

Poetry Terms



- **Alliteration** – the repetition of initial consonant sounds. Ex: On the bald street breaks the blank day.
- **Allusion** – a reference to a person, place, thing, event or idea in history or literature used to suggest an emotion or idea. Ex: an allusion to the Garden of Eden might suggest a notion of paradise or a time of purity and innocence. (Allusion is different from *illusion*, which is a deception or erroneous perception of reality.)
- **Apostrophe** – a figure of speech in which the poem’s speaker addresses someone absent or dead, or something nonhuman as if it were alive and present and could reply.
- **Assonance** – the repetition, at close intervals, of vowel sounds.
- **Ballad** – a fairly short **narrative poem** written in a songlike stanza form.
- **Consonance** – the repetition, at close intervals, of consonant sounds found within or at the end of words.
- **Couplet** – 2-line stanza, which may or may not rhyme.
- **End rhyme** – rhyme that comes at the end of lines. Ex. “It runs and it creeps/ For awhile, till it sleeps”
- **Eye rhyme** – words that look alike but do not sound alike. Ex: bough, cough; brow, blow.
- **Figurative language** – words that are literally inaccurate but are used to describe or define something. Usually this language makes use of **metaphors** or **similes** to compare and equate something to another.
- **Fixed form** – poetry that is categorized by its patterns of lines, meter, rhymes and stanzas. Examples of fixed forms include the sonnet, ballad and villanelle.
- **Free verse** – poetry that is not in a fixed form. Also called *open form*.
- **Imagery** – the use of images, often **figurative** ones, that appeal to one of the 5 senses. Images can be olfactory (smell), auditory (sound), tactile (touch), visual (sight), or gustatory (taste).
- **Internal rhyme** – rhyme that comes within one or several lines. Ex: I wished upon the most beautiful moon in June and hope/ that soon I will fall in love.
- **Lyric** – a short poem that expresses the personal emotions and thoughts of a first-person narrator and is characterized by its musical qualities.
- **Metaphor** – an implied comparison in which the figurative word is substituted for the original term (in contrast to the explicit comparison of a simile). Ex: “He is a lion in the field.”

- **Meter** – the recurrence of rhythmic stresses or accents in a regular pattern.
- **Narrative poem** – a poem that tells a story.
- **Onomatopoeia** – use of a word that resembles the sound it denotes. Ex: buzz, bowwow, choo-choo.
- **Personification** – giving human characteristics to an animal, object or abstract concept.
- **Poetry** – literature written in meter or verse. It is characterized by language chosen for its sound and suggestive power and by such literary techniques as structured meter, rhyme, and metaphor.
- **Prose poem** – a poem which is written in prose format; i.e. it has no fixed lines.
- **Quatrain** – a four-line stanza.
- **Rhyme** (see also **End, Eye, Internal** and **Slant rhyme**) – two or more words that repeat the same end sounds. Also called *perfect rhyme*. Ex: send, bend, trend.
- **Rhyme scheme** – the pattern of end rhymes denoted by lowercase letters (*a, b, c, d...*) where each letter represents a new rhyme.
- **Setting** – the place and time in which a poem takes place; not all poems have settings.
- **Simile** – an explicit comparison of one thing to another using the connecting words *like, as, than, similar to, resembles* or *sees*. Ex: He is like a lion in the field.
- **Slant rhyme** – words, usually in a set rhyme scheme, which have similar sounds but are not perfect rhymes. Also called *approximate rhyme, imperfect rhyme, or near rhyme*. Ex: arrayed/said.
- **Sonnet** – a 14-line poem that has traditionally followed specific rules of rhyme and meter.
- **Stanza** – a group of lines in a poem. People often mistakenly call them paragraphs.
- **Style** – the author’s manner of expression. An author’s style is the result of choices about vocabulary, organization, **imagery**, pace, and recurring themes.
- **Symbol** – a figure of speech in which a person or thing stands for some other idea/abstract concept. Ex: the color white has become a symbol of purity or innocence.
- **Theme** – the central or unifying idea that is developed in a work.
- **Tone** – the expressions of the author’s attitude toward the subject matter.
- **Verse** – another name for poetry derived from the Latin “vers” meaning “to turn.” It refers to the fact that poetry lines “turn” at a specific point versus *prose*, which has no fixed lines.