

AP Lit Analysis
Alternative Questions for Poetry

Ask	Instead of	Why?
<i>What does the poem want me to know?</i>	What does this poem mean?	Carol Jago says that poems do not have one set meaning. Instead of growing anxious over finding that one right answer, this phrasing invites you to explore the poem for multiple interpretations.
<i>What is trying to figure out?</i>		Another way to approach meaning is to consider it from the poet's perspective. Poet R. A. Villanueva explains that he often writes poems in a way to "figure things out." Not every poem has one finite meaning or purpose.
<i>What impact does this literary element have on the poem?</i>	What or where is a specific literary element?	Celine Gomez explains that this question moves us beyond simply finding and defining a literary element. By explaining that element's impact, you move into higher-thinking analysis.
<i>What universal truth is the author conveying?</i>	What is the theme?	Too often, theme analysis struggles to move beyond simple subject matter. Celene Gomez suggests approaching it as a fellow human. What universal feelings or truths is the speaker discussing, and how do they apply to all of us?
<i>Why did the poet choose this form?</i>	What is the form?	Poet R. A. Villanueva explains that line breaks, pauses, and other form techniques indicate the way he wants his poem to sound. Even in fixed form poems, there is a purpose behind a poem's structure. Instead of "what," as "why" to study a poem's structure.
<i>How does the poet use form to develop his/her ideas?</i>		
<i>How does it feel?</i>	Where is the imagery?	Instead of listing all sensory experiences, feel them yourself! Ask yourself what feelings arise as you experience the poem. Then, support your answer with textual support. This is imagery analysis.
<i>Consider the speaker's presentation of self vs. the reality of their situation.</i>	Where's the complexity?	Complexity means multiple things are happening, but it can be hard to find sometimes. To nail it down, consider what the speaker says or feels versus what is really happening. Many times, there's two different things there.
<i>What emotions drive the poem?</i>	What is the tone?	Always study tone from the speaker's point of view. Be as specific as possible with your tone words, and consider how the emotions evolve, shift, and compound on each other as the poem moves along.
<i>Why is this speaker talking?</i>	Who is the speaker?	Identifying the speaker is only step one. By examining the speaker's purpose, nuances, background, and more, you can get closer to complex analysis.