



A GUIDE FOR READING POETRY

*We don't read and write poetry because it's cute.
We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race.
And the human race is filled with passion. And medicine, law, engineering,
business, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life.
But poetry, beauty, romance, love, this is what we stay alive for.*

John Keating
Dead Poets Society

There is no right or wrong way to read poetry. There is a possibility to experience poetry in such a way that we become more connected with the human race and thus with our own humanity. Poetry activates our imagination and our curiosity, and gives us access to emotions and imagery that can be otherwise elusive.

This guide for reading and experiencing poetry includes invitations for reading sacred texts given by the Christian and Jewish traditions. Secular 'approximations' follow. For more texture, listen to my conversation with Rick Voirin at Rise Leaders Radio, Episode #18 Using Poetry to Expand Perspective (Start Close In): www.rise-leaders.com/podcast

From the Christian tradition, 'Lectio Divina', Latin for Divine Word:

- Read
- Meditate
- Pray
- Contemplate

From the Jewish tradition, PaRDeS:

- Peshat -the 'surface', or literal meaning
- Remez - 'hints', or the deep meaning beyond the literal sense
- Derash - 'inquire', comparing to similar occurrences
- Sod - 'mystery', or the esoteric/mystical meaning

Four Approximations:

1. What are the facts? What can I observe about the poem - the 'black and white'.
2. What comes up for me? What am I reminded of? How do I relate to this?
3. What deeper meaning do I give my interpretation?
4. What do I want to do with this new insight or understanding?



START CLOSE IN

by David Whyte

Start close in,
don't take the second step
or the third,
start with the first thing
close in,
the step you don't want to take.

Start with
the ground
you know,
the pale ground
beneath your feet,
your own
way of starting
the conversation.

Start with your own
question,
give up on other
people's questions,
don't let them
smother something
simple.

To find
another's voice
follow
your own voice,
wait until
that voice
becomes a
private ear
listening
to another.

Start right now
take a small step
you can call your own
don't follow
someone else's
heroics, be humble
and focused,
start close in,
don't mistake
that other
for your own.

Start close in,
don't take the second step
or the third,
start with the first
thing
close in,
the step you don't want to take.



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What are your observations about the poem?

Words, structure, author, length, etc.

What comes up for me as I read, or recite this poem? Am I reminded of something?

Images, comparisons, analogies, memories - a situation I am in myself?

What meaning do I make of this?

Is there a new way of making sense of what I was reminded of? How might I integrate this into my life now? Is something new possible?

What will I do now? Is there a new, more informed action I can take?

Will I take an observable action? Might I be more compassionate? Will I take on a new practice, or habit, to make this insight sustainable?