

Poetry: Tone

Tone “may be defined as the writer’s or speaker’s attitude toward the subject, the reader, or herself or himself” (Perrine 804). Anyone can sense a speaker’s attitude in tone of voice; however, understanding the tone in written poetry is an entirely different matter. The reader does not have voice inflection to carry meaning. Thus, your understanding of diction, images, details, language, and syntax all contribute to the understanding of tone.

Diction-the connotation of the word choice

Images-vivid appeals made to the senses have an emotion or attitude attached to them

Details-facts chosen or omitted by the author or speaker convey feeling or attitude

Language-overall use of words in the entire passage

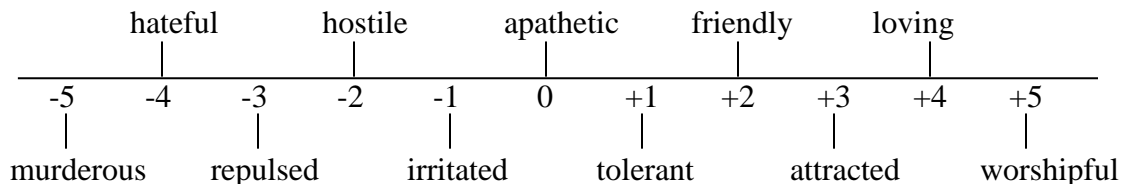
Syntax-selected sentence structures reveal attitude (short sentences often indicate emotion; longer sentences usually indicate a more reasonable or scholarly intent)

Shifts in Tone

As you grow more aware of tone, you will discover that good writers rarely stick with one tone. Shifts in tone are often cued by:

- ✓ key words (but, yet, nevertheless, however, although)
- ✓ punctuation (dashes, periods, colons)
- ✓ stanza and paragraph divisions
- ✓ changes in line and stanza or in sentence length
- ✓ sharp contrasts in diction

Intensity of Tone Words



Tone Vocabulary

A basic tone vocabulary is essential in describing attitudes discovered in text:

COLUMN A	COLUMN B	COLUMN C	COLUMN D	COLUMN E
bitter	angry	apathetic	complimentary	condescending
contemptuous	apologetic	childish	disappointed	horrific
friendly	arrogant	concerned	enthusiastic	humorous
nostalgic	candid	didactic	ironic	optimistic
reverent	detached	dramatic	mocking	peaceful
sentimental	giddy	fanciful	sarcastic	skeptical
somber	hostile	pejorative	serious	sympathetic
zealous	ominous	resigned	urgent	vibrant

Tone Words

angry	sad	sentimental
sharp	cold	fanciful
upset	urgent	complimentary
silly	joking	condescending
boring	poignant	sympathetic
afraid	detached	contemptuous
happy	confused	apologetic
hollow	childish	humorous
joyful	peaceful	horrific
allusive	mocking	sarcastic
sweet	objective	nostalgic
vexed	vibrant	zealous
tired	frivolous	irreverent
bitter	audacious	benevolent
dreamy	shocking	seductive
restrained	somber	candid
proud	giddy	pitiful
dramatic	provocative	didactic