

## Checklists: Poetic Elements

### -tone

- Who is speaking in the poem?
- Is the narrator's voice close to the poet's or is it the voice of a fictional or historical person?
- How does the speaker address the listener?
- Does the poem directly reveal an emotion or an attitude?
- Does it indirectly reveal any attitudes or emotions?
- Does your reaction to what is happening in the poem differ widely from that of the speaker? If so, what does that difference suggest?
- Is the poem in some way ironic?
- What adjectives would best describe the poem's tone?

### Diction

- As you read, underline words or phrases that appeal to you or seem especially significant
- What is it about each underlined word or phrase that appeals to you?
- How does the word or phrase relate to the other lines? What does it contribute to the poem's effect?
- How does the sound of a word you've chosen add to the poem's tone or mood?
- What would be lost if synonyms were substituted for your favorite words?
- What sort of diction does the poem use? Conversational? Lofty? Monosyllabic? Polysyllabic? Concrete? Abstract?
- How does the diction contribute to the poem's flavor and meaning?

### Imagery

- List a poem's key images in the order they appear.
- What does the poem's title suggest? Does it help you interpret the images?
- Remember, images can draw from all five senses, not just visual.
- List key adjectives or other qualifying words.
- What emotions or attitudes are suggested by the images?
- Does the tone stay the same, or shift, or progress?
- How do the poem's images "add up" to its theme?

## **METAPHOR**

- Identify a poem's key comparisons, whether metaphor or simile, stated or implied.
- How are the tenor and vehicle alike (i.e. what is the basis of the comparison)?
- In what ways are they essentially unlike (in other words, where or when does the metaphor break-down)?
- If the poem uses an extended metaphor, how is the comparison extended? If the poem uses local metaphor, how do the vehicles create a unified pattern of meaning (a motif)?
- In what ways does the use of metaphor expand or enrich the meaning of the poem?

## **SOUND**

- List the main auditory elements you find in the poem.  
Look for *rime, alliteration, assonance, euphony, cacophony, onomatopoeia*.
- Is there a pattern in your list?
- How do the sound effects help communicate the poem's main theme?
- How does the sound of the words add to the poem's mood?

## **RHYTHM**

- Read the poem aloud.
- Mark the syllables on which the main stresses seem to fall.
- How many syllables are there on each line?
- Does the poem fall into a regular metrical pattern?
- How does the rhythm of the poem reinforce its tone? Its theme?

## **READING A SONNET**

- Read the poem carefully.
- What is the mood of its opening lines?
- Keep reading until you feel the mood shift. Where does that shift take place?
- What is the tone after the sonnet's turn away from its opening direction?
- How does the poem resolve (i.e., how does it reconcile its contrasts)?

### **THINKING ABOUT LINE BREAKS**

- Read the poem, paying attention to where its lines end.
- Do the breaks tend to come at the end of sentences or phrases?
- Do they tend to come in the middle of an idea?
- Do the lines tend to be long? Short? A mix of both?
- Is the poem broken into stanzas? Are they long? Short? A mix of both?
- What mood is created by the breaks?
- How do the line and stanza breaks reinforce the poem's meaning as a whole?

### **MYTH**

- Does the poem have a recognizable source in myth or legend?
- What new details has the poet added to the original myth?
- What do these details reveal about the poet's attitude toward the source material?
- Have important elements of the original been discarded? What does their absence suggest about the author's primary focus?
- Does the poem rely heavily on its mythic imagery? Or is myth tangential to the poem's theme?
- How do mythic echoes underscore the poem's meaning?

### **SYMBOL**

- Is the symbol a traditional one?
- If so, is it being used in the expected way? Or is the poet playing with its associations?
- What does the image seem to mean to the poem's speaker?
- What emotions are evoked by the image?
- If an image recurs in a poem, how does it change from one appearance to the next?
- Does the image radiate meaning beyond its literal sense? If not, it might not be intended as a symbol.