

Analyzing Poetry

Introduction

Analyzing poetry sounds difficult, but it isn't hard if you take it one piece at a time. We're going to break it down step by step and see what we can discover about our poem. We'll do this with two goals in mind. Our first goal is just to enjoy the poem. Remember that most of the time, poets wrote poems so people would enjoy them. Don't get so stressed about figuring them out that you forget to enjoy them. Our second goal is to analyze them so we can discover what the poet is trying to say to us and learn about how he or she communicated those ideas. That will help us enjoy the poem even more and learn how to write poems that communicate our ideas to others.

Step One:

Read the poem thoughtfully and carefully out loud. Then read it silently to yourself. Are there any words of which you aren't sure of the meaning? Write them down.

Step Two:

What do you think the words mean from their context in the poem? Write down your thoughts and then look them up in a dictionary. Revise or expand their definitions based on what you learn.

Step Three:

What is the title of the poem? Is it obvious how it relates to what the poem is about? If not, what do you think the title might be referring to?

Step Four:

What is the setting? Where does the poem take place? What details do you notice about the setting?

Step Five:

What perspective or point of view is the poem written from? Is it something the speaker experienced? Is it something that happened in the past? Is it happening now or is it something that might happen in the future?

Step Six:

What words or phrases are repeated?

Why do you think the poet did this?

Stanzas On Freedom

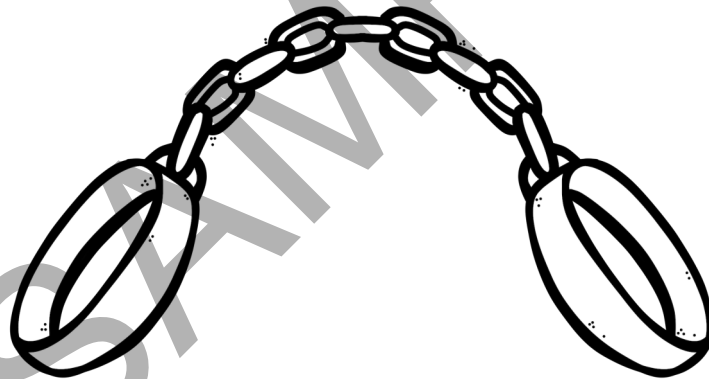
by James Russell Lowell

Men! whose boast it is that ye
Come of fathers brave and free,
If there breathe on earth a slave,
Are ye truly free and brave?
If ye do not feel the chain,
When it works a brother's pain,
Are ye not base slaves indeed,
Slaves unworthy to be freed?

Women! who shall one day bear
Sons to breathe New England air,
If ye hear, without a blush,
Deeds to make the roused blood rush
Like red lava through your veins,
For your sisters now in chains,-
Answer! are ye fit to be
Mothers of the brave and free?

Is true Freedom but to break
Fetters for our own dear sake,
And, with leathern hearts, forget
That we owe mankind a debt?
No! true freedom is to share
All the chains our brothers wear
And, with heart and hand, to be
Earnest to make others free!

They are slaves who fear to speak
For the fallen and the weak;
They are slaves who will not choose
Hatred, scoffing, and abuse,
Rather than in silence shrink
From the truth they needs must think;
They are slaves who dare not be
In the right with two or three.



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