

Poetry

What is poetry?

"Poetry is the music of the soul." - Voltaire

"I believe that poetry is the heart of the language..." - Margaret Atwood

"Poetry is what makes one laugh or cry or yawn..." - Dylan Thomas

Few people agree on a definition for poetry, yet many enjoy reading poetry. Many argue that you do not read poetry, you experience it. Poets choose and arrange their words carefully. The language of poetry, the images, metaphors, sounds, pauses and rhythms create the meaning of a poem. In fact the meaning of the poem is often its language. It is important to see how a poem works, how the parts fit together, instead of concentrating on a specific meaning.

How to Read a Poem

Relax! Reading a poem involves spending time with it, listening to it. How does the poem connect with your feelings? Experience the poem as an individual.

TO READ A POEM:

Begin by reading the poem several times. If the meaning puzzles you, try these points:

1. Read the poem all the way through, even if you come to a phrase you do not understand. What images do you see? How do you feel? What do you think?
2. Read the poem again, concentrating on the parts that are unclear. Try to unlock the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context, or use a dictionary.
3. Read the poem a third time, aloud. How do the sounds of the poem affect you?
4. Tell what the poem is about. What is happening? What does the poet see, think or feel?
5. Connect with the poem. Which feelings, situations or images remind you of events or emotions in your own life?

Discussing a Poem

Poems have different meanings to different people. Sharing your ideas about a poem can help others experience a deeper appreciation.

TO DISCUSS A POEM:

1. Listen to the poem as it is read aloud.
2. Read the poem yourself. Does it remind you of an experience you have had?
3. React to the poem. How did it make you feel? How does it sound? What images does it create?
4. Discuss it! What related ideas occurred to each of you?
5. Open up the discussion. What is happening in the poem? How do the words and phrases affect you?
6. Reread the poem aloud. Enjoy the meaning.

The Sounds of Poetry

Sound is what makes poetry different from all other styles of writing. **Rhythm** and **rhyme** are two elements that influence the sound in a poem. The arrangement of sound helps create feelings and meaning in a poem. "The sound of poetry is the music of poetry, it's got rhythm, it's got a beat, it's got a pulse." (unknown)

Rhythm - we react to rhythm everyday through the music we listen to, the sports we play etc. In poetry rhythm is the beat of the lines.

How to determine the rhythm patterns of a poem:

1. Listen to the beat and mark each syllable. Mark the lighter or unstressed syllables this way .
2. Mark the heavy or stressed syllables this way, .
3. Listen again to the beat of the lines.
4. After marking the beat, look for the pattern, usually the rhythm pattern repeats.

The sun that brief December day

Rose cheerless over hills of gray

And darkly circled gave at noon

A sadder light than waning moon.

“It rhymes, it sings, it repeats. Listen to the music, listen to the rhyme.”

Rhyme - Rhyme is the repetition of sound in different words. Poets use rhyme for the same reason. They use rhythm to help organize the poem and to suggest meaning and emotion.

The most common type of rhyme in poetry is called *end rhyme*, which occurs, at the end of each line.

Example - There was a great swimmer named Jack

 Who swam ten miles out - and nine back.

Internal rhyme - occurs within a single line of poetry - e.g. See the mean gleam in his eye and deep crease in his cheeks.

Often poets repeat a rhyme scheme within a four or five line stanza. A **stanza** is something like a paragraph in prose. It is a group of lines standing together. It is also important to remember that some poem have no rhyme at all.

To find the rhyme pattern of a poem mark each line according to the sound at the end with a, b, c, d, etc.

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree
Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I have rued.

Repetition is used in poetry to make sure the reader gets the point.

Line Breaks help set the pace and rhythm of a poem. They tell you where to pause and where to take a breath. Poets arrange their poems carefully. Try to follow the signals given by line breaks, rhythm and rhyme.

Rhythm and Meter is the pattern of stressed words or syllables in a poem. There are four basic types of meter or metrical feet that may be used in poetry.

1. *Iambic* - one stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable. It gives a walking rhythm. E.g. The sun went down from peak to peak.
2. *Trochaic* - one stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable. This gives a running rhythm. E.g. Let us go now, you and I.
3. *Anapestic* - two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable. This produces a galloping rhythm. E.g. And the sound of a voice that is still.
4. *Dactylic* - one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables. This also produces a walking rhythm. E.g. This is the forest, primeval, the murmuring pines and the hemlocks.

The Forms of Poetry

Poetry has been growing and changing since ancient times and there are many different poetic forms. The roots of modern poetry go back to prehistoric songs, chants and prayers.

Common Poetic Forms

Haiku - a three line form that captures a moment in nature. The Haiku originates from Japan. Its seventeen syllables are arranged in three lines in a five - seven - five pattern.

In the bent birch tree

Wind ruffles the fur and quills

Of a porcupine.

(Bruce Meyer)

Free Verse - a common form of modern poetry that does not follow a set pattern of meter. It may include rhyme.

Elephants
Aren't any more important
Than insects,
But I'm on the side of elephants,
Unless one of them tries
To crawl up my leg.
(John Newlove)

Sonnet - a fourteen line poem that usually follows a rhyme scheme and metrical pattern. Famous sonnets include those written by William Shakespeare and John Keats.

Ballad - a short narrative poem told in song like form. Many ballads have been passed down, as folk songs that tell love stories or tales about heroes or historical events.

Poetic Literary Devices

Alliteration- The repetition of the consonant at the beginning of words, or on the stressed syllables. *Six Scilian sailors sailed the seven seas.*

Allusion - A reference to an outside fact, event or other source. *World famous golden-thighed Pythagoras.*

Apostrophe - Addressing a person or personified object that is not present, speaking to the dead as if alive. *O loss of sight, of thee I most complain.*

Assonance - The repetition of vowel sounds. *The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain.*

Caesura - A deliberate pause in the reading of a poem, often indicated by a period or a dash in an unusual place. It often indicates a change in the train of thought. *I - I feel like a blossom on a tree.*

Hyperbole - A deliberate and extreme exaggeration used for effect. *He is so fat; you'd need a shoehorn to get him in the car.*

Imagery - The language that creates pictures and sensory impressions. Imagery appeals to your senses, sights, sound, touch, taste and smell. Imagery creates the mental pictures that develop

during the reading of the poem, the mind movies.

"From The Sea"

The sea is a hungry dog,

Giant and gray.

He rolls on the beach all day.

With his clashing teeth and shaggy jaws

Hour upon hour he gnaws

The rumbling, tumbling, stones

And "BONES, BONES, BONES".

The giant sea -dog moans,

Licking his greasy paws.

(James Reeves)

Irony - The contrast between actual meaning and the suggestion of another meaning. There are three types of irony:

1. **Verbal** - meaning one thing and saying another
2. **Dramatic** - what the speaker says and what the speaker means or what the speaker says and what the author means.
3. **Situational** - when the reality of a situation differs from the anticipated or intended effect, when something unexpected occurs.

Metaphor - an unstated comparison between two objects - implied, not directly given. *All the world's a stage. He is a sly old fox.*

Metonymy - A figure of speech in which the name of one thing is substituted for that of another. *The Crown means the Monarchy. The stage means the theatrical profession.*

Onomatopoeia -fitting a word to the sound it represents. *Hiss, buzz, gurgle, sizzle*

Paradox - A statement that seems contradictory and yet is true. *The beginning of the end.*

Oxymoron - A phrase which brings together two contradictory terms. *"I must be cruel only to be kind."*

Personification - giving human qualities to an inanimate object. *The unmistakable odor of quiet. The wind howled. (person - if- cation)*

Simile - A stated comparison between two unlike things using the word "like" or "as". *He is as crazy as a fox.*

Symbolism - The use of imagery so that one object represents something else. *The cross, for example is a symbol of Christianity, the lion a symbol of courage.*

Synecdoche - A figure of speech in which a part represents the whole. *The factory employed 500 hands. Hands represent the persons.*