

DIDLS

Diction – the *connotation* of the word choice

Images – vivid appeals to understanding through the senses – *concrete language*

Details – *facts* that are included or those that are omitted

Language – the *overall* use of language, such as formal, clinical, jargon

Sentence Structure – how structure affects the reader's attitude

DICTION

Laugh: guffaw, chuckle, titter, giggle, cackle, snicker, roar

Self-confident: proud, conceited, egotistical, stuck-up, haughty, smug, condescending

House: home, hut, shack, mansion, cabin, home, residence

Old: mature, experienced, antique, relic, senior, ancient

Fat: obese, plump, corpulent, portly, porky, burly, husky, full-figured

IMAGES

The use of vivid descriptions or figures of speech that appeal to sensory experiences helps to create the author's *tone*.

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun. (restrained)

An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying king. (somber, candid)

He clasps the crag with crooked hands. (dramatic)

Love sets you going like a fat gold watch. (fanciful)

Smiling, the boy fell dead. (shocking)

DETAILS

Details are most commonly the *facts* given by the author or speaker as support for the attitude or tone.

The speaker's perspective shapes what details are given.

LANGUAGE

Like word choice, the language of a passage has control over tone.

Consider language to be the entire body of words used in a text, not simply isolated bits of diction.

For example, an invitation to a wedding might use formal language, while a biology text would use scientific and clinical language.

- When I told Dad that I had goofed the exam, he blew his top. (slang)
- I had him on the ropes in the fourth and if one of my short rights had connected, he'd have gone down for the count. (jargon)
- A close examination and correlation of the most reliable current economic indexes justifies

the conclusion that the next year will witness a continuation of the present, upward market trend. (turgid, pedantic)

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

How a sentence is constructed affects what the audience understands.

The inverted order of an interrogative sentence cues the reader to a question and creates tension between speaker and listener.

Short sentences are often emphatic, passionate or flippant, whereas longer sentences suggest greater thought.

Sentence structure affects *tone*.

SHIFT IN TONE

Good authors are rarely monotone. A speaker's attitude can shift on a topic, or an author might have one attitude toward the audience and another toward the subject. The following are some clues to watch for shifts in tone:

- - key words (but, yet, nevertheless, however, although)
 - - punctuation (dashes, periods, colons)
 - - paragraph divisions
 - - changes in sentence length
 - - sharp contrasts in diction
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Example:

At the passage "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust" there was a little alteration of the words to suit the process. A door opened in the wall: and the violet coffin mysteriously passed out through it and vanished as it closed. People think that the door is the door of the furnace: but it isn't. I went behind the scenes at the end of the service and saw the real thing. People are afraid to see it; but it is wonderful. I found there the violet coffin opposite another door, a real unmistakable furnace door this time: when it lifted there was a plain little chamber of cement and fire-brick. No heat, no noise. No roaring draught. No flame. No fuel. It looked cool, clean, sunny. You would have walked in or put your hand in without misgiving. Then the violet coffin moved again and went in, feet first. And behold! The feet burst miraculously into streaming ribbons of garnet coloured lovely flame, smokeless and eager, like pentecostal tongues, and as the whole coffin passed in, it sprang into flame all over; my mother became that beautiful fire. The door fell; well, they said that if we wanted to see it all through to the end, we should come back in an hour and a half. I remembered the wasted little figure with the wonderful face, and said, "Too long" to myself—but off we went... When we returned, the end was wildly funny; Mama would have enjoyed it enormously. We looked down through an opening in the floor. There we saw a roomy kitchen, with a big cement table and two cooks busy at it. They had little tongs in their hands, and they were deftly and busily picking nails and scraps of coffin handles out of Mama's dainty little heap of ashes and samples of bone. Mama herself being at the moment leaning over beside me, shaking with laughter. Then they swept her up into a sieve and shook her out; so that there was a heap of dust and a heap of bone scraps. And Mama said in my ear, "Which of the two heaps do you suppose is me?..." and that merry episode was the end, except for making dust of the bone scraps and scattering them on a flow bed... O grave, where is thy victory?... And so goodnight, friends who understand about one's mother.

- *The Society of Authors on Behalf of the George Bernard Shaw Estate*

Diction: vanished, cool, clean, sunny, violet, miraculously, garnet, flame, Pentecostal
The diction has a clean and beautiful connotation. The different colors give the image of great beauty. The words miraculously and pentecostal have the connotation of something holy.

Imagery: violet coffin; streaming ribbons of garnet coloured lovely flame, smokeless and eager; my mother became that beautiful fire; dainty little heap
The images suggest happiness. The violet coffin represents spring because the violet is a spring flower. Spring is reminiscent of happiness and rebirth. The man views his mother's cremation not as sad, but instead a happy and beautiful thing.

Details: a plain little chamber of cement and fire-brick; No heat, no noise. No roaring draught. No flame. No fuel; It looked cool, clean, sunny; burst miraculously into streaming ribbons of garnet coloured lovely flame; as the whole coffin passed in, it sprang into flame all over; I remembered the wasted little figure with the wonderful face; They had little tongs in their hands, and they were deftly and busily picking nails and scraps of coffin handles out of Mama's dainty little heap of ashes and samples of bone; they swept her up into a sieve and shook her out; a heap of dust and a heap of bone scraps; making dust of the bone scraps and scattering them on a flow bed

The details give the impression that the cremation is plain and simple. The cremation chamber is described using the word "plain." It is described as having nothing ornate. The coffin was simply put in and it was covered in fire. Afterwards the ashes were simply swept up with no ceremony. It gave no impression that there was anything sad about the process.

Language: The language is light, joyful, and informal. This is the complete opposite of the conventional view of death as a very serious occasion. It reinforces the happy tone. The language seems almost playful. The narrator is joking and feeling happy about his mother's death.

Sentence Structure: Most of the sentences are fragments or fragmented to make the reader dwell on the longer sentences. The fragments also bring attention to themselves. They use the senses to contrast each other. The author used many commas, semi-colons, and colons to break up the writing. It made the passage seem jumpy and less formal.

Tone: The passage has a tone of wonder, awe, and happiness. The man believes that mother has become something greater.

What does TPCASTT stand for?

Poems can be very difficult to interpret because a lot of what they have to say is not written but is implied. A major problem that students have with interpreting poetry is that they read the poem once, pick out a detail or two and then jump to a conclusion, often the wrong conclusion. To avoid this pitfall, it is important to gather significant data and try out different hypotheses before drawing a conclusive interpretation. These steps, sort of like the scientific method, comprise a safe way to avoid serious misinterpretations.

Title

Ponder the title before reading the poem. Make up questions about the title. There are two kinds of titles: interactive titles and naming titles. Interactive titles have some sort of interplay with poem itself and can affect its meaning. Naming titles may give less crucial information. If a poem lacks a title, you can do this step with the first line of the poem or skip it.

Paraphrase

Translate the poem into your own words. Word for word! Line for line! Find synonyms for every possible word. Summarizing is NOT paraphrasing!

Connotation

Contemplate the poem for meaning beyond the literal. Identify and figure out the figurative language. Do DIDLS.

Attitude

After identifying a subject/topic of the poem, figure out how the speaker (and/or the poet) feels about it. This is also called tone.

Shifts

Note transitions in the poem. Shifts in subject, attitude, mood, or motif.

Title

Examine the title again, this time on an interpretive level. Answer your questions. Figure out how the title illuminates the poem. Remember a “naming title” may not mean much. Remember you can do this with the first line of a poem if it lacks a title or you can skip this step altogether.

Theme

After identifying a subject/topic of the poem, determine what the poet thinks about the subject. What is his/her opinion?

SOAPS

SOAPS is handy as a general introduction to a poem. If you are having a tough time getting any meaning at all from a poem, SOAPS will lead you to at least a basic understanding.

Subject—the general topic, content and ideas in the poem.

Occasion—The time and place of the poem. Try to understand the context that encouraged the poem to be written.

Audience—To whom is the poem written?

Purpose—What is the reason behind the writing of the poem?

Speaker—What can you say about the voice speaking the poem?

After reading the poem through once, take a moment to write a few complete thoughts regarding each of the above subjects.