

WORKSHEET:

Close-Reading a Poem

Read the poem “Theme and Variation” by Anne Wilkinson and complete the short answer questions below.

Theme and Variation

by Anne Wilkinson

This is the noisy silence of a tree
The rustle in the fern is the noise of fear
A twig is a nerve; it snaps the heart to pounding.

This is the swollen silence under the sea;
The hush and push of pressure soundless, sounding,
Drowning the human splash, the man-made tear.

This is the spiral'd silence in a cave
Where silence echoes itself; it echoes a jest
As a shell forever uncoils the thread of a wave.

This is the silence of love, and though the ear part
It cannot hear, it will not hear the rest,
The pause between compulsions of the heart.

—from *The Essential Anne Wilkinson*
(The Porcupine's Quill, 2014)

What images spring to mind? Which 'collisions' of words are unusual or unexpected?

What do you hear—rhyme, rhythm, assonance, consonance, repetition, alliteration? Do words echo or mimic the sound of other things? What words seem to speed up or slow your reading?

What other poetic devices are used? (metaphor, symbolism, allusion?)

What do you *sense* from the words, rather than *understand*? What do you feel or imagine? How does it affect you? Does the poem call up a particular mood?

What role does interpretation play? Might each reader connect on different levels? How?

What does the poet show us that can't be shown by any other means?
