

Questions for Comparing Poems p. 952

Here are some questions and steps for identifying, interpreting and comparing the topic, theme and tone of more than one poem. As you respond to these questions or prompts, be sure to note line numbers to cite your evidence, according to this format: “puddingstone” (line 3) or “her terrified hands will lie / Still ringed with ordeals” (lines 9-10).

1. Read each poem through slowly and carefully.
2. Compare the titles .How do the titles point to the topics and possible themes, and are these similar or different?
3. What is the situation and setting in each poem? Make a list of the words in each poem that name objects or indicate actions. Which things or scenes are most significant, and how would you visualize or imagine them? Compare your notes on situation, setting, objects, and actions in both poems.
4. Who are the speakers? Are there other people in the poems? Is anyone identified as a listener or auditor? Are any things or beings (such as animals) personified or given human traits? Compare the speakers and other personalities in the poems.
5. What happens in each poem? Look closely at each stanza. Could the stanzas or lines be rearranged without making a difference? Does one poem tell of a single event or short passage of time, whereas another describes repeated actions or longer periods? Is one poem more eventful than the other?
6. Write down four or five words that describe the tone of each poem. Do these words also describe the language or style of each poem? Can you use all or some of the same words for both poems?
7. What is different about the two styles and forms, including length? Notice the rhythm and sounds, any regular or irregular patterns of **meter** or **rhyme**, and the shape of the stanzas.
8. Re-read the poems and try to express their themes in complete sentences. Then try to combine the two themes in a single statement that notes similarities and differences between them. Does your statement comparing the themes resemble your comparison of the tone and style of the two poems? Do the themes relate to similar or different historical, political and social issues or contexts featured in the poems? Do the poems develop their themes with comparable **allusions** to myth, religion, literature, art or other familiar or traditional ideas or associations?
9. Drawing on your notes and responses to the other questions, outline and write an essay comparing the two poems.