Poetry Analysis
in 5 easy steps!
1. Read

- Read the poem both silently and aloud.
- Identify any unknown vocabulary words and look them up.
2. Form

- What is the form or structure, if any?
- Why would the author choose this style or rhyme scheme?
- Be sure to consider structure, punctuation, and point of view.
3. Images

- What images do you see, feel, hear, or experience?
- What poetic devices were used to create these?
- Be sure to consider figurative language and imagery.
4. Sound

- How does the poem sound?
- What is the mood or attitude?
- What poetic devices were used to create these?
- Be sure to consider sound, diction, and point of view.
5. So What?

- What are we to understand, learn, or experience from this poem?
- What is the theme?
- How do form, imagery, figurative language, and sound create this theme?
- You may want to consider the author’s biography for hints to inform this part of the analysis.
“Ode to My Socks”
An example of the 5 step analysis process
Maru Mori brought me a pair of socks which she knitted herself with her sheepherder’s hands, two socks as soft as rabbits. I slipped my feet into them as though into two cases knitted with threads of twilight and goatskin. Violent socks, my feet were two fish made of wool, two long sharks sea-blue, shot through by one golden thread, two immense blackbirds, two cannons: my feet were honored in this way by these heavenly socks. They were so handsome for the first time my feet seemed to me unacceptable like two decrepit firemen, firemen unworthy of that woven fire, of those glowing socks.

Nevertheless I resisted the sharp temptation to save them somewhere as schoolboys keep fireflies, as learned men collect sacred texts, I resisted the mad impulse to put them into a golden cage and each day give them birdseed and pieces of pink melon. Like explorers in the jungle who hand over the very rare green deer to the spit and eat it with remorse, I stretched out my feet and pulled on the magnificent socks and then my shoes.

The moral of my ode is this: beauty is twice beauty and what is good is doubly good when it is a matter of two socks made of wool in winter.
Sample Analysis: Form

When considering “Ode to My Socks” by Pablo Neruda, one cannot help notice the long, narrow construction Neruda employs to speak about his socks. The long lines require the reader to read the poem slowly and pay attention to each word. The reader understands that the socks are more than just a fancy thing to the speaker but rather something very important. The narrow structure is also rarely punctuated, allowing the reader to consider the thoughts of his socks as one whole thought. The break for the moral of the ode at the end brings the reader out of the description of the socks and back to a state of considering the socks’ worth to the reader. This break is abrupt and requires the reader to recognize the truth about the value of warmth and protection in a cold world.
Sample Analysis: Images

The images within the poem are very strong and appealing. Neruda describes his socks originally “as soft as rabbits” and the reader immediately thinks about that tactile sensation. But Neruda goes on to contrast that image with the empowerment he feels when the socks are on his feet. He says that they are sharks with golden teeth. The contrast between the soft rabbit and furious shark shows that the socks have an emotional power for the speaker; the socks are warm but he feels confident when they are on his feet. He also speaks of the unworthiness of his feet to even wear the socks. The image he provides to express this idea is that his feet are “decrepit firemen” unworthy of the socks fire. The image of snarled and disfigured foot comes the reader’s mind and instantly the unworthy feelings the speaker is describing are understood.
Sample Analysis: Tone

The tone of the poem also speaks to awe the speaker holds for the socks. The poet’s diction makes the reader consider the value of the socks to speaker. The socks are “magnificent” “glowing” and “heavenly.” The speaker expresses a tone of reverence for the socks. It at first strikes the reader as absurd to speak of socks in such a hyperbolic way, but then the reader recognizes the socks have a special value for the speaker.
Sample Analysis: So What?

The long narrow structure, specific images, and reverential tone allow the reader to come to the truth concerning “Ode to My Socks.” The poet is not being silly or sarcastic about his socks, but rather recognizes their valued importance. The speaker is poor and living in a freezing climate and a good pair of wool socks would be of extreme value. The dream like consideration of the socks, the imagery of the emotional power of the socks, and the specific diction concerning the socks majesty allow the reader to recognize their worth to the speaker and then cause the reader to consider what they value to that same degree and this is the true power of “Ode to My Socks.”