

READING ACTIVITY

READING LITERARY TEXTS* (Appreciation of a poem*)

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- Objective** : Facilitating readers to understand and appreciate the literary qualities of different genres of literature
- Participation** : Individual
- Material** : Any literary text (e.g. Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening – Robert Frost)
- Preparation** : Reading any literary text as often as possible paying attention to three of their distinctive features such as form, content and style
- Procedure** : **Multiple reading:** Read the poem as many times as you like as multiple readings could unravel the beauty of the poem. *Letting oneself into the poem and be with it is more significant than attempting to dismantle it or deconstruct its meaning under the guise of being analytical. In fact, over indulgence of the intellectual exercise kills the joy of reading poetry. It is said that poetry speaks to the mind as well as to the heart and it's the "heart part" that separates poetry from other forms of writings. This poem is subjected to several interpretations as its simplicity is found to be very deceptive, so it demands several reading.*

Diction: Focus on the choice of words. A poem requires a slow and careful study to glean the full meaning as poets often exercise "poetic license" to disregard the linguistic conventions – an absence of full sentences, capitalization and punctuation marks and using ambiguous and at times clichéd expressions can be disorienting. As poets are said to employ –Apt words in their apt places – words in poems often carry both denotative and connotative meanings which lead to multiple meanings emerging from them. Frost's description woods as "lovely, dark, and deep" has led to lot of discussions as those qualities of woods contradict themselves.

Imagery: Pay attention to the evocative qualities – those qualities that produce an emotional response from readers stemming from word pictures created by a poet using details of the sounds, sights, smells, tastes and feelings. The poem is replete with images – 'woods fill up with snow', 'frozen lake, the darkest evening', 'harness bells a shake', and 'Of easy wind and downy flake' create many sensory images.

Theme: Theme is what a poem is about but the poets often don't state it explicitly, hence, readers have to discover it through their careful analysis. The critics have identified different themes in the poem and the consensus seems to be the tension between man and nature and life and death. The lines "...miles to go before I sleep" are found to be very puzzling and mysterious.

Structure: Look at the structure of the poem. Unlike prose wherein lines are across a page, poets pay greater attention to where lines break and where words fall. You can usually identify a poem by how it looks. In a **concrete poem**, for instance, a poet makes the text of a poem in the shape of the theme. This poem consists of four identically constructed stanzas.

Tone: It is the attitude of the poet toward the subject or audience, which is yet another vital aspect of a poem for appreciation. In some poems it is explicit but in several others one has to discover it from the clues. Some readers consider the tone in the poem as tranquility but others regard it as one of turbulence as the speaker in the poem faces a dilemma.

Learning outcome:

- 1) Readers realize that understanding a poem can be a daunting task as they cannot rush through in understanding as it contains multilayered meanings.
- 2) Readers recognize that poetry, unlike other genres of literature, has several additional features for analysis and appreciation.

Further activity: Readers who are habituated to reading literary form(s) remain loyal till their end. Hence, reading literary texts and appreciating them must become a lifelong activity.

***Literary texts:** Literary texts include all the four genres – prose, poetry, fiction and drama. Each genre has its own distinctive features and as poetry is the oldest literary form and very popular amongst students it is considered here for appreciation.

***Appreciation of a poem:** Some of the features generally considered for appreciation are rhyme, rhythm, diction, format, feelings and ideas, techniques and so on. We need to keep in mind the shifts in appreciation – rhyme in ancient time was considered to be the most essential aspect of poetry but the advent of blank verse dismissed it. Today, even the fragmentary lines of prose are regarded as poetry.

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