DiCTION IN POETRY

You will be identifying author’s tone in two different poems. Pay attention, though, because the tone may not be consistent through the whole poem. READ THE POEM ALL THE WAY THROUGH MORE THAN ONCE BEFORE YOU BEGIN.

Section One
Directions: As you read the poem, you are looking for words (diction) that the author uses that shows his or her attitude.

1. Underline words or phrases as you go, and next to the underlined portion, jot down a comment or two that describes the possible attitude (Tone) of the writer. (I did one for you). Try to respond at least 3-4 times minimum.
2. After you are done reading the whole poem, write a 2-3 sentence discussion of the tones (Tones – plural) of the poem. Explain your reasoning, and include the words (Diction) that you think best show the author’s tone. Additionally, discuss where the shift occurs and what led you to that belief.

Poem One
“One Perfect Rose”
A single flow’r he sent me, since we met.
All tenderly his messenger he chose;
Deep-hearted, pure, with scented dew still wet--
One perfect rose.

I knew the language of the floweret;
"My fragile leaves," it said, "his heart enclose."
Love long has taken for his amulet
One perfect rose.

Why is it no one ever sent me yet
One perfect limousine, do you suppose?
Ah no, it's always just my luck to get
One perfect rose.

--Dorothy Parker

Write your answers for direction #1 next to the lines.

Write your answer to #2 here:
Poem Two

“Loneliness”

Now it is Loneliness who comes at night
Instead of Sleep, to sit beside my bed.
Like a tired child I lie and wait her tread,
I watch her softly blowing out the light.
Motionless sitting, neither left or right
She turns, and weary, weary droops her head.
She, too, is old; she, too, has fought the fight.
So, with the laurel she is garlanded.
Through the sad dark the slowly ebbing tide
Breaks on a barren shore, unsatisfied.
A strange wind flows... then silence. I am fain
To turn to Loneliness, to take her hand,
Cling to her, waiting, till the barren land
Fills with the dreadful monotone of rain.

-- Katherine Mansfield

Write your answer to #2 here:
Section Two

Since everyone reacts emotionally to certain words, writers often deliberately select words that they think will influence your reactions and appeal to your emotions.

Dictionary definition (DENOTATION): cockroach (kok' roch'), n. any of an order of nocturnal insects, usually brown with flattened oval bodies, some species of which are household pests inhabiting kitchens, areas around water pipes, etc.

1. What does the word cockroach mean to you?

2. Is a cockroach merely an insect or is it also a household nuisance and a disgusting creature? Explain

See what meanings poets Peter Wild and Christopher Morley find in roaches in the following poems.

Roaches by Peter Wild

Last night when I got up
to let the dog out I spied
a cockroach in the bathroom
crouched flat on the cool
porcelain,
delicate
antennae probing the toothpaste cap
and feasting himself on a gob
of it in the bowl:
I killed him with one unprofessional
blow,
scattering arms and legs
and half his body in the sink...
I would have no truck with roaches,
crouched like lions in the ledges of sewers
their black eyes in the darkness
alert for tasty slime,
breeding quickly and without design,
laboring up drainpipes through filth
to the light;
I read once they are among
the most antediluvian of creatures,
surviving everything, and in more primitive times
thrived to the size of your hand...
yet when sinking asleep
or craning at the stars,
I can feel their light feet
probing in my veins,
their whiskers nibbling
the insides of my toes;
and neck arched,
feel their patient scrambling
up the dark tubes of my throat.

from Nursery Rhymes for the Tender-hearted
By Christopher Morley

Scuttle, scuttle, little roach-
How you run when I approach:
Up above the pantry shelf
Hastening to secrete yourself.

Most adventurous of vermin,
How I wish I could determine
How you spend your hours of ease,
Perhaps reclining on the cheese.

Cook has gone, and all is dark-
Then the kitchen is your park;
In the garbage heap that she leaves
Do you browse among the tea leaves?

How delightful to suspect
All the places you have trekked:
Does your long antenna whisk its
Gentle tip across the biscuits?

Do you linger, little soul,
Drowsing in our sugar bowl?
Or, abandonment most utter.
Shake a shimmy on the butter?

Do you chant your simple tunes
Swimming in the baby's prunes?
Then, when dawn comes, do you slink
Homeward to the kitchen sink?

Timid roach, why be so shy?
We are brothers, thou and I,
In the midnight, like yourself,
I explore the pantry shelf!
Reread the dictionary definition.

3. Which of the denotative (Dictionary) characteristics of a cockroach do both poets include in their poems? List all.

Wild:

Morley:

4. In each poem, the insect acquires meaning beyond its dictionary definition. Both poets lead us away from a literal view of roaches to a nonliteral one. What additional characteristics does Morley give to roaches?

5. What characteristics does Wild give his roaches that are not in the dictionary definition?

6. Which poet succeeds in giving roaches a favorable connotation? Explain why you chose this poem.


8. Each poet creates a unique tone in his poem. Identify the tone in each. Then, provide 4-5 examples of diction (words, phrases, or lines) that help to convey the chosen tone.

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<th>Wild Poem</th>
<th>Morley Poem</th>
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