

Title; setting and context; persona

A title is a very important part of any text – spoken or written both in poetry and in prose. It is as important as the head is to the entire body.

Before one tackles any text, it is always important to take time to try and look out for any meanings suggested by the title. Our initial interpretation of a title before we delve into the body of its text often affects how we understand that text. This is because a title is ideally meant to be the sum up of the subject matter of a text. It always gives us a clue of what the poem or prose text is all about. Also, the title is important because it relates to the writer's message / intention.

N.B. Whether correctly or wrongly interpreted, a title evokes in us some expectations that critically influence our understanding of a given text. That is, even if the first guess at the meaning of the title is eventually proved wrong by the content that still is the beginning to understanding of the text. It is better than simply bumping into the text with a blank mind. Also, when one gets to study the text, they should keep relating it to the title so as to be able to pick the relationship between the two. This way, a reader is able to conclude that a title is relevant to a given text or not. A title – how it is written and the word(s) that make it up, also reflect on the writer's style and message. So it is key to notice how brief / lengthy, punctuated, the words, etc. used in the title because their choice is intentional and thus affects our over all interpretation of the text.

Poems for illustration: ***You!*** by Traditional Igbo, **Rhymes and Rhythms** pg ***Tarantella*** by Hilaire Belloc, **Demystifying A Level Poetry** pg. 130 and **Prose and Poetry Unseens** Pg 38-39; ***To Mt. Masaba*** by Timothy Wangusa, **Demystifying A Level Poetry** pg. 4

Setting and context are synonymous but not totally the same. **Setting** refers to the time (when) and place (where) of occurrence of actions / events in a given poem or prose text. In terms of time it may be dawn, morning, noon, afternoon, evening, dusk night, day, summer, winter, spring, autumn, past, present, future, etc. this is called time setting. In terms of place, it may be a church building, school, street, home, bar, grave yard, village, slum, town, city, etc. this is called place setting. **In between the two** aforementioned settings there is often the atmospheric setting that can be described by adjectives such as; cloudy, rainy, sunny, windy, stormy, foggy, still, warm, noisy, silent / quiet, cold, hot, chilly, etc. Setting in its varied forms as seen above naturally affects the events, actions, feelings, ideas and behavior of characters in a given poem or prose text. For example if the setting is in the city, under normal conditions, we would expect liveliness, cheerfulness, business, wealth, high class life, but also chaos, tension, strikes, poverty, beggars, etc. In the villages we may anticipate calmness, peace, harmony, communal celebrations, unity, scarcity, illiteracy, but also abundance etc On a sunny day may we anticipate joy, laughter, partying, cheerfulness, hopefulness etc yet on a cold / cloudy / rainy day; misery, hopelessness, disease, death, etc dusk or night may portend; sickness,

danger, insecurity, fear, death, misery, etc yet morning or sunrise may portend; hope, joy, happiness, gladness, optimism, life, continuity etc

N.B Setting may be directly stated (explicit) or implied (implicit) and may some times be static or evolve with the change of events in a poem or prose text.

✓ What is the difference between setting and atmosphere in a poem?

Context, on the other hand, refers to the general circumstances surrounding the speaker and how they affect his view of events and actions in a given text. Like setting, context reflects on the when and where of events and actions. However, the when and where can only be inferred from deeper details such as names of people, places, behavior of people, actions (rejoicing, mourning, playing etc.), tense, language (e.g. simple / complex words, vernacular, abusive /offensive, scientific, tense, etc.) and among others.

N.B. Setting and context enable words to gain more proper and appropriate meaning because words have the potential to mean so many things in as many contexts and settings as there can be. Also, these two aspects help readers to establish and relevantly appreciate the mood and atmosphere in a given text.

Persona means *mask* and refers to the speaking voice in a poem. It is the speaking voice through which a poet speaks to the audience. This is so because often times poets, like writers of other texts, are only observers of what takes place in life then relay these experiences to society. And so they wear a *mask* (voice) with which they can best share the observed experiences and ideas. For example a poet may be a professor but who closely observes the life and suffering of a beggar and so decides to relay this experience to readers by some times letting the beggar or passers-by speak. Nonetheless, there are few instances when the poet is actually the speaker in the poem or prose piece. We can always tell the speaking voice from the choice of personal pronouns used by the poet e.g. *I, we, us, ours, him, her, you, his, them, they, their* etc. N.B. In prose, the speaking voice is referred to as *narrator*.

RHETORICAL DEVICES

Rhetorical stems from the word rhetoric. **Rhetoric** refers to speech or writing in which the point(s) to be communicated are put across to the listeners or readers persuasively. Thus **rhetorical devices** are aids that a skillful speaker or writer employs in his language so as to be able to communicate effectively and persuasively. In employing any of these devices, the speaker or writer intends to appeal to and sway the listeners or readers to his view / side of things through emphasis and persuasion. The art of doing this is termed as **rhetory**. Rhetorical devices include:

Rhetorical question: This is a question that which a speaker may throw at his audience but demands no answer from the recipients. It is often intended to provoke and awaken their

thoughts and emotions so as to get them to the point where speaker or writer is. In this way, he causes his audience to see things as he does hence being able to persuade them. For example during a political rally a presidential candidate may play on the audience's emotions by saying "Do you want Amin to come back?" This does not necessarily mean that Amin will come back if they do not vote his or her into power, but that they may suffer tyranny, oppression, death etc as they did during Amin's era. N.B. Rhetorical questions are often times simple whose would-be response is as well too obvious.

Hyperbole to the intended use of exaggeration for purposes of creating effect such as emphasis. It is also referred to as **overstatement**, where by things are made to sound more than they really are. For example when a lover says to his loved one, "I will cross the ocean for you..... I will go and bring you the moon..... as long as you love me" Of course he cannot do it and neither is he telling lies but only trying to emphasize how much he loves his beloved and so persuade her to love him back.

Euphemism is a device in which indirectness replaces directness. Here things are **understated** for purposes of politeness / manners and social acceptability. Thus words / expressions that are socially offending, traumatizing / alarming or embarrassing are expressed in softer – more acceptable and palatable terms to the recipient. For instance "My late aunt passed on many years ago." is less alarming than "My dead aunt died many years ago." The former is more civil and polite than the later. Euphemism often times helps to lighten the feelings, mood and atmosphere in which things are said.

Juxtaposition refers to putting two or more items are placed side by side so as emphasize the **difference / contrast** between them. This device is used for purposes of drawing emphasis and clarity. Study: *Richard Cory* by Edwin Arlington Robinson, **Images and Impressions pg.130**.

Copy the poem, study it and identify what has been juxtaposed by the poet and the implied meaning behind the juxtaposition.

Analogy refers to close comparison. Apart from being a figure it is also a device that is used in which two things that are similar in some way, are compared so as to explain something and make it easier to understand. Study: *The Analogy* by Bahadur Tejani **Demystifying A Level Poetry Pg. 49 – 50**.

Copy the poem in your books and explain meaning in the analogy drawn by the poet.

Paradox refers to something absurd or contradictory. Here, a phrase/ statement/ idea or situation that seems absurd and self-contradictory – not seeming to make sense and yet on

closer examination, it actually entails a degree of truth / logic or meaning. Paradox often has an undertone of irony to it since it reflects the unusual and commonly unexpected. For example a situation such as: Many students being taught by the same teacher – using the same materials and yet when results return, some pass and others fail. Also a situation where in the same village or place: while a mother A is in desperate need to have a child of her own at whatever cost, yet a mother B has the courage of having her child beheaded in the name of riches. The greatest of all teachers, Jesus often made paradoxical statements such as: Those who try to save their life shall lose it and those that lose it shall save it; the first shall come last etc. Study ***The Mess of Love*** by D.H Lawrence, **Demystifying A Level Poetry Pg. 63** ; ***Death of an Eland*** by Henry Barlow, **Poems from East Africa pg. 16 – 17**

Copy both poems in your books, study them and identify the paradoxes therein. What sense or interpretation do you make out of them in regard to the poem? Study and answer each poem independently.

Oxymoron is a kind of device which is more like paradox. In this, two opposed ideas are combined into one statement that sounds contradictory but makes sense at a closer look. For example: necessary evil, sweet pain, painful pleasure, bitter sweet, wise fool, legal murder; better to live with the devil you know than the angel you don't know. etc. This device is employed for special effect such as emphasis and humor

Antithesis is a device in which ideas or terms that are directly opposed to each other or totally different in meaning are placed side by side for purposes for emphasis of the speaker's subject and message. Study: Elegy (On the night before his execution) Pg. 64

Copy the poem the poem in your exercise books and draw the antitheses in the poem as in Prime of youth - frost of cares and explain their in the context of the poem.

Climax is a term very common to all genres of literature i.e. drama, novel and poetry.. It is the systematic and cumulative description and arrangement of ideas, events, actions or emotions in their order of increasing intensity and impressiveness, to their highest point. Here effect is always achieved as the highest point marks the turning point hence resolving the tension and conflict therein. It is also employed in speech.

Anticlimax / bathos is the opposite of climax and refers to descent / sudden lowering. Here readers or listeners often experience a disappointing end after big build - up: That is to say, experiencing an ordinary or unsatisfying event that follows an increasingly exciting, dramatic, or unusual series of events or a period of increasing anticipation and excitement. It can also relate to a sudden lowering of tone and subject matter - from serious and compelling to comic, trivial and dull.

N.B. The reader / listener is disappointed by being let down in his expectations of what was going to happen in a poem. He is let down from the good to the bad in a way that is surprising because events are described as taking a different course from that initially set for the reader.

Richard Cory by Edwin Arlington Robinson, **Images and Impressions pg. 130.**

Copy and study the poem. Identify the use of climax and bathos, and how they have been used to effectively bring out the poet's message.

Satire is the use of light hearted and playful language to criticise human weaknesses, follies and vices. Satire is the result of using / employing irony, sarcasm and ridicule / mockery. Thus a piece of writing or speech can be said to be satirical because it contains irony, sarcasm or ridicule / mockery.

Irony literally means *opposite*. As a device, irony refers to the disparity between what is expected and what actually happens – in actions and words. Irony can be analysed at two levels – literally (surface wise) or figuratively. It can also be categorised into three: *Verbal irony* – when people use words or phrases whose meaning is contrary to what they actually mean. For example when A loses B's new golden necklace and B's response is "it is alright!" with a smile, instead of heating up and questioning A as would be naturally expected, at least for a while.

Situational irony – when something happens but is contrary to what is actually expected. For example a mother who is jealous of her biological daughter's success so much that she decides to have nothing to do with her. Yet naturally, we would expect any mother to delight in her daughter's success, at least that of the biological one.

Character irony – when a character behaves in a manner contrary to what is expected of them. For example an adult, who because he / she is hungry cries instead of finding something to eat.

Sarcasm refers to cutting language in which someone uses light hearted remarks to strongly criticise another for their wrong doing.

Ridicule refers to the act of making fun of somebody in a way that is contemptuous hence mocking / belittling / demeaning them such that they feel small and so foolish because of their actions.

Copy and study: Building the Nation by Henry Barlow, Demystifying A Level Poetry Pg. 66-67. Identify and explain the use of satire in the poem.