

What is a Poem?



A poem is a piece of writing that expresses feelings and ideas using imaginative language.

People have been writing poems for thousands of years. A person who writes poetry is called a poet.

What are poems about?

Poems can be about anything!
You could write a poem about...



A person you love.



Somebody you miss.



The view from a window.



A favourite object or activity.



A special place.



An animal.



A memory or achievement.

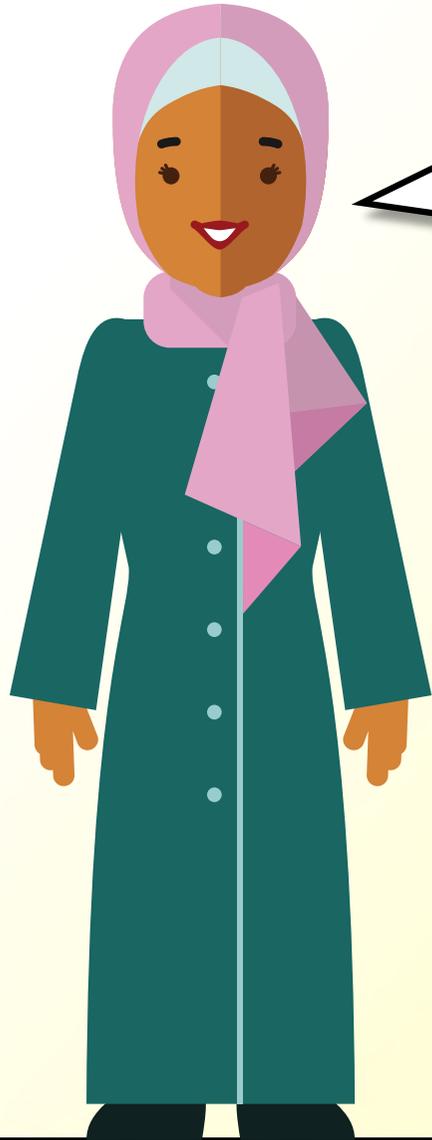


Your hopes, dreams or emotions.



A story.

The Parts of a Poem



Poets choose words very carefully when they are writing. The words are organised into lines and verses.

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

Excerpt from The Tyger by William Blake

The words in a poem are grouped into lines.

The lines are grouped into verses (which are also known as stanzas).



Reading Poetry

Reading a poem more than once can be helpful.
As you read, ask yourself these questions.

How does it
make me feel?

What did I
imagine as I
read?

What does it
make me think
about?

What is the
poem about?

Which parts
stand out?

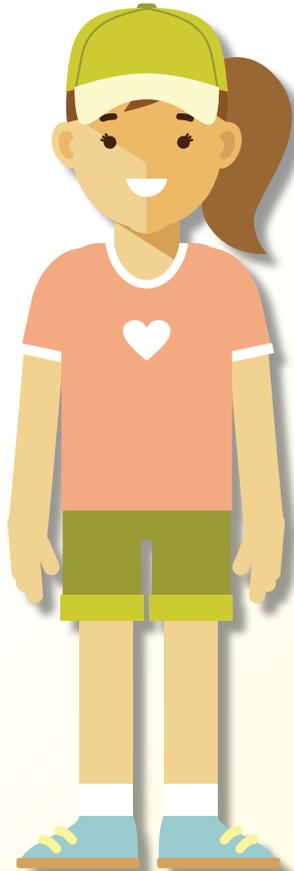
What is the
mood of the
poem?

Which words or
phrases are the most
effective? Why?

Why did the
poet choose
those words?

Have any words
been used in
surprising ways?





Types of Poetry

There are many different types of poem.
Here are a few of them...

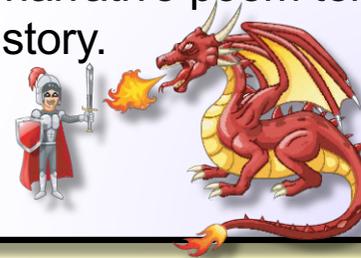


Nursery Rhyme

A nursery rhyme is a simple traditional poem or song.

Narrative Poem

A narrative poem tells a story.



Shape Poem

This is written in the same shape as the object it describes.

A C R O S T I C

In an acrostic poem, the first letter of each line spells a word or message when it is read vertically.

Sonnet

A sonnet is a special type of poem that has fourteen lines. Each line usually has ten syllables.

Limerick

A limerick is a funny poem with five lines that follows a particular format (AABBA).

Haiku



A haiku is a Japanese poem. The first line has five syllables, the second has seven and the third has five.

Can you think of any others?

The Features of a Poem



Poems can include different features.
How many of these do you know?

Rhyming	Rhythm	Repetition
Figurative Language	Similes and Metaphors	Personification
Hyperbole	Alliteration	Onomatopoeia

Some poems may include many of these features. Some may have none!

Rhyming is when words end in the same (or a similar) sound. Many poems rhyme but they don't have to.

Rhyming

The lines in a poem may rhyme in a special pattern.

These words rhyme with rain.

drain, train, brain,
plane, cane, strain,
vein, ascertain

These words rhyme with shoe.

blue, crew, grew,
too, through,
cuckoo, view



The Queen of Hearts,
She made some tarts,
All on a summer's day;
The knave of Hearts,
He stole the tarts,
And took them clean away.



A pair of lines that rhyme is called a rhyming couplet.

The small, delightful butterfly 
Flew so beautifully across the sky.

Rhythm

Rhythm is very important in poetry. It is the pattern of sounds and syllables.

These words have two syllables:
pur-ple
dan-ger
flow-er

These words have three syllables:
beau-ti-ful
pho-to-graph
his-to-ry

These words have four syllables:
in-cred-i-ble
cat-er-pil-lar
jan-u-a-ry

A syllable is a single, unbroken sound of a word.

Can you count the syllables in each line of this traditional poem?

I lived first in a little house,
And lived there very well;
I thought the world was small and round,
And made of pale blue shell.

I lived next in a little nest,
Nor needed any other;
I thought the world was made of straw,
And brooded by my mother.



Can you see a pattern?

Repetition

Poets may repeat sounds, syllables, words, phrases, lines and verses in their poems.

This can help to make the rhythm stronger. It also makes some parts seem more important.

Can you see how repetition is used in these two examples?

If you did know to whom I gave the ring,
If you did know for whom I gave the ring,
And would conceive for what I gave the ring,
And how unwillingly I left the ring.



*From The Merchant of Venice
by William Shakespeare*

Row, row, row your boat,
Gently down the stream.
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
Life is but a dream.



Row, row, row your boat,
Gently down the river.
And if you see a polar bear,
Don't forget to shiver.

Can you find other examples of repetition in poetry?

Vocabulary

*At the
midnight in the
silence of the
sleep-time...*

*It sparkles like
a bubbling
spring.*

*The
sunflowers
smiled...*

*John was
older than
the hills.*

Poets choose
their words
very carefully
when they
are writing.

Poems may include figurative language.
This suggests ideas and creates images
in the reader's mind. It can include...

Similes

Using as or like
to compare things.

Metaphors

Describing one thing as
being something else.

Personification

Giving human qualities to
an animal or an object.

Hyperbole

Using an extreme
exaggeration for effect.

Alliteration

Using the same letter or
sound at the start of words
in a phrase or sentence.

Onomatopoeia

Words that, when spoken,
make the sound that they
represent.



Similes and Metaphors

Similes and metaphors make descriptions more interesting. They both describe things by comparing them with others.



Similes

Similes use *as* or *like* to compare things.

The athlete was as fast as a bullet train.

The teacher was angry like a raging dinosaur!



Metaphors

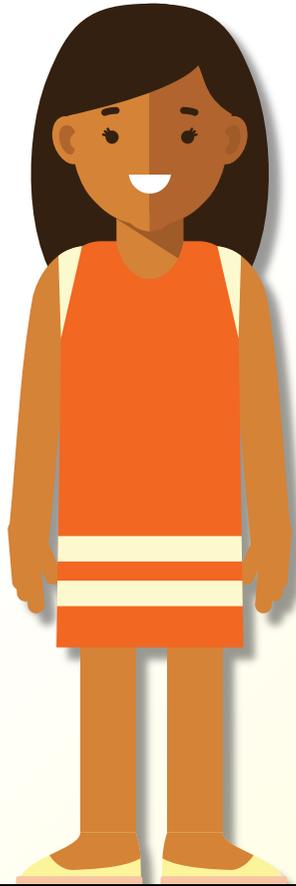
Metaphors describe one thing as being something else.

The athlete was a bullet train.

The teacher was a raging dinosaur.

Personification

Personification is where an object or animal is given human qualities in a piece of writing.



The flowers danced in the sunlight.



The owl shed a tear when its mother flew away.



The moon smiled as it looked down upon us.

"Ah, William, we're weary of weather," said the sunflowers, shining with dew. "Our travelling habits have tired us. Can you give us a room with a view?"

They arranged themselves at the window and counted the steps of the sun, and they both took root in the carpet where the topaz tortoises run.

In this poem (by William Blake) the sunflowers talk to the poet, explaining how tired they are. They also travel together, just like people do.



Hyperbole

Hyperbole is an extreme exaggeration that is used for effect.

Could you use some of these ideas in your own poems?



The girls were dying to take part in the game.

Can you come up with your own examples?



*I'm so hungry
I could eat a horse!*



*Jon is the fastest thing
on two feet!*

Alliteration is when the same letter or sound appears at the start of words in a phrase or sentence.

Alliteration

The cute and cuddly kitten curled up contentedly.



As the massive monster moved closer, the skillful sorcerer set forth his spell.



The branch was bending as the bird was bouncing.



Alliteration can enhance a description, create a musical effect and add drama to a poem.



An onomatopoeia is a word that, when spoken, makes the sound that it represents. Here are a few examples...

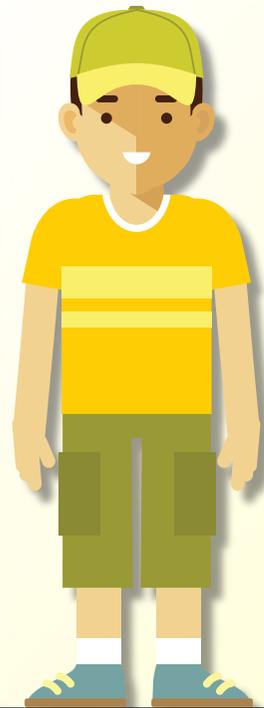
Onomatopoeia

BOOM

POP!

CRASH!

BONG



SPLASH



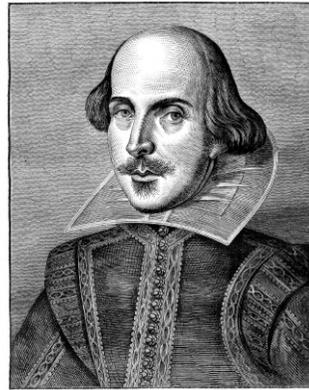
Moo!

How could you use onomatopoeia in your own poetry?

BANG

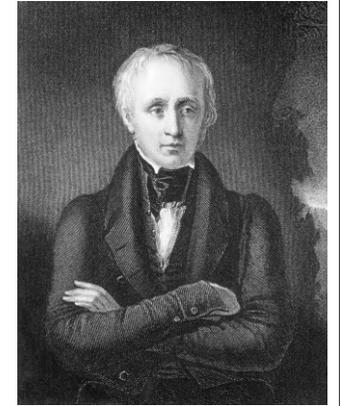
Have you heard of these poets?

Famous Poets



William Shakespeare was an English poet, playwright and actor. He is thought to be the greatest writer in the English language and is often called England's national poet.

William Wordsworth was an English poet who helped found the Romantic movement in English literature. He wrote the poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" and became England's poet laureate.



Emily Dickinson was an American poet who wrote more than 1800 poems. However, only a few of them were published during her lifetime. Many of her poems were about death and immortality.

Michael Rosen is an English writer and poet. He has written a number of poetry books for children and toured schools in the UK and around the world. Michael was the Children's Laureate from 2007 to 2009.



Photo (CC BY 2.0)

Can you find out about other poets?

Planning and Writing



When you are planning and writing a poem, you might need to think about the following...

Type

- What kind of poem are you writing?
- Does this type of poem have a special structure that you need to use?

Rhyme and Rhythm

- Will it have a rhyming pattern?
- How many syllables will each line have?
- Could you repeat syllables, words or phrases to make the rhythm stronger?

Theme

- What will your poem be about? Choose a topic that interests you.
- Will you try to tell a story?
- What do you want the reader to feel or think about?

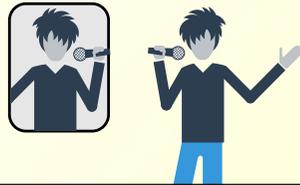
Vocabulary

- Gather words and phrases that describe the people, places, objects and emotions in your poem.
- Think about the figurative language that could make it more interesting.

As you write a poem, read it to yourself regularly. This can help you to think of improvements.

Performing Poetry

When you are performing a poem to an audience, try to remember the following tips...



Rehearse

Try rehearsing your performance in front of a mirror or to some trusted friends.



Record

Try recording your rehearsal. You can then watch your performance to find ways to improve.



Loud and clear

Make sure that you are speaking loudly and clearly, so that everyone can hear your words.



Match the mood

Think about how you can use your voice, facial expression and hand gestures during your performance.



Show your face!

If you're reading a poem from a piece of paper, make sure that your audience can see your face.



Fidgeting

Try not to fidget as this can be distracting for your audience.