

Reading

Lesson 1:

What is a poem?

In class we looked at the poem, "Homework! Oh Homework!" by Jack Prelutsky. Then, we tried to answer the question, "What makes a poem, a *poem*? Together, the class came up with an amazing list—rhyme, repetition, mood, short and long lines, speaker—were some of the qualities you listed.

In today's lesson, let's look at another poem and see what we can find.

1. Read the poem aloud
2. Circle words that rhyme
3. Underline words that are repeated
4. Highlight words that you don't know and check the meaning in a dictionary.
5. How many lines are in the poem?
6. How many stanzas are in the poem?

Since Hanna Moved Away

The tires on my bike are flat.
The sky is grouchy gray.
At least it sure feels like that
Since Hanna moved away.

Chocolate ice cream tastes like prunes.
December's come to stay.
They've taken back the Mays and Junes
Since Hanna moved away.

Flowers smell like halibut.
Velvet feels like hay.
Every handsome dog's a mutt
Since Hanna moved away.

Nothing's fun to laugh about.
Nothing's fun to play.
They call me, but I won't come out
Since Hanna moved away.

-Judith Viorst

Please write your answers to the questions in complete sentences.

7. Who might be the narrator of the poem?

8. How would you describe the mood of the poem?

9. The poet says, "The sky is grouchy gray." What does this tell you about the narrator's feelings since Hanna moved away?

10. In your opinion, why does the speaker repeat the line "Since Hanna moved away."?

Lesson 2:

Lines and line breaks

Lines are the building blocks of poems. Poets use short lines. Some poets use longer lines instead of shorter lines. Some poets begin lines at the left. Some poets push lines to the right. Some poets use lines to give their poem shape. The more poetry you read, the more you will notice how poets use lines. Line breaks are just as important as lines. Line breaks are used to control how you read a poem.

This is important, so I'll say it again:

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1. In the writing on the left, how do lines and line breaks change the text?

2. **Poetry Challenge:** Find 2-3 sentences from a piece of mail. In the box below, rewrite the sentences and make them look like a poem by using different line lengths and line breaks.

Lesson 3:

Stanzas

Stanzas are the groups of lines in a poem. As we talked about in class, stanzas are like "paragraphs" in a poem.

- Stanzas can give a poem shape
- Stanzas can give a poems structure.
- Stanzas can create patterns in a poem.
- Stanzas can create organization in a poem.

In today's lesson, let's look at how the poet, Portia Nelson, uses stanzas.

1. Read the poem aloud
2. Circles words that rhyme
3. Underline words that are repeated
4. Highlight words that you don't know and check the meaning in a dictionary.
5. How many lines are in the poem?
6. How many stanzas are in the poem?

7. How does the poet use stanzas in this poem?

8. What story is the poet sharing with the reader?

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters

Chapter I

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk
I fall in.
I am lost ... I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes me forever to find a way out.

Chapter II

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place
but, it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter III

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in ... it's a habit.
my eyes are open
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

Chapter IV

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

Chapter V

I walk down another street.

-Portia Nelson

Lesson 4:

Speaker or, *persona*

Every poem has a speaker. In poetry, we refer to the speaker as the *persona*.

Don't confuse the speaker of the poem with the author of the poem—that's the poet.

And don't confuse the speaker with the person who reads the poem aloud—that's the reader.

Here is a poem with an interesting speaker:

The Caterpillar

Under this loop of honeysuckle,
A creeping, colored caterpillar,
I gnaw the fresh green hawthorn spray,
I nibble it leaf by leaf away.

Down beneath grow dandelions,
Daisies, old-man's-looking-glasses;
Rooks flap croaking across the lane.
I eat and swallow and eat again.

Here come raindrops helter-skelter;
I munch and nibble unregarding:
Hawthorn leaves are juicy and firm.
I'll mind my business: I'm a good worm.

When I'm old, tired, melancholy,
I'll build a leaf-green mausoleum
Close by, here on this lovely spray,
And die and dream the ages away.

Some say worms win resurrection,
With white wings beating flitter-flutter,
But wings or a sound sleep, why should I care?
Either way I'll miss my share.

Under this loop of honeysuckle,
A hungry, hairy caterpillar,
I crawl on my high and swinging seat,
And eat, eat, eat—as one ought to eat.

-Robert Graves

Please write your answers to the questions in complete sentences.

1. Who is the speaker of the poem?

2. What story is the speaker telling the reader?

Lesson 5:

Free verse

As we learned in class, not all poems rhyme or follow rules. Poems that do not follow rules are free verse. Free verse is free from rhyming, repetition, even stanzas.

Because free verse poetry is free from rules, it is fun to write, but it can be difficult to read. Here's a free verse poem by e.e. cummings

in Just-

in Just-

spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame balloonman

whistles far and wide

and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it's
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

the funny
old balloonman whistles
far and wide
and bettyandisabel come dancing

from hop-scotch and jump-rope and
it's
spring
and

the
funny-footed

balloonMan whistles
far
and
wide

by e. e. cummings

1. This poem by e.e. cummings breaks many of the rules of poetry. What are some of the rules that he breaks? What do you notice?

Lesson 6:

Theme

We learned that in fiction, the theme of a story is the life lesson, or the message the author wants to share with the reader.

The same is true of poetry. Poetry is personal, and poets use language to show how they feel about their topic.

Do you remember the book, *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson? In the book there was a fence that separated the girl's backyards. But, the fence also stood for something bigger; the fence was a symbol for the laws of segregation that kept the girls from being friends.

In this poem by student Grace Walton, the swingset represents, or symbolizes, her childhood and the memories created around the swingset.

The Swingset

Wood rots,
ropes fray,
metal rusts,
memories stay.

It stands there deserted.
Sometimes it was a ship
escaping from a storm.
Other times, many times,
It was the Toyota minivan, a friend and I
drove to McDonald's.

Now years of playing end.
It's just the goal for flashlight tag,
where people cry after losing
or brag after winning.

At times I want to shed
my childhood,
but somehow I can't cart it away
to the dump, where
swingsets are shredded, where
time past
can't ever
return.

-Grace Walton

1. In this poem, the speaker's backyard swingset represents her childhood.

In the last stanza, the speaker says "I can't cart it away to the dump where swingsets are shredded, where time past can't ever return."

How do you think the speaker feels about growing-up? What evidence do you have from the poem?

2. In your opinion, what is the theme, or the life lesson, of this poem?

Lesson 7:

Imagery

One of the most powerful things a poet can use is imagery. Imagery is sensory language, or language that appeals to a reader's sense of sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch. Imagery helps create pictures in the reader's mind mental images and visualize the story or poem.

This poem by student Ben Williams is an example of how a poet uses language to produce imagery, or a picture in our mind.

Deer Print

A soft indentation—
two toes—
marks the ground,
a blank reminder
of what has been here before me.
I try to feel amazed,
to marvel at this muddy imprint,
to feel lucky at my chance to notice—
but I want to see the deer,
steam streaming from her nostrils
as she stares at me,
thin legs threatening to give way,
small brown head
trembling in the cold.
I want to see her bound away,
her tail high in the air,
her two-toed hooves
marking the ground.

-Benjamin Williams

1. What senses does this poem appeal to—sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch? Use evidence from the text to support your thinking.

This next poem by student Nora Bradford also uses language to appeal to the reader's senses.

Watermelon

I watch Mom cut five slices,
Then I take the largest and the reddest.
When I sink my teeth into solid juice,
The melon squirts its fireworks.

I swallow a seed—
that's one I won't spit
into the bowl
beyond the deck railing.

When I finish the delightful redness
I throw the green rind to Hob,
who waits his turn.
He grabs the crust in his mighty jaws

and runs away
With its sweetness.

-Nora Bradford

2. What senses does this poem appeal to—sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch? Use evidence from the text to support your thinking.

Lesson 8:

Alliteration

As we learned in class, alliteration is the repeated sound of the first consonant. We used the tongue-twister "*She sells seashells by the seashore*" to show how sounds repeat.

In these two poems you can see how poet Valerie Worth uses alliteration to create a pleasing sound with syllables that slide smoothly when you say them.

1. Read each poem aloud
2. Underline beginning sounds that are repeated

sea lions

the satin sea lions
nudge each other
toward the edge
of the pool until
they fall like
soft boulders
into the water,
sink down, slide
in swift circles,
twist together
and apart, rise again
snorting, climb
up slapping
their flippers on
the wet cement:
someone said
that in all the zoo
only the sea lions
seem happy.