

Poetry - Literary Terms

- 1) poetry: any piece of literature written in verse or meter
Ex. Mary had a little lamb
Its fleece was white as snow
And anywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go.
- 2) meter: a series of words written so that the syllables form a rhythm or a beat
Ex. (accents indicate where beat falls) Ma-ry had a lit-tle lamb
- 3) rhyme scheme: the specific, prescribed rhyming pattern of a poem (refer to sonnet)
- 4) end rhyme: when lines rhyme at the end of lines of poetry
- 5) internal rhyme: when rhyme occurs with a word in the middle and end of a line of poetry
- 6) prose: ordinary speech or writing, as opposed to poetry/writing in verse
Ex. Mary had a pet lamb and she could not go anywhere that it did not follow her.
- 7) imagery: a type of language that creates vivid mental images by bringing to mind (evoking) ideas appealing to the senses
Ex. The sun shone through the window [not imagery] vs.
The sun cascaded through the window; as it hit an imperfection in the glass pane, the light was fragmented and showered the floor with tiny prisms of the colors of the rainbow. [imagery]
- 8) image: something outside of the body that one becomes aware of through one of the five senses; ex. color, sound, taste, etc.
Ex. Remembering the vividness or detail is recalling an image. (Refer to imagery above.)
- 9) simile: a comparison of two dissimilar things, using "like" or "as;" a form of imagery
Ex. She's like the wind.
- 10) metaphor: a comparison of two dissimilar things as if one is the other, not just similar
Ex. She is the wind.
- 11) extended metaphor: when a comparison of two dissimilar things is taken beyond the simple comparison and developed into an extended theme
Ex. Refer to Benjamin Franklin's epitaph. In it, he compares his life to a book. Read the following and see how he develops the theme beyond that simple comparison:
"The Body of
B. Franklin,
Printer,
Like the Cover of an old Book,
Its Contents torn out,
And Stript of its Lettering and Gilding [gold edging]
Lies here, Food for Worms.
But the Work shall not be wholly lost:
For it will, as he believ'd, appear once more,
In a new and more perfect Edition
Corrected and amended
By the Author..."

- 12) epic poems: written by the ancient Greeks and Romans, these long poems told about fantastic adventures and brave heroes.
- 13) onomatopoeia: the use of words that imitate sounds
Ex. swish, pow, boom, whack, hiss, snap, crackle, pop
- 14) rhythm: a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables
- 15) stanza: a group of lines that form a unit in poetry; like a paragraph, a stanza develops a single main idea. When the stanzas are put together, they show the organization of ideas in a poem.
Ex. Because I could not stop for Death—
He kindly stopped for me—
The Carriage held but just Ourselves—
And Immortality... (Emily Dickinson)
- 16) hyperbole: a figure of speech that uses exaggeration for effect.
Ex. I am so hungry I could eat a horse.
- 17) allusion: a reference to a well-known work of literature, a famous person, or an historical event. Recognizing allusions can add to the reader's understanding of a piece of writing.
- 18) concrete poem: a poem that is placed on the page so that the arrangement of the words in the poem suggests a picture. The shape often expands on the meaning.
- 19) lyric poem: presents a single speaker who expresses thoughts and feelings. These thoughts and feelings can be related to a variety of subjects.
- 20) narrative poem: tells a story; like a short story, it has characters, setting and plot.
- 21) parody: an imitation of another work of literature. Parody can be used to criticize or praise, but it is often used to point out the humor in something usually taken seriously.
- 22) repetition: a literary technique in which words or lines are repeated at regular intervals throughout a selection. Poets use repetition for emphasis or to create a particular sound pattern or rhyme.
- 23) symbol: something that stands for or represents something else.
Ex. In a cartoon, a light bulb is a symbol for an idea.
- 24) quatrain: the most popular stanza form in European history is the four-line stanza which is also known as a quatrain.
- 25) couplet: units of two lines are called couplets; generally, they are referred to as rhyming couplets (because they rhyme).
- 26) rhymed verse: rhymed verse is simply a poem with line endings that rhyme. In order to write a rhymed verse, select the rhyme you want to use by creating a rhyme scheme. Some common rhyme schemes include ABAB and AABB, but there are a number of variations possible. For the example below, the rhyme scheme used is: ABCB
Ex. Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go.

- 27) blank verse: this form of poetry has five pairs of syllables and does not rhyme.
- 28) consonance: the repetition of a consonant sound within or at the end of a group of words.
Ex. late at night hard-hearted short and sweet
- 29) alliteration: the repetition of a consonant sound at the beginning of a group of words
Ex. Love, leave me like the light..." (Cullen)
- 30) personification: a figure of speech that give human qualities to an object, a place or an idea.
Ex. The water tripped over the rocks in the creek.
- 31) limericks: a popular type of rhymed verse that have both melody and rhythm
Ex. "There once was a fellow named Dirk,
Whose work was to clerk for a Turk..."
- 32) haiku: a Japanese form of poetry that is made up of three lines, unrhymed, with five syllables in the first line, seven in the second line, and five in the third line
- 33) tanka: another form of Japanese poetry, the tanka is longer than a haiku and does not rhyme. It contains five lines: the first line has five syllables; the second, seven; the third, five; the fourth, seven; and fifth, seven.
- 34) cinquain: this American poem may have been influenced by the tanka; it has five lines: the first line has two syllables; the second, four; the third, six; the fourth, eight; and the fifth line has two syllables.
- 35) diamond-shaped poetry: this form of poem requires neither rhyme, rhythm or a specific number of syllables. It has seven lines set up as follows: first line, a noun; second line, two adjectives describing the noun; third line, two participles (-ed, -ing); fourth line, four nouns, or a phrase about the noun; fifth line, three participles that begin to show a change in the subject; line six, two adjectives which continue the idea of change; seventh line, a noun, the opposite of the subject (the noun in line one).
Ex.

Morning
 Crackling, crisp
 Glistening, gleaming, glaring
 Sun that stings my eyes
 Rushing, raging, tiring
 Soothing, sleepy
 Evening.
- 36) sonnet: from the Italian *sonnetto*, which means *little sound* or *little song*, this is a brief but carefully organized poem form of fourteen lines, with a specific "beat" and a specific rhyme scheme. There are two kinds of sonnets: Shakespearean and Italian. (Ex. later)
- 37) free verse: this kind of poem has no strict rhythm or rhyme. This kind of poetry most closely imitates normal speech. Sound is particularly important in this kind of poem.
- 38) sensory details: carefully chosen words that describe things that can be perceived by the senses, as opposed to information; they create clear and vivid images in a poem.
- 39) tone: an insight into the author's attitudes about his/her subject or theme. The tone can be determined by carefully studying the author's choice of words, the style of writing, and the content.
Ex. The tone of "Annabel Lee" is one of sadness and loneliness.

- 40) mood: the state of mind or feeling created by a piece of writing (ex. a feeling of mystery or sentimentality)
 Ex. In Brighton Beach Memoirs, the mood the author creates is one of sentimentality and humor recalling the author's experiences growing up during the Depression.
- 41) theme: an idea or general truth the author is trying to get across to his/her audience in a piece of literature.
 Ex. In Brighton Beach Memoirs, themes or truths about life that the author presents to the reader are: that going through puberty is not easy, but it can be survived; or that families must stick together through the best and worst of times.
- 42) abstract: things lacking physical detail, that cannot be perceived through any of the senses. The effects of these can be seen, but they cannot be perceived through the senses.
 Ex. poetry, politics, happiness, understanding, curiosity, hatred, jealousy
- 43) concrete: anything that can be perceived/experienced through the physical senses
 Ex. bread, sunlight, surf, violet, clouds, speed, warm, cold, echoes, poems
- 44) metonymy: a figure of speech (very similar to synecdoche) using the name of one thing to refer to something closely associated with it.
 Ex. I've been reading Shakespeare. or I ate the whole plate. or
*I should have been a pair of ragged claws
 Scuttling across the floors of silent seas. (T.S. Eliot)*
- 45) denotation: the dictionary definitions of words
 Ex. flame- a tongue of light rising from a fire
- 46) connotation: the associations that come with words, beyond their dictionary definitions
 Ex. flame- burning, destruction, passion, mysticism, etc.
- 47) cliche: an expression that has become trite, or worn out by constant use
 Ex. strong as an ox, cool as a cucumber, could eat a horse, talk your ear off, etc.
- 48) ballad: a song or poem that tells a story in short stanzas and simple words with repetition, refrain, etc.: most old ballads are of unknown authorship and have been handed down orally in more than one version.
 Ex. "My Darlin' Clementine" "On Top of Old Smoky" "Sweet Betsy From Pike"
- 49) assonance: is the repetition of a vowel sound
 Ex. "soft," "squalls;" or "rain," "late"

"...they are pains of ice,
 A vice of knives..." (Sylvia Plath)
 (cutting powder)

"Or if the secret ministry of frost
 Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
 Quietly shining to the quiet moon." (Coleridge)
 (brightness and sparkle)