

# Literary Elements Commonly Used in Poetry

## The Sounds of Poetry

Alliteration – to repeat the same initial consonant sound in a series of words

*Example: big black bug*

Assonance – to repeat vowel sounds without repeating consonant sounds; the rhyme of vowel sounds when the word endings differ

*Example: pale gray lake*

Consonance – to repeat consonant sounds within and at the end of words; repetition of a consonant sound when vowel sounds differ (can be ending, beginning, or middle consonants)

*Example: The dog growled eagerly at the beggar.*

Onomatopoeia – a word that imitates the sound of something

Meter – the pattern of rhythm in a line of poetry

## The Language of Poetry

Allusion – a reference to an event or character from history, literature, mythology, or the Bible.

*Example: a Herculean effort (mythological allusion); the riches of Job (Biblical allusion)*

Anaphora – the repetition of words and phrases that begin a series of sentences or lines of poetry.

Apostrophe – when the speaker directly addresses an absent person or a personified quality; an address to the dead, absent, inanimate as if present or alive

Connotation – associated meaning; what a word implies

Conceit – a fanciful or elaborate analogy between two seemingly dissimilar things

Denotation – the direct, specific meaning of a word; the dictionary definition of a word

Diction – word choice

Didactic – intended to teach or convey instruction/information as well as entertainment

Euphemism – the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend

Hyperbole – an exaggeration for the sake of effect

*Example: This book weighs a ton.*

Idyllic – picturesque in natural simplicity; suggests peace and contentment

Imagery – words or phrases that appeal to the senses (visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, gustatory)

Metaphor – an implied comparison of two things; expressed without “like” or “as” (an **extended metaphor** is a metaphor that continues through a series of sentences in a paragraph or lines in a poem)

Metonymy – substitution of a term naming an object associated with the word

*Example: Have you read much Shakespeare?*

Oxymoron – a combination of two contradictory words

*Example: Jumbo shrimp*

Paradox – a seemingly contradictory statement that is, nonetheless, true

*Example: Parting is such sweet sorrow.*

Parody – imitation for amusement of instruction; uses exaggeration or inappropriate subject matter

Personification – to give human characteristics to inanimate objects or ideas

Rhetorical Question – a question to which no answer is expected

Simile – a comparison of two things using “like” or “as”

Symbol – an object that stands for something else

Synecdoche – substitution of a part to represent the whole

*Example: The quarterback threw the pigskin.*

Theme – the universal message of a piece of literature

## *The Structure of Poetry*

Blank verse – unrhymed iambic pentameter

Couplet – two successive lines which rhyme with each other

Eye rhyme – words that look like they should rhyme, but do not (rough / cough)

Imperfect rhyme – words that do not quite rhyme when rhyme is expected

Internal rhyme – the rhyme of words within a line or between words in middles of lines

Poetic foot – a set of syllables in a line of poetry with a definite rhythm

Quatrain – a stanza consisting of four lines

Refrain – a group of words or lines recurring regularly at the ends of stanzas

Rhyme – to repeat a sound at the end of lines of poetry

Rhyme scheme – a pattern of recurring sounds in words at the end of lines

Rhythm – the arrangement of stressed and unstressed sounds; the beat of a poem

Scansion – determination of the rhythm by identifying poetic feet and meter

Slant word – nonsense word used to force a rhyme, understood by the reader

Stanza – a unit of poetry consisting of a group of related verses

Verse – a single line of poetry

### *The Various Types of Poetry*

Ballad – a narrative poem intended to be sung

Dirge – a poem that is sung or recited at a funeral

Doggerel – poorly executed attempt at poetry; generally monotonous rhyme or rhythm, cheap sentiment, or trite subject matter

Dramatic monologue – one person speaking to a silent listener; reveals true character

Elegy – a poem written to lament the dead

Free verse – a poem without defined rhyme or rhythm; arranged according to natural speech patterns usually without any rules or specific forms

Haiku – a short 3-line poetic form from Japan; lines consist of 5 syllables, 7 syllables, and 5 syllables

Limerick – a humorous five-line poem with a rhyme scheme of AABBA

Lyric poetry – a poem with intense emotion and vivid images, often with a musical quality

Narrative poem – a poem that tells a story

Pastoral – a poem glorifying shepherds or rustic life, typically drawing a contrast between the innocence and simplicity of country life and the corruption of the city

Ode – a lyric poem serious in subject and dignified in style

Sonnet – a 14-line poem written in iambic pentameter with a couplet at the end

# Poetry Breakdown

## UNITS OF POETRY

### Syllables

#### Foot

*The basic building block of poetry composed of syllabic patterns. These patterns create a meter (the pattern of beats or accents based on stressed or unstressed syllables in a line.*

Iamb (u /)

Trochee (/ u)

Anapest (u u /)

Dactyl (/ u u)

Spondee (/ /)

#### Lines

*Lines named based on how many feet are in each line.*

Monometer (1)

Dimeter (2)

Trimeter (3)

Tetrameter (4)

Pentameter (5)

Hexameter (6)

Heptameter (7)

Octameter (8)

Nanometer (9)

#### Stanzas

*Lines can be divided into groups, called stanzas.*

Line (1)

Couplet (2 lines)

Tercet (3 lines)

Quatrain (4 lines)

Cinquain (5 lines)

Sestet (6 lines)

Septet (7 lines)

Octave (8 lines)

#### Cantos

*One of the largest divisions of poetry*