose gone
- 7. Allusions/symbolism.** Are there any allusions or symbols in the poem? What are they and how are they used? Are they familiar symbols or ones that seem to be specific to the context of the poem? Are they used obviously or subtly? Does the use of these devices impact the reader's experience in ways such as increased concentration, rich associations, a heightened emotional effect?
- 8. Theme.** What is the theme, that is, the universal idea behind the particular statement? (Example: "Portrait," by e.e. cummings. The subject of the poem is the death of Buffalo Bill; a theme is that death claims all men, however glamorous.) The theme in good poetry is often suggested or implied; it is never merely asserted and versified. Not all poems have a theme; most have more than one, but an interpretation need focus on only one.
- 9. Prose Statement.** What is the central idea expressed in a prose (standard, non-poetry writing) statement? This should be no more than two or three sentences maximum.

**** Effect = the effect on the reader's experience of the poem as a result of the various stylistic choices.

Adapted from materials developed by Jack Williamson, Terri L. Cox