



9 tips for how to read a poem, by Doctor Norman Rosenthal



Dr. Norman Rosenthal, is the world renowned researcher who coined the term Seasonal Affective Disorder and pioneered the use of light therapy for its treatment. He is a best-selling author and has an active psychiatry and coaching practice. Dr. Rosenthal is now suggesting the use of POETRY as a means of healing, inspiring and bringing joy to your life.

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Here are some suggestions for how you might get the most meaning, value and enjoyment out of a poem.

1. Actively engage with the poem. Someone once said, “If the sheets haven’t been ruffled, poetry hasn’t spent the night.” In other words, if you want to get the most out of a poem, roll up your sleeves and play with it actively. Give the poem your full attention and it will reward you.
2. Experience the poem with all of your senses. A poem is no more a purely intellectual experience than a song or a painting or a spoonful of ice cream.

3. A poem is a collaboration, a conversation between the poet and the reader. The reader completes the poem, in the process bringing to it his or her own past experiences. The poem is a genie that comes out of the bottle to liberate the reader's imagination. Allow yourself to experience the wonder a poem provides when it opens up new spaces in which your mind can roam.

4. Read the poem more than once. One mysterious aspect of a poem is how it can change with successive readings. It is strange how new meanings begin to unfold. After all, the lines are right there on the page. When you read them the first time, they may seem perfectly clear. How is it then that they can still yield new revelations and rewards when you revisit them? What is it about a poem that enables the brain to perform such magic?

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5. Read the poem aloud - and listen to it. One pleasure inherent in a poem is the musicality of its words, which may best be enjoyed when you hear them spoken. Many

of the poems I will share with you are read aloud online by talented women and men.

6. Tolerate - and even savor - ambiguity of feeling and thought. Be intrigued by what you don't immediately understand. There is such a thing as creative reading as well as creative writing. Often in poems, circuits are not completed. Ideas are left unfinished or equivocal. This is not accidental. The unfinished business may serve as a focus of continued puzzlement, a brain teaser lingering in the your mind, begging for a solution. There is some experimental data suggesting that people remember unfinished or interrupted tasks better than completed ones. So, it may be that by presenting the reader with unfinished ideas, the poet creates a more indelible and memorable work.

7. The reader completes the poem, in the process bringing to it his or her own past experiences. At the moment of completion, it may feel like the pieces of a puzzle fall together. You may delight in the aha moment as you think, "So that's what the poet meant!" Such epiphanies

may happen more than once in relation to the same poem.

8. Pay attention to details: Punctuation, the separation of lines, their placement on the page, form, rhythm and rhyme, as well as the white space that helps give the poem its shape. They are all part of what the poet is trying to communicate.

9. Remember to enjoy the poem. It should be fun, not work.

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