

Tone: The author or speaker's attitude toward his or her subject.

When one person speaks to another person, it is very easy to understand how they feel about their topic. If their voice is soft and their hands hang loosely at their sides, they may be content or relaxed. If their fists are clenched and **THEY BEGIN TO YELL**, they are angry. Of course, it's easy to understand someone when you can see their body language and listen to their voice, but how do you know what a writer means when you read their work?

Understanding a writer's tone is critical. To misunderstand tone is to misunderstand a poem or story. How then do you understand the tone of a poem? The key to understanding any poem is to look at:

1. Diction (word choice and its connotations)
2. Rhyme scheme (Is there rhyme present, or does the poem lack rhyme)
3. Images (Are the images beautiful? light? dark? frightening?)

After analyzing these three areas, you can begin to unlock tone. Look at 6-8 words in a short poem to analyze diction and connotation. Is the rhyme scheme constant? Use the images to help visualize the scene being portrayed. Once you analyze these areas, read the poem one more time. Does the author have the same tone about the subject as the speaker? If not, the tone may be ironic. If the author and speaker share the same tone, you may find tones of joy or melancholy, contentment or anger, nostalgia or resentment, etc. Basically, any word that describes how a person can feel emotionally can be a tone.

Go to [TP CASTT](#) to find out more about reading poetry.

Now read "My Papa's Waltz" below. Answer the questions listed, and try to discover the tone of the poem. We will review the poem on Monday to see how you did.

- 1. Identify the rhyme scheme of the poem**
- 2. Identify 7 examples of diction and state each word's connotation.**
- 3. Identify 3 sound devices in the poem**
- 4. Identify 4 images in the poem**
- 5. After examining your evidence, state the speaker's attitude toward his father. Justify your answer in a 3-4 sentence paragraph.**

My Papa's Waltz

[Theodore Roethke](#)

The whiskey on your breath
Could make a small boy dizzy;
But I hung on like death:
Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans
Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother's countenance
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist
Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by dirt,
Then waltzed me off to bed
Still clinging to your shirt.

