**Putting the Pieces Together:  Explicating Poems**

Now that you are familiar with meter, rhyme, verse forms, stanza forms, sound devices, imagery, and figures of speech, you need to put the pieces together and look at each poem you study as an organic whole.  Remember that it is always clearer to work from the literal level of the poem (what is really going on, what is really being described) to the figurative level (what the poem means or the emotion it conveys).  The following are some steps/questions to ask yourself to help with this process:

**Checklist for Reading, Explicating, & Analyzing Poetry:**

1. Read the poem more than once.  Read it out loud.
2. Look up vocabulary/diction you don't know.  Some words have multiple meanings. Knowing all of a word’s meanings (denotations & connotations) is essential to fully understanding a poem’s nuanced message.
3. Determine the rhyme scheme & meter to identify the verse form, whether rhymed, blank, or free verse. Check the stanza form as well to see if it is a special stanza form like ballad, limerick, sonnet, etc...
4. If it is a sonnet, determine whether it’s Italian (octave & sestet) or Shakespearean (3 quatrains & couplet) – this will help you interpret the meaning (octave=problem/question & sestet=answer/response **or** 3 quatrains= series of extended metaphors to describe a concept & couplet=twist).
5. Identify the **speaker**: remember the speaker is not a poet, but a man, woman, child, lover, or hunter.
6. Identify the **occasion**: the setting or context of the poem.
7. Identify the **audience**: person/object/general public/situation being addressed.
8. Identify the **purpose**: to entertain, parody, satirize, woo, comment, question.
9. Paraphrase the poem: describe in your own words what is literally occurring or being described in each line of each stanza or section of the poem.
10. Circle any figurative language, imagery, or other poetic devices.
11. Underline any sound devices such as alliteration, assonance, or repetition.
12. Box any word that suggests the **tone** or the speaker's attitude towards the subject?  What is the central emotion conveyed?
13. What is the relationship of the title to the poem?  Remember sometimes the title is merely the first line of the poem and is of no significance.
14. **Connect each figurative, sound, or tone device identified in #10-12 to possible meaning(s) in order to identify the poem’s overall subject/theme and emotion**. (\*\*\*This step expresses the essential purpose of this process).