

SROS: An Interpretive Reading Strategy

The following heuristic (problem solving technique) is an interpretive reading strategy that is quick, flexible, and easy-to-follow. Readers can use it with many different genres: fiction, non-fiction essays, drama, poems. It is very useful with poetry because often it prevents students from becoming distracted early by a particular word or line and misreading the entire text based on that one fragment.

S means **STRUCTURE**. Without reading the text, look at its shape. What observations can you make about its physical structure? What divisions do you note (chapters, sections, acts, stanzas)? How big are they? Are they the same size? (If not, what predictions might we make about the larger sections?) Do you notice any patterns in these divisions? Look at punctuation. Circle periods and semicolons which signal the ends of clauses. Commas? Other punctuation marks? Check carefully for quotation marks, dashes, and question marks. Identify any time and/or space progressions. Season words? Verb tense? Tense shifts?

R means **RHETORICAL SITUATION**. Who is speaking, to whom, and about what? What are the circumstances? (The narrator can always be specified, although sometimes in general terms (a father, a woman). Sometimes the audience is specific (his son, her children), but other times it must be defined as a general audience. What is the poem about in general terms ("This is a poem about a man with a horse who stops to look at the woods on a snowy night.") You may need to do several readings to identify the rhetorical situation with confidence.

O means **ORGANIZATION**. Typical patterns are narration + reflection, description + reflection, analysis (part to whole, comparison/ contrast, classification) + reflection. Look for change and development (small to large, barrenness at the beginning to richness at the end, naiveté to understanding).

S means **STYLE**. This is the language the writer uses and how he or she uses it. Try to define how the language presents the narrator's attitude toward the subject. What is the tone of the language s/ he chooses? Examine specifics of diction or syntax (sentence structure). Does the syntax echo the "action" of the text? Look at imagery. What sensory details are given? What kind of scene is this? What feelings does the language evoke? What words or phrases seem particularly evocative? Does anything seem not to fit? Pay attention to sound, including rhyme and rhythm. Are there places where the pattern is broken? How do the sounds of the text develop meanings?