

ELEMENTS OF POETRY

(Partial List)

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2011

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(Structure, Sound, Imagery, Figurative Language, Elements of Fiction, Poetic Forms)

STRUCTURE

1- Poetic Line - the words that form a single line of poetry.

Example: "Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house" is the well-known first poetic line of "A Visit from Saint Nicholas" by Clement Clarke Moore.

2- Stanza - a section of a poem named for the number of lines it contains.

Example: A couplet is a stanza of two lines. The first stanza from "Barbara Frietchie" by John Greenleaf Wittier is a couplet:

Up from the meadows rich with corn,
Clear in the cool September morn,

3- Enjambment - when there is no written or natural pause at the end of a poetic line, so that the word-flow carries over to the next line.

Example: the following lines from "Knoxville, Tennessee" by Nikki Giovanni contain enjambment:

and listen to
gospel music
outside
at the church

homecoming

4- Placement - the way words and poetic lines are placed on the page of a poem.

Example: The following are creatively-placed lines from a poem by E.E. Cummings:

in Just-

spring when the world is mud-

luscious the little

lame ballonman

whistles far and wee

5- Verse - a line in traditional poetry that is written in meter.

Example: In "When I do count the clock that tells the time" from Shakespeare's "Sonnet Number Twelve," the underlined syllables are accented, giving the line a metric pattern known as an iambic pentameter (see Meter).

6- Capitalization and Punctuation - In poetry, rules of capitalization and punctuation are not always followed; instead, they are at the service of the poet's artistic vision.

Example: in our backyard

we plant

tomatoes

is the first stanza from "Laughing Tomatoes" by Francisco X. Alarcón. Notice the lack of capitalization and punctuation.

SOUNDS

1- **Rhythm** - the basic beat in a line of a poem.

Example: "Whose woods these are, I think I know" is the first line from "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost. Notice that the accented words (underlined) give the line a distinctive beat.

2- **Meter** - a pattern of stressed and unstressed (accented and unaccented) syllables (known as a foot) in a line of poetry.

Example: In an iambic pentameter, the pattern is five iambic (unaccented + accented) feet in each line (see Verse).

3- **End Rhyme** - same or similar sounds at the end of words that finish different lines.

Example: The following are the first two rhyming lines from "The King of Cats Sends a Postcard to His Wife" by Nancy Willard:

Keep your whiskers crisp and clean,

Do not let the mice grow lean.

4- **Internal Rhyme** - same or similar sounds at the end of words within a line.

Example: A line showing internal rhyme (underlined) from "The Rabbit" by Elizabeth Maddox Roberts:

When they said the time to hide was mine,

5- Rhyme Scheme - a pattern of rhyme in a poem.

Example: A quatrain - a stanza of four lines in which the second and fourth lines rhyme - has the following rhyme scheme: abcb (see Quatrain).

6- Assonance - the repetition of vowel sounds within words in a line. Example: A line showing assonance (underlined) from "A Visit from Saint Nicholas" by Clement Clarke Moore:

The childrenre were nestled all snug in their beds

7- Consonance - the repetition of consonant sounds within words in a line.

Example: A line showing consonance (underlined) from "A Visit from Saint Nicholas" by Clement Clarke Moore:

Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse

8- Alliteration - the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words.

Example: Notice the alliteration (underlined) in "Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout Would Not Take the Garbage Out" by Shel Silverstein.

9- Onomatopoeia - words that sound like their meaning.

Example: buzz, swish, hiss, gulp.

10- Repetition - sounds, words, or phrases that are repeated to add emphasis or create rhythm. Parallelism is a form of repetition.

Examples: Two lines from "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll showing parallelism:

Beware the Jabberwock, my son!

The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!

Read the poem "The Bells" by Edgar Allan Poe and listen to the way the repetition of the word "bells" adds rhythm and creates an increasingly ominous and morbid mood.

11- Refrain - a line or stanza repeated over and over in a poem or song.

Example: In "Jingle Bells," the following refrain is repeated after every stanza:

Jingle Bells, jingle bells,

Jingle all the way!

Oh, what fun it is to ride

In a one-horse open sleigh!

12- Word Play - to play with the sounds and meanings of real or invented words.

Example: Two lines from the poem "Synonyms" by Susan Moger:

Claptrap, bombast, rodomontade,

Hogwash, jargon, and rant

Two lines from the poem "Antonio" by Laura E. Richards:

Antonio, Antonio,

Was tired of living alonio.

IMAGERY (see also Imagist Poetry)

1- Precise Language - the use of specific words to describe a person, place, thing, or action.

Example: Notice how Paul B. Janeczko uses proper nouns in his poem "Reverend Mona":

When the elders said she was too old,

Reverend Mona

surrendered her tabernacle

next to Fast Frankie's Pawn Shop

2- Sensory Details - the use of descriptive details that appeal to one or more of the five senses.

Example: Notice the sensory details in the following lines from "The Sea" by James

Reeves:

The giant sea dog moans,

Licking his greasy paws.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

1- Simile - a comparison of two unlike things, using the words like or as.

Example: "I read the shoreline like an open volume."

2- Metaphor - a comparison of two unlike things, not using the words like or as.

Example: "Ribbons of sea foam / wrap the emerald island."

3- Personification - to ascribe human traits to non-human or non-living things.

Example: "The unfurled sailboat glides on / urged by wind and will and brilliant bliss."

4- Symbolism - a person, place, thing, or action that stands for something else.

Example: In "From Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes, a set of stairs symbolizes life.

5- Hyperbole - the use of exaggeration to express strong emotion or create a comical effect.

Example: "I'm so hungry I could eat a hippo."

6- Verbal Irony or Sarcasm - when you mean the opposite of what you say.

Example: "My darling brother is the sweetest boy on Earth," she muttered sarcastically.

7- Situational Irony - when the outcome of a situation is the opposite of what is expected.

Example: After many years of trying, Mr. Smith won the lottery -- and immediately died of a heart attack.

8- Pun - a humorous phrase that plays with the double meaning or the similar sounds of words.

Examples: "Tomorrow you shall find me a grave man," said the duke on his deathbed. The cookbook *Lunch on the Run* by Sam Witch is awesome.

9- Allusion- a reference to a familiar person, place, or event.

Example: The following two lines from the poem "My Muse" contain an allusion to Pandora's Box:

hunched over from carrying

that old familiar Box

10- Idiom - a cultural expression that cannot be taken literally.

Examples: She is the apple of his eye. He drives me up the wall.

ELEMENTS OF FICTION (Poems may contain some or all elements of fiction. For example, a narrative poem (a poem that tells a story) may contain all elements.)

1- **Setting** - the time and place where a story or poem takes place.

2- **Point of View / Narrative Voice** - the person narrating a story or poem (the story/poem could be narrated in first person (I, we), second person (you), or third person limited or omniscient (he/she, they).

3- **Characterization** - the development of the characters in a story or poem (what they look like, what they say and do, what their personalities are like, what they think and feel, and how they're referred to or treated by others).

4- **Dialog or Dialogue** - the conversation between the characters in a story or poem.

5- **Dialect or Colloquial Language** - the particular style of speaking of the narrator and the characters in a story or poem (according to their region, time period, and social expectations).

6- **Conflict** - the problem or situation a character or characters face in a story or poem.

7- **Plot** - the series of events in a story or poem.

8- **Tone and Voice** - the distinctive, idiosyncratic way a narrator has of telling a story or poem (tone and voice depend on the intended audience, the purpose for writing, and the way the writer or poem feels about his/her subject).

9- Style - the way a writer uses words to craft a story or poem.

10- Mood - the feelings and emotions the writer wants the reader to experience.

11- Theme and Message - the main topic of a story or poem, and the message the author or poet wants to convey about that topic.

TWENTY POETIC FORMS

1- Acrostic - a poem in which the first letter of each word forms a word - usually a name - if read downward.

Example: "A Rock Acrostic" by Avis Harley.

2- Couplet - two lines of poetry that rhyme and usually form one complete idea.

Example: The poem "Catch a Little Rhyme" by Eve Merriam is written in couplets.

3- Haiku - a Japanese three-line poetic form - usually about nature - with lines of three, seven, and five syllables, respectively.

Example: I call to my love
on mornings ripe with sunlight.
The songbirds answer.

4- Quatrain - a stanza made up of four lines, often containing a rhyme scheme.

Example: "The Toaster" by William Jay Smith.

5- Cinquain - a five-line untitled poem, where the syllable pattern increases by two for each line, except for the last line, which ends in two syllables (2,4,6,8,2).

Example: The cinquain that begins with "Oh, cat" by Paul B. Janeczko.

6- Limerick - a humorous rhyming poem written in five lines and having a particular meter. It often begins with "There once was a..."

Example: Limericks by Edward Lear.

7- Sonnet - a poem that is 14 lines long, generally written in iambic pentameter.

Example: "Sonnet 116" by William Shakespeare.

8- Free Verse - a poem that does not follow a predictable form or rhyme scheme or metric pattern.

Example: "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes.

9- List or Catalog Poem - a poem in the form of a list, that uses sensory details and precise language to persuade the reader to take notice of what is being listed.

Example: "Things To Do If You Are a Subway" by Robbi Katz.

10- Villanelle - a challenging poetic form that includes five tercets (aba rhyme) followed by a quatrain (abaa rhyme) and a pattern of repetition of lines 1 and 3 of the first stanza.

Example: "Is There a Villain in Your Villanelle?" by Joan Bransfield Graham.

11- Ode - a poem that celebrates or praises something.

Example: "Ode to Pablo's Tennis Shoes" by Gary Soto.

12- Lyric Poetry - poetry that expresses a poet's personal experience, feelings, and emotions.

Example: "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" by William Wordsworth.

13- Blank Verse - a poem written in iambic pentameter, but with no rhyme.

Example: Verses in *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare.

14- Blues Poem - poems that - like blues songs - deal with personal or world issues.

Example: "Evening Air Blues" by Langston Hughes.

15- Nonsense Poem - a fun, usually rhyming poem that makes no sense, focusing instead on the sounds and the rhythm of the poem.

Example: "The Jumblies" by Edward Lear.

16- Concrete Poem - a poem that uses words to form the shape of the subject of the poem (also known as a "shape poem").

Example: "Concrete Cat" by Dorth Charles.

17- Narrative Poem - a poem that tells a story.

Example: "The Sneetches" by Dr. Seuss (Theodor Geisel).

18- Ballad - a poem that tells a story, usually written in four-line stanzas.

Example: "The Wreck of the Hesperus" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

19- Epic Poem - a long and heroic narrative poem.

Example: "The Odyssey" by Homer.

20- Imagist Poetry - poems that contain precise visual images.

Example: "The Red Wheelbarrow" by William Carlos Williams.

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