

## To the Teacher

Poetics is the oft-forgotten core component of formal language study. Even in schools that assign students a strong list of novels to read and that provide challenging programs of vocabulary and grammar, the study of poetry may be limited to reading a thin assortment of poems from an interpretive point of view. The extraordinary technical substance of poetry may be ignored, but for a passing glance at rhyme, sonnet form, alliteration, personification, simile, and metaphor. There is a tendency to relegate poetry to the literary sidelines—something extra to pursue if time permits.

That won't do.

An understanding of poetics must be a central component of any rigorous language curriculum. It is not just that there are some poems and poets so famous that to be unaware of them would constitute ignorance; it is that the technical elements of poetics are employed by poets, novelists, politicians, and essayists. It is that talented and powerful writers of every stripe incorporate poetic strategies into their work. We may separate poetry from prose in our organizational thinking when we develop curricula, but writers don't. Abraham Lincoln wrote poetry as a young man, and used poetic techniques in his Gettysburg Address. Herman Melville wrote poetry in *Moby Dick*, but disguised it as prose and hid it in ordinary-looking paragraphs.

Poetry may not be ignored; it is a primary form of expression in every society we can recall, from the beginning of culture—from Beowulf to Pushkin, from Pacific Island chants to Stephen Foster to Homer to Chaucer, from the Anglo-Saxons to slave spirituals. Poetry is a universal and irresistible form of human expression.

And there is this: there are poems that are among the supreme accomplishments of the world—poems of such stature that not to know them is to have one’s education hobbled. Like the Sistine frescoes of Michelangelo, or the sculpture of Bernini, or the *Mona Lisa* of Leonardo, or the novels of Dostoevsky, or the dome of Brunelleschi, or the clarinet concerto of Mozart, or Thomas Jefferson’s *Declaration of Independence*, or Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, or the narrative of Frederick Douglass—like these and a hundred other works we could not imagine being without—there are poems that belong as a profound part of one’s intellectual life: Homer’s *Iliad*; the sonnets and poem-plays of Shakespeare; the poems of Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman.

There are many things in life that we care nothing for, prior to an authentic encounter with them. But afterwards, we would not surrender our knowledge of them—not for riches. I would, under no circumstance, forget William Butler Yeats’s “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” or Elizabeth Bishop’s “Visit to St. Elizabeth’s,” or W.H. Auden’s “In Memory of W.B. Yeats,” or A.E. Houseman’s “To an Athlete Dying Young.” If you told me I could never again read *Romeo and Juliet*, I would be deeply sad. There are a dozen poems by Emily Dickinson that surprise and delight me every time I find them, as though we had never met.

Caring passionately for certain things that one has learned through academic experience is one of the signal characteristics of the educated mind.

Not every content has the power to help us care, or to clarify our thinking, or to suggest meaning. Not every page of curriculum can become one of the favorite things we ever learn in our entire lives. But there are many poems that can do this. “This,” wrote Emily Dickinson, “is my letter to the world, that never wrote to me.” Reading Emily’s sentence, we click into connection with her, and feel, and understand. We are touched, and in some secret inside corner of our hidden selves, we are illuminated and brought to life.

It is essential to understand that this powerful event, this gleaming experience we often have with a poem, is *caused* by objective, named techniques. Poems are planned. An architect provides instructions for one wall to be of brick and another of wood. A painter applies two colors in full knowledge of the color theory that governs the way the two colors interact. A composer of symphonies knows that she is writing in a minor key, knows the name of each note she puts on the staff, knows how many octaves the woodwinds are above the strings in a particular passage. If she did not know these things, and employ the strict technical knowledge with skill, the completed symphony would not seem so natural and spontaneous. In order to be emotionally moving, the symphony must be under strict intellectual control.

Like science or medicine, all serious art involves elaborate learning and complex decision-making.

So with poems. Poets touch our hearts and spirits because they use their minds to assemble components that permit something to be called a poem, including meter, rhyme, vowel sounds, consonant sounds, figures of speech, and so forth. The final result is a unified and coherent work of art that moves us or illuminates our experience. The final poem is likely to contain numerous elements and techniques that only other poets are likely to perceive or understand.

About this book...

There are several premises that interconnect in the design of this book, which is the third in a series of six books that explore the nature of poetry.

The first premise—as you see above—is that poetry is not the undisciplined, spontaneous, and primarily emotional expression it is often imagined to be; it is a conscious art form—highly developed, often technically accomplished, and as meticulously designed as a painting or a symphony. A poem is a work of the mind. Poets know what they are

doing, and what they are doing requires knowledge and skill, in addition to inspiration and talent.

The second premise is that poets are human beings first, and as such they are part of their culture, part of their time, part of the intellectual life of the world. Poets, like other people, think about the world, the oceans and mountains, the birds and the skies and the wind. They think about reality. Great poets have written poems about galaxies, storms, robins, and deserts.

It is curiously appropriate, therefore, for a book about poetry to offer connections to science. And, more than one might imagine, it works in reverse too: scientists have edged over the border into poetics to gather words and names for their concepts, especially in recent decades, when Einstein's relativity and Planck's quantum mechanics have pushed science far from the world we think we know into discoveries so bizarre as to seem fantastical.

And of course, we want instruction to be centered on concepts and to be interdisciplinary, so the connections between poetry and science provide an opportunity to reflect on aspects of human inquiry that are big enough to embrace both poetry and science in single vistas.

A third premise is that this book must be effective both as a stand-alone text for students who did not study the previous volumes and also as a more advanced exploration of poetics for students who did study the previous two volumes. For this reason, the elements of poetics contained in previous volumes are included here, but there are elaborate presentations of new concepts, and there are new poem selections that are longer and more challenging than those in previous volumes. I have also extended the range of emotional content in this book; in the first two books for younger elementary students, I tried to emphasize positive and funny poetry, avoiding poems that entered into sad or tragic problems. In this book some of those fences are down, since older students are ready for a wider range of reflection.

## Content Review

The questions on the following pages are provided so that the teacher can review the facts and concepts of the text with the students. The first section may be copied and distributed to students. This is not intended as a test, but rather as a form of organized review and discussion.

It is essential to provide students with a balance of strong knowledge content and higher order thinking experiences.

Critical thinking is worth little if the student is misinformed about the facts, so an exceptional foundation of real knowledge forms the basis for very strong subsequent thinking.

## Content Review

1. When words end in the same sound, like *boot* and *flute*, that is:
  - a. alliteration
  - b. consonance
  - c. rhyme
  - d. assonance
2. One-syllable rhyme, like *knee* and *sea*, is called:
  - a. masculine rhyme
  - b. feminine rhyme
  - c. eye-rhyme
  - d. end rhyme
3. Words that look the same but do not sound the same, like *tough* and *through*, are called:
  - a. internal rhyme
  - b. end rhyme
  - c. eye-rhyme
  - d. near rhyme
4. The pattern of rhyme, indicated by a letter sequence, is called:
  - a. rhyme line
  - b. rhyme scheme
  - c. rhyme sequence
  - d. rhyme structure
5. When a rhyming word is in the middle of a line, that is:
  - a. internal rhyme
  - b. end rhyme
  - c. middle rhyme
  - d. center rhyme
6. When periods or commas make pauses at the ends of lines, the lines are:
  - a. end-stopped
  - b. enjambed
  - c. rhyme stopped
  - d. line-stopped
7. Lines that do not pause at the end are called:
  - a. run-on
  - b. flow lines
  - c. enjambed
  - d. end-run
8. "For after the rain when with never a stain" contains:
  - a. a sonnet
  - b. a feminine rhyme
  - c. eye-rhyme
  - d. internal rhyme
9. The words *daughter* and *water* are an example of:
  - a. feminine rhyme
  - b. masculine rhyme
  - c. eye-rhyme
  - d. rime royal

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10. When words begin with the same vowel or consonant sound, that is called:
- a. consonance
  - b. assonance
  - c. alliteration
  - d. internal rhyme
11. The line "Sing no sad songs for me" contains:
- a. alliteration
  - b. metaphor
  - c. assonance
  - d. trochees
12. Poets often alliterate:
- a. adverbs
  - b. the adjective and noun
  - c. the subject of the clause
  - d. metaphors
13. When words share the same vowel sound, like *speak*, *sleet*, and *receipt*, that is:
- a. alliteration
  - b. metaphor
  - c. consonance
  - d. assonance
14. When words share the same consonant sound, like *slimmer*, *hum*, and *emu*, that is:
- a. assonance
  - b. consonance
  - c. conjugation
  - d. containment
15. The line "Much madness is divinest sense" contains examples of:
- a. internal rhyme
  - b. eye-rhyme
  - c. reversal
  - d. enjambment
16. When a word mimics a sound or noise in nature, that is called:
- a. intonation
  - b. onomatopoeia
  - c. recall
  - d. metaphor
17. The pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables is called:
- a. alliteration
  - b. meter
  - c. iambics
  - d. line flow
18. A repeating stress pattern is called the poetic:
- a. foot
  - b. hand
  - c. length
  - d. quantum



