Five preliminary strategies for understanding and appreciating poetry.
A good poem will no more yield its full meaning on a single read than a Beethoven symphony on a single hearing. Two readings may be necessary to simply let you get your bearings. And if the poem is a work of art, it will repay repeated and prolonged examination.
2. Keep a dictionary by you and use it.

- It is futile to try to understand poetry without knowing the meanings of the words of which it is composed.
3. Read so as to hear the words in your mind.

- Poetry is meant to be heard: its meaning conveyed through sound as well and print. Therefore every word is important. Make sure you hear them!
4. Pay careful attention to what the poem is *really* saying.

- Do not get so caught up in the sounds and the language of the poem, that you pay no attention to what the poem really means. Again, because most poems have such hidden meanings, multiple reads are required.
5. Practice reading poems aloud

- Read each poem you encounter affectionately, but not affectedly. Try not to treat each line as a complete thought, but rather follow the flow of the poem.
Essential Questions of Poetic Analysis

- Who is the speaker?
- What is the occasion?
- What is the central purpose?
- By what means is the purpose achieved?
Who is the speaker?

A cardinal error of some readers is to assume that a speaker who uses first person pronouns (I, mine, me) is always the poet referring to themselves, when more often than not that is not the case. Poems like short stories belong to the world of fiction and reflect a factually real world, but not always that of the poet.
What is the occasion?

- This question begs the age old question WHY? Why did the poet write this? Why now? Why this very moment? What is the historical context?
What is the central purpose?

- Sometimes the purpose is to tell a story, to reveal human character, to impart a vivid impression of a scene to express a mood or an emotion, or to convey vividly some idea or attitude. Whatever the motive, be sure you can identify the central purpose. After you have defined the reason the poet wanted to convey this topic in this way, analysis comes more organically.
By what means in the purpose achieved?

- After identifying the central purpose you should explore the degree to which the poet achieved their desired end result.