

June Jordan's Guidelines for Critiquing a Poem (Slightly Modified)

1. Read the poem aloud.
2. Ask: Is it a poem?
 - a. Poetry is a medium for telling the truth.
 - b. Poetry is the achievement of maximum impact with a minimal number of words.
 - c. Poetry is utmost precision in the use of language; hence, density and intensity of expression.
3. What is its purpose?
4. Is it coherent?
5. What are the strengths of the poem?
6. What are the weaknesses of the poem?
7. Is it a good poem?
 - a. **Technical Checklist for June Jordan's "Good Poem"**
 - i. Strong, descriptive verbs. Eliminate all forms of the verb "to be."
 - ii. Singularity and vividness of diction.
 - iii. Specificity; resonant and representative details.
 - iv. Avoidance of abstractions and generalities.
 - v. Defensible line breaks.
 - vi. Compelling/appropriate rhythm: horizontal and/or vertical (see June Jordan's essay on vertical rhythm).
 - vii. Sound devices: alliteration, assonance, dissonance.
 - viii. Rhyme.
 - ix. Consistency of voice, distance from the reader, and diction.
 - x. Dramatic inconsistencies.
 - xi. Punctuation.
 1. Punctuation is not word choice. Poems fly or falter according to the words composing them.
 2. Therefore, omit punctuation and concentrate on every single word.
 3. Example: if you think you need a question mark, then rewrite so that syntax makes the interrogative nature clear.
 4. As for commas, dashes, and dots? Leave them out!
8. Is the poem complete?
 - a. Is it a dramatic event?
 - b. Does it have a beginning that builds to a compelling middle?
 - c. Does it end in a way that "lands" the poem somewhere that fully and satisfies the reader?
9. How does it fit into—or change—a tradition of poems?
10. Read the poem aloud again!

Repeat your critical passage through these guidelines.

Muller, Lauren, editor. *June Jordan's Poetry for the People: A Revolutionary Blueprint*. Routledge, 1995.