




Hyper Poetry – Part II

A Poetry Experience

For 12th graders


By Beth Halbert

How to Read a Poem



There are many ways to read poetry. Here are some steps, though, to help you get started. These are especially helpful if you are asked to discuss or write about a poem.

1. Look at the title



Sometimes a poem's title won't offer any insight until after you read the poem; nevertheless, treat the title as part of the poem, or its first line.

1. Look at the title


Selecting a Reader

Ted Kooser

**First, I would have her
be beautiful,
and walking carefully up
on my poetry
at the loneliest moment
of an afternoon,**

The title
"Selecting a
Reader" makes me
think of calling on
students to read in
class or writing
something and then
choosing who I
want to read it.

2. Read the poem straight through without stopping to analyze it.



Don't be distracted by trying to find a meaning this first time through.


Selecting a Reader

by Ted Kooser

First, I would have her be
beautiful,
and walking carefully up on
my poetry
at the loneliest moment of
an afternoon,
her hair still damp at the
neck
from washing it. She should
be wearing
a raincoat, an old one, dirty
from not having money
enough for the cleaners.

She will take out her
glasses, and there
in the bookstore, she will
thumb
over my poems, then put
the book back
up on its shelf. She will say
to herself,
"For that kind of money, I
can get
my raincoat cleaned." And
she will.

3. Start with what you know




Try to make some connection with something that is in the poem. It may be an experience you have had or just something that is familiar to you.

3. Start with what you know

"She will take out her glasses, and there in the bookstore, she will thumb over my poems, then put the book back up on its shelf. She will say to herself, "For that kind of money, I can get my raincoat cleaned." And she will."

These lines in the poem remind me of going to Barnes and Noble and skimming through books. There are always so many that I want to buy, but I have to restrain myself.

4. Look for patterns




Patterns in poems might be by grammatical, sensory (e.g., a combination of sounds, colors, scents), or object-related, evolving and changing from the beginning to the end of the poem.

4. Look for patterns

First, I would have
her be **beautiful**,
and walking
carefully up on my
poetry
at the **loneliest**
moment of an
afternoon,
her hair still damp at
the neck
from washing it.

It seems like
everything at the
beginning of the
poem is very light
and soothing. That
could be a pattern.

5. Identify the narrator




Too often we assume that the poet narrates poems, unless an alternate voice or persona is clearly established. That is not always the case.

5. Identify the narrator

First, **I** would have her be beautiful,
and walking carefully up on **my poetry**
at the loneliest moment of an afternoon,
...
she will thumb
over **my poems**, then put the book back
up on its shelf.

The narrator here is a poet. The poet has obviously been pretty successful because he or she has books in a bookstore.

6. Reflect in writing




This will help you digest your thoughts and make greater sense of disparate insights while taking you deeper into the poems you have read so many times.

6. Reflect in writing

The poem "Selecting a Reader" starts out with a poet talking about who his ideal reader would be. She would be beautiful, etc. You think that she is just going to fall in love with his poetry and not be able to stop reading it.

7. Read the poem again



If you haven't read the poem aloud yet, be sure to do that now.


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8. Find the crucial moments



Often a poem, like a story, has moments when the action shifts, the directions changes, or the meaning alters.

8. Find the crucial moments

She will take out her glasses, and there in the bookstore, she will thumb over my poems, then put the book back up on its shelf. She will say to herself, "For that kind of money, I can get my raincoat cleaned." And she will.

I think the direction of the poem changes in the last four lines of the poem when the woman places the book of poems back on the shelf and decides that her money would be better spent getting her raincoat cleaned.

Conclusion



You now have many intelligent ideas about the poem and you are able to talk or write about it with more confidence.