

COMMON CORE

Included in this workshop:

RL 1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly. **RL 4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds on a specific verse or stanza of a poem. **RL 5** Analyze how a poem's form or structure contributes to its meaning.

Appreciating Poetry

What makes a song unforgettable? Perhaps it's the rhythm of the music or the catchy lyrics. Poetry is memorable in the same way. Like musicians, poets use words, rhythm, and sounds to convey feelings and ideas. In this workshop, you will learn how poets use the structure and elements of poetry to express meaning.

Part 1: Structure and Form

How does a poem speak to you from the page? First, you may notice its shape. A poem's shape, or **form**, is the way its words and lines are laid out on the page. As the main unit in a poem, the **line** may or may not be a complete sentence, and it can vary in length.

In some poems, the lines are arranged in groups, called **stanzas**. A stanza's role in a poem is like that of a paragraph in prose. Each stanza is a separate emotion or idea, but it contributes to the overall meaning of the poem.

Some poems have a **conventional**, or **traditional**, form, which means they follow fixed rules, such as a set number of lines or a repeating pattern of rhythm or rhyme. Traditional forms include the limerick and haiku. Poems in **irregular**, or **open**, form may have rhyme, but their shapes and patterns may be unusual. **Free verse**, an open form, has a rhythm more like everyday speech, and it does not have regular patterns of rhyme.

Whether writing in traditional or open forms, poets use graphical elements to help convey meaning. **Graphical** elements include the position and appearance of words, capital letters, lines, and stanzas on the page.

Examine the structure and form of this traditional poem.

A MINOR BIRD

Poem by **Robert Frost**

I have wished a bird would fly away,
And not sing by my house all day;

Have clapped my hands at him from the door
When it seemed as if I could bear no more.

5 The fault must partly have been in me.
The bird was not to blame for his key.

And of course there must be something wrong
In wanting to silence any song.

EXAMINE THE POEM

- Notice that this poem is made up of four two-line stanzas.
- Look at the four pairs of rhyming words.
- Read the poem aloud to hear its singsong rhythm.
- Note that each of the eight lines begins with a capital letter, even though there are only four complete sentences in the poem.

MODEL: STRUCTURE AND FORM

The following poem is written in free verse and sounds like everyday speech. Read it aloud to hear what the speaker is saying about his or her special hiding place. Notice how the poem's structure hints at its meaning.



UNDER THE BACK PORCH

Poem by **Virginia Hamilton**

Our house is two stories high
shaped like a white box.
There is a yard stretched around it
and in back
5 a wooden porch.

Under the back porch is my place.
I rest there.
I go there when I have to be alone.
It is always shaded and damp.
10 Sunlight only slants through the slats
in long strips of light,
and the smell of the damp
is moist green,
like the moss that grows here.

15 My sisters and brothers
can stand on the back porch
and never know

I am here
underneath.
20 It is my place.
All mine.

Close Read

1. Describe the focus of each stanza. (What do you “see”?) Look at the boxed details for clues.
2. Why do you think the speaker likes hiding under the back porch? Explain how the structure and form of the poem help you imagine the speaker's world.
3. Notice the last four lines of the poem. What effect does their short length help to create? (Hint: Think about where the speaker is at this point in the poem.)

Part 2: Poetic Devices

Poetry has the power to affect your emotions and transport you to new worlds, much as music and films do. Poets, however, rely on language alone to create sounds and images. With sound devices, poets can match the rhythm of ocean waves or the roar of a crowd. They use imagery and figurative language to appeal to your senses and create scenes as vivid as those that unfold on a movie screen. As you read a poem aloud, notice how the sounds and images capture your attention and help you understand the poem's meaning.

SOUND DEVICES

Sound devices give poems a musical quality, but they can also create a mood and emphasize important ideas or words. Here are a few of the sound devices poets use.

SOUND DEVICES	EXAMPLES
<p>RHyme the repetition of sounds at the end of words, as in <i>me</i> and <i>see</i></p> <p>RHYTHM the pattern of stressed (/) and unstressed (-) syllables in each line. (A poem with a repeating pattern has what is called a meter.)</p>	<p>Notice how the rhythm and rhyme in this poem help to create a playful, upbeat mood.</p> <p>They came to tell your faults to <i>me</i>, They named them over one by <i>one</i>; I laughed aloud when they were <i>done</i>, I knew them all so well <i>before</i>,— Oh, they were blind, too blind to <i>see</i> Your faults had made me love you <i>more</i>. —“Faults” by Sara Teasdale</p>
<p>REPETITION the use of a word, phrase, or line more than once</p> <p>ALLITERATION the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words, such as the <i>c</i> in <i>curved</i> <i>crook</i></p>	<p>The repeated phrases and the alliteration in the last line help to emphasize the moon's shape.</p> <p>How thin and sharp is the <i>moon</i> tonight! How thin and sharp and ghostly white Is the slim <i>curved</i> <i>crook</i> of the <i>moon</i> tonight! —“Winter Moon” by Langston Hughes</p>

MODEL 1: RHYME AND RHYTHM

As you read this short poem aloud, notice how Emily Dickinson uses rhyme and rhythm to emphasize the most important words.

A word is dead

Poem by Emily Dickinson

A word is dead
 When it is said,
 Some say.

1 I say it just
 5 Begins to live
 That day.

Close Read

1. One pair of rhyming words is boxed. Find the other pair.
2. Stressed and unstressed syllables are marked in the second stanza. How does the rhythm in this stanza compare with that in the first stanza?

MODEL 2: OTHER SOUND DEVICES

This free-verse poem is filled with sound devices: repetition, rhyme, alliteration, and **onomatopoeia**—the use of words (made-up or real) whose sounds suggest their meanings. How do these sound devices help you experience the snow?

Cynthia in the Snow

Poem by Gwendolyn Brooks

It SUSHES.
 It hushes
 The loudness in the road.
 It flutter-twitters,
 5 And laughs away from me.
It laughs a lovely whiteness,
 And whitely whirs away,
 To be
 Some otherwhere,
 10 Still white as milk or shirts.
 So beautiful it hurts.

Close Read

1. What onomatopoeic words does the poet use to suggest the silencing effect of falling snow?
2. The use of alliteration in the boxed line helps to create a light, joyful mood. Find another example of alliteration.
3. Identify three pairs of rhymes. For one pair, explain what qualities of snow the rhyme helps to emphasize.

IMAGERY AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Imagery is language that appeals to the five senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. “Cynthia in the Snow” focuses on the sense of hearing, but it also helps you see the snow as it “whitely whirs away.” With a few vivid images, the poet draws you into the winter scene.

One way poets create imagery is through **figurative language**. Figurative language uses creative comparisons to help readers picture ordinary things in new ways. For example, the snow is not just white but “white as milk or shirts.” Here are three types of figurative language.

TYPE	EXAMPLE
SIMILE a comparison between two unlike things, using the word <i>like</i> or <i>as</i>	<p>This simile compares a cat’s coloring to spilled milk. The word <i>as</i> signals the comparison.</p> <p>He’s white As spilled milk, My cat who sleeps With his belly Turned toward The summer sky. —from “Ode to Mi Gato” by Gary Soto</p>
METAPHOR a comparison between two unlike things that does not contain the word <i>like</i> or <i>as</i>	<p>This metaphor compares fame to a bee. It conveys both the good and the bad side of fame.</p> <p>Fame is a bee. It has a song— It has a sting— Ah, too, it has a wing. —by Emily Dickinson</p>
PERSONIFICATION a description of an object, an animal, a place, or an idea as if it were human or had human qualities	<p>Here, “proud words” are given human qualities.</p> <p>Look out how you use proud words. When you let proud words go, it is not easy to call them back. They wear long boots, hard boots; they walk off proud; they can’t hear you calling— Look out how you use proud words. —“Primer Lesson” by Carl Sandburg</p>

Part 3: Analyze the Text

In this poem, the speaker reflects on her mother's courage, a quality that she has missed since her mother died. Use what you've learned in this workshop to analyze the elements—structure, form, sound devices, figurative language, and imagery—that help to create a picture of a remarkable parent.

*The **COURAGE** That My Mother Had*

Poem by **Edna St. Vincent Millay**

The courage that **my mother** had
Went with her, and is with her still:
Rock from New England quarried;¹
Now granite in a granite hill.

- 5 The golden brooch² my mother wore
She left behind for me to wear;
I have no thing I treasure more:
Yet, it is something I could spare.

- Oh, if instead she'd left to me
10 The thing she took into the grave!—
That courage like a rock, which she
Has no more need of, and I have.

1. **quarried**: dug up from the ground.

2. **brooch**: a piece of jewelry that can be fastened to clothing.

Close Read

- Describe two characteristics that make this a traditional poem. Think about the number of lines in each stanza and the patterns of rhythm and rhyme.
- One example of alliteration is **boxed**. Find another example.
- Identify the simile in the third stanza. What does it suggest about the mother's personality?
- Identify the focus of each stanza and describe what each one contributes to the overall meaning of the poem. Think about the speaker's view of herself and of her mother.