

1. It "reads" by discovering the large and small literary elements that combine to form the text.;
2. It seeks to establish that all these elements are unified by a dominant idea that controls the text.

Steps:

1. Read the poem several times, until the literal meaning is clear, you have become familiar with all significant details, and are familiar with all the words. Read the poem a few more times, now paying attention to any unusual shifts (in tone, diction, or narrative), as well as to the poem's particular cadences and form.
2. Identify the speaker (remembering that he/she is different from the author), the addressee, and the motive behind the poem (i.e., Why is the speaker saying these things?).
3. What is the setting of and context for the poem? (Has anything been happening when the poem begins? What has provoked the speaker into utterance? What seem to be the speaker's concerns?)
4. Try to paraphrase the poem's argument or movement. Does the poem invite more than one kind of reading?
5. Are there any literary, cultural, or historical references that enhance, complicate, or hinder your understanding of the poem?
6. Pay close attention to the opening lines and the closing lines.
7. Is there an emotional curve on which the poem is strung?
8. Identify key images and lines and see how they are developed over the course of the poem.
9. Examine the poem's diction. Ask what any particular word, phrase, line is doing in the poem. If it's a good poem, there will be a good answer. Consider some of the choices against other choices the poet could have made.
10. Always test your expectations (as set up by the poem's title, initial tone, subject matter, etc.) against what the poem actually does. Do not assign meanings and/or construct interpretations that you can't support with direct references to the text.
11. Establish if the poem is written in a traditional/received form and determine its stanza structure, rhyme, and meter. Note any variations from its prosodic patterns and wonder about their significance.
12. If written in free verse, (how) does the poem compensate for those formal gestures found in traditional verse?
13. Does the poem's sound reflect (or act out) the situation it describes?
14. Do content and form seem to reflect, complement, or comment on each other in any other way?
15. Summarize all interpretative possibilities, as they have emerged from your explication of the poem.
16. Connect the poem to other literary works that make use of similar themes.
17. When pertinent, consider the poem's theme in the context of other current debates about culture, gender, sexuality, racial and ethnic identity, religion, and socio-politics.

DUTY

Your husband is obsessed
with your care:
he waits on you.
If he owes you
it is certainly not this much,
not this daily washing
and turning
and feeding.
I think this is duty.
He was a military man.
Perhaps, after all, you are his country now,
maybe this is just patriotic love.

I want you to know
even though you are unable to speak
he talks to you and brushes your hair.

When you began dying
I put an IV just under
the skin of your thigh
to keep you a few days longer.
(It is an old nursing home trick.
Raise a goose egg of normal saline
and prevent dehydration
when you can't find a vein.)

Both he and I knew
it was just an endgame
but we needed time.

It was the reverse of induced childbirth:
a drip to slow down the delivery.
Looking back, I am sorry.

But death came fast anyway
and when it did
we cried
looked down on you together
and he stroked your face.
I went to the kitchen
watched the gray squirrels
run through the snow.

When he shook hands,
your husband always
lifted up my hand
just an inch or two
as if to say
I will take care of it, doctor.

DAVID L. SCHIEDERMAYER

DAVID L. SCHIEDERMAYER (1955-). American physician, educator, ethicist, poet. Schiedermayer was born in Royal Oak, Michigan, and grew up in Appleton, Wisconsin. He received his bachelor's degree in chemistry summa cum laude from St. Olaf College. He attended the Medical College of Wisconsin, from which he received his M.D. in 1981, again with a distinguished record. Schiedermayer trained in internal medicine at the Medical College of Wisconsin, where he is now associate professor of medicine. In 1986-1987, he was Henry J. Kaiser Foundation fellow and National Fund for Medical Education visiting scholar at the Center for Clinical Medical Ethics at the University of Chicago. His poetry writing began well before medical school and has continued. Individual poems have appeared in the Journal of the American Medical Association, Pharos, Annals of Internal Medicine and the Archives of Internal Medicine. His literary work was published in book form as House Calls, Rounds, and Healings: A Poetry Casebook (1996). In teaching, he has a special interest in the interplay between medical ethics and compassion, as well as in the use of literature in addressing clinical issues.

MARILYN KRYSL (1942-). American poet and writer. Krysl has published seven books of poetry and two volumes of fiction, the most recent, *How to Accommodate Men*. Her poetry and stories have appeared in such annual anthologies as the Pushcart Prize Anthology and Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards, along with many journals and other publications. She is currently director of creative writing at the University of Colorado at Boulder. While her poetry reflects a wide range of her interests, she is particularly interested in health and healing. Some of her poetry grew out of the year she spent as artist in residence at the Center for Human Caring at the University of Colorado School of Nursing, which commissioned her to reflect on and write about the day-to-day experiences of nurses and nursing students and their relationships with patients. Other poetry records her experiences as a volunteer in the Kalighat Home for the Destitute and Dying, administered by Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity, or time she spent with curanderas, Navajo healers, and alternative healers.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS THE MOMENT OF DEATH

I work nights; and he was awake.
When he saw me, he said, "I'm not going to
make it." Well when they say that
they know. People can tell. You don't

argue with an expert. I wet the cloth
and bathed his face, but it didn't do him
good. So I took his hands in my two
and we held on. No one

was alone in that motion. The way water
is a part of itself, we were the going
until his hands went slack in mine.
Still I held on, some final acknowledgment

beginning its climb out of the body,
his skin resilient still, that shine
across a taut thing—then I saw it sag
and go flat. His body had a clearness

about it then, the clean weightlessness
of a crucible completely empty,
in which you hear the air ticking
against the glaze. Then I heard another

sound, like when you're a kid, holding
a shell to your ear, hearing
the ocean. I held on, and then I understood:
it was the sound of my own blood.