

Poetry 9 Terminology

This list of terms is a building block that will be further developed in future grades. It contains the terms you are responsible for learning in your grade nine year.

General

- **Poem:** Words organized in such a way that there is a pattern of rhythm, rhyme and/or meaning. The relationships between words are emphasized in poetry, so the various word-clusters or verses have a collective impact on the reader/listener (which is different from prose, where the words often “hit” the reader one at a time in sentences).
- **Speaker:** The person who “talks” in the poem. This isn’t the same as the author because poets make things up, just like storywriters, so they invent speakers just like storywriters invent characters. The speaker is often a created identity (a made up self) and should not automatically be equated with the author.

Types of Poems

- **Narrative:** A poem that tells a story. Narratives may or may not rhyme, but they almost always follow the plot structure of a short story.
 - **Ballad:** A long poem that tells a story, usually a folk tale or legend, in rhyme. Often set to music, the traditional ballad typically has a refrain or chorus that adds to its musical qualities.
- **Concrete:** Concrete poetry experiments with the very materials of the poem itself: words, letters, format. The final product does what it says in that the meaning of the poem is demonstrated through some kind of concrete image made with words, letters, etc. Concrete poems rely heavily on the visual or phonetic to get across their meaning.
- **Free Verse:** Poetry that has no regular pattern of rhythm, rhyme or line length. Free verse poems experiment with words to create images for the reader.
- **Lyric:** Shorter poems of intense feeling and emotion. They can be composed in almost any meter (pattern of rhythm) and on almost any subject, although the most usual emotions presented are those of love and grief.

Poetic Devices

A. Sound

- **Alliteration:** Repeated consonant sounds at the beginning of a series of words. This device uses sound to catch the reader's attention. *I kicked cold coffee coloured puddles* is an alliteration because of the repeating "ck" sound.
- **Onomatopoeia:** Words that sound like what they mean are called onomatopoeia. "Buzz", "hiss", "splash" are typical examples of this sound device—also known as imitative harmony.

B. Comparison

- **Metaphor:** A direct comparison between two dissimilar items. *That baby is sugar sweet* is a metaphor that compares the baby to sugar.
- **Personification:** A figure of speech by which non-human things (animals, ideas, or inanimate things) are referred to as if they were human. *A non-human item is given human characteristics.* *The trees stretched their arms to the sky* is an example of personification because the trees are described as if they are people stretching.
- **Simile:** A comparison between two dissimilar items using "like" or "as". *The stars were like diamonds in the sky* is a simile that compares stars to diamonds using the word "like".

C. Word Play

- **Figurative Language:** The imaginative language that makes a poem rich to a reader. Figurative language often relies on comparison devices like simile, metaphor, and personification to make a point. Figurative language is the opposite of literal language.
- **Hyperbole:** A deliberate exaggeration to make a point. *I am hungry enough to eat the fridge* is an example of hyperbole.
- **Image:** A single mental picture that the poem creates in the reader's mind.
- **Imagery:** The set or pattern of images in a poem or narrative. Poets create pictures in readers' minds by appealing to the various senses. For example, these images can be mental pictures (sight) or sound images (hearing). This collection of images appealing to the five senses is called the imagery of the poem.

- **Literal language:** The literal meaning of the poem that ignores imagery, symbolism, figurative language and any imagination on the part of the poet or the reader. For example, on a literal level, the idiom “cat got your tongue?” means that a cat has someone’s tongue, not that the person is quiet and does not know what to say (the figurative meaning). Literal language is the opposite of figurative language.
- **Mood:** The feelings created by the poem in the reader; mood is best discovered through careful consideration of the images presented by the poem, and thinking about what feelings those images prompt. For example, if the “rain weeps”, the mood is sad, while if the “rain dances”, the mood is happy.
- **Oxymoron:** A pair of opposite words is an example of oxymoron. For example, “cold fire” or “jumbo shrimp”.
- **Understatement:** The opposite of hyperbole. Understatement achieves its effect through stating less than what is necessary. For example, a person might say to a hospitalized car crash victim, “I bet that hurt.”

Verse Forms

- **Couplet:** Two lines of poetry that rhyme. The last two lines of an English sonnet is a couplet. The following example is a couplet:
Roses are red, violets are blue
Sugar is sweet and so are you
- **Quatrain:** Four lines of poetry that have a rhyme scheme. “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” (above) is an example of a quatrain. Quatrains often have an abab or abcb rhyme scheme, as well as the aabb shown above. The first three verses of an English sonnet are quatrains.
- **Stanza:** Another word for “verse paragraph”. See below.
- **Verse / Verse Paragraph:** A “paragraph” of writing in a poem. These paragraphs are written as clusters of rhyming lines in traditional poetry, such as octaves, sestets and quatrains. Also known as a stanza.

Rhythm and Rhyme

- **Rhyme:** When sounds match at the end of lines of poetry they are considered rhyming (technically = end-rhyme). The examples below in “rhyme scheme” and “couplet” demonstrate this.
- **Rhyme Scheme:** The pattern of rhyme in a poem, indicated with letters of the alphabet. To decide on a rhyme scheme, you assign a letter of the alphabet to all rhyming words at the ends of lines of poetry, starting with the letter “a”. When you run out of one rhyme sound, you start with the next letter of the alphabet. For example, the following is an aa bb rhyme scheme (star/are and high/sky):

<i>Twinkle, twinkle, little star</i>	a
<i>How I wonder what you are</i>	a
<i>Up above the world so high</i>	b
<i>Like a diamond in the sky</i>	b

- **Rhythm:** A pattern of sound in a poem; it may be a regular or irregular pattern. Rhythm is the musical beat of the poem, and some poems are more musical than others.