

Wealth & Poverty Unit

Explicating a Poem



AN EXAMPLE

Analyzing poetry



- A poetry explication is an analysis which describes the possible meanings and relationships of the words, images, and other small units that make up a poem.
- Analyzing poetry can be difficult! For this course you have to write an analysis, or explication, of “Ballade of Worldly Wealth” by Andrew Lang.
- In the following presentation we will be analyzing “Dreamland” by Lewis Carroll to help prepare you for this seemingly daunting task. 😊

Step 1- Read the poem.



Dreamland by Lewis Carroll

When midnight mists are creeping,
And all the land is sleeping,
Around me tread the mighty dead,
And slowly pass away.

Lo, warriors, saints, and sages,
From out the vanished ages,
With solemn pace and reverend face
Appear and pass away.

The blaze of noonday splendour,
The twilight soft and tender,
May charm the eye: yet they shall die,
Shall die and pass away.

But here, in Dreamland's centre,
No spoiler's hand may enter,
These visions fair, this radiance rare,
Shall never pass away.

I see the shadows falling,
The forms of old recalling;
Around me tread the mighty dead,
And slowly pass away.

Step 2- Read the poem out loud.



- Click on the link below to hear audio of this poem:

<http://voicethread.com/share/815005/>

Step 3- Go through and find the definitions to words you do not know.

Dreamland

- When midnight mists are creeping,
And all the land is sleeping,
Around me **tread** the mighty dead,
And slowly pass away.
- Lo, warriors, saints, and **sages** ,
From out the vanished ages,
With **solemn** pace and **reverend** face
Appear and pass away.
- The blaze of **noonday splendour**,
The twilight soft and tender,
May charm the eye: yet they shall die,
Shall die and pass away.
- But here, in Dreamland's centre,
No **spoiler's** hand may enter,
These visions fair, this **radiance** rare,
Shall never pass away.
- I see the shadows falling,
The forms of old recalling;
Around me tread the mighty dead,
And slowly pass away.
-

Definitions:

- **Tread:** to set down the foot or feet in walking; step; walk.
- **Sages:** a profoundly wise person; a person famed for wisdom.
- **Solemn:** grave, sober, or mirthless, as a person, the face, speech, tone, or mood
- **Reverend:** worthy to be revered; entitled to reverence.
- **Noonday:** of or at noon or midday
- **Splendour:** brilliant or gorgeous appearance, coloring, etc.
- **Spoiler:** a person or thing that spoils
- **Radiance:** warm, cheerful brightness

Step 4- Answer the who, what, when, where, why, how questions.

WHO?

Who is speaking?

Remember that the author is not always the speaker.

- Who are they talking to?
- Who are they talking about?

WHAT?

- What are they talking about?

Answers from “Dreamland”



Who?

- The speaker is a man who envisions warriors, saints, and sages in his dreams.
- Carroll is speaking to people who do not see the value of dreams.

What?

- He is talking about the fact that you can see these smart people in your dreams because dreams can be “real” and alive.

Step 4- Continued



WHEN?

- When did the author write this?
- What was going on in the world at the time?
- What time period did the author write this?
- **You may have to do some additional research here!**

WHERE?

- Where did the author write this?
- Where does this poem take place?

Answers from “Dreamland”



When?

- Carroll wrote this poem in 1865.
- During this time the American Civil war was being fought, and the Industrial Revolution was going on in England.
- Carroll wrote during the Victorian Era.

Where?

- Lewis wrote this poem in England- soon after he published this poem he published *Alice in Wonderland*.

Step 4- Continued



WHY?

- Why did the author write this? What is the purpose of this poem?
 - You may have to do some additional research here.
 - This is also up to your own personal interpretation.

HOW?

- How did the author write about this?
- How did he send his intended message?
- This is your lead in to the next step.

Answers from “Dreamland”



WHY?

- Carroll may have wrote this poem to address those who believe that dreams may not be worth looking into.
- It is said that one of his friends came to him and told him that this was an actual dream that he had, so Carroll decided to take the dream and turn it into a poem.
- He also may have wrote this poem to express the ideal that in your dreams you can experience the best of life.

HOW?

- Carroll wrote his ideas in the form of a poem.
- The poem consists of five stanzas, each four lines each.

Step 5- Line by line analysis.



- Go through line by line, stanza by stanza, and look at the literary devices that the author uses.
- A good idea is to look at the number of stanzas and the meter of the poem first.
- For a comprehensive list of literary terms, click on the following link:
 - <http://www.poetry-online.org/poetry-terms.htm>
- **TIP:** For the poem that you will be explicating, look for the following literary devices: meter, rhetoric, diction, word order, rhyme scheme, rhyme, alliteration, repetition, simile, voice, tone, attitude.
- Ask yourself: Why does the poet use the device? How does it influence the poem's meaning?

Step 6- Diction: Now let's look at the language that Carroll continuously uses.



- List all the words that have to deal with night-time or darkness: midnight, sleeping, solemn, twilight, dreamland, shadows.
- List all the words that deal with death or seem spooky: mists, creeping, dead, vanished, pass away, die, falling, shadows, forms, slowly.
- List any word or phrase that is repeated: dead, die, pass away.
- Think about why he chooses these words. Poets choose their words very wisely. It is important to remember to look for patterns, or words that reoccur, while reading poetry.

Now you should be able to write a literary analysis of "Ballade of Worldly Wealth."



- Introduction: Who, What, When, Where, Why, How
- Body Paragraphs: The details and patterns of the poem, not a line-by-line translation.
 - Focus on one device per paragraph?
- Don't necessarily need a conclusion.
- Tips:
 - The poet is not necessarily the speaker.
 - Always use present tense when discussing poetry.
 - Avoid the verb "to be" in your writing—use active verbs.
- I hope that this has helped you to write your own explication of "Ballade of Worldly Wealth."
- Questions? Just ask! 😊