Close Reading: A Guide

1. Begin by reading the passage through a couple of times. Try to simply understand what’s going on in the narrative. Paraphrase it.
2. Mark up the text as you read, annotate/make notes in the margins and underline or highlight any words or phrases that seem significant or interesting; including the use of punctuation if you think it’s significant.
3. Look up any words that you don’t know, or any that are being used in a specific way i.e. historical context. Think about the language itself; are there any puns or slang words? Onomatopoeia or alliteration? Interesting etymologies?
4. Look at the structure of the piece – how is it organised? How does it sound when read aloud? Is it affected by meter or rhythm? Or punctuation?
5. Think about the syntax. How are words arranged in the sentence or line? Is it significant?
6. Analyse the tone and narrative voice. Who is speaking? What time of day is it? Do we know the age/gender of the narrator? How does the narrator relate to the author or poet; is a persona being used? Why? What tone is being set? How does this affect the reading of the poem?
7. What poetic or rhetorical devices are being used? E.g. Are metaphor, simile, assonance, rhyme, anaphora, hyperbole, metonymy, enjambment, or personification being used?
8. How do these relate to/construct the form of the poem? Does it affect the diction? The imagery? The meaning?

NB. Close reading requires direct and in-depth engagement with the text, therefore it is not enough to say that *this* word rhymes with *that* one, you must suggest *why* and analyse the impact of it on the rest of the text. You must **interpret** the text, not simply describe it. Identify textual devices at work and analyse them. Try to integrate your reading of the language used with historical or cultural context, but always bring it back to the text. When writing, use quotations and avoid making general statements with no evidence to support it. Avoid referencing other works in a close reading assessment, as the piece is too short to take on other texts. Try to develop an argument or a personal ‘reading’ of the text and provide evidence to back up your claims.