

About Poetry

What is Poetry?
Characteristics of Poetry

WHAT IS POETRY?

Defining poetry is tricky because a simple definition can't do it justice. It's like trying to define a tree or a sunrise.

To truly understand poetry, you must experience it: you must read it – deeply, widely, carefully, and repeatedly, and you must write it as well.

That said, let's take a look at three fairly acceptable definitions:



☘ “A poem is a piece of writing in which the words are chosen for their sound and the images and ideas they suggest, not just their obvious meaning. The words are arranged in separate lines, often ending in rhyme.” from *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*.

☘ “Poetry is writing in language chosen and arranged to create a particular emotional response through meaning, sound, and rhythm.” from *Webster’s New Encyclopedic Dictionary*.

☘ “Poetry is writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound, and rhythm.” from www.yourdictionary.com.

I've taken the liberty of joining these three definitions, adding a few clarifying words here and there:

Poetry is:

1-a form of creative writing

2-that expresses a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience

3-with words carefully chosen for their sound and for the images and ideas they suggest, not just their obvious meaning,

4-and arranged in intentional separate lines, sometimes ending in rhyme,

5-for the purpose of creating a particular emotional response through its layers of meaning, placement of words, sound, and rhythm.



A few years ago, my students and I
brainstormed the following list of

CHARACTERISTICS OF POETRY:

- 1- Poetry uses concentrated language: less words, more meaning.
- 2- All words are chosen carefully so that each word packs a punch.
- 3- Words are chosen for their sound and layers of meaning.
- 4- Often poetry uses language in a beautiful, creative, and expressive way.

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- 5- Often poetry expresses strong feelings and emotions.
 - 6- Words are intentionally arranged in separate lines.
 - 7- Lines are sometimes arranged in stanzas.
 - 8- Often poetry has rhythm.
 - 9- Sometimes poetry has rhyme.
 - 10- Poetry contains imagery (descriptions with sensory details), figurative language (similes, metaphors, symbolism, personification, etc.), and sound effects (alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, consonance, rhythm, and rhyme).



11- Poems have their own unique shape.

12- Poetry comes in different forms and patterns.

13- Poetry always has a purpose, but it doesn't always have to make sense.

14- Sometimes poems don't follow punctuation/capitalization rules, but when rules are broken, it's for a reason.

15- Poetry doesn't have to be serious; it can be funny or silly.

16- Poetry uses language to create music and art.



17- Poems contain some (and sometimes all) elements of fiction (setting, point-of-view, characterization, conflict, plot, theme, voice, style, and mood).

18- Poetry makes you see an aspect of life or the world in a new way.

19- Poetry attempts to put into words inexpressible ideas and emotions.

20- Poetry should be seen, heard, and “felt with the heart.”



From "Inside a Poem" by Eve Merriam:

It doesn't always have to rhyme,
but there's the repeat of a beat,

somewhere

an inner chime that makes you want to
tap your feet or swerve in a curve;

a lilt, a leap, a lightning-split: ---

thunderstruck the consonants jut,

while the vowels open wide as waves in

the noon-blue sea.



GREAT BOOKS ABOUT POETRY:

How to Write Poetry by Paul B. Janeczko

Immersed in Verse by Allan Wolf

A Kick In the Head by Paul B. Janeczko

The Series Poetry for Young People by Scholastic

Reader's Handbook by Great Source Education Group

(the section titled "Reading Poetry")



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2011