

Poetry

High School Creative Writing Course

This course is designed for the novice in writing poetry. It assumes a student knows little or nothing about writing a poem. It does not delve into sophisticated aspects of the genre.

My intention in constructing this course is to teach the student, step by step, how to create a poem. There are many definitions of a poem, but for the sake of our study, we are going to work with this definition: a poem expresses how we feel an experience.

If we tell someone we love them or we are angry with them, we are using abstract words. We cannot picture in our imagination what “love” or “anger” look like, nor any other abstract words such as truth, beauty, joy, loneliness, suffering, ecstasy, etc. As rational beings, through our intellect, we can comprehend the meaning of these words, but as abstractions, they do not move us to feel. Our goal as poets is to involve a reader in feeling and sharing an experience we have had.

One of the greatest obstacles to writing poetry is our intellect, because the more intelligent we become, the more we think and speak and write in concepts and universals. The very work of the

intellect is to derive universal truths from specific, concrete facts and express them in abstract language.

As poets, however, we must banish all abstract words from our minds. We must think in particulars, not universals. We must learn to use specific, concrete imagery, the language of the five senses.

We experience the world through our five senses. As a child, if we brush against a wood-burner, we come to understand heat by the sense of touch. We hear approval, disapproval, consolation, and love in the different tones of our mother's voice. Our father takes us to a zoo to see various species of animals, and we experience them by sight. In the spring we smell the aroma of freshly cut grass, and in the winter, the sharp crispness of the air, and we differentiate seasons by odor. Some food is pungent and some is sweet, and our taste tells us which we enjoy.

Step 1

When we begin to write a poem, we have to have a mood or a feeling we want to express. It may be awe and wonder of the vast sky on a clear night. It may be loneliness and desperation on a damp November day. It may be happiness when we are thinking of someone we love. It may be

fear when walking on a dark street or being alone in a creaky house. It may be sorrow when someone close to us has died. It may be confidence when we think about youth and all the possibilities and challenges that lie ahead. First the feeling, first the mood.

Step 2

The second step is to “translate” the feeling or mood into an image, something we can see, hear, taste, smell, feel. We are moved, touched, affected, through our senses.

Let us consider some examples. Close your eyes. Think of a lemon. Cut it in half. Take a bite out of it. Your sense of taste should have made you salivate and found the image acrid and pungent, perhaps distasteful.

If, on the other hand, you closed your eyes, thought of a chocolate meringue pie, and pictured yourself biting into the pie, the sensation may have been sweet and sugary.

And so the point is that we can feel and experience through the images that words create, and as poets, we can move other people to feel what we want them to feel.

How do we implement step two, the translation of emotions into images? Our writing, no matter which of the genres we use, will sound authentic if we write from our own experience, choosing multiple areas of our lives in order to get the constant rush of images we need. Let us consider the following facets of our everyday existence and see what images we can make from them.

1. Dishes: broken, clean, dirty, glass, cup, washing, wiping, dishwasher, etc.

Example: He made me glow, dark, but luminous, like sherry wine in a crystal glass.

2. Utensils: knives, forks, spoons, cups, saucers, plates, butter dish, etc.

Example: Like an old fork, I bent to everyone's tune.

3. Condiments: salt, pepper, garlic, parsley, thyme, mustard, ketchup, mayonnaise, etc.

Example: Like a new bottle of ketchup, my thoughts were thick and refused to run.

4. Food: potatoes, carrots, onions, soup, tomatoes, stew, meat, ice cream, fish, cake, pie, lettuce, peppers, etc.

Example: He wrapped his feelings in layers like an onion.

5. Animals: birds, deer, snakes, cats, dogs, fish, squirrels, monkeys, lambs, tigers, gnats, mosquitoes, wasps, butterflies, bees, blue jays, robins, sparrows.

Example: Thoughts of him kept bugging me like a pesky gnat.

6. Amusements: roller coaster, whip, dodgems, Ferris wheel, merry-go-round, water-slide, etc.

Example: Like a Ferris wheel, our love topped, then bottomed out.

7. Church: spires, arches, naves, altar, candles, tabernacle, incense, statues, niche, cross, pulpit, organ, steeple, bells, tower, pews, etc.

Example: The aroma of you fills my memory like incense rising above an altar.

8. Appliances: toaster, washer, dryer, oven, disposal, compactor, dehumidifier, telephone, refrigerator, burners, fan, can-opener, etc.

Example: Like a neglected oven, my mind was layered in soot.

9: Tools: hammer, nails, saw, pliers, rake, torch, anvil, jack, wrench, nuts, bolts, pick, axe, level, plane, etc.

Example: Hammer my heart until you shake it loose.

10. Religion: baptism, water, salt, robe, confirmation, tongues of fire, slap, soldier, marriage, rings, gown, shepherd, feast, wine, good Samaritan, etc.

Example: The music struck like tongues of fire up and down the spastic dancers.

11. Cosmetics: rouge, lipstick, eyeliner, eye shadow, brush, eyebrow, tweezers, mascara, high-light, pencil, etc.

Example: You pencil me in your life like a false eyebrow.

12. Adornments: ribbons, scarves, handkerchiefs, belts, pearls, earrings, bracelets, beads, glasses, rings, etc.

Some ragged scarves of snow wrapped around the mountain top.

13. Universe: stars, galaxies, light, moon, sun, planets, etc.

Example: A cracked moon stared up from the broken pond.

14. Garden: plant, seed, rake, hoe, plow, harvest, weeds, roots, etc.

Example: He sowed uncertain seeds and reaped a doubtful harvest.

15. Trees: birch, oak, evergreen, leaves, branches, roots, maple, dogwood, bark, sap, etc.

Example: In the greening of summer, even, some leaves turn to yellow or red or gold.

16. Topography and weather: mountains, hills, rivers, trees, valleys, plains, hurricane, earthquake, storms, winds, rain, showers, mist, fog, etc.

Example: The docile valley was pelted by the indifferent rain.

Some other areas which you can develop are: cars, dancing, computers, houses, oceans, ships, sewing, etc. The possibilities are endless.

In creating images, the novice poet may resort to clichés, overworked comparisons, such

as: white as snow, black as coal, hot as hell, cold as ice. In order to learn how to develop fresh images which will arouse the reader's imagination and give her a novel insight into the poet's experience, the poet should practice using metaphysical imagery.

Metaphysical imagery is joining words from different fields of knowledge. Since the words are not associated with one another, the poet can create a fresh image, one that is neither trite nor banal.

Example: If we were to describe the cross country team's running up Ash street as running up "coronary hill," we would be using a metaphysical image. "Hill" is a word used in topography, the contour of the land. "Coronary" belongs to the world of medicine. Yoking the two words together provides a fresh image, and it jolts the reader's imagination so that he feels in a more vivid way the experience of running up a steep street.

Further examples: slinky night approaches; the brazen sun enters my room; her words caress my ears; who will suture earth's gaping wounds; the haughty stars mocked my puny dreams.

Every poem in this book has been written by one of my high school students. If former

**students can write poems as well crafted as these,
so can you.**

Natural Grace

...Shelby Wydo

**The moon's glowing vestments
arose from the earth's black altar
while the stars came up the aisle
to genuflect at her shrine.**

Disgruntled

...Marah Williams

**The crumpled clouds clatter in a fierce
frenzy. Hot veins of lightning pulse
in the thick sky, while raindrops slither
down my window like sick, slimy serpents.
The groping wind tickles tiny tree
branches, and they squirm in their
coats of pewter bark. Dandelions sulk
in the bleak field, waiting for the sun.**

Birth –Grave
...John Zielinski

**A blade of light cuts through the mother night,
parting the legs of darkness with scorching heat.
The dark squirms in agony, trying to
escape the cutting edge of the sword
that blazes violently from night's womb,
a screaming birth of glorious energy.
The darkness convulses once more in pain
and gives life to the murderous infant dawn.**

The best way to develop an ability to use images is to practice writing the “haiku,” a Japanese form which consists of three lines with five, seven, and five syllables. It usually consists of images from nature with traditional connotations. The haiku contains but a minimum of statement, i.e. one grasps the idea from the images.

Dawn
...Jody Williams

**The hands of light grab
the darkness and tuck it in
God's pocket 'til dusk.**

The Senility of Autumn

**Antiquated leaves,
doddering through the stale air,
are wrinkled with age.**

Ocean
...Jean Sinzdak

**The ocean rises
and with foamy lips swallows
the succulent sun.**

Midnight Waltz
....Shelby Wydo

**The moon's glowing beams
cut in on the dark meadow
and dance with the trees.**

Shape of a Stone
...Timothy Seechock

**The shape of a stone
depends upon its placement
on this rocky earth.**

Lost Love
....Michael Duricko

**Melting snow-capped hills
are feelings I own as you
walk out of my life.**

Neptune

....Jennifer Dunleavy

**Churning waves hissing,
gray-green murk foams with stirred sand.
Neptune is boiling.**

Night

....Mary Louise Giunta

**Black night approaches,
seizes the sun by the throat
and strangles the day.**

Words are the tools of the poet in fashioning poems. And so the poet must learn to love words, to handle them, to caress them, to touch them, to taste them, to roll them around in his mouth until he has ingested their very essence.

English is a polyglot language, one that has assimilated words from every language in the western world. We are unabashed thieves when it comes to the development of our language. French, by way of contrast, is an exclusionary language which the French try to keep pure and untainted by other languages.

Just as our nation has been enriched by the variety of nationalities which comprise our

country, so our language is the richest in the world because we incorporate words from other languages into our own. For example, in our medical vocabulary, there are innumerable words which derive from Greek: pediatrician, orthodontist, fluoroscope, endoscopy, orthopedic.

The Romans occupied Britain from 43 A.D. to 410 A.D. The people of Britain spoke a Celtic tongue, and Latin had but a small effect on their language.

North German tribes known as the Anglo-Saxons began their great invasions into Britain in 449 A.D. They brought with them their own language, and the vulgar, not literary, Latin, they had picked up from the Roman soldiers guarding Rome's border in North Germany. These invasions continued for one hundred years, and in time the Britons lost their Celtic language, which was replaced by Anglo-Saxon and some Latin.

In 597 A.D. the first monastery was established in Britain, and within a century all England had embraced Christianity. The use of Latin, the language of the western Church, spread.

In 1066, by his victory at Hastings, William the Conqueror took possession of England for the Normans, and Norman-French became the

language of the court and of cultured people in general. (1066 A.D. to 1200 A.D.) Norman-French was a modified Latin, and so any word borrowed from it was derived from Latin. Norman-French, however, had little effect on the Anglo-Saxon of the common people.

It was during the Old French period, 1200 A.D. to 1500 A.D., that Anglo-Saxon-English began to borrow more words because Anglo-Saxon-English was a limited language for conveying ideas, whereas Old French had a far more cultivated vocabulary.

During the Renaissance, the revival of learning, English first came into contact with classical Latin. Latin was a second language for any cultivated man of this time.

The English language was not adequate to express thoughts which Greek and Latin could express with ease. As an analogy, one might think of dealing with primitive tribes in a jungle who have but a limited vocabulary which makes them incapable of expressing sophisticated ideas.

During the period of the Renaissance, thousands of Greek and Latin words were incorporated into the English language, some without being changed, i.e. anglicized. By way of example: alumni, minister, drama, aroma, stimulus, terra firma, persona non grata,

magnum opus, phobia, larynx, phone, martyr, etc.

As we learn to create the images of poetry, we have to learn how to choose the proper words. This process is called “diction.”

As a general rule, the shorter the word, the more powerful its impact in expressing an experience. The more learned or scholarly a person becomes, the more sophisticated his vocabulary becomes.

This is tragic for an aspiring poet because polysyllabic, Latinate words tend to be abstract. They are invaluable when we are discussing philosophy, theology, or writing a formal essay, but they are useless when we are trying to express how we feel. And as I have said in my definition of poetry, a poem expresses how we feel about an experience.

Not all of us are Latin scholars, able to recognize the etymology of each word in our vocabulary. The rule we will follow, therefore, is the shorter the word, (one syllable, two at most) the greater the chance it is Anglo-Saxon in origin.

Examples:

**cupidity.....lust
intestine.....gut**

**ambulate.....walk
perspicacity...insight
malevolent....evil**

Write the Anglo-Saxon equivalent for the following words:

**avaricious
culmination
microscopic
compassionate
malediction
fallacious
miniscule
ferocious
erudition**

Even though it may seem to be a mechanical approach to writing poetry, we should develop a list of words to use in our poems, words that appeal to the five senses. The advantage of compiling an initial list of three or four hundred words is that it assures us, in a technical way, that we will write using imagery. I can never repeat too often that transforming the abstract into the concrete is the most important aspect of learning to write poetry. Use the following list as an example.

lark	wound	gaping	lunge
tumble	globe	needle	suture
woods	earth	mix	cup
rumble	wine	chalice	candle
thin	taper	cringe	vein
thimble	blood	pit	pattern
womb	taut	flaccid	ring
staff	wall	carriage	drape
bar	patches	bricks	mortar
band	trowel	nails	nails
wind	hammer	beam	batter
howl	shatter	crush	grapes
shriek	yarn	clip	clip
claw	cut	tattered	squirm
chuckle	torn	singe	vestment
tapestry	circle	cloak	steeple
clutter	tear	veil	altar
girdle	clamp	maze	web
zipper	crease	tease	spin
seam	whisper	yawn	mingle
pump	mutter	flutter	lightning
pale	thunder	shreds	limp
stitch	patches	wither	scamper
fondle	trickle	cling	square
fetid	block	stars	moon
shawl	wither	wilt	cringe
prince	squint	rain	limbs
band	trees	branches	whistle
colt	door	bang	bell
weaving	charge	hazy	lazy
knit	frost	linger	pinch
sew	touch	droop	flower

Like any other genre of writing, we must write and rewrite and rewrite again. From notes we have of poets' creative endeavors, we see they agonized over the choice a word. In one of Emily Dickinson's manuscripts, she had as many as fourteen alternatives for the word she selected. The essence of good writing is rewriting. The following exercise will give you an idea of what I mean.

The	clouds	are	thick	today,	hanging
	air	is	heavy	now	leaning
	sky		crusted	tonight	drooping
	heavens		weighty	at dawn	unfurled

low	in a	frowning	sky,	pouting	almost,
down		scowling		threatening	somewhat
close		angry		demanding	a bit
heavy		nasty		sullen	

like	petulant	old	men,	wrinkling
	angry		crows	squinting
	crafty		women	raising
	senile		birds	shaking
	dying		gulls	

their	foreheads,	and	blocking	out my smile.
	eyes		blanking	warmth
	heads		blotting	joy
	brows		blinking	love
			wiping	sun

Pierce their heavy lids. Break out
Penetrate its drooping brows. Batter down
Crack sagging face Force through
Lift mourning Lift up

beyond its weight to sunlit skies,
heft brilliant
my soul cries out. Fly free. Soar high.
mind shouts winging soaring
thoughts pleads Mount up. Climb up.

Bonds snapped. What we can be is found in thee.
Chains broken. Where there is air so fair.
Manacles smashed. The dove brings the branch.
Cell bars opened. Fly from the grip of gravity.

Step 3

Tone is the attitude of the poet, the way he feels about the subject matter of the poem. A poet conveys his attitude (tone) through the words he chooses and through the sounds of those words.

If the poet feels sad or depressed or angry or lonely or afraid or hostile, then he conveys these emotions to the reader by tone. If the sound of the words doesn't fit the poet's frame of mind, then the reader cannot grasp what mood the poet wants him to empathize with. Soothing and pleasant sounding words would be out of place in

a poem meant to convey any of the above feelings.

When consonants dominate a word (often the accented syllable), the sound they produce is cacophonous (unpleasant to the ear). The consonants which are called “plosives,” are the most harsh: (b, d, g, k, p, t).

kick	thick	hate	black
demented	peck	punk	drape
probe	might	hack	drudge
dumb	cough	stupid	belch

If the poet feels happy and peaceful and wonderful and content and romantic, then the words must fit his frame of mind. Grating and harsh sounding words would be inappropriate for such a poem.

As a general rule, the vowels, the semi-vowels, and the liquids are soft and pleasant sounds.

Vowels:	a e i o u
Semi-vowels:	l m n r soft v and f
Combinations:	th wh

Note the effect they produce in the words or phrases that follow. The words themselves denote something pleasant, and their sound is euphonious (pleasant to the ear).

lovely wonderful ivy on the vine
murmur whirlwind lullaby
day by day cellar door calm

Daydreams

....Jeanne-Marie Brolan

Lovely, lazy, crazy dreams
lounging languidly in my imagination,
swimming in a sea of incomplete thoughts,
slowly saturating my senses like
sweet, sticky syrup.
But I'm safe even if I'm caught
because like nutri-sweet treats,
(the kind without calories)
dreams, unlike realities,
give life sweet pleasure without
having to measure the pounds.

Tempest

...Erin Quinn

The darkness drips like blackest ink
that blots the lonely clouded page
and drapes the earth in misty veils
as liquid curtains kiss the ground.
The clapping thunder fills the sky
with bitching, cracking screams and shouts
until the rolling heavens cease
to free their vengeful wrath and scorn.

**A Long Sleepless Night
....Alex de Virgilis**

**The dull, dragging drudgery of this sleepless night
flows within my head like thick mud.
Heartbeats are slowed to minutes apart.
Eyelids of steel droop over
my half-naked eyes which
stare out beyond their dull haze,
scouting the darkness lying before me.**

**Something keeps gliding silently past my lazy eyes
but I cannot see it...
It must be the rising steam from the heat
of my body, like smoke billowing from
the black mouth of a belching chimney,
eager to
taint the virgin air.**

Fantasy

...Grace Zandarski

**And if I said that I would be
the princess in your dream-come true,
could you build me tall white towers
On rolling hills of emerald green?
On proud white steeds we'd ride the wind
and plunge to depths of never-night.
And yet,
I know the only gleam would be
reflections from the neon lights
on cheap satin sheets over pale white skin.
From rolling hills to black macadam
and flies that dance on greasy panes,
dreams lie stagnant in muddy pools
while passion makes its play.**

Stagnant Motion
...Chris Roe

**Long I scraped dead valleys,
split dry grasses, turned cold rocks.
Still I couldn't grasp the vision
that ran through your mind.
Down around dark pools muddled,
chasing hints of wind in trees, till you
sent your streams to follow, let it
splash and let it bubble, lit with
sunlight, let it sparkle.
I was dry and you were churning,
and neither filled the other's needs.**

Step 4

Poetry is metrical writing, a regular pattern of accented and unaccented syllables, and meter makes the poet put his thoughts into a framework. Metrics make the poet pick and choose between words, a tug of war between form and content that makes the art of the poem.

We have bases in baseball, boundaries in football, a set height for the hoop in basketball. When we put form on a game, it makes for a better game. When we put form on a poem, it makes for a better poem. Robert Frost said, "free verse is like playing tennis without the net."

We expect to find rhythm in poetry just as we expect to find rhythm in music. Metrical poetry is pleasant to listen to because it has this regular pattern of accented and unaccented syllables.

Now that we have studied and mastered steps one, two, and three, feeling, images, and diction, we must learn to arrange our words to achieve the rhythmical effect we want.

A poet has words as his tools, thousands of them, but since there are very bad as well as very good poems, it is in the arrangement of the words that we come to see the poet's skill. After all, everyone has access to the dictionary. Ordering the procession of words into a pattern is what makes a poet.

And it is also one of the things that distinguishes a writer of prose from a writer of poetry. A prose writer may use images and try to convey a mood, but he will never arrange his words into a metrical pattern, never use the line as a unit of measurement.

Words in the English language, unlike those of Latin and French, are composed of syllables that are accented or unaccented. If we consider the word "today" and think how we pronounce it, we realize that we place the accent on the second syllable. And so, to achieve rhythm

in our poetry, we must arrange the accented and un-accented syllables in a pattern, a metrical pattern.

Following are a few facts we must learn about metrics.

Meter....accents are arranged to occur at regular intervals.

Foot....the basic metrical unit.

**u / iamb most common foot e.g. invent
in English poetry at last**

**/ u trochee to vary the rhythm, e.g. lady,
to give urgency to manly
an idea**

**/ / spondee to slow the rhythm e.g. sunrise,
midnight**

**u u / anapest to speed the rhythm e.g. intercede,
at the start**

**/ u u dactyl to achieve a stately, e.g. yesterday,
formal rhythm sanctified
(rarely used)**

**u u pyrrhic when necessary e.g. in the cold
night**

To determine the meter, count the number of feet in each line. This is called scansion, or scanning the line. Scanning is NOT an exact science. At times students will differ on where to place an accent.

Feet per line

1...monometer	5....pentameter
2....dimeter	6....sextameter
3....trimeter	7....septameter
4....tetrameter	8....octameter

The last three are rarely used in English poetry. Any line which is more than five feet (pentameter) tends to break into two parts. *The Raven* by Edgar Allan Poe, is written in trochaic octameter, but when we read it, we break each of the lines into two parts.

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore....
while I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
as of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
'Tis some visitor,' I muttered, 'tapping at my chamber door...
only this and nothing more.'

If you do not know on what syllable a word is accented, consult the dictionary. (If you use a computer, click on the word with the right side of your mouse and "dictionary lookup" will appear. Click on this and it will tell you where the accent falls on the word.) You may find the following rules, which govern one syllable (monosyllabic) words, helpful.

1. There is a strong accent on monosyllabic nouns, verbs, and adjectives, except the verb “to be.” E.g. is, am, was, etc. Likewise there is usually no accent on verbs used as auxiliaries. E.g. I have loved, I will go, I am listening.

2. There is no accent on one syllable prepositions, conjunctions, or articles. E.g. in, on, down, by, at, from, near, and, but, nor, for, or, since, while, when, a, the, etc.

Following are examples of metrical lines:

A. “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound...”

This line has four feet and four iambs. We call it, therefore, iambic tetrameter.

B. “My lips, two blushing pilgrims stand to smooth....”

This line has five feet and iambs. We call it iambic pentameter. (If the entire poem is composed of iambic pentameter and the lines do not rhyme, we call the lines blank verse.)

C. While watching lovely ladies dance....

Scan this line.

D. “that makes the frozen ground swell under it”

Scan this line.

**E. Trembling, frightened, I watched the storm
strike terror in the hearts of men
once strong until the fury whipped
their ship like a toy on top of the waves.**

Scan these lines.

The dominant foot in English poetry is the iamb. Poems have been written in meter where another foot is dominant, as we have seen in *The Raven*, but the majority of poets who write in meter use the iamb as the foot that occurs most often in their lines. When another foot other than an iamb is used, the poet uses it in order to change the rhythm or to call attention to a word or an idea.

In early English poetry, rhythm was achieved by the use of heavy alliteration and a certain number of accents per line. e.g. *Beowulf*. Chaucer and other poets of his time developed accentual, syllabic verse, which is what most use today.

Because the accents of words were changing as dialects were melding into modern English, much of the poetry of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was metrically ragged.

And so poets resorted to rhyme which had a jingling effect on their poetry and made it sound silly.

In the mid sixteenth century, the Earl of Surrey created English blank verse, unrhymed iambic pentameter. He felt rhyme has its problems because we often change the proper order of the words (the syntax) in order to achieve a rhyme. Shakespeare used blank verse in his plays, and it has become the most comfortable meter for English metrical poetry.

In order to avoid a sing-song effect from too regular a meter, we should use the iamb only sixty percent of the time, substituting other feet for the other forty percent.

The following poems are written in blank verse. This first poem uses a variable foot, i.e. an extra unaccented foot, “in,” when it enhances the rhythm of the poem. There are also secondary accents, a lighter accent on a syllable because of its position in the line: e.g. “while I seduce.....”

Vengeful Moon

Down you fall my brilliant sun to sleep in
your tomb beneath the earth while I seduce
the mortal world and caress its lakes with
silver combs. Waves crest and fall to my great,
mighty God-like call. Revenge so sweet and rightly due
mocks your power, damns your smoking, smothered fire.
Quiver at my ageless face which watched the
daylight dim, then die, for I am the reason why.

Letting Go

...Jennifer Dunleavy

I think I'll start for home now. You come too.

Not now. Not yet. The sun's not set. Violets
are growing under our feet and tulips glow
red in the afternoon light.

But look at the heads
of sunflowers bent low to the earth. It's time
to leave the garden alone.

But who will tend
to the weeds and trim the laurel wood when we're gone?

The garden is in full bloom now. Nature
will care for nature. We'll stay near, should frost come.

The Futile Chase
...Leslie Gilotti

The waves sprint across the white sand, chasing the little sandpipers that dance before them. The waves fail and slink away in their defeat as the sandpipers trail behind them, taunting them. Once provoked, the waves surge forward, determined to catch the teasing birds. To the waves' dismay, the birds again scurry out of reach and evade the water's wrath.

August Regrets
...Christine Lantka

The waves caress the sand as the tired, fatigued sun hugs the distant horizon. As the cool breeze whispers its sweet secrets in the ears of the seagulls, the water blushes in blazing hues of red and pink. The obnoxious waves slumber peacefully as the cluttered beach is abandoned for the evening hours. Only tattered shells remain to pattern mosaics in the cool sand. It's time for me to say goodbye.

Homeward
...Candace Gillen

**What happens when the sun sets is unclear,
like her view out the rear window, all bleary,
but a trail home. They were on separate sides
of this world. She is walking back to find
thick clothing and warm faces by a fire's light,
beaconed by a smile. Embraces do not lie.
Humped smiles, ankles tied too tight, all behind.
A flight out of gloom, toward a crisp old time.**

Step 5

**Rhyme (or Rime) is the repetition of the
accented vowel sound and all succeeding sounds.**

**“Masculine” rime occurs when the rime
sounds involve only one syllable. E.g. dog, frog,
bog, log; resort, support, retort; afterwhile,
crocodile.**

**“Feminine” rime occurs when the rime
sounds involve two or more syllables. E.g.
bearer, wearer; nearer, dearer, hearer;
delightful, spiteful, frightful; later, alligator.**

Together with meter, which creates a rhythm in our poetry such as we enjoy in music, rime is a part of the music of poetry which appeals to the reader's love of sound. The poet thus appeals to another of the five senses, the reader's sense of hearing.

As in the use of any other poetic device, we must be careful in the use of rime because it can ruin a poem as well as enhance a poem. Nothing is more indicative of amateur poetry than bad rhyming. If, for example, we use masculine rime at the end of a line in conjunction with a comma or a period, the poem will sound childish like a nursery rime.

e.g. I had a dog,
whose name was Frog.
He loved a bog,
and he liked the fog.
He hated hogs,
And he slept on logs.
He drank egg-nogs,
And wore Roman togs.

To avoid sing-song endings, enjamb at least half of your lines. Enjambment means continuing the sense and the sentence beyond the end of the line. This technique eliminates commas and periods at the end of lines and thus prevents the rime from becoming so dominant that it calls attention to itself.

**e.g. I hear the sounds of earth
at night. There is more mirth
when stars are out and beams of
moon light up my dreams
of.....**

**At Dawn
...Kasey Congdon**

**As if we held each other by thin strings
of shade, our hands lie empty now. Dawn brings
a new caution to play between us. Look
how we lower our eyes like blinds and hook
our fingers 'round our mugs tightly. The light
glares like a bare bulb. Pull the shades. Let night
come back to kill these beams.
Let us lie in the dark comfort of dreams.**

**Apple Cider Days
...Mary-Louise Giunta**

**On apple cider days, when Nature's gown
is pleated with falling leaves in shades of brown,
my shoulder nestles under yours. We walk, our
shadows clinging, snug, together. Our talk
is of sultry summer days when the sun above
wrung us dry. That was the dawn of our love.
The sky threatens rain. We continue to go
along leaf-spattered paths. Sky threaten snow!
We'll still cling together. We're all that we know.**

An Unexpected Feeling ...Chad DeQuevedo

**Two thousand tiny trembling stars hanging in the sky that night
Did not mean so much to me then. The light
they gave off was just light, and the moon's glow
had no meaning for me. My spirits were low
and nothing seemed special until you leaned down
and you kissed me. There I sat, silent, feeling around
in my soul to find out what feeling I had felt,
a feeling that made my heart melt
and made all the stars seem special and bright.
Now I know it was love I felt when you kissed me that night.**

**Some poets use different rime schemes, of
which there is an infinite variety. If, as in the
following poem, the poet chooses not to rime two
lines in succession, then the need for enjambment
to avoid sing-song rime is no longer a
consideration.**

Winter Night ...Dawn Colangelo

**The fluffy snow has blown and made the streets
a veiling, shimmering sheet of spotless white.
The constant clattering beat of horses' feet
pervades this cold, crisp December night,
while the tinkling of bells and songs fill the sharp air.
As lovers stroll, their hands entwined, through the park
they flit and flirt toward the Christmas fair.
The snow falls, and kisses linger in the dark.**

If we want to write a humorous poem, the use of exact rime at the end of each line will add to the humor of the poem. Consider the following poem and the effect the rime scheme has.

Busy Bee
....David Rogan

**The buzzing bounding Busy bee
was tapping tulips 1 – 2 – 3.**

**T’was off and on the pinkish mix
of bursting metal 4 – 5 – 6.**

**A single stem remained unsapped,
and Busy bee got somehow trapped.**

**Inside the pinkish prison cell,
the Busy bee got stuck in hell.**

**The waving wiry wilting bud
gave way to Busy with a thud.**

**So Busy hummed a happy tune
and buzzed on toward the yellow moon.**

**Now Busy lived a happy life
keeping in mind his tulip strife.**

**He gave us all a trendy trend:
a pretty bud can mean the end.**

In good poetry, approximate rimes are used as often as true rhymes. There are many different subdivisions of approximate rime, but we will confine ourselves to several of the more important ones.

Approximate Rime:

Similar sounds: gong - ring; run – ran;
seal – rule; walled – freed; some – none;
witch – notch; kick – neck; spill – reel;
room- foam; cop – cup; roar – rear; fuss – lush

Assonance: Vowel sounds are repeated.

ice – night; hate – day; fee - easy; coal – old

Consonance: Consonant sounds at the end of words are repeated.

sounds – shatters – cymbals;
simple – fragile – little;
merged – corked – forged;
teeth – width – filth

Alliteration: Consonant sounds at the beginning of words are repeated.

fire fly; flights of fancy; two ton Tony;
flip flop; golden girls; piercing pain;
crumbling crates

Following are three poems which use approximate rime. Many poets feel it is less constraining to use approximate rime than it is to use true (exact) rime.

**Battling Time
....Caralyn Gilotti**

**A clock's tick-tocking shatters the silence
of my sleepless night. Twisting and writhing,
I try to penetrate slumber's gates. Time,
that clock's quick pulse, smothers this sound of mine.
Time haunts me, pounding out each short second,
failing, if I fall asleep at its hands.
Menacing time has won its fight. My eyes lie
open through this never-ending night.**

**The Oldest Profession
...Kenneth Kovaleski**

**Disturbing a sticky summer night's
stale darkness, the cooing calls
from wandering whip-poor-wills work
their way through the wild woods.
In order to feed their fatherless chicks,
they flourish their fancy, flashy feathers
as the western sky swallows
the small ball of fluorescent orange.**

Almost Peace
...Nicole Fugowski

Foamy waves gently lap over the deserted sand.
Tranquil breezes whisper over warm ground.
A lone gull, drifting on the ocean,
lifts its wings and soars into the distant sun.
Lying on the beach, I follow his flight.
I close my eyes and let my restless mind
glide with him through a maze of clouds, searching
for open skies. What will the future bring?

Step 6.

Theme is the central **idea** of a poem. Theme is **what** the poet feels; tone is **how** the poet expresses what he feels.

Do not confuse theme with a lesson, a sermon, or a message. If you want a lesson, go to school. If you want a sermon, go to church. If you want a message, go to your cell phone. A poet is not in the business of teaching, preaching, or relaying messages.

This does not mean, however, that the poet and his poetry must be bland or neutral. On the contrary, a poem should bristle with emotion. It should burst with passion. We know that certain experiences have set our teeth on edge, some have kindled in us flames of love, and others have dropped us into the pit of despair or loneliness.

It is our feeling of love, of outrage, of compassion, of loneliness, of hope, that should make its impact on the reader. Great poetry is teeming with large passions. Life means something. What we do and feel and think and say is important, and great poetry confirms this by having a viewpoint on everything. “This is how I feel the world” is the poet’s theme.

Read the following poems to grasp their themes, the way these poets feel the world.

Martyr

.....Patrick Sweeney

**Refusing to leave the chamber
of winter’s cloak of snow,
a bird defiantly sits
atop a lifeless tree.
It endures the piercing cold
rather than make the journey south
to bask in the sympathetic rays
of the warm sun.
As the world before it
becomes a blinding white,
its act of martyrdom goes unnoticed
by the indiscriminate frost.**

**“Our background once,” he said, “was white.”
(And I believed with all my might.)
Now what does he say? ...”It’s gray.”**

**So tell me, artist, how long must I paint
masterpieces for them to taint?**

**Mumbling upon a Mushroom Stalk
.....Elizabeth Liptock**

**I once met a man, crinkled and crippled with age, who
rattled and raved, sang and saved his forgetful memories.
He sat, shrunk upon his haunches, ready to spring
upon an earnest ear or someone who**

**dropped
a penny**

**in his
calloused, copper cup.
(yes, they would do)**

**I walked past often,
in fact every day.
He called me Daisy, Daisy May.**

**His endless eyes a bleak, blah blue buried deep beneath
sketched streaks of pale wrinkles and sunken screens.**

**Although he could not see well,
he saw.**

**As I passed, one generous day, I
dropped
a quarter
on my way
in his careful cup**

**when I heard him mumble, Mumble, MUMBLE.
Broken phrases, unclear speech, but like a poor prophet
he preached.**

He said to me, “Daisy, Daisy May, come and sit, come to dinner. You’ve been cookin all day.

I feel my bones kickin, telling me to quit this life but ah my mind says, ‘no way.’

Oh, Daisy, what do ya know? From dust, dust and bone they say WE came to be and to stay.

Generations have become the ignorant of today.

Daisy, I am old, old and out of sight. But some, Some, SOME, are young, young and pure, still suckling from their momma’s tomb and are starved. Ignored. Can’t we hear them?

CAN YOU HEAR ME?”

He stopped....

Sappy saliva dripped from the crusty, creased corners of his mouth.

“We are too busy saving whales, those damn whales, Daisy.”

I went to give him another dollar when he grabbed my ‘Gucci’ wrist and kissed it, Muttering, “Daisy May, won’t you stay awhile?

We will watch the whales fly!”

Absence
.....Sarah Kelley

**Even the trees with autumnal bursts
of orange and red
cannot spark life in brooding passages
of time.**

**Against the bluest, bitter sky, their towers loom
like a thousand cathedrals, leaves praying
in the bitter air.**

**A soft and quiet wind breathes around the circle of
waiting trees.**

**And light...bright light...streams through
my open window. The shadows dance
along the wall as if to say that
all is empty
without
Something.**

Mindkeepers
...Liz Kennedy

**This is the time for raking our minds, our woods
that once, like spring in prime, quivered with fresh leaves
of hope, trembled with sun and storms. Like birds,
thoughts grace the air above, nesting each eve
on branches of love. But clouds, cold, and creeping
frost, smothered pure and promising thoughts which died
like precious leaves before bloom, floating to earth,
meeting their doom. Victims of climate they're swept
away, and we, woodsmen, rake them today.**

Step 7.

Although imagery is a very important aspect of poetry, a poem may be monotonous and bland unless the poet makes comparisons to let us see the image in a fresh way. If we were to visit an antique shop, and, in a poem, list all the items throughout the shop, then the poem would be filled with images, but it would sound like a catalogue from a department store.

The better poet uses figures of speech in his poems, and of these, he uses metaphor, comparing things of an unlike nature, most often, as well as simile, which is a type of metaphor.

If the entire poem is a comparison, it is called an extended metaphor, or “conceit.”

Victim

...Stephen Mellody

You are a thief in the tar

night,

stealing my kosher

heart

**like the Artful Dodger in his
prime.**

Father Time
...Carla Mascara

**You are a careless wizard,
both friend and foe,
transforming yourself to hinder my life.
On bright summer days when my love and I
are together,
you break into sprints,
reaching the finish line
before we even begin the race.
Yet on bitter winter nights,
when my love and I
are apart,
you stand almost motionless,
unyielding to my frequent shoves.
I long to be your master,
commanding you when to stay,
and when to leave.
But one cannot saddle and ride the wind,
nor bottle rainbows.**

Best Friend
...Candace Gillen

**Tales of the admiree twisted like
the red wax into the cylinder
and set within.
I confide in the old, well known
niches of the purse.
Tears of trouble click inside a
mirrored case.
The loyal leather knows me well,
my smiles of sunshine and
my puffy eyes of snow clouds.
All my items of value she zips inside.**

Tight-Seamed Heart
...Corin Schall

**Your well-stitched eyes, your patterned
skin, your patch-work limbs, I long to garnish.
Your fitted pins prick me. My colorless
thread cannot brighten your
clarion vestment.
Arachne, help me! Skill my taut fingers.
With princely purple,
cheeky crimson,
winking blue,
I will weave your untarnished tapestry.
I will win your tight-seamed heart.**

**Programmable and Scientific
...Christopher Kearns**

**Rolling paper and burning ink spring out
of the world's mind. Trios of ordered
squares like a telephone face, the shout
of its technical answers, put EVERYTHING in place
because it's flawless with a shiny Sharp coat.
Filled with square sins and having plenty more
to add, will it always be true? Is it > you?
Quit making love to buttons and
open your eyes. There is more to this world, and I
swear your calculator lies. Einstein pressed no buttons,
and relatively speaking, he found an answer.**

**Camera
...Shannon Jordan**

**The picture
I develop changes
from well to well.
I'm not the camera
I thought
I'd be,
one which
never changes
the truth, showing what is,
is.
I'll have to
change my focus
to see you
the way you are.**

Transition
...Mary Babcock

**There is a curious
change
as the moon rises east
of the west setting sun.
With maybe a whisper,
vibrant rays slip down
and hug the earth.
Eyes averted
only glimpse
the sun's silent glory
before night's curtain
screens the sky.
And in this night
blossoms a moon,
mystifying all mankind.**

**A Lawn Sale
...Marnie Scacchitti**

**Her life, after death,
is packed away
 in cardboard cartons, sold
for a dollar
 to strangers at a lawn sale.
My hands,
 obscene eyes,
voyeurs,
 invade her mildewed volumes of
Frost and Wordsworth and
Keats,
 (To Steph, with much love, Ron)
her notebooks and her journals.
A litter of crumpled straw-wrapper
 bookmarks,
scraps of poetry scrawled in her hand,
a brown leaf that glowed
 once
in a long ago autumn.
This woman I've never seen,
her thoughts have
 been
 sold
for a dollar to
 a stranger.**

**And Where Have All the Swings Gone?
...Caralyn Gilotti**

**Flakes of faded paint, cracked from time,
fall from the iron gates clinging
to their ancient hinges, unable to close
to protect the park they once sealed.
Easing back its brittle doors,
I enter our once majestic kingdom.
In the speckled concrete fountain
lie pennies and nickels
of a young girl's wishes, tarnished
and corroded by seasons passed.
And where have all the swings gone?
One lonely, lopsided chain hangs
from a bar which once donned diamonds and stripes,
now whitened.
They have faded too, from seasons passed,
nor does our jungle gym fort still stand.
A castle once impenetrable
to cap guns and water balloons
has crumbled.
Struts of its skeleton have been crippled,
fractured too, by seasons passed.
Shuffling the dead-dry leaves underfoot,
as I trudge back to our kingdom's gates,
I rest against our ailing oak bench.
It was here we settled our kid wars,
here we sold our lemonade.
I see two initials in the dry-rotted wood.
For deep as they were the day we carved them,
they have survived
through seasons passed.**

**The Party's Over
....Gretchen Heim**

**Spats casually strolled over
to ruffled skirts which
flirted as they were asked to dance.
Before they passed out
onto the floor, drunken
tuxes chased flashy sequins
which bewitched their eye.
The room was filled with
silent chatter and soundless laughter
as the instruments shouted
their thoughts.**

**Later that night
as the ball rolled
 on
 and
 on,
a black cloak spoke to the deaf clothes.
He passed around
a red scarf to show an invite
as he gestured toward the
exit with his scythe.**

**The garments gladly accepted
by unraveling from the
mannequins they supported
and leaving them on the stone floor
as they danced toward the exit.**

**Suggestions for Figures of Speech:
Metaphor, Symbol, Simile.**

Ring
Dance
Circle
Carousel
Mountain
Star
Sea
Wall
Water
Rain
Sun
Moon
Mask
Ladder
Abandoned house
Valley
Rock, stone
Fire
Ice
October roses
Doll
Tomb, grave, monument
Pearl

Toy soldiers
Old wedding gown
Cobweb
Desert
Clock
Bridge
Olive branch
Dove
Steps, staircase
River
Night
Dawn
Spring, fall
summer, winter
Chain, bracelet
Coat, robe
Door
Table
Parade, stage
band, game
Woods, forest, trees
Stallion, colt, buck
Mirror

Exercise in Similes and Metaphors

Tell someone in a metaphor or simile.....

- 1. You're special to me. You're...**
- 2. My girlfriend/boyfriend is gorgeous. She's, he's.....**
- 3. My father is tough. He's.....**
- 4. Life is wonderful. It's...**
- 5. Death is no bargain. It's....**
- 6. My mother is a gentle lady. She's...**
- 7. Happy birthday. You're...**
- 8. Get a move on. You're....**
- 9. Since he/she died, you're....**
- 10. Get out of bed. You're...**
- 11. What a glorious day! It's...**
- 12. The lake is so calm. It's....**
- 13. The ocean is rough today. It's....**
- 14. She was drained of emotion like....**
- 15. He died in peace like...**
- 16. You're strong. You're like....**
- 17. You smell fresh like.....**
- 18. You're not so hot yourself. You're....**
- 19. You're about as exciting as.....**
- 20. Why don't you stop complaining? You're....**

Though it is not so commonly used as metaphor, symbol is the richest figure of speech, more pregnant with possibilities than any of the others. The reason is that a symbol can, and often does, have more than one meaning, and the poet may want it to convey to the reader more than one meaning. A metaphor restricts us to one interpretation, but the symbol invites a variety of interpretations, all of them often justified.

A wall can be a symbol of: 1. an obstacle between people; 2. a feeling of isolation; 3. a protective barrier; 4. a difficulty to overcome or that can't be overcome.

A star can be a symbol of: 1. something that inspires us; 2. an ideal to strive for; 3. something that is constant, that never wavers; 4. something that brings us good fortune or success; 5. something that shines, uniquely and only for us.

Woods can be a symbol of: 1. a place of evil; 2. death; 3. despair; 4. mystery; 5. adventure; 6. maturation.

For centuries, from the very beginning of English poetry, poets have used the seasons of the year as symbols of certain times of a person's life, as symbols of a person's moods, as symbols of a person's spiritual rejuvenation or demise.

A Moment Stolen by an Undertow ...Caralyn Gilotti

**As dusk eased night onto an empty beach,
the sky mirrored the murky sea's calming gray hues.
Walking along, the wet sand enveloping my feet,
squishing through my bare toes, I noticed
a single, beautifully ornate shell,
half sunken in the sand,
and I watched the sea's soft, foamy blanket
cover and uncover the shell,
exposing it more and more
until it was no longer hidden
by its sandy shield.
Just as I bent down to pick it up,
a thundering wave arose from the sleeping sea
and crashed over my head, saturating me.
After I wiped the ocean's burning salt from my eyes
and spit its taste from my mouth,
again I stooped to pick up the shell,
but it was gone,
kidnapped by the undertow of a selfish sea.**

The Lighthouse ...Frank Rempe

**A lighthouse stands at the end
of a rock pier.
An ocean, shifting, swells below,
indifferent to the beacon's light.
If a wave can be melodramatic,
that is what these waves are.
Odd how they never seem to crash
against the rocks...
because it seems they should....?
Deceptive momentum.
If the lighthouse on the rocks can hope,
then that is what this one does....
hopes for the waves to hit.**

**Teddy Bear's Picnic
....Rachel Fisher**

**I peer, perplexed, at this baffling ball
of twine. Its various ends are lost
among one another, confusing
themselves as well as me with a
disorganized network of stranded
thoughts. I attempt to pluck and tear
the cords from each other, but knots of
camaraderie are binding, and my
frantic attempts to yank them apart
only pulls them closer together and
tighter than ever before. I am
overcome with the burden of self-imposed
frustration as I try to take each
yarn individually. Please...not
all at once. Not everything intertwined
in a big clump like
a kite's long, tangled cord.**

**Da Vinci's Staircase
....Jill Fisher**

**Imposing marble,
haughty and reserved,
mounts before me.
Its cold, yet graceful figure,
yields an eloquent shape.
Ascending from the lifeless floor
the staircases rotate
and blend together, their limbs
entwined
in an eternal embrace.
And yet, the two bodies
remain disjoined,
never converging,
but both leading
to a tantamount climax,
despite their ambivalent paths.**

**Blackened Dwellings
...Corin Schall**

**I stare awkwardly. My dimpled chin reaches
up and pushes my arrow eyes toward the moon, the
silver standard goddess of the knight kingdom.
She stares back defiantly and waltzes, her satin
cloak casting shadows for me to sneak in, light footed
and swift. These cast images protect me in
her blackened dwellings as I spy streets shocked
to life by the constant prodding of her fluorescent
beams. I spy rudely at the unknowing subjects
passing by. I sit alone, a sore, open to the passers'
infectious stares. How could my silver-caped
goddess be so cruel? How could she giggle softly,
watching my body crack in the exposing light?**

**But, i Love Him
....James Petras**

**The cold chain strangles,
pulled by the albatross
who dangles upon my chest.
The black-footed bird pecks at my
aching aorta.**

**“Why don’t you fling the beast
away?” the wind queries me.
He has come bearing an
empty sack and shall kidnap your
burning bosom.**

**But the albatross’s wings
spread over my ears.
I gaze into his eyes and
my inner ocean churns
its frothy foam.**

**“Don’t you see that his webbed
toes constrict you. He frightens
away the falcon and eagle.
You shall be doomed to dwell with
cacophonous crows.**

But, i Love Him.

Objectivity
....Pinakin Amin

**As I try to count
the stripes that mount
the dusty zebra's back,
I quickly lose track
of lifes's true facts
that appear exact.
Are they black lines
on a white back,
or rather white fine
stripes on black?**

For the aspiring poet, irony is the most difficult figure of speech, not to understand, but to use. Irony, to use a metaphor, slices along a very thin line because the poet says or implies the opposite of what he means, and the reader must be able to grasp the truth beneath the appearance of truth.

Verbal irony: saying the opposite of what one means.

Dramatic irony: what is said and what the reader knows to be true are different.

Situational irony: what one expects to happen and what does happen are different.

On Hearing her SmileEugene McGarry

Marbled corridors stretching along through the future
time
lined by oaken bookcases whose musty tomes
caught and silenced the tick-tock of his shoes before he
could hear them
echoing through the space were once his walkway of life,
dusty busts his traveling companions. And once marble
was cozy,
and must and dust were the scent and pollen of the orchid
of knowledge,
the only flower blooming in his garden. No roses there.

But late one spring evening, as the new moonlight washed
upon the walls,
she slipped between a window's bars and capered about
the halls,
no printed paper able to mute the laughter and off-key
melodies
that peaked through the corridors. And on hearing her
smile,
he finally heard the empty silence that had enveloped him
all the days of his age of reason. Sneezing and coughing
he grabbed her hand and together they fled the stone-cold
floors
for the warm earth in the garden, and as they stood
among the clumps of wilting orchids, he thought he saw
a lush crimson-petalled blossom raise her head from
behind a bush,
and smile at him. The orchids only stared.
(quite like Plato's stony eyes)

Images

.....Michael Jay Fowler

**We thank you, Lord, for poppies, bright
flowers from which all good things come.
White powder smuggled, money paid.
A silver shaft slips, slides, sinks deep.
Dimpled arms puckered by rude steel.
Blue veins that wreath and twist, submerge
like some river changing its course.
Clenched fists, taut arms, the flow of blood
held back by dark rubber nooses.
Blank eyes staring from dark doorways.
Small infants crying for something more
than mother's milk. If from your love
this flower blooms, do we thank you
for all these things as well?**

Station Break

...John Hart

**Pappy J. is
gone.
In the glorious Loman tradition
of being overworked, underpaid, unloved, unneeded,
he hung himself
from a naked unlit bulb.
No one saw him as he
swung
in the light of the CBS
eye in color.**

what goes up must bring down
(dedicated to the one I drowned)

.....James Petras

i stumbled among the boulders,
slipping inTo stagnant puddles,
wHich collected the once-thriving
wAters from above.

i searched amoNg the rock
faces, but saw no mouths to speak,
nor ears to listen.

every day the cliffs grew more intimate.
theY drew toward one another.
the vise abOut me tightened.
i yearned to have air beneath me.
my cramped legs leaped,
bUt there was someplace to fall.

i had to scale these rocks
before I could feed their fungi.
aMong my stumbles I came upon
a rope dangling from above.

my eyeS tried to follow its line,
but the sun blinded me.

i did not see you on the cliff.

i seized the rOpe in hopes of
climbing this beanstalk,
but the Rope and I moved as one.
it was looped around an elm.

its pulley Reeled me up,
but I passed you
on the waY down.

**Mindgame, An Abstract Thought
....Jeffrey Stanton (For the Stoics)**

**I dream of Archimedes circling infinity
in the swirling sands of Syracuse:**

**“give me a stone to stand on, boys,
and I shall move the bloody earth.”**

**I’m awake, I’m awake, I cry:
the capital of Outer Mongolia is Ulan Bator.**

**But what does it all come down to if
“man’s contingency finds no external justification,”
as the wall eyed poet sings drunkenly in a café?**

**I can’t go on, I’ll go on
and wrest Excalibur from the alchemist’s stone:
I’m alive, I’m alive, I assert:
the capital of Rhodesia is Salisbury.**

**But now in the twilight, the twilight of idols,
an angry young man moves meekly on
and dreams of distant Cathay’s walls
and life in the dying light of a dying day:
I exist, I exist, I demand
of an ineffectual crowd gathered in the wings,
and put forth to a distant, future herd:
the capital of Britain is London
and, oh, yes, it’s all bloody absurd.**

**And I babble, babble on into the night,
an unrhymed poet, an unsung songster,
trying to muster from my experience
the courage to carry on the game.**

Captured

...Kasey Congdon

**This is the meadow I've dreamed,
the barbed-wire fence, the gleam
of sentries' guns. Now, love, I watch
your winter-white eyes switch
from right to left, caged. This is
my meadow, where pretty grasses
grow protected. Here I'll keep you,
till the fence-posts melt in the dewy
morn, till the grasses die in May,
till my sentries fall on their bayonets.
By love or war, no matter,
here you'll stay. This is my meadow.**

Equal Justice

....Marah Williams

**When a violent rain falls,
the leadened slashes strike
with blisters of grey water
both the blushing roses and
the scorned weeds below them.**

Perfect Circle
...Leslie Gilotti

**Each arc clings together with selfish precision,
creating an impenetrable fortification.
With careful mathematical procedure,
Pi and radii are corralled
within this impersonal, but secure circumference.
I often wonder...
how is it that this bunch of awkward squares
can make such a perfect circle?**

Admissions
...Douglas Regula

**Satan, in a three-piece suit,
said, "Mr. Faust, old chap,
what would you do
to have your wish—
admission to this school?"**

**Would you
eat beetles on the half shell,
play five bullet Russian roulette,
marry a girl with a rice pudding face,
become a Democrat?**

**Would you
read books on a desert isle,
wear a flaming napalm shawl,
drink bright green, pond-slime cocktails,
sell your brother,
your mother,
your soul?"**
"Well, maybe."

Poems may also be structured and given unity by allusion, a reference to a person and event in the bible, mythology, history, or literature. The use of allusion is not a retelling of the story to which the allusion is made.

For example, if we allude to Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden, it is not a synopsis of their happiness and fall. It is the use of a past event or story to intensify the emotional experience of something the poet wants us to experience now, something the person in the poem is feeling at the present moment. If the person in a poem has experienced a fall from grace, perhaps an allusion such as this might make his experience more poignant.

Procrastination

...Heather Keegan

I think it's time
for me to jump-start my life.
Maybe I'll dye my hair
the color of autumn sunsets
or paint my house turquoise
or walk over the Grand Canyon
on a tightrope
or swim the English channel
wearing only a smile.

Like Prufrock,
the most daring thing I have to do
is throw away my coffee spoons.

I, Troy
....Jennifer Dunleavy

**Oh, Sinon, don't bring your Trojan
horse to my town. I will not accept
Greek gifts. Your desperate plea does not
deceive me. Father Laocoon
was killed because he knew Ulysses'
trickery, and Minerva turned her
head. So Cassandra uttered truth
in vain. Heedless, I followed the crowd
and believed you 'til I heard the gut
of the horse groan with soldiers armed
to sack my city. I won't
open
my wall
to the enemy.**

Depths Unknown
...Mary Babcock

**I entreat you to yield to my
ravishing song
like the Sirens luring Ulysses
to depths unknown.
But as I imitate the Sirens,
you carbon Ulysses
and have bound yourself
to the mast.**

**Grandmother
...Michelle LiVecchi**

**Like Dorothy's vision
of the wizard,
there she was,
in a dream of mine
that was wispy like
her white hair.
She was singing softly with
shallow breaths.
Her thin pink lips
murmured my name.
I stood at a distance
so the old woman could not see
the longing in my child eyes.**

**Lord
...Patti Gilroy**

**As Dulcinea,
I've been saved
from the devil
by the Lord,
Don Quixote.
Because of you, Aldonza
no longer
lives within me.
I am now
a servant at
your manor,
my Lord.**

Priam/Old Man
...Christine Fata

Like Priam, he puts on his armor to conquer youth. But his winter is slowly approaching, with no spring in sight.

No more sickening sweet or reborn buds.

No incessant buzz of evil bugs.

Your arrow can no longer pierce the skin of a young society for you are old and weak and frail. Like all good things, your life too must end. So lay down your armor peacefully, old man.

C.S. Lewis, Revisited
...Ann Mekilo

Teddy bears and wardrobe doors are left behind in the time capsule called childhood.

Lips smeared with sticky candy are soon replaced by lips smeared with sticky lipstick.

The limp, lifeless, leather baseball glove stands in a corner

like a snubbed friend, passed up for frilly pastel dresses.

Dripping double-dip ice cream cones are given up for double-dates with drips.

Mother Goose rents a room at the old folks home, rarely visited by her children.

Flirting with disaster as we hang from trees soon turns to another sort of flirting.

And just like Lucy, Edmund, Susan, and Peter, we realize we can never return to Narnia.

**Fly to the Angels.
...Lisa Kelly**

**I was reflecting alone on a rotting, rocky ridge
when a cackling crow required
my attention. He said,
“I will give you
roses and romance, passion and lust,
if you give me
your heart, your soul, and life in trust.”**

**He sang sweet songs and beckoned me with his beauty.
But in him I could not confide.
I tried,
I cried,
and I almost died.**

**He finally flew away on fiery wings, but not forever.
Like a streak of luminous lightning, the crow returned.**

**“Come, promise that you’ll love only me
and be my servant, and I
will be your precious pet and
protect you for eternity.”**

But in him I could not confide.

I rid myself of the crow, but continued to reflect.

**Then a delightful, adorable dove
joined me on the ridge.**

**He cuddled and cooed comforting
thoughts in my ear. He said,
“My dear, join me in paradise
and share my wealth, life, and love.**

**I ask nothing of you.
Being yourself will suffice.”**

**I wilted under his enticing words
and reached out to grab his wings.**

“Take me now. Bear me up on your wings!”

**“Not now,” he cooed. “I will call you when it is time,
as long as you promise to always be mine.”**

So my heart with his is forever entwined.

**My Paradise Regained
...Tara Devine**

**In the room in my head,
there's a party with too many people.
Pushy, obnoxious women
and portly, opinionated men
fight for my attention.**

**Perhaps if I were you, Milton,
I wouldn't be wearing
the face I keep in the jar,
labeled, "For Visitors Only."
In your darkness, these guests
might feel uncomfortable and leave.
Sadly for me, my room is bright.**

**The lady with the lampshade on her head
gives me the push I need.
I hand each unwelcome guest his coat,
and guide him gently out my door,
leaving only a sober few
to chat by a familiar fireside.**

Fixed Form

Some poems have stringent rules which govern their structure. We have seen the haiku and the rules which govern its composition. The most popular of all English fixed form poems is the sonnet. It has rules not only for its metrical pattern, but also for its subject matter, its rime scheme, its number of lines, and division of lines.

There are two types of sonnets.

1. Italian or Petrarchan	2. Elizabethan or Shakesperean
Subject matter: serious theme	Same
Number of lines: Fourteen	Same
Metrical pattern: Iambic pentameter	Same
Rime scheme: abba abba cdecde (last six lines can be various combinations of cde)	abab cdcd efef gg
Division of lines: Octet: statement or problem	Three quatrains: statement or problem
Sestet: decision, summation, resolution	Couplet: decision, summation, resolution

**Approaching Dark Pastures
...Marah Williams**

**The stench of age lingers about my face,
hovers in the deep hollows of my cheeks and swims
through waves of my gray hair. It fills the space
where teeth once lived and perfumes my wrinkled limbs.
The taste of failure sits in my mouth with food
I can no longer chew. Lamé legs season
my palate with shame, while blindness adds to the mood
that eats away at my heart for this reason.
Oh the sad sound of death is very near
to me, and it's humming a tenebrous tune
as I listen to bells of demise ring faint, but clear,
and I know that my turn is coming soon.
For a clock's only good if it keeps its time,
or it slows down and stops ticking, just like mine.**

**Nightmare Recollection
...Maura Howley**

**Plaintive whispers sneak from the hole in my mind
while dusty cobwebs part before them. Fog,
weaving through my thoughts, will not let me find
a clean, clear space somewhere free from smog.
As I sleep, my pillow is dampened by tears
from ghostly images long ago dead,
and shady phantoms, the heart of my fears,
waltz with the murmurings inside my head.
My voice is frozen with the ice-cold
mist. The specters keep up their eternal dance
of fear as the terrible night grows old.
To force slumber's retreat is my only chance.
Sometimes there are things best kept out of sight
because dreams seem real in the shroud of night.**

**Seasonal Love
...Heather Keegan**

**Your brazen rays thawed the glacier that
was my heart, frozen solid by lovers past.
Fresh, warm water bubbled through me while I sat
watching you. I felt the summer coming fast.
Hot nights and embraces made my knees fail,
inspiring front porch kisses that made me high.
You held my waist, and I clung to the rail
to keep myself from falling out of the sky.
I didn't know what that crimson glow meant
when I saw it in your eyes. Even if he could,
the night sky would never tell what I'd spent,
the last golden coin of my childhood.
You left me alone in the morning light
to realize that winter had come that night.**

**Farewell
...Valerie Sindzak**

**In naked light we pace the artless earth,
our cold sentinels, these now heavy trees,
drenched in sodden, sickly leaves. Chilled, we seize
and clutch this veil of shade. Life fades, all birth
now entombed in vacant wombs, stripped of worth.
Your shrinking form, as stiff as rotting leaves,
I must leave. I cannot soothe. I cannot please.
And mother's groans fear daughter's smothered mirth.
Trembling, in crippling bones, this terror heaves.
Childhood sun, as I leave, your warm hold must
Be done. Yet, mother, though I see once lemon leaves
are tarnished brass, and each, an aging rust,
and enfolding arms no longer speak, "embrace,"
all past colors still spark life in grieved space.**

Free Verse

Many poets feel that meter and rime inhibit their creativity by forcing them to choose words that don't convey their feelings. And so free verse gained popularity in the twentieth century under the aegis of William Carlos Williams, a poet and a practicing medical doctor from Rutherford, New Jersey.

There is no set number of feet per line in free verse. This means the poet may have a different number of feet in each line of the poem if he so chooses. Despite the freedom from a specific metrical pattern, this does not mean the poet does not use iambs, spondees, or anapests. He must use various types of feet to create the rhythmical effect he wants, to slow down, to speed up, to emphasize a feeling, etc.

In metrical poetry, the foot is the unit of measurement. In free verse, the line is the unit of measurement. It is the measure in the poetry of the nineteenth century poet, Walt Whitman, the forerunner of twentieth century poets who wrote in free verse.

By the standards of today's poets, however, Whitman's lines are long. If you choose to use long lines as the unit of measure, they should be closed rhetorical units (i.e. no enjambment), sustained by a strong cadence, frequent

parallelism, a repetition of a motif such as one hears in a symphony, and some, but not regular, internal rime (i.e. within the line).

**When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd
....Walt Whitman
(part of his poem on the death of Lincoln)**

1

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
and the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,
and thought of him I love.

2

O powerful western fallen star!
O shades of night—O moody tearful night!
O great star disappear'd—O the black murk that hides the star!
O cruel hands that hold me powerless—O helpless soul of me!
O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul!

3

In the dooryard fronting an old farm house near the white-wash'd' palings,
stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
with many a pointed blossom rising delicate, with the perfume strong I love,
with every leaf a miracle—and from this bush in the dooryard,
with delicate color'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
a sprig with its flower I break.

**In a swamp in secluded recesses,
a shy and hidden bird is warbling a song.**

**Solitary the thrush,
the hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements,
sings by himself a song.**

**Song of the bleeding throat,
death's outlet song of life, for well dear brother I know,
if thou wast not granted to sing, thou wouldst surely die.**

Free verse is of ancient origin. The psalms (songs) of the bible use free verse, and the line is the unit of measure. Each line usually has a caesura near the middle, i.e. a pause that breaks up the long line. Hebrew poetry is neither accentual nor rhythmic, but it does use many techniques such as parallelism, figurative language, concrete imagery, repetition, etc.

Psalm 90 (part of the song)

- 1. You who dwell in the shelter of the most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,**
- 2. say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress,
my God in whom I trust,”**
- 3. for He will rescue you from the snare of the fowler,
from the destroying pestilence;**
- 4. With his wings he will cover you, and under his wings
you shall take refuge;
his faithfulness is a buckler and a shield.**
- 5. You shall not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day;**
- 6. not the pestilence that roams in darkness,
nor the devastating plague at noon.**
- 7. Though a thousand fall at your side, ten thousand at
your right side,
near you it shall not come.**
- 8. Rather with your eyes you shall behold
and see the requital of the wicked,**
- 9. because you have the Lord for your refuge;
you have made the Most High your stronghold.**
- 10. No evil shall befall you,
nor shall affliction come near your tent,**
- 11. for to his angels, he has given command about you
that they guard you in all your ways.**
- 12. Upon their hands they shall bear you up,
lest you dash your foot against a stone.**

A poet may, however, use phrases and not lines as his unit of measurement. Some modern poetry tends to this approach rather than to the use of the line. There is an extensive measure of enjambment when the phrase is the unit of measurement rather than the line.

**To a Poor Old Woman
...William Carlos Williams**

**munching a plum on
the street a paper bag
of them in her hand**

**They taste good to her.
They taste good
to her. They taste
good to her.**

**You can see it by
the way she gives herself
to the one half
sucked out in her hand.**

**Comforted
a solace of ripe plums
seeming to fill the air
they taste good to her.**

Rhythm, or cadence, is a movement characterized by regular recurrence and intermission, or by increase and decrease at regular intervals: of force, emphasis, stress, beat, etc. In order to achieve rhythm in our free verse and not to have our poems look and sound like prose, we can use a repetitive pattern of key words and phrases. This will establish a musical effect in our poetry as well as give the poem unity.

Suicide

....Vincent J. Vanston

**In the greening of summer, even,
when the leaves pose for pictures,
full and proud like a pregnant lady,
even then, when the mountain laurel
put on their pink show,
ever knowing brilliance will be brief,
even then, when a scraggly pine,
mocked and scorned, hangs on,
when even the milk-weed is tall—
a few leaves turn, red or gold or orange,
searching for the autumn of the year,
heedless....even then.**

**Since art is form, even in so called free
verse, there has to be form, or there is no art.
There have to be parameters, something that
takes the unbridled words and harnesses them
into art. Using a figure of speech can provide a
framework for a poem and impose form on it.**

**Our Playground
...Catherine Dawgert**

**The gates are open,
come frolic with me.
Climb moonbeam jungle gyms,
and dodge shooting stars.
And we'll swing on a comet's tail
until we awaken the dawn,
and as she rubs the stardust
from her eyes, we'll chute
down rainbowed slides
into shimmering pools of sunlight
where we can splash and bathe
in morning's golden glory.
Let's chase the sun's fiery chariot
and play hide and seek with the moon
before tomorrow's tears tarnish
our sterling hearts and fear leadens
our fairy-winged souls.
The gates are open. Come frolic with me
while our only scars are
skinned knees and freedom
still invites us to play.**

Freedom Burst
....Jennifer Dunleavy

**Damp curls dance in the midst
of the bright night.**

**Hot December air blankets me and
the humidity is so
unusual.**

**There are feathers in my throat,
rising from my winged heart, fluttering
because reckless love waits
on the other side of town.**

**And sky-wide eyes are transfixed
on a drunken yellow moon
while waves of a “Hazy Shade of Winter”
pound through my years.**

**The roller coaster
dips
and the swimming city rushes
forward in an orange blur of mercury lights.
High heel holds the gas horizontal but
the light is red.**

9:30 newsbreak. I’m on my way home.

New Year's Blues

....Kristin Wintermantel

On New Year's Eve in Times Square

I stand

silent, pensive, grave.

**I watch the endless desert of people
who feast with wine and Auld Lang Syne,
Drunken, frenzied, loud.**

**I watch them, a part of the scene,
but still detached,
like a branch cut from the cactus.**

Why do they indulge? Why do I fast?

Lipstick Sunset

...Jeffrey Partyka

**There's a lipstick sunset
smeared across the August sky.**

**There a bittersweet perfume
hanging over the fields,
and the creek is running high.**

**I left my lover waiting
in the dawn somewhere
to wonder why
at the end of the day
all her dreams would fade
to a lipstick sunset.**

Where Angels Die
...Kara McInerney

**When I was at the age of six, a mere child,
my mother told me legends of the woods,
tales of viny trees and animals run wild.
She said, “Don’t even try
to make it through, even if you think you could,
because that’s where all the angels die
when they walk amid the woods.”
One rainy night as I was walking
and whistling a tune,
I could have sworn I heard the angels talking,
so I stopped to take a peek, and soon
I saw the devil’s children stabbing robes of white,
snapping halos like celery sticks,
ignoring angelic screams that vanished into night
crushing sacred hearts with discarded bricks.
They ran off, chanting their father’s creed,
leaving the angels to hang and bleed.**

**Note: All the poems in this book were
written by former students of mine at Scranton
Preparatory School.**