Poetry Protocol
An Approach to Understanding a Poem

1. **Title:** What clues does the title provide to the poem’s meaning before you read the poem?

2. **Background:** What background information exists about the poet and or the poem? How does this information impact on the poem’s meaning?

3. **General Idea:** After the first reading of the poem, what is the general idea or general topic of the poem (such as the effects on war, love, thoughts about loss, etc.)?

4. **Speaker/Mood:** Who is speaking in the poem? (Sometimes it is not the poet.) What is the mood of the poem?

5. **Form:** What is the form of the poem? (In other words, how are the lines organized? In stanzas? Does the form have a name such as “sonnet”? Is there a special rhyme scheme or meter/beat? Are there any poetic devices? Simile? Metaphor? Personification? Refrain? Repetition?)

6. **Paraphrase:** Now begins the most important part of your analysis. Re-read the poem and, in your own words, restate the poem. You can decide to do this either line by line, or stanza by stanza, whatever makes the best sense for the poem.

7. **Interpret:** After you have put the poem into your own words, in a brief paragraph explain what the poem was about.

8. **Title (revisited):** Now that you have a better understanding of the poem, what further information does the title add to the poem’s meaning?

9. **Theme:** What is the theme of the poem? (State this in sentence form.)

10. **Personal Response:** How has this poem touched upon your own experience?