

# How to make sense out of Poetry



# What is it?

- o Poetry is different than non-fiction because it tries to do something different.
- o In non-fiction, the author is trying to tell us about an experience.
- o In poetry the author is trying to get us to participate in this same experience. A poem wants to broaden and deepen our experiences- it's art.
- o Take a look at the following picture:

If this were writing, it would  
be poetry.





# CAUTION

1. Don't always expect something beautiful.
2. Don't always look for a moral.

## Winter- William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

When icicles hang by the wall,  
And Dick the shepherd blows his  
nail,  
And Tom bears logs into the hall,  
And milk comes frozen home in pail,  
When blood is nipped and ways be  
foul,  
Then nightly sings the staring owl,  
“tu-whit, tu-who!”

A merry note,  
while greasy Joan doth keel the  
pot.

When all aloud the wind doth blow,  
And coughing drowns the parson's  
saw,  
And birds sit brooding in the snow,  
And Marian's nose looks red and  
raw,  
When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl,  
Then nightly sings the staring owl,  
“Tu- whit-to-who!”

A Merry note,  
While grasy Joan doth keep  
the pot.

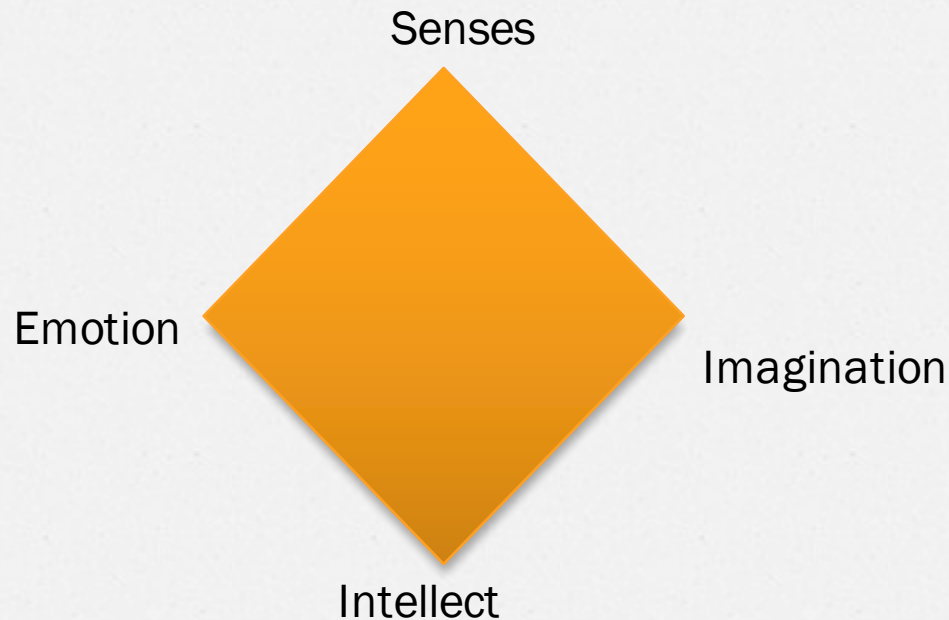
**What is the point of this poem?**

# What's the purpose?

- o In this poem Shakespeare is describing the quality of life in the winter. He is providing a series of concrete details so we can IMAGINE (image) the scene for ourselves.
- o There is no moral.
- o This poem is not beautiful.

# The primary purpose of art is experience- the story of life

- There is diamond in poetry. We call something poetic, if it can connect in these ways simultaneously.



# How do I read a poem?

- 1) Slowly
- 2) More than once
- 3) Must look up all the unfamiliar words
- 4) Hearing the sounds in your head- possibly aloud
- 5) Paying extreme attention to detail- including punctuation
- 6) Making notes



# Initial Questions to ask yourself?

1. Who is the poet and when and where did he live?
2. Who is the speaker in the poem? Is there a persona? Is he speaking, as a soldier, as a mother, as a son, as a victim, etc...
3. What is the occasion?
4. What are the dominant images?
5. What is the purpose?- To tell a story, to express a mood or emotion, to reveal a human character, to recreate an event, etc...

The man He Killed  
by  
Thomas Hardy- 1840-1928

Had he and I but met  
By some old ancient inn, We  
should have set us down to wet  
Right many a nipperkin! But  
ranged as infantry, And staring  
face to face, I shot at him as he at  
me, And killed him in his  
place. I shot him dead  
because— Because he was my  
foe, Just so: my foe of course he  
was; That's clear enough;  
although He thought he'd 'list,  
perhaps, Off-hand like—just as I—

Was out of work—had sold his  
traps— No other reason  
why. Yes; quaint and curious  
war is! You shoot a fellow  
down You'd treat, if met where any  
bar is, Or help to half a crown.

# In groups – Let's look at this poem

1. Who is the speaker of this poem?
2. What is the occasion of this poem? Is it the author or is there a persona?
3. What are the images- is there one predominant one?
4. What is a one sentence paraphrase of this poem?
5. What is the central purpose of the poem?

\*Perrine compares reading poetry playing tennis. Both are enjoyable but both are difficult. The better you are at doing it, the more enjoyable it is. However, if you are not good; it can be miserable.

# Homework

- o Read one of the following poems and write a paragraph answering the five questions on the previous page:
- o “A Study of Reading Habits” by Philip Larkin (1922-1985)
- o “Dulce et Decorum Est” by Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)
- o Don’t share answers. It’s a completion grade. I want to see how you are thinking.

The ideas from this Power Point  
are drawn from the instruction  
from the following source.

Meyer, Michael. *The Bedford Introduction to  
Literature*

*Reading, Thinking, and Writing.* (University of  
Connecticut)

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