

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A POEM

with a nod to Hugh Behm-Steinberg

1. **What is the intent of the poem?** What drove the poet to write the poem? Story, lyrical statement, etc.?
2. **Beginnings and Endings.** Frames. Openings and closings. Of lines, stanzas, the poem itself.
3. **Order and Organization.** How lyric is presented, or drama developed.
4. **Voice.** How and who. Speaking in a poem, how it resonates, is set up.
5. **Point of View (POV).** Is there a POV, does it change?
6. **Verbs, Verb Tense, Pronouns.** Rotate around. What happens when first person becomes third person? When past becomes present?
7. **Texture of Language.** Alliteration, assonance, sound, meter and rhyme.
8. **Image, Metaphor, Trope.** Sites where language is pressured to mean more than it normally or casually does.
9. **Resiliency with the Materials.** Something that doesn't fit. Syntax. Grammar. Balance and consistency.
10. **Title.**
11. **Clarity and Mystery.**
12. **Patterns.** What's repeated, what do you return to.
13. **Mode:** lyric, meditative, narrative, rhetorical.
14. **Opportunities.** Places where you can do something else in the poem. If you pass your hand over the poem, where do you feel the heat?
15. **Structure.** Skeleton (structure that supports the poem) versus scaffolding (structure which allows the poem to be written, but is no longer needed when the poem is complete?)
16. **Sequence versus Series.** How is the poem tied together?
17. **Larger Issues.** How does this poem relate or interact with other poems? Sources. Canons. Cultural context.