

Poetry is something that most people recognize when they see it, even if they cannot define the term *poetry* precisely. In poetry, unlike prose, the look and sound of the words are inseparable from a poem's meaning. The word *poet* comes from the Greek word *poiētēs*, meaning "one who makes or fashions," and writing a poem involves a careful choice and crafting of language. Reading a poem, too, is different from reading prose; it is an experience that involves all the senses. As the French poet Paul Valéry said, "Prose [is] walking, poetry dancing."

Key Standard

R3.7 Recognize and understand the significance of various literary devices, including figurative language, imagery, allegory, and symbolism.

Form

The **form** of a poem is the physical arrangement of the words on the page. This includes the length and placement of the lines and the way they are grouped into **stanzas**. Some poetry is written in strict formal patterns. Other poetry, known as **free verse**, is not. Poets choose forms that help them convey their ideas.

YOUR TURN Look at the two excerpts at the right. Which is an example of free verse? Explain your answer.

Sound Devices

Poets use a variety of techniques to produce special qualities of sound. **Alliteration**, **assonance**, **consonance**, and **rhyme** involve repetition of sounds.

- **Alliteration** is a repetition of initial consonant sounds in nearby words (as in "to **j**iggle and **j**ump for joy").
- **Assonance** is a repetition of vowel sounds within words (as in "a **g**reed as **d**eep as the **s**ea").
- **Consonance** is a repetition of consonant sounds within or at the end of words (as in "of fleet foot and sound **mind**").
- **Rhyme** is a repetition of final sounds in two or more words (as in "a **stray gray tray**"). The **rhyme scheme** of a poem is the pattern formed by the rhymes at the end of the lines.

Onomatopoeia is the use of words—like *snort*, *clank*, and *whir*—that sound like what they refer to.

YOUR TURN Find and identify examples of sound devices in the excerpt at the right.

FORM

Love can not fill the thickened lung with breath,
Nor clean the blood, nor set the fractured bone;
Yet many a man is making friends with death
Even as I speak, for lack of love alone.

—Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Sonnet 30"

she spun herself into a web
and looking for a place to rest
turned to him
but he stood straight
declining to be her corner

—Nikki Giovanni, "Woman"

SOUND DEVICES

There will come soft rains and the
smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their
shimmering sound;
And frogs in the pools singing at night,
And wild plum-trees in tremulous white;
Robins will wear their feathery fire
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

—Sara Teasdale, "There Will Come Soft Rains"

Rhythm is the pattern, or beat, of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of poetry. When a rhythm is repeated throughout a poem, it is known as the poem's **meter**. Poets use rhythm to highlight the musical quality of language and to emphasize ideas and feelings. In the following line from Shakespeare's "Sonnet 18," the stressed syllables are marked (ˈ) and the unstressed syllables are marked (˘):

Shāll Í cōmpáre thee tó ā sūmmer's dáy?

YOUR TURN Tap out the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in the excerpt from Millay's "Sonnet 30" at the right. How does the poem's meter help you read the lines?

Figurative Language

Most poets try to create word pictures in their poems that help readers see, hear, feel, smell, and even taste the experiences they present. Such word pictures are called **imagery**. One technique poets use to create strong imagery is **figurative language**, which conveys meanings beyond the literal meanings of the words. Similes and metaphors are kinds of figurative language involving comparisons between things that have something in common.

- In a **simile** (such as "My life is like an open book"), a word such as *like* or *as* signals the comparison.
- A **metaphor** (such as "Jealousy is a green-eyed monster") is a direct comparison, with no signal word.

YOUR TURN How does the simile in this excerpt help you understand the relationship between the speaker and the person addressed?

Personification is a type of figurative language in which animals, inanimate objects, or ideas are given human qualities (as in "The teakettle ordered us back to the kitchen").

YOUR TURN What does the personification in the excerpt at the right tell you about the speaker's frame of mind?

RHYTHM

Love is not all: it is not meat nor drink
Nor slumber nor a roof against the rain;
Nor yet a floating spar to men that sink
And rise and sink and rise and sink again;

—Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Sonnet 30"

SIMILE

What did we say to each other
that now we are as the deer
who walk in single file

—N. Scott Momaday, "Simile"

PERSONIFICATION

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering,
breaking,
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

—Robert Hayden, "Those Winter Sundays"