TIPS FOR READING AND UNDERSTANDING POETRY
1 - Preview the poem. Read the title and the name of the poet and notice the structure (shape, number of lines, stanzas, and capitalization and punctuation) and anything that stands out (a rhyme scheme, repetition, invented words, etc.).
2- Read the poem aloud several times. Listen for rhythm and rhyme, the sounds of words and groups of words, and the overall sound of the poem. Pay attention to the punctuation; if there is no punctuation at the end of a line, don’t pause, go right on to the next line. (If the poem has no punctuation at all, you will need to decide if you should pause at the end of each line or if you should keep going all the way to the end). Get a feel for the poem. Enjoy it.
3- **Clarify words and phrases** that you don’t understand, including figures of speech. Use context clues, the dictionary, or ask for help. Sometimes poems contain allusions that are critical to understanding their meaning.

4- **Identify the speaker** – it will help you understand the poem. Remember that the speaker is not always the poet.
5- Analyze the structure and the language. Study the poem’s form and the way it’s organized, the placement of words on the page, the word choice, and the use of figurative language. Identify the tools and tricks the poet used to craft the poem.

6- Visualize the imagery. Make personal connections to what you picture in your mind. Let the images speak to you. Feel the mood of the poem.
7- Identify the theme and the message (the “meaning” of the poem). What’s the topic? What do you think the poet is saying about the topic? Think about all you have already noticed about the poem. Look for clues about the poem’s meaning in the connotations of words and the way the poem is written. Poems may say more than one thing and can mean different things to different people. Some poems are not about “meaning” at all, but about words and sounds. Make a personal connection to the poem.

What does it say to you? Why?
1 - Evaluate the poem and perhaps share it with others. Do you think it’s well crafted? What do you like about it? Would you include it in your collection of favorite poems? Would you like to share it and discuss it with a friend?
From “Introduction to Poetry” by Billy Collins:

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide
or press an ear against it hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,
or walk inside a poem’s room
and feel the wall for a light switch.
Poetry Guides and Poetry Anthologies

*Reader’s Handbook* by Great Source Education Group (pages 408-468)

*Immersed in Verse* by Allan Wolf

*A Kick in the Head* - edited by Paul B. Janeczko

*A Child’s Anthology of Poetry* - edited by Elizabeth Hauge Sword

*I Feel a Little Jumpy Around You* - by Naomi Shihab Nye and Paul B. Janeczko

*Cool Salsa: Bilingual Poems* - edited by Lori M. Carlson

*This Same Sky* - international poems selected by Naomi Shihab Nye

*Heart to Heart* - poems inspired by 20th century art - edited by Jan Greenberg

*The Oxford Illustrated Book of American Children’s Poems* - edited by Donald Hall

The Series *Poetry for Young Children* by Scholastic

*Poetry 180* - an anthology of contemporary poems selected by Billy Collins

*An Invitation to Poetry* - edited by Robert Pinsky and Maggie Dietz
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