

June Jordan's Guidelines for Critiquing a Poem

1. Read it aloud.
2. Is it a poem?
 - a. Poetry: A medium for telling the truth.
 - b. Poetry: The achievement of maximum impact with minimal number of words.
 - c. Poetry: Utmost precision in use of language, hence, density and intensity of expression.
3. What is its purpose?
4. Is it coherent?
5. What are the strengths of the poem?
6. What are the weaknesses of the poem?
7. Is it a good poem?

Technical Checklist:

- a. Strong, descriptive verbs. Eliminate all forms of the verb "to be."
 - b. Singularity and vividness of diction (choice of words)
 - c. Specificity / resonant and representative details
 - d. Avoidance of abstractions and generalities
 - e. Defensible line breaks
 - f. Compelling / appropriate horizontal and / or vertical rhythm and / or vertical line breaks.
 - g. Alliteration / Assonance / Dissonance
 - h. Rhyme
 - i. Consistency of voice / distance from the reader / diction
 - j. Dramatic inconsistencies
 - k. Punctuation (Punctuation is not word choice. Poems fly or falter according to the words composing them. Therefore, omit punctuation and concentrate on every single word. E.g., if you think you need a question mark then you need to rewrite so that your syntax makes clear the interrogative nature of your thoughts. And as for commas and dashes and dots? Leave them out!)
8. Is it complete? Is it a dramatic event? Does it have a beginning that builds to a compelling middle development and then an ending that "lands" the whole poem somewhere fully satisfying to the reader?
 9. How does it fit into or change a tradition of poems?
 10. Read the poem aloud!

* From *June Jordan's Poetry for the People: A Revolutionary Blueprint*