

SOAPSTONE

An Acronym for Analyzing Literature

Rhetorical Elements

Speaker: Is someone identified as the speaker? What assumptions can you make about the speaker? (e.g., age, gender, class, emotional state, etc.)

Occasion: What is the rhetorical occasion of the poem? Is it a memory, a description, an observation, a valedictory, an argument, a diatribe, an elegy, a declaration, a critique, etc.?

Audience: Does the speaker identify an audience? What assumptions can you make about the intended audience?

Purpose: What is the speaker's purpose? In what ways does the poet convey this message? What is the message? How does the speaker try to spark a reaction in the audience? How is the poem supposed to make the audience feel? What is its intended effect?

Subject: What is the subject of the piece? How do you know this? How does the poet present his/her subject? Does (s)he present it immediately or does (s)he delay its revelation?

Stylistic and Linguistic Elements: syntax, language, literary devices, imagery, diction, detail.

Tone: What is the author's attitude toward the subject? What emotional sense do you take from the piece? How does the diction point to tone?

Organization: How is the poem organized? How does the poet arrange his/her content? What is its rhyme scheme and meter? Is it free verse? How are the words arranged on the page? Is it written in a specific poetic form like a sonnet, a villanelle, a sestina, etc.? Is there a discernable pattern or motif in the poem? What kind of repetition, if any, does the poem feature? How does the physical structure of the poem relate to its mental arrangement? Does the poet build the poem-- via a list, analogy, climax, comparison/contrast, cause and effect, hierarchy, variations of a single theme, etc.?

Narrative Style: How does the poet tell the "story" of the poem? What does the poet reveal? What does he/she conceal? What does (s)he invert/subvert? Is the poem "dramatic," almost play-like in its use of dialogue or theatrical conventions like the soliloquy? How does the poet treat time?

Evidence: What kind of diction dominates the poem? What is the source of the images (e.g. nature, weapons, law, science, theology, love, architecture, etc.). What do sound devices contribute to the poem?