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What is a Poem? Before we look at some specific elements of poetry, it'd be helpful to define what a poem is. What exactly makes a poem different, for example, from a piece of prose? Or song lyrics, even? The truth is that when we get down to it, poetry isn't all that easy to pin down. Even poets themselves disagree about what constitutes a poem. What chance, then, do our struggling students have? Luckily, some broad, general characteristics can be agreed upon. In this article, we will examine these common features of poetry and how we can best instill an understanding of them in our students.

It looks like a poem - If it looks like a poem and reads like a poem, then the chances are pretty good that it is indeed a poem. Poetry comes in lines, some of which are complete sentences, but many are not. Also, these lines usually don't run out to the margins consistently, like in, say, a novel. All this gives poetry a distinctive and recognizable look on the page.

It often has some underlying form holding things together - While this isn't always true (in some free verse, for example), a lot of poetry conforms to a prescribed structure, such as in a sonnet, a haiku, etc.

It uses imagery - If the poet is worth his or her salt, they'll endeavor to create images in the reader's mind using lots of sensory details and figurative language.

It has a certain musicality - We could be forgiven for thinking that poetry's natural incarnation is the written word and its habitat, the page, but the printed word is not what poetry's origins lie in. The earliest poems were composed orally and committed to memory. We can still see the importance the sound of language plays when we read poems out loud. We can see it, too, in the attention paid to musical devices incorporated into the poem. Devices such as alliteration, rhyme, and meter, for example, will look many of these later in this article. Remember that some forms of writing, such as prose poetry or poetic prose, may blur the lines between poetry and prose. In these cases, the distinction might be less clear, and it's up to the reader to interpret the work's genre.

THE PURPOSE OF POETRY: WHAT IS POETRY FOR? For all the forms professional writers can take, the professional poet most often finds themselves struggling to make ends meet financially. Poetry can be challenging to understand and requires much effort from the reader. Students can be forgiven for wondering exactly what the point of this difficult-to-write and difficult-to-read genre is that it is apparently used to torture the less literary-minded during their school years. It may be a hard sell to some of our more reluctant students, but there is a point behind all this word-smithery. Poetry's purpose is essential to help us understand the world around us. It endeavors to show us things anew that we may have previously taken for granted. It offers us new perspectives on the familiar. Poetry aims to enable us to see the world with fresh eyes again, like a child's. Doing this helps us understand our world more profoundly. **THE STRUCTURE OF POETRY** We've mentioned already that though poetry's origins lie in the spoken word, it does take a very recognizable shape when put down on the page. This is mainly due to the overall organization of the lines on the page, often in the form of stanzas. Though some modern forms of poetry eschew traditional poetic conventions such as rhyme schemes and meter etc., the stanza still plays a vital role in the overall look of printed poetry. But, just what exactly is a stanza? - your students may well ask. Stanzas are the poetic equivalent of a prose paragraph. They are a series of lines grouped together and separated from other groups of lines or stanzas by a skipped line. Stanzas come in various lengths, dependent either on the poet's whim or the conventions of a particular poet and their technical needs. The length of a stanza is usually the most common form of stanza. There are three lines called a tercet, six lines called a sestet, or occasionally a sextain; seven lines are called a septet; eight lines are called an octave. When exploring the elements of poetry, your students must appreciate that there are many different types of poetry, some of which we will look at below. But regardless of the specific kind of poetry in question, a poem will most likely fit into these three overarching types of poetry: lyric, narrative, and descriptive.

Lyric poetry mainly concerns the poet's emotional life: it's written in their own voice and expresses solid thoughts and emotions. There is only one voice in a lyric poem, and we see the world from that single perspective. Most modern poetry is lyric poetry in that it is personal and introspective. **Lyric Poetry Example:** The Cat's Serenade
The moon is high and the night is still
A feline prowls with a velvet thrill
His whiskers twitch and his eyes gleam bright
As he sets out on his nightly flight
The world is his, all to explore
His kingdom vast, a hunter's floor
With stealth and grace he moves along
A symphony of purrs and song
The night breeze whispers in his ear
As he purrs a tune, oh so clear
His melody lulls the world to sleep
As he creeps and crawls, oh so deep
The stars above, they shine so bright
As the cat serenades the night
With every note, he weaves a spell
A magical tune, too hard to quell
So listen close, my dear friend
To the cat's serenade, till the very end
For in his song, there lies a clue
To the secrets of the night, so pure and true.
As its name implies, narrative poetry is concerned with storytelling. Just as in a prose story, a narrative poem will most likely follow the conventions of the plot, including elements such as conflict, rising action, climax, resolution etc. Again, as in prose stories, narrative poems will most likely be peopled with characters to perform the actions of the tale. **Narrative Poem Example:** The Tale of Little Miss Whiskers
Little Miss Whiskers was a feline so fine,
Her fur was soft, and her eyes did shine.
With a tail that flicked and a nose so pink,
She roamed the streets, without a wink.
She lived in a world, full of mystery and night,
With rats and mice, she'd battle all night.
She'd prowled and pounce, with grace and style,
Her hunting skills were quite a while.
One day, she found a mouse, so small,
And she chased it, till she'd had her fill.
She caught it, and she ate it up,
And she was happy, till she'd had her cup.
And when she was done, she'd wash her face,
And she'd stretch, and she'd take a nap.
And when she woke up, she'd stretch and yawn,
And she'd go back to her hunting game.
With courage and wit, she stayed on track,
She let a dog, a bird, and a mouse, And together they roamed,
From house to house, they braved the streets,
And the alleys dark, And in each other, they found a spark.
Little Miss Whiskers had finally found her way,
And her new friends, she decided to stay.
For in this world, so strange and new, she had found a family,
And a home so true. And so she roamed,
With her tail held high, In a world that was full, of wonders and sky.
With every step, she felt so free,
Little Miss Whiskers, the cat of the city.
Descriptive poetry usually employs lots of rich imagery to describe the world around the poet. While it most often has a single poetic voice and strong emotional content, descriptive poetry differs from lyric poetry in that its focus is more on the externalities of the world rather than the poet's interior life. **Descriptive Poetry Example:** The Majestic Cat
At so grand, with fur of gold, A sight to see, so brave and bold. His eyes of amber, bright and clear, A gaze so piercing, it filled with fear. He sat atop a throne of pillows, A king of his own, no need for billows. His head held high, with regal grace, A monarch of the feline race. His fur was soft, like silk and down, His whiskers long, like a monarch's crown. His paws were strong, with sharp claws, A hunter's weapon, with no flaws. He moved with grace, like a dancer's feet, His tail so long, like a winding street. He leaped and bounded, with such ease, A sight so grand, it was hard to please. But when he curled, and snuggled close, His gentle purr, like a soothing dose. His eyes so calm, his heart at rest, A friend so true, with no protest. For in his majesty, he still had love, A heart so pure, like a cooing dove. A cat so grand, yet still so kind, A true companion, that's hard to find. We have mentioned that poetry often works on the conventions of specific underlying structures. Now, look at some of the more common subtypes and their defining characteristics. Sonnet: Sonnets are predominantly concerned with matters of the heart. If you see a sonnet's recognisably blocky form, it's prevalent in many forms of popular music, especially rap. Challenge your students to find examples of assonance in the music they listen to and share them with the class. They may also want to try their hand at writing their own examples too. Consonance: Consonance is the constant focused counterpart to assonance. It involves the repetition of consonant sounds in the middle or at the end of words, distinguished from alliteration, where the initial sound is repeated. Exercise: The crow crunched through the thick cloud like a rocket. Exercise: As there are many similarities between the devices of alliteration, assonance, and consonance, it would be a good idea to give the students opportunities to practice distinguishing between them. An excellent exercise to achieve this is to first identify examples of each device from a verse in a poetry anthology before challenging them to create original examples of each on their own. The students can then use the examples they have identified as models to create their own. Meter: Meter is like the beat or rhythm in a poem. It's a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables that makes the poem sound musical and smooth. Think of it like the way music has a steady beat that makes you tap your foot. Example: One common type of meter is called iambic pentameter. In iambic pentameter, each line has five groups of two syllables, and the second syllable in each group is stressed, or has more emphasis. It sounds like "da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM." Here's an example from a famous poem by Shakespeare: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" (Sonnet 18, line 1) In this line, each group of two syllables has a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one, like "Shall I," "to thee," "a sum-," "mer's day." This makes the poem sound nice and rhythmic, almost like a song. Different types of meter create different rhythms and feelings in poems. Understanding meter can help you appreciate the music and flow of poetry, just like you appreciate the beat in your favorite songs. Exercise: Introduce the concept of meter using the "Rhythmic Clap and Snap" method. Writing syllables and more words into a poem, using a specific pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, can help you understand the rhythm and feel of a poem. Another good exercise is to have students write their own poems using a specific meter, such as iambic pentameter, trochaic, dactylic, and anapaestic. Explain that stressed syllables and unstressed syllables are represented by a long line and a short line, respectively. Have students write a poem using a specific meter, such as iambic pentameter. Encourage creativity by having students create their own lines in various meters. This interactive exercise provides a lively way for students to understand and experience the rhythmic aspect of poetry. Onomatopoeia: Onomatopoeia refers to creating words that sound like the very thing they refer to. For many students, the first introduction to onomatopoeia goes back to learning animal sounds as an infant. Words such as Oink! Chirp! Woof! and Meow! can all be thought of as onomatopoeic. Be sure to examine these elements of poetry with your younger students first. Example: Aside from animal noises, the names of sounds themselves are often onomatopoeic, for example: Bang! Thud! Crash! Exercise: Encourage students to coin new onomatopoeic words. 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words, such as iambic pentameter, trochaic, anapestic, and dactylic. Explain the stressed and unstressed syllables and demonstrate clapping and snapping to the correct rhythm for the first phrase. Divide the class into groups to practice reading their assigned phrases with the right meter. Then, have groups perform their phrases while they identify the meter. Encourage creativity by having students create their own lines in various meters. This is an interactive exercise provides a lively way for students to understand and experience the rhythmic aspect of poetry. Onomatopoeia Meaning: Onomatopoeia refers to creating words that sound like what they represent. For many students, the first introduction to onomatopoeia goes back to learning animal sounds as an infant. Words such as Oink! Chirp! Woof and Meow! can all be thought of as onomatopoeia. Be sure to examine these elements of poetry with your younger students first. 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This involves combining stressed and unstressed syllables to create a constant beat pattern that runs throughout the poem. Each pattern of beats is called a foot. There are various possible combinations of stressed and unstressed syllables, or feet, and these patterns have their own names to describe them. While exploring all of these in this article is impossible, we look at one of the more common ones below. Example: Shall I compare thee to a summer's day/ Iambic pentameter, i.e. five metrical feet of alternating unstressed and stressed syllables] Exercise: A valuable way of tuning in students to meter is to have them mark the stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of poetry. The iambic pentameter is a good place to start. This pattern is found in many of Shakespeare's plays. It is also frequently used in love sonnets, where its rhythm reflects the beating of the human heart and reinforces the idea that love comes 'from the heart'. Once students have become adept at recognizing various meters and rhythms, they should have a go at writing in them too. Figurative / Connotative Language in Poetry Meaning: Metaphors make comparisons between things by stating that one thing literally is something else. Metaphors are used to bring clarity to ideas by forming connections. Often, metaphors reveal implicit similarities between two things or concepts. Example: We can find lots of examples of metaphors in our everyday speech, for example: She's an old flame/ Time is money/ Life is a rollercoaster/ Exercise: When students can comfortably identify metaphors in the poems of others, they should try their hands at creating their own metaphors. A good start is challenging them to convert some similes into metaphors. Not only does this give students valuable practice in creating metaphors, but it also helps reinforce their understanding of the differences between metaphors and similes while giving them a scaffold to support their first attempts at producing metaphors themselves. Simile Meaning: Unlike metaphors that make comparisons by saying one thing is something else, similes work by saying something is similar to something else. They commonly come in two forms. Those that compare using 'as' and those that make a comparison using 'like'. Example: She is as strong as an ox/ The night is like a blanket. Exercise: It'd be helpful for students to convert metaphors they identify in poetry into similes, reinforcing their understanding of both. Personification Meaning: Personification is a particular type of metaphor where a non-human thing or idea is ascribed to human qualities or abilities. This can be in the form of a single phrase or line or extended in the form of a stanza or the whole poem. Example: The moon was shining sulkily. Because she thought the sun/ Had got no business to be there/ After the day was done - "It's very rude of him," she said, "To come and spoil the fun." [From The Walrus and the Carpenter by Lewis Carroll] Exercise: To help students practice distinguishing between metaphors, similes, and personification, gather a list of jumbled-up examples of each from various poems. Students can then sort these accordingly. When they have completed this, task them to devise an original example of each. The elements of poetry are many, and while the elements explored above represent the most important of these, it is not an exhaustive list of every element. It takes lots of exposure for students to become comfortable recognizing each and confident in employing these elements in their writing. Take every opportunity to reinforce student understanding of these elements. Poetic elements are often employed in genres outside of poetry, such as in stories, advertising, and song - waste no opportunity! Start with Reliable Examples: Begin your poetry lessons with poems that resonate with your students or showcase themes they can relate to. Using familiar topics or contemporary poets can pique their interest and make poetry more accessible. Engage the Senses: Encourage students to analyze the sensory elements in poems, such as imagery and figurative language. Ask them to visualize, hear, taste, and feel the emotions portrayed in the verses, fostering a deeper connection to the poem's meaning. Interactive Activities: Incorporate hands-on activities to make learning poetry engaging. Organize group discussions, poetry recitation contests, or creative writing workshops to encourage students to express themselves and gain confidence in their own poetic abilities. Explore Diverse Voices: Expose your students to various poets from different cultures, backgrounds, and periods. This not only promotes cultural appreciation but also broadens their understanding of diverse perspectives. Cross-Curricular Connections: Demonstrate how poetry connects to other subjects, like history, science, or art. Exploring historical poems or scientific poetry can foster interdisciplinary learning and show students the versatility of poetry as a means of expression. By implementing these tips, you can create a vibrant and inclusive learning environment, fostering a genuine appreciation for the important elements of poetry among your students. DOWNLOAD THIS FREE 30 DAY POETRY WRITING ACTIVITY MATRIX/ Your students will love this 30-day Poetry Matrix to challenge their understanding of and ability to write great poetry. It works beautifully for DISTANCE LEARNING due to its instructional hyperlinks and simple guides for students to follow. Add it to GOOGLE CLASSROOM or SeeSaw to keep your students engaged in the task. LOOKING FOR MORE GREAT ARTICLES ON POETIC ELEMENTS? 1. ELEMENTS OF POETRY FORM SOUND DEVICES IMAGERY MOOD/TONE THEME 2. Poetry: Poetry is a form of writing that uses not only words, but also form, Patterns of sound, Imagery, And figurative language To convey the message. Any Poem will include some or all of these elements. 3. 1. FORM - A poem's form is its appearance. Poems are divided into lines. Many poems, especially longer ones, may also be divided into groups of lines called stanzas. - Stanzas function like paragraphs in a story. Each one contains a single idea or takes the idea one step further. What is the purpose of the first stanza of "The Highwayman"? The wind was a torrent of darkness, among the gusty trees. The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas. The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor, And the highwayman came riding - Riding - riding - The highwayman came riding up to the old inn door. (Sets the scene) 5. 2. SOUND. SOUND DEVICES/Devises Some poems use techniques of sound such as rhythm, rhyme, and alliteration. 6. Rhythm - The pattern of beats or stresses in a poem. Poets use patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables to create a regular rhythm. Try beating out the rhythm with a finger as you read these lines. She was a child and I was a child, In this kingdom by the sea; But we loved with a love that was more than love - I and my Annabel Lee; 7. Metrical rhythm involves stresses or syllables into repeated patterns called FEET within a line. In English, each foot usually includes one syllable with a stress and one without a stress. The number of metrical feet in a line are described in Greek terminology as follows: dimeter - 2 feet trimeter - 3 feet tetrameter - 4 feet pentameter - 5 feet hexameter - 6 feet heptameter 7 feet octameter - 8 feet 8. RHYME: The repetition of the same or similar sounds, usually in stressed syllables at the ends of lines, but sometimes within a line. There are strange things done in the midnight sun By the men who mull for gold; 9. Rhyme Scheme The rhyming pattern that is created at the end of lines of poetry. If the poem does not have a rhyme scheme it is considered to be a free verse poem. 10. Homework! - Watch the explanation in the video, print the worksheet and answer the questions. 11. ALLITERATION: The repetition of consonant sounds at the beginnings of words. Seven silver swans swam silently seaward. Peter Piper pick a peck of pickled peppers. 12. Onomatopoeia Words that are used to represent particular sounds. 13. Repetition The repeating of a particular sound device to create an effect. To create emphasis, a poet may repeat words or lines within the poem. 15. 3. IMAGERY Poets use words that appeal to the reader's senses of sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. Which senses does the following stanza appeal to? Back, he spurred like a madman, shouting curses to the sky, With the white road smoking behind him and his rapier brandished high. Sight? Sound? 20. Mother to Son By: Langston Hughes Well, son, I'll tell you: Life for me ain't been no crystal stair. It's had tacks in it, And it splinters, And boards torn up, And places with no carpet on the floor - Bare. But all the time I've been a-climbin' on, And reachin' landin's, And turnin' corners, And sometimes goin' in the dark Where there ain't been no light. So, boy, don't you turn back. Don't you set down on the stoPs 'Cause you finds it kinder hard. Don't you fall now - For 'I've still goin', honey, I've still climbin', and life for me ain't been no crystal stair. 22. In "The Highwayman," images create a picture of Tim. Which figures are used to describe his eyes and his hair? His eyes were hollows of madness, his hair like molten hay, eyes : hollows of madness: Metaphor hair : molten hay : Simile 23. Which figures are used to describe the following? "My love is like a rose. Our love bloomed in the garden. " The rose is used as a metaphor for the love. The garden is used as a simile for the love. 24. The theme of a poem is its central or main idea. To identify a theme, ask yourself what ideas or insights about life or human nature you have found in the poem. Poetry is one of the oldest forms of art, but do modern readers need it? Let's figure out why poetry matters in the digital age. The desire for creativity has been a trademark of men since time immemorial (remember those rock paintings?) Art helped the elements explored above represent the most important of these, it is not an exhaustive list of every element. It takes lots of exposure for students to become comfortable recognizing each and confident in employing these elements in their writing. Take every opportunity to reinforce student understanding of these elements. Poetic elements are often employed in genres outside of poetry, such as in stories, advertising, and song - waste no opportunity! Start with Reliable Examples: Begin your poetry lessons with poems that resonate with your students or showcase themes they can relate to. Using familiar topics or contemporary poets can pique their interest and make poetry more accessible. Engage the Senses: Encourage students to analyze the sensory elements in poems, such as imagery and figurative language. Ask them to visualize, hear, taste, and feel the emotions portrayed in the verses, fostering a deeper connection to the poem's meaning. Interactive Activities: Incorporate hands-on activities to make learning poetry engaging. Organize group discussions, poetry recitation contests, or creative writing workshops to encourage students to express themselves and gain confidence in their own poetic abilities. Explore Diverse Voices: Expose your students to various poets from different cultures, backgrounds, and periods. This not only promotes cultural appreciation but also broadens their understanding of diverse perspectives. Cross-Curricular Connections: Demonstrate how poetry connects to other subjects, like history, science, or art. Exploring historical poems or scientific poetry can foster interdisciplinary learning and show students the versatility of poetry as a means of expression. By implementing these tips, you can create a vibrant and inclusive learning environment, fostering a genuine appreciation for the important elements of poetry among your students. DOWNLOAD THIS FREE 30 DAY POETRY WRITING ACTIVITY MATRIX/ Your students will love this 30-day Poetry Matrix to challenge their understanding of and ability to write great poetry. It works beautifully for DISTANCE LEARNING due to its instructional hyperlinks and simple guides for students to follow. Add it to GOOGLE CLASSROOM or SeeSaw to keep your students engaged in the task. LOOKING FOR MORE GREAT ARTICLES ON POETIC ELEMENTS? Share - copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt - remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution - You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. 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