

Poetry

1 GETTING THE IDEA

Poetry is a type of writing that uses descriptive language and sound devices, such as rhythm and rhyme, to create meaning and produce emotion in readers.

It often takes multiple readings to completely understand a poem. During the first reading, think about the poem's topic and the images it creates. During other readings, think about the poem's structure, poetic devices, and figurative language.

Structure

You can often recognize poetry by its structure. Poetry is usually made up of **lines**, which are rows of text. Lines may or may not be complete sentences. In a poem, lines are grouped into sections called **stanzas**. Poets may develop their ideas by having stanzas build on one another.

Rhythm

Most poems have rhythm, which makes them fun to listen to and read aloud. **Rhythm** is the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line. Say the word *poet* aloud. You can hear that the first syllable is stressed, or said more strongly, and the second syllable is unstressed: *PO-et*.

Read aloud the following poem. Pay attention to which syllables you stress as you read.

There Was an Old Man with a Nose

by Edward Lear

There was an Old Man with a nose,
Who said, "If you choose to suppose,
That my nose is too long,
You are certainly wrong!"
That remarkable Man with a nose.

Rhyme

Many poems have lines that end with words that **rhyme**, or have the same ending sounds. When that is the case, the poem has a **rhyme scheme**, or rhyme pattern. You can show the rhyme scheme by giving each new sound at the end of a line a new letter. Read aloud the following rhyme. Write the letters *a* and *b* next to each line below to show the rhyme scheme.

Pease porridge hot,
Pease porridge cold.
Pease porridge in the pot
Nine days old.

Repetition

In poetry, **repetition** is the use of the same sounds, words, or lines. Poets often use repetition to help unify a poem or to reinforce the meaning or theme. Read the following poem. Circle the words that are repeated.

Two Birds and Their Nest

by Walt Whitman

Two guests from Alabama—two together,
And their nest, and four light-green eggs,
 spotted with brown,
And every day the he-bird, to and fro, near at hand,
And every day the she-bird, crouch'd on her nest,
And every day I, a curious boy, never too close,
 never disturbing them,
Cautiously peering.

Alliteration is the repetition of an initial consonant sound. Most tongue twisters use alliteration. Read the following sentence. Circle the initial consonant whose sound is repeated.

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

Figurative Language

Poets use **figurative language** to create images with words. Two kinds of figurative language are similes and metaphors.

- A **simile** is a comparison of two unlike things or ideas that uses the word *like* or the word *as*.
- A **metaphor** is a comparison that does not use the word *like* or the word *as*. It says that one thing *is* another thing.

Read the following sentence. Is it a simile or a metaphor? What is being compared?

Joe is a big, cranky baby when he doesn't get his way.

Point of View and Theme

Point of view is the position or outlook from which the speaker tells a story or observes something. The **speaker** in a poem tells the poem, much like the narrator of a story tells the story. The speaker is the voice of the poem and can represent the poet or another person or character. Poets may write poems from different points of view.

- **First-person point of view** reveals the speaker's thoughts. The speaker directly observes or experiences what the poem describes. This point of view uses first-person pronouns.
- **Third-person point of view** reveals the thoughts and observations of someone who is *not* directly involved in the poem. This point of view does not use first-person pronouns.

The **theme** is the central idea a poem explores. Read the following poem. Circle the line that first reveals the poem's point of view. Then explain the poem's theme.

I'm Nobody! Who Are You?

by Emily Dickinson

I'm nobody! Who are you?
Are you nobody, too?
Then there's a pair of us—don't tell!
They'd banish us, you know.
How dreary to be somebody!
How public, like a frog
To tell your name the livelong day
To an admiring bog!

Kinds of Poetry

There are many kinds of poems. The chart below defines some of them.

Kind of Poem	Definition
lyric poem	a short poem that is like a song and usually deals with personal feelings and states of mind
epic poem	a long poem that tells about the adventures of a hero or a historic event
sonnet	a poem that has fourteen lines with ten to twelve syllables per line and a rhyme scheme
ballad	a poem that tells a story with short stanzas containing an equal number of lines and a refrain that repeats
light verse	a poem that is humorous and often silly; light verse is usually short and uses clever word play
free verse	a poem that does not follow any fixed rules of rhythm or rhyme or traditional structure

Language Spotlight • Antiquated Language

When you read older poems, you will often come across **antiquated**, or old-fashioned, language. Some antiquated words are old forms of words we still use, such as *thou* for *you*. Others are words that we no longer use frequently, if at all. You can often use context to figure out the meaning of an antiquated word. However, sometimes you may have to look up the word in a dictionary.

Read the following poem. Write the modern word for each underlined word. Use a dictionary if you need to.

from **Written in March**

by William Wordsworth

Like an army defeated
The snow hath retreated,
And now doth fare ill
On top of the bare hill;
The ploughboy is whooping—anon—anon

2 COACHED EXAMPLE

Read the poem.

Pop-Corn

from *Child Songs of Cheer*
by Evalene Stein

Pop! Pop!—Poppetty-pop!

Shake and rattle and rattle and shake
The golden grains as they bounce and break
To fluffy puffiness—*Poppetty-pop!*

5 Bursting and banging the popper's top!

Poppetty-pop!

Pop! Pop!

The yellow kernels, oh, see them grow
White as cotton or flakes of snow!

10 *Pop! Pop!*

O-ho, how they frolic and fly about
And turn themselves suddenly inside out!

Pop-pop-poppetty! Pop-pop-pop!

The popper's full and we'll have to stop;

15 Pile the bowl with the tempting treat,
Children, come, it is time to eat!

Answer the following questions.

- 1** Read this line from the poem.

White as cotton or flakes of snow!

Which of the following does the line include? Choose **all** that apply.

- A. alliteration
- B. metaphor
- C. repetition
- D. rhyme
- E. rhythm
- F. simile

Hint: Think about what each of these poetic terms means. Then say the line aloud. What are some sounds of poetry? What creates an image in your mind?

- 2** Read the following lines from the poem. Write *a* or *b* in each box to show the rhyme scheme.

- Pop-pop-poppetty! Pop-pop-pop!*
- The popper's full and we'll have to stop;
- Pile the bowl with the tempting treat,
- Children, come, it is time to eat!

Hint: Remember to use the same letter for two or more lines that rhyme with each other.

- 3 How does the poet use repetition in the poem? What effect does the repetition have? Write your answer on the lines below.

Hint Look for words and phrases that the poet uses over and over again. Then read the poem aloud and picture what is being described to help you determine the effect of the repetition.

- 4 The following question has two parts. First, answer Part A. Then, answer Part B.

Part A

From whose point of view is "Pop-Corn" told?

- A. a speaker not involved in the action
- B. a speaker who wants to be in the action
- C. a speaker who ignores the action
- D. a speaker taking part in the action

Part B

Which line from the poem **best** supports the answer to Part A?

- A. Shake and rattle and rattle and shake
- B. O-ho, how they frolic and fly about
- C. The popper's full and we'll have to stop;
- D. Pile the bowl with the tempting treat,

Hint Think about who the speaker is in the poem. What kinds of pronouns does the speaker use?