

# ANALYZING POETRY

Poetry doesn't always come right out and say what it means. Its **FORM**—the way poetry is written and the figurative language that is often used in poetry—affects its *meaning*. One way to think of poetry is as a puzzle to solve—look for the clues in a poem to figure out what the author is trying to convey.

Just as we analyze other types of fiction, we can analyze poetry—we can find explicit and implicit evidence in the poem. We can draw inferences from the writer's word choice and the form (how the writer breaks up stanzas, if the writer repeats lines, how the title figures into the poem, etc.).

## EXAMPLE:

In the poem below, Christina Rossetti describes the happiness of being in love.

### A Birthday by Christina Rossetti

C.R. compares her heart to things that are natural and beautiful.

C.R. compares her heart to places with plenty of food and water. These places are also safe and peaceful.

My heart is like a singing bird

Whose nest is in a water'd shoot;

My heart is like an apple-tree

Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;

My heart is like a rainbow shell

That paddles in a halcyon sea;

My heart is gladder than all these

Because my love is come to me.

She is happy because her love has come to her.

Raise me a dais of silk and down;

Hang it with vair and purple dyes;

Carve it in doves and pomegranates,

And peacocks with a hundred eyes;

Work it in gold and silver grapes,

In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys;

Because the birthday of my life

Is come, my love is come to me.

C.R. thinks of her heart as beautiful and valuable, and feels that it is protected and provided for by her love.

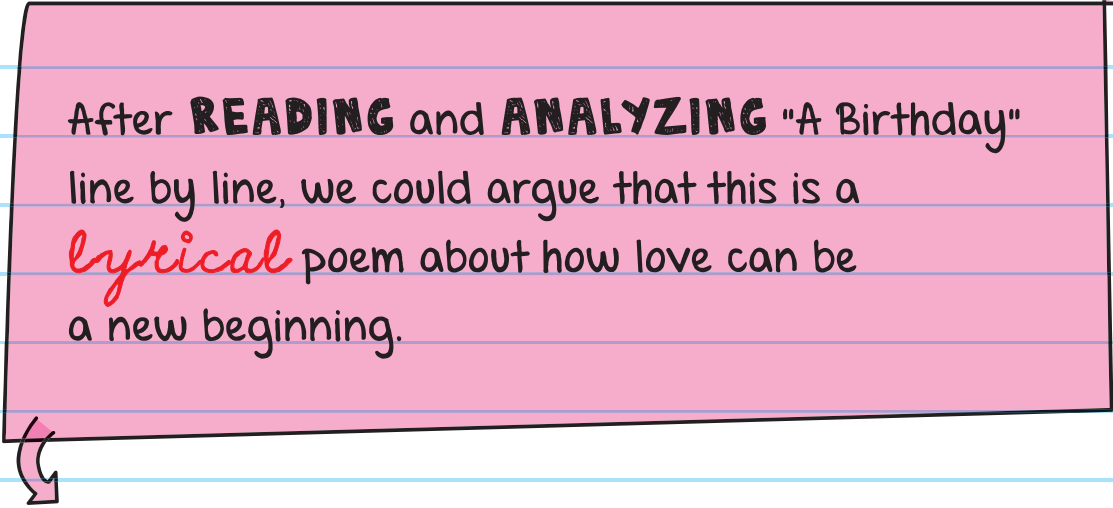
This stanza is about how happy she feels.

These lines sound like preparation for royalty or a grand celebration.

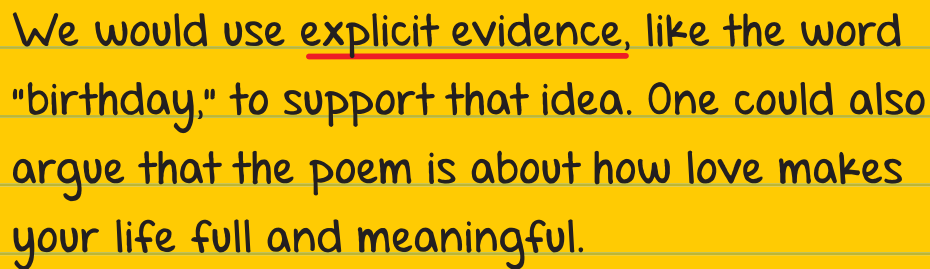
These lines mix language about French royalty and images that could be religious.

This is part of the title of the poem! It must be important. But why? Birthdays are the beginning of a new life. She is saying that her love makes her feel like she's just been born into a new life! The whole poem is about celebrating this feeling.

After **READING** and **ANALYZING** "A Birthday" line by line, we could argue that this is a *lyrical* poem about how love can be a new beginning.



We would use explicit evidence, like the word "birthday," to support that idea. One could also argue that the poem is about how love makes your life full and meaningful.



We could use the phrase "My heart is like an apple-tree / Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit" as implicit evidence. We can infer from this simile that the person feels full of happiness.

