

Exploring Riddle Poem Techniques

Still, I am like a mirror,
Fast, I am stronger than stone.
Wet, I can burn you,
Cold, I can keep you warm.
Life, I can be in the desert,
Death, I can be on the riverbank.
What am I?

What is the answer?

- Is the answer a concrete object such as desk or car? Or is it an abstract concept such as happiness or peace?
- How specific is the answer? Is it very specific such as *Tonya's white cat*? Is it specific such as *blue cheese*? Or is it general such as *car*?
- Why do you think the author choose to write a riddle about water? How much harder would it be to write (and guess the answer to) a poem with a more specific answer like *river*? And how about an even more specific answer like *Stark's Pond*?

What clues does the poem contain?

-In this poem, each line acts as a clue except for the last one which asks the question. Let's look at the fist line.

Still, I am like a mirror.

Our mystery object is like a mirror, but only when it's still. That rules out lots of mirror-like objects such as windows and metal. And still is a good trick word because it covers both water that isn't moving, such as a pool, and calm moving water. Calm streams and rivers can reflect images just as a pool of water can.

Fast, I am stronger than stone.

This line is another good clue. The poet could have written "Fast, I cut through stone" but we often use the word cutting when we talk about rivers making canyons. Cutting is almost too obvious so the poet uses the phrase "stronger than stone" instead. The other lines work on these same principles, telling us things that water can do, but presenting the clue in a way that isn't completely obvious. For instance, we don't think of wet things burning us (scalding). And the last line can be really tricky because we don't think of water being on the riverbank, but that's exactly what it does during a flood.

What is the perspective of the poem?

- Does the poem adopt the persona of the object or does it present the information from a third person perspective?
- How does this choice in perspective affect the types of clues used?
- How does this choice in perspective work to trick the audience?

How does the riddle use figurative language?

- What types of figurative language does this poem use? Imagery? Metaphor? Metonymy? Onomatopoeia? Personification? Simile? Synecdoche?
- How does the use of figurative language provide clues?
- How does the use of figurative language work to trick the audience?

How does the poem use rhetorical devices or poetic devices?

- What rhetorical devices does the poem use? Asyndeton? Antithesis? Chiasmus? Parallelism? Zeugma? If used, are these rhetorical devices used to emphasize the clues?
- Does the poem make use of poetic sound techniques? Alliteration? Assonance? Consonance? If used, are these sound techniques used to emphasize the clues?
- Does the poem use visual clues such as its shape, capitalization, or formatting (bold, italic, larger font size) to emphasize the clues?