

Ten Questions to Ask of a Poem

1. Who is the speaker in this poem? What tone of voice emerges from the words?
2. What are the key words in the poem? Are there patterns of connotative meaning that carry the weight of the poem's meaning?
3. What emotions or attitudes are suggested by the poem's images? Do you see a pattern, a *motif*, emerging from the imagery?
4. How does the poem make use of non-literal language? Where and when does the poem wax metaphorical? To what effect?
5. What sound effects does the poet employ? How do these sound effects communicate tone and underscore meaning?
6. In what ways does the rhythm of the poem reinforce its tone? Its theme?
7. How does the poem's form help the poet communicate its tone? Its theme?
8. If the poem alludes to myth or previous literature, how is the original material used to influence the poet's theme?
9. Do any of the poem's images invite a symbolic interpretation? If so, in what ways does the symbol reward the reader?
10. What is the theme of this poem—in other words, what does the poet seem to be saying about its dominant topic?

