

Poetry 11 Terminology

This list of terms builds on the preceding lists you have been given in grades 9-10. It contains all the terms you were responsible for learning in the past, as well as the new terms you are now responsible for learning.

- *The new terms are marked with (NT): New Term.*
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Poem: Words organized in such a way that there is a pattern of rhythm, rhyme and/or meaning. The relationships between words are emphasized in poetry, so the various word-clusters or verses have a collective impact on the reader/listener (which is different from prose, where the words “hit” the reader one at a time in sentences).

Speaker: The voice used by a poet to speak a poem. The speaker is often a created identity (a made up self) and should not automatically be equated with the author. The speaker is not the same as the author—poets and storytellers make things up (fiction). The speaker does not necessarily reflect the author’s personal voice; however, authors sometimes use speakers as masks to protect themselves when they are writing about controversial ideas and/or criticizing politics or religion.

Types of Poems

- **Ballad:** A long poem that tells a story, usually a folk tale or legend, in rhyme. Often set to music, the traditional ballad typically has a refrain or chorus, which adds to its musical qualities.
- **Concrete:** Concrete poetry experiments with the very materials of the poem itself: words, letters, format. The final product does what it says in that its words, letters, and format demonstrate the poem’s meaning. Concrete poems rely heavily on the visual or phonetic to get across their meaning.
- **Epic:** This is a very, very long poem that tells a story. Epic poems are narrative poems that are long enough to be in a book of their own, rather than an anthology. (NT)
- **Epitaph:** Epitaphs are poems about the dead that are written to be on a tombstone; this means they are usually very short. (NT)
- **Epigram:** These are very short, witty poems that make a pithy pronouncement about something. Usually they are written as a couplet. (NT)
- **Free Verse:** Modern poetry that has no regular pattern of rhythm, rhyme or line length. Free verse poems experiment with words to create images for the reader.

- **Lyric:** Shorter poems of intense feeling and emotion. Some are modern free verse poems and others are more “old-fashioned” poems that have rhythm and rhyme. Types: sonnet, ode, and elegy.
- **Narrative:** A poem that tells a story. Narratives may or may not rhyme, but they almost always follow the plot structure of a short story.
- **Parody:** A parody is a mockery of another piece of literature; it copies the style and voice, and sometimes language of the original for comedic effect. Parodies can exist in any genre, not just poetry. (NT)
- **Sonnet:** A fourteen-line lyric written in iambic pentameter. Sonnets follow a rigid rhyme scheme. Typical rhyme schemes for sonnets are the Shakespearian or English sonnet (abab cdcd efef gg) or the Italian or Petrarchan sonnet (abba abba cdc cdc OR abba abba cde cde). For more information about iambic pentameter and rhyme scheme, see “Rhythm and Rhyme” below.

Poetic Devices

A. Sound

- **Alliteration:** Repeated consonant sounds at the beginning of a series of words. This device uses sound to catch the reader’s attention. *I kicked cold coffee coloured puddles* is an alliteration because of the repeating “ck” sound.
- **Assonance:** Repeating vowel sounds in the middle of words. This device also uses sound to catch the reader’s attention. This is a subtle device for which you have to listen carefully. *Twinkle twinkle little star* is an example of assonance because of the repeating short “i” sound. (NT)
- **Cacophony:** Sounds that are unpleasant and harsh to the ear. Usually, cacophony is achieved through repeating “s”, “c”, “k” or other, similarly harsh-sounding sounds. For example: “*and squared and stuck their squares of soft white chalk.*” The opposite of euphony. (NT)
- **Consonance:** Repeating consonant sounds in the middle of words. This device also uses sound to catch the reader’s attention. This is a subtle device, although it is less subtle than assonance. *If elephants laugh carefully, it is because they are afraid* is an example of consonance with the repeating “f” sound. Notice that the ‘ph’, ‘gh’ and ‘f’ letter patterns all make the “f” sound. (NT)
- **Euphony:** Sounds that are very pleasant to the ear. The opposite of cacophony. (NT)

- **Onomatopoeia:** Words that sound like what they mean are called onomatopoeia. “*Buzz*”, “*hiss*”, “*splash*” are typical examples of this sound device. Onomatopoeia is also known as imitative harmony.

B. Comparison

- **Extended Metaphor:** If a metaphor is a direct comparison between two dissimilar items (see below), an extended metaphor is a longer version of the same thing. In an extended metaphor, the comparison is stretched through an entire stanza or poem, often by multiple comparisons of unlike objects or ideas. (NT)
- **Metaphor:** A direct comparison between two dissimilar items. *She is a monster* is a metaphor comparing a girl to a monster.
- **Personification:** A comparison between a non-human item and a human so that the non-human item is given human characteristics. *The trees stretched their arms to the sky* is a personification because the trees are described as if they are people stretching.
- **Simile:** A comparison between two dissimilar items using “like” or “as” to make the comparison. *The stars are like diamonds in the sky* is a simile, comparing stars to diamonds.

C. Word Play

- **Allusion:** A reference in one piece of literature to something from another piece of literature. Allusions can also be references to person/events/places in history, religion, or myth. Allusions are frequently made in poetry, but they can/do occur in other genres as well.
- **Apostrophe:** A rhetorical figure in which the speaker addresses a dead or absent person, or an abstraction or inanimate object. For example, the speaker in John Donne’s “Holy Sonnet X” speaks to death as if it were a person. “O Death!” (NT)
- **Cliché:** A phrase, line or expression that has been so overused, it is boring and commonplace, such as “it was a dark and stormy night” or “red with anger.”
- **Connotation:** The unspoken, unwritten series of associations made with a particular word. For example, the word “dog,” depending on how it is used, might connote faithfulness, loyalty, and devotion. On the other hand, the word “dog” could connote viciousness.
- **Denotation:** The literal meaning of the word that a person would find in the dictionary.

- **Figurative Language:** The imaginative language that makes a poem rich to a reader. Figurative language often relies on comparison devices like simile, metaphor, and personification to make the point. Figurative language is the opposite of literal language.
- **Hyperbole:** A deliberate exaggeration to make a point. *I am hungry enough to eat the fridge* is a hyperbole.
- **Image:** A single mental picture that the poem creates in the reader's mind.
- **Imagery:** Poets create pictures in the reader's mind that appeal to the sense of sight; they also create descriptions to appeal to the other four senses. This collection of appeals to the five senses is called the imagery of the poem. Also: the collection and/or pattern of images in a poem.
- **Literal language:** The literal meaning of the poem, which ignores imagery, symbolism, figurative language and any imagination on the part of the poet or the reader. Literal language is the opposite of figurative language.
- **Mood:** The emotion of the poem. The atmosphere. The predominant feeling created by or in the poem, usually through word choice or description. The feelings created by the poem in the reader; mood is best discovered through careful consideration of the images presented by the poem, and thinking about what feelings those images prompt. For example: if the "rain weeps," the mood is sad; and if the "rain dances", the mood is happy. Mood and tone are **not** the same.
- **Oxymoron:** An oxymoron is a pair of single word opposites placed side by side for dramatic effect. A contradiction in terms. For example, "cold fire" or "sick health" or "jumbo shrimp".
- **Paradox:** A large oxymoron. An apparently contradictory statement that, despite the contradiction, has an element of truth in it. Wordsworth's "the child is the father of the man" is a paradoxical statement.
- **Repetition:** Deliberately repeated words, sounds, phrases, or whole stanzas. Repetition is used to make a point in the poem.
- **Symbol:** Something that represents something else. For example, a dove often represents the concept of peace.
- **Syntax:** Word order—the way words are put together to form phrases, clauses or sentences in a poem. Sometimes poets play with syntax to increase the richness of their figurative language or to make a line of poetry work into a particular rhythm.
(NT)

- **Tone:** The narrator’s attitude toward the subject of the poem and, sometimes, toward the reader of the poem. Tone is NOT THE SAME AS MOOD, although the two can overlap.
- **Understatement:** The opposite of hyperbole. Understatement achieves its effect through stating less than what is necessary. For example, a person might say to a hospitalized car crash victim, “I bet that hurt.”

Verse Forms

- **Couplet:** Two lines of poetry that rhyme. The last two lines of an English sonnet work together to make a couplet. The following is an example of a couplet:
Roses are red, violets are blue
Sugar is sweet and so are you
- **Octave:** Eight lines of poetry that have a rhyme scheme. The first part of an Italian sonnet is an octave.
- **Quatrain:** Four lines of poetry that have a rhyme scheme. Quatrains often have an abab, abcb, or aabb rhyme scheme. The first three verses of an English sonnet are quatrains.
- **Sestet:** Six lines of poetry that have a rhyme scheme. The second part of an Italian sonnet is a sestet.
- **Stanza:** Another word for “verse paragraph”. See below.
- **Verse (technically: Verse Paragraph):** A paragraph of writing in a poem. These paragraphs are written as clusters of rhyming lines in traditional poetry, such as octaves, sestets and quatrains. Also known as a **stanza**.

Rhythm and Rhyme

- **Blank Verse:** Unrhymed iambic pentameter. All sonnets, Shakespearian plays and the King James version of the Bible are written in blank verse. Unrhymed iambic pentameter is said to closely mimic the cadences of natural speech. See below for more information on iambic pentameter.
- **End Rhyme:** Rhyme that occurs at the ends of verse lines. The nursery rhyme in “rhyme scheme” below is written with end rhyme. (NT)
- **Iambic Pentameter:** A line of poetry that is ten syllables in length. The syllables follow a pattern in which an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed one. The

words “giraffe” and “destroy” are iambs. An iamb is two syllables, and “penta” means five, so five iambs in a row = iambic pentameter. A line of iambic pentameter bounces gently along (soft-hard-soft-hard-soft-hard-soft-hard-soft-hard). For example, when Romeo says, “O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright” (*Romeo and Juliet*, I.v.44), he is speaking in iambic pentameter. The following is an example from Macbeth:

*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor play'r
That struts and frets his hour up on the stage*

- **Internal Rhyme:** When two or more words rhyme within the same line of poetry. For example, “Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary” is an example of internal rhyme. (NT)
- **Refrain:** The chorus of a ballad, or a repeating set of words or lines, is the refrain of a poem. Refrains add to the musical quality of a poem and make them more song-like. This is interesting because the ancestral origin of poetry was song.
- **Rhyme:** When sounds match at the end of lines of poetry, they rhyme (technically, it is end-rhyme). The examples below in “rhyme scheme” and “couplet” demonstrate this.
- **Rhyme Scheme:** The pattern of rhyme in a poem, indicated with letters of the alphabet. To decide on a rhyme scheme, you assign a letter of the alphabet to all rhyming words at the ends of lines of poetry, starting with the letter “a”. When you run out of one rhyme sound, you start with the next letter of the alphabet. For example, the following is an example of an aabb rhyme scheme (star, are, high, sky):
*Twinkle, twinkle, little star
How I wonder what you are
Up above the world so high
Like a diamond in the sky*
- **Rhythm:** A pattern of sound in a poem; it may be a regular or irregular pattern. Rhythm is the musical beat of the poem, and some poems are more musical than others.