The Music of the Hemispheres
In the medieval ages, philosophers believed that each planet, as it zoomed around in orbit, made a sound... a note. The sound of all the planets in space was called the music of the spheres.

Today, we say the human brain has two hemispheres, and through the magic of human language, we have poetry, the music of the hemispheres.
Language is human.
Many animals make sounds, but only human beings make language.

We love language for lots of reasons, and one of the most important is that we love the beautiful sounds of language.

Words are made of sounds.

When we write words, we show the sounds with letters.
The letter \( s \) sounds like

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Some sounds sound like woodwinds, or horns, or wind in the trees.
Some sounds in words are like sounds in nature:

This little piggy cried

Wee wee wee

all the way home.

This is called

onomatopoeia

(AH no MAH toe PEE uh).
plop

trickle

splash

drip
There are two main kinds of sounds: **vowels** and **consonants**.

Vowels sound like singing:

\[ a \ e \ i \ o \ u \ y \]

and consonants sound like clicks, and taps, and bumps:

\[ b \ c \ d \ f \ g \ h \ j \ k \ l \ m \ n \ p \ q \ r \ s \ t \ v \ w \ x \ z \]
We can even do a **vowel-consonant split** by putting vowels and consonants on different lines.

What words are these?

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i e
 o e
 u e
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cr ck t
 fl wr
 p ddl
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Are you beginning to think that poets are aware of every sound in their poems, just as composers know each note in their compositions?

You are right. Poets know all the vowel sounds, and all the consonant sounds, and all the stresses, and they arrange these sounds at the same time that they arrange the meanings of words.
Poets often put *rhymes* in poems.

A rhyme is a similar sound found in two different words, such as *rhyme* and *time*, *monarchy* and *malarkey*.

The sounds do not have to be spelled alike.
The team had a scheme it would seem!
If the lines rhyme at their ends, that is called end rhyme.
Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed, a
The dear repose for limbs with travel tired, b
But then begins a journey in my head a
To work my mind when body’s work’s expired. b

from Sonnet 27
William Shakespeare

Rhyme Scheme
If we want to study the rhyme scheme of a poem, we assign the letter a to the first rhyme sound, and the letter b to the second rhyme sound, and so on. So the rhyme scheme of this poem is abab. The a rhymes are bed and head, and the b rhymes are tired and expired.
Emily Dickinson used end rhyme in this poem about a flower, the gentian. Dickinson rhymed the even lines, 2, 4, 6, and 8, but not the odd ones.
God made a little gentian:  
It tried to be a rose  
And failed, and all the summer laughed.

But just before the snows  
There came a purple creature  
That ravished all the hill;  
And summer hid her forehead,  
And mockery was still.

from XLVII  
Emily Dickinson
Rhymes put inside the lines are called **internal rhyme**.

Shakespeare used internal rhyme in:

**Double, double, toil and trouble.**

William Blake used both end rhyme and internal rhyme in his poem “The Tiger.”
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?

from “The Tiger”
William Blake
Rhyme is not all that poets use to compose the sounds of poems. Another technique is alliteration, the repetition of the first, initial, sounds of words:

“Baa, baa, black sheep.”

Alliteration lets us emphasize a sound that is perfect for the meaning. Robert Burns used alliteration:
John Anderson my jo, John,
When we were first aquent:
Your locks were like the raven,
Your bony brow was brent.

from “John Anderson, My Jo”
Robert Burns

(The word brent means smooth in Scottish.)
William Shakespeare used **alliteration** on the letter *s* in Sonnet 30. Notice the interesting eye-rhyme with *past* and *waste*.

When to the *sessions* of *sweet* *silent* thought
I *summon* up remembrance of things *past*,
I *sigh* the lack of many a thing I *sought,*
and with old woes new wail my dear Time’s *waste*. 
Alliteration often takes the form of an adjective and its noun that begin with the same letter. A.E. Housman used alliteration this way in “To an Athlete Dying Young”:

So set, before its echoes fade, the fleet foot on the sill of shade, And hold to the low lintel up The still-defended challenge cup.
One poem may have end rhyme, internal rhyme, eye-rhyme and alliteration, and more.

Look at these lines from William Butler Yeats’s (pronounced Yates) poem “The Lake Isle of Innisfree.”
Innisfree is a lake in County Sligo, Ireland.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore:
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,
I hear it in the deep heart’s core.

Notice how Yeats supports the alliterated l’s with lots of other l’s inside words in this passage.
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore.