

## Basic Poetry Terms

**Poetry** - a rhythmic, compressed language that uses figures of speech and imagery designed to appeal to our emotions and imagination

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**Poetic License** - the freedom to violate normal conventions of language or truth in the interests of forceful poetic or fictional writing. Ex. Non grammatical structures in poetry demonstrate this. Other examples include non punctuated stream of consciousness passages in prose, the inclusion of words that are normally considered obscene, unannounced variations of points of view and time sequence, distortions of historical fact

**Prose** - Literature that is not poetry: ordinary form of spoken or written language, without metrical structure

**Literal Language** - When the words you are using are the true meaning of the word or phrase (i.e. "It is hot outside" literally means the temperature is hot.)

**Denotation** - the literal, dictionary meaning of a word or phrase

**Figurative Language** - When a word or phrase has a meaning other than it's literal meaning (i.e. "She is hot." Does not mean she is temperature hot. "Hot" refers to her attractiveness.)

**Connotation** - the inferred or implied meaning of a word or phrase, the subtext of what is being said

**Speaker** - The "voice" talking to us in a poem. The speaker is NOT necessarily the poet.

**Audience** - to whom the poet is addressing the poem. It can be a specific person or just a general audience.

**Subject** - what the poem is about, the topic of the poem

**Theme** - the point or message that the poet is making through the poem

**Tone** - the author's attitude towards the situation described (examples of tone: friendly, bitter, ashamed, embarrassed, angry, sarcastic, melancholy, excited, brave, hurt, thankful, reflective, mysterious, preachy, confused, reminiscent, mournful, sad, condescending, respectful, admiration, devotion, romantic, dislike, anger, serious, comedic, playful, proud, envious, confident, jealous, humorous, ironic, pessimistic, optimistic, mocking, objective, tragic, witty, derogatory)

**Imagery** - words or phrases that appeal to the reader's senses and allow a reader to imagine what the poet is writing about (smell, taste, sight, touch, hear)

**Line** - words on the same horizontal line before a break

**Refrain** - phrase, line, or group of lines that is repeated throughout a poem. (i.e. in a song, the chorus is a refrain)

**Stanza** - a group or set of lines created by the poet, set off by spaces

## Playing with the Meaning of Words

**Diction** – style of speaking or writing as dependent upon choice of words

**Hyperbole** - A figure of speech in which deliberate exaggeration is used for emphasis. Many everyday expressions are examples of hyperbole: tons of money, waiting for ages, a flood of tears, etc.

**Understatement** - deliberately saying less than you mean, creating emphasis towards something ("You trimmed your hair" – said to someone who just shaved their hair.)

**Simile** - A figure of speech in which two things are compared using the word "like" or "as." (i.e. Her hair is like straw. His eyes are black as the night.)

**Metaphor** - A figure of speech in which two things are compared, usually by saying one thing is another, or by substituting a more descriptive word for the more common or usual word that would be expected. Some examples of metaphors: the world's a stage, he was a lion in battle, drowning in debt, and a sea of troubles

**Personification** - A figure of speech in which nonhuman things or abstract ideas are given human attributes: the sky is crying, dead leaves danced in the wind, blind justice.

**Symbol** - using one thing to represent another.

**Irony** – a twist on the expected (situational or verbal irony – sarcasm – can be used in poetry)

**Paradox** - a phrase that seems to be a contradiction Example: "winning the lottery was the worst and best thing that ever happened to them" An oxymoron is a type of paradox, where two words side by side are a contradiction, but still mean something bitter Example: sweet goodbye (oxymoron)

**Pun** - the humorous use of a word or phrase that has more than one meaning; the use of words that are alike or nearly alike in sound but different in meaning; a play on words Ex.

**Inversion** - deliberately inverting (mixing up) the word order of a phrase or sentence. Used for emphasis or rhyming purposes.

## Playing with the Sound of Words

**Alliteration** - The repetition of the same or similar consonant sounds at the beginning of words. Ex. "She sells seashells by the seashore." and "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers."

**Assonance** - The repetition or a pattern of vowel sounds, as in the tongue twister "Moses supposes his toeses are roses."

**Consonance** - The repetition of similar consonant sounds at the ends of words. Ex. lost and past or confess and dismiss.

**Onomatopoeia** - A figure of speech in which words are used to imitate sounds. Examples of onomatopoeic words are buzz, hiss, zing, clippety-clop, cock-a-doodle-do, pop, splat, thump, and tick-tock.

**Rhyme** - The occurrence of the same or similar sounds at the end of two or more words. The pattern of rhyme in a stanza or poem is called rhyme scheme and is shown usually by using a different letter for each final sound. In a poem with an AABBA rhyme scheme, the first, second, and fifth lines end in one sound, and the third and fourth lines end in another.

**Couplets** - a set of two lines one after the other that rhyme

**Repetition** - purposefully repeating a word or phrase to give that word or phrase emphasis or to make a point

**Rhythm** - the beat or musical quality of the words

## Types of Poems

**Free Verse** - a poem without any regular meter or rhyme.

**Narrative** - A poem that tells a story. Ballads, epics, and lays are different kinds of narrative poems.

**Ballad** - A type of narrative poem that tells a story similar to a folk tale or legend and often has a repeated refrain. Example: T.S. Eliot "The Lady of Shalott"

**Epic** - A long, serious poem that tells the story of a heroic figure.

**Lyric** - that expresses the thoughts and feelings of the poet. A lyric poem may resemble a song in form or style. Sonnets and odes are types of lyric poems. Modern day "lyrics" of songs are named for this type of poem

**Ode** - A type of lyric poem that is serious and thoughtful in tone and has a very precise, formal structure. Example: John Keats: "Ode to a Nightingale"

**Sonnet** - A type of lyric poem that is 14 lines long. Italian (or Petrarchan) sonnets are divided into two quatrains and a six-line "sestet," with the rhyme scheme abba abba cdecde (or cdcdcd). English (or Shakespearean) sonnets are composed of three quatrains and a final couplet, with a rhyme scheme of abab cdcd efef gg. English sonnets are written generally in iambic pentameter. Example: William Wordsworth "Sonnet"

**Elegy** - A type of lyric poem that laments the death of a person, or one that is simply sad and thoughtful. Example: Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (Do not mistake elegy for "eulogy" or "epitaph". A eulogy is a speech made about someone's life accomplishments, usually given at a funeral. (Any funeral you may have been at would have had a eulogy where someone gets up and talks about the person's life and accomplishments. It is a way of paying tribute to the dead person.) Epitaph is Greek for "on the gravestone". It is the inscription written on a person's tombstone. It is usually short, precise, and can be serious or funny. Examples: "Here lies Krusty the Clown. Beloved son, husband, and famous clown."

**Concrete Poem** - a poem not written in lines, but instead written in a shape that illustrates its meaning.