

Analyzing Poetry

Introduction

Analyzing poetry sounds difficult, but it isn't hard if you take it one piece at a time. We're going to break it down step by step and see what we can discover about our poem. We'll do this with two goals in mind. Our first goal is just to enjoy the poem. Remember that most of the time, poets wrote poems so people would enjoy them. Don't get so stressed about figuring them out that you forget to enjoy them. Our second goal is to analyze them so we can discover what the poet is trying to say to us and learn about how he or she communicated those ideas. That will help us enjoy the poem even more and learn how to write poems that communicate our ideas to others.

Step One:

Read the poem thoughtfully and carefully out loud. Then read it silently to yourself. Are there any words of which you aren't sure of the meaning? Write them down.

Step Two:

What do you think the words mean from their context in the poem? Write down your thoughts and then look them up in a dictionary. Revise or expand their definitions based on what you learn.

Step Three:

What is the title of the poem? Is it obvious how it relates to what the poem is about? If not, what do you think the title might be referring to?

Step Four:

What is the setting? Where does the poem take place? What details do you notice about the setting?

Step Five:

What perspective or point of view is the poem written from? Is it something the speaker experienced? Is it something that happened in the past? Is it happening now or is it something that might happen in the future?

Step Six:

What words or phrases are repeated?

Why do you think the poet did this?

Step Seven:

Who are the characters in the poem? Is there a narrator? Is the narrator the poet or someone or something else?

Step Eight:

What is the mood of the poem? What words or phrases convey that? Think of the mood as how you as the reader feel when you read the poem. Does it make you happy or sad? Does it make you think hard about something?

Step Nine:

What is the tone of the poem? What words or phrases convey that? Think of the tone as how the poet communicates the feeling. Is it singsong, silly, humorous, sarcastic, etc.?

Step Ten:

What kind of rhythm does the poem have? Is it long and smooth? Is it jumpy or choppy?

Step Eleven:

What do you observe about the way the poem is broken into stanzas and lines? Why do you think the stanzas and lines are broken the way they are? What impact does it have on the poem?

Step Twelve:

What type of poem is it? How do you know it is this type? There are many different types of poems you may have learned about. Let's refresh our memory. A few of the types of poems are free verse, sonnet, haiku, concrete or shape, elegy, limerick, ballad, ode, cinquain, and acrostic.

Step Thirteen:

Does your poem have a rhyme scheme? If so, what is it?

Step Fourteen:

What literary devices are used? There are many different literary devices you may have learned about. Let's refresh our memory. A few of them are imagery, hyperbole, idiom, metaphor, alliteration, personification, allegory, allusion, assonance, hyperbole, simile, and onomatopoeia.

Step Fifteen:

What is the main theme of the poem? Is it about love, nature, a lesson learned, etc.?

Step Sixteen:

Is there anything you know about the poet and his or her life that sheds additional light on what the theme of the poem is?

Step Seventeen:

Can you determine the poet's purpose in writing the poem? Does the poet want you to learn something, remember something, feel something, etc.?

Step Eighteen:

Is the poem part of a series? If so, what is the overall theme of the series?

Analysis and Summary:

Now it's time to summarize the poem, take what you've learned and noticed about the poem, and write it all out together. Think of what you would tell someone about the poem that would help them understand it if they had never read it before.

[illegible]

A blank sheet of lined paper with a dashed border and horizontal ruling lines.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

With a parent or teacher's permission, do some research and see if you can find out more about Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

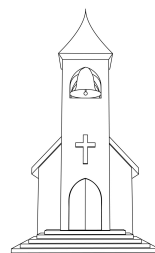
When and where was he born? _____

What was his life like? Did he have a family? What did he do for a living? _____

Did he publish any other poems? If so, what are the names of some of them? _____

When and where did he die? _____

What other interesting things did you learn about him? _____



Christmas Bells

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

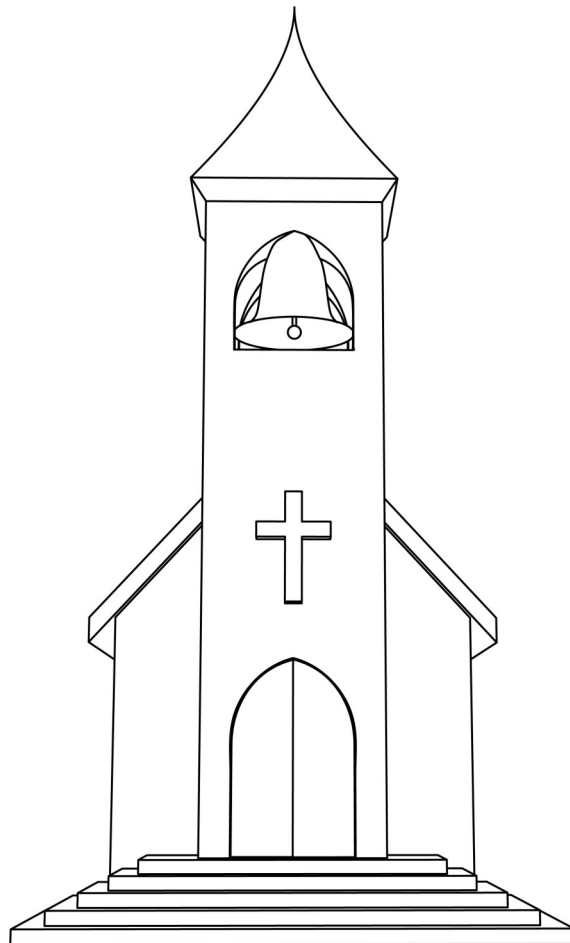
Till, ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead; nor doth he sleep!
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men!"



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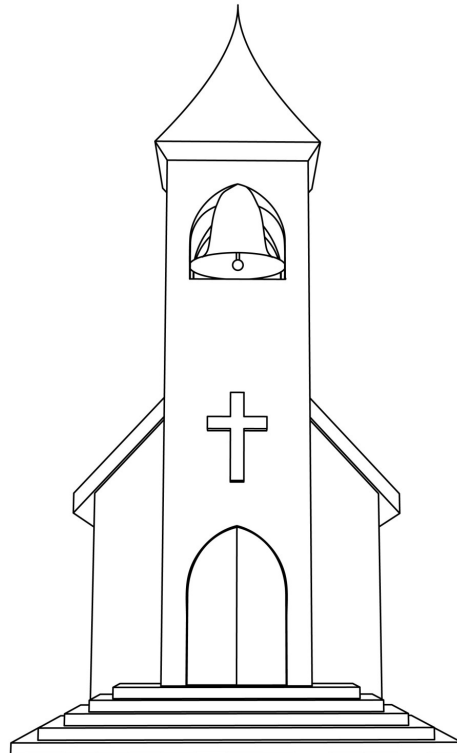


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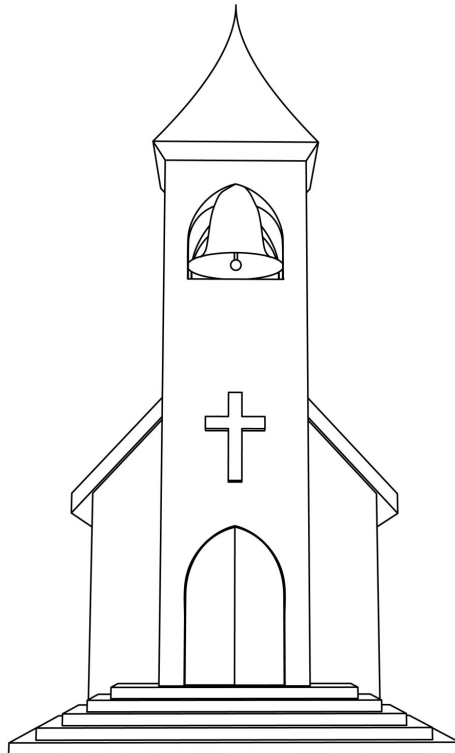
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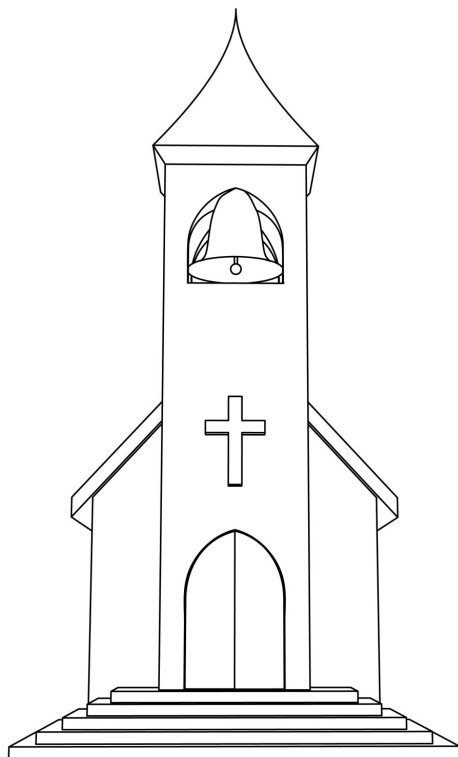
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