

## The Sounds of Poetry

Poetry should be read primarily for its beauty and the reader's enjoyment. Much of this enjoyment results from the effectiveness of the poet's writing. To be effective, poets use a range of techniques, devices, forms and styles. Therefore, it's necessary to pull some poems apart to find out how the poets have created them, so that we can appreciate both the poetry and the poet's skills.

Part of the pleasure of poetry comes from the music of the words. This is especially apparent when poems are read aloud. Long before children understand language fully, they will respond with interest and engagement to nursery rhymes, chants and songs. This is largely due to the distinct sound of individual words and phrases together with distinctive rhythms when spoken or sung. Poets use many devices and techniques to achieve effective sounds in poetry. Some of these are: alliteration, rhyme, rhythm, onomatopoeia, assonance, consonance, and word sounds.

### 4. Alliteration

Alliteration is the name given to words used close together which contain the same **consonant sound**, usually at the beginning of the word.

#### Some reasons for using alliteration:

- To draw attention to the words.
- To make the words "catchy" and therefore easy to remember.
- To make them sound amusing.
- To make them unusual to say. Some can be said very quickly, but others force you to say them slowly.
- To create a pleasant or musical combination of sounds.

#### Alliteration often occurs in

- Nursery rhymes: Little Miss Muffet and Jack and Jill
- Advertising: Coca Cola
- Tongue twisters (deliberately overused):  
*Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers...*

#### Sounds like...alliteration

Are the following examples of alliteration?

- Kittens causing chaos...
- Gentle ghost...
- Reading and writing...
- Faulty phone...
- Cheerful character...
- Whole-hearted...
- Psychic person...

#### Alliteration in poetry

Many poets use alliteration in their poems. In some poems, it is very obvious; in others it is used more subtly.

### "Song of Rain" by Hugh McCrae

Night,  
And the yellow pleasure of candle-light...  
Old brown books and the kind fine face of the clock  
Fogged in the veils of the fire—its cuddling tock.

The cat,  
Greening her eyes on the flame-litten mat;  
Wickedly wakeful she yawns at the rain  
Bending the roses over the pane,  
And a bird in my heart begins to sing  
Over and over the same sweet thing—

Safe in the house with my boyhood's love,  
And our children asleep in the attic above.

### CHAPTER 4 REVIEW

Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds in words close together and used to create patterns of sound.

#### For your interest

- Alliteration was the main feature of the very earliest English poetry, written hundreds of years ago. Here is an example. The language has changed, but you will still be able to recognize some words and identify the alliteration:

In a somer sesun, when softe was the sonne,  
I shope me into a shroud, a sheep as I were;  
In habite of a hermite, unholy of werkes,  
Wend I wyde in this world, wonders to here.

### 5. Rhyme

Rhyme is the use of words with **identical final sounds**. Rhyme, like alliteration, is one of the more obvious poetic devices. Like alliteration, when it is overused, it can be funny. It is also "catchy" and so helps as a memory aid.

## Nursery rhymes

Because rhymes are fun to say and easy to remember, they are an essential feature of nursery rhymes, the first form of poetry children learn. Examples:

### “Old Mother Hubbard” by Mother Goose

Old Mother Hubbard  
Went to the cupboard  
To get her poor dog a bone.  
But when she got there  
The cupboard was bare  
And so the poor dog had none.

### “Hey Diddle Diddle”

Hey diddle diddle  
The cat and the fiddle  
The cow jumped over the moon.  
The little dog laughed  
To see such fun  
And the dish ran away with the spoon.

## Kinds of rhyme

Words aren't always what they seem. Some pairs of words look as if they rhyme, but they don't; while others look quite different, but do rhyme.

## Types of rhyme

- **Full rhymes:** the major final sounds are identical (wild, child)
- **Near or part rhymes:** the final sounds are similar, but not identical, as in “dimmer” and “thinner”; only the consonant or vowel sounds are the same.
- **Eye rhymes:** the words look the same, but don't sound the same as in “cough” and “bough.”

## Identifying rhyme

Which types of rhyme are the following?

- Above/glove \_\_\_\_\_
- Feign/rain \_\_\_\_\_
- Wood/flood \_\_\_\_\_

## Identifying rhyme patterns

In many simple poems, the final words in successive lines often rhyme. However, this is very restrictive and can become boring unless it is used for humorous effect. Poets who choose to use rhyme usually vary it,

perhaps by making every second line rhyme or by creating a pattern of rhymes.

In the convention of naming rhyming patterns, the first rhyme is always called **A**, the next **B**, and so on. This is called the rhyme scheme.

## Finding the rhyme pattern

The rhyme pattern is based on individual stanzas. Use the following guide to find out the rhyme patterns of a stanza, or the whole poem if it is not written in stanzas.

**Step 1:** Call the final sound in the first line **A**.

**Step 2:** Search through the final sounds of the other lines for that same sound, and, if it occurs again, call that line **A** too.

**Step 3:** Go back to the first line in the stanza which isn't a rhyme and call its final sound **B**.

**Step 4:** Search for any final sounds that rhyme with **B** and call them **B** too.

**Step 5:** Continue this process, using a new letter for each new sound until all lines have been given a letter.

**NOTE:** There may be some lines that don't rhyme with any others, but letters must still be given to them.

This is what the stanza of poetry will look like after you identify the rhyme scheme:

### “Old Mother Hubbard” by Mother Goose

Old Mother Hubbard	A
Went to the cupboard	A
To get her poor dog a bone.	B
But when she got there	C
The cupboard was bare	C
And so the poor dog had none.	B

## Variation on rhyme

Most poets choose to use rhyme less obviously than in the previous poem.

In the following poem, the poet has used a definite rhyme scheme, but it is not really obvious when the poem is read aloud.

### “The Target” by Ivor Gurney

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I shot him, and it had to be  
One of us! ‘Twas him or me.  
‘Couldn’t be helped, and none can blame  
Me, for you would do the same.

My mother, she can’t sleep for fear  
Of what might be a-happening here  
To me. Perhaps it might be best  
To die, and set her fears at rest.

For worst is worst, and worry’s done.  
Perhaps he was the only son...  
Yet God keeps still, and does not say  
A word of guidance any way.

Well, if they get me, first I’ll find  
That boy, and tell him all my mind,  
And see who felt the bullet worst,  
And ask his pardon, if I durst.

All’s a tangle. Here’s my job.  
A man might rave, or shout, or sob;  
And God He takes no sort of heed.  
This is a bloody mess indeed.

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**Q:** Can you guess why the rhyme isn’t obvious?

**A:** Many of the lines are “end-stopped.” This means that there is a pause in the sense at the end of each line. However, if you paused at the end of every line in “The Target” it would spoil the sense of the poem.

For example, the first natural pause comes halfway through the second line. These two lines are called “run-on lines.” By using them the poet can still use rhyme while avoiding the singsong effect that it often produces.

#### Near rhyme and eye rhyme

Another way for a poet to make a rhyming scheme less obvious is by the use of “near rhymes” as in “crowd” and “bough” or “eye rhymes” such as “speak” and “break.”

#### Internal rhyme

Alfred Lord Tennyson has used an interesting rhyme scheme which involves more than rhyming just the final sounds in lines. He has used a technique called internal rhyme. The pattern for the first stanza is shown.

### “Nocturne” by Alfred Lord Tennyson

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The splendor falls on castle walls	A A
And snowy summits old in story:	B
The long light shakes across the lakes,	C C
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.	B
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,	D
Blow, bugle, blow, echoes, dying, dying, dying.	D D D

#### CHAPTER 5 REVIEW

- **Rhyme** refers to words with identical final sounds, generally used at the ends of lines.
- **Eye-rhyme** is where the words look, but do not sound, as if they rhyme.
- **Near** or **part-rhyme** is where either the consonants or the vowels rhyme.
- **Eye-rhyme, part-rhyme** and **run-on lines** are sometimes used to stop rhyme from becoming monotonous.
- **Rhyme schemes** are shown by letters of the alphabet: **ABAB CDCD EFEF**.

#### 6. Rhythm

There is rhythm in everything in life—in the seasons, in our heartbeat, in the sounds of an engine, in music. Some rhythms are natural rhythms, such as the rhythm of normal speech. Other rhythms conform to patterns, such as in music and poetry. Examples of musical rhythm include the waltz, march and tango.

#### Rhythm in poetry

In poetry, when rhythm falls in to definite, musical patterns, the patterns are called meter and each pattern is given a name.

In poetry, the “ / “ is used to indicate an accented or stressed syllable, the “ x “ indicates an unaccented or unstressed syllable. x/ = **iambic**, like skipping. (Nicole)

Poets create effects when they use rhythmic patterns. (The effect may create a fast-moving impression or a sing-song sense.) If the pattern occurs five times = **pentameter**.

#### CHAPTER 6 REVIEW

- Musical patterns are called **meter** and each pattern has a name. (iambic)
- The **number of times** a pattern repeats in a line of poetry (pentameter) helps to create effects like fast-moving, sing-song, etc.

## 7. Onomatopoeia

Sound is one of the most important features in poetry and so to appreciate it fully, poetry should be read aloud. Some words imitate sounds. The use of these words is called **onomatopoeia**. Poets use onomatopoeia extensively to enhance the sound of the poem through fun or for special effects, but more often, to help convey meaning, mood and atmosphere in a subtle way.

Example of words made by water: ooze, drip, gurgle, lap, squelch and patter

Other examples: buzz, trumpet, sizzle, twang, rumble, creak, clang, whisper

### Subtle use of onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia isn't always as obvious as the words listed above. Generally, poets like to be more subtle with sound words and choose words whose sound also suggests qualities. For example, words containing short sounds suggest smallness or quickness; words containing long sounds suggest largeness and slower action.

Compare the words "flit" and "saunter." Both describe movement but "flit" suggests speed and action, and "saunter" reflects the slow pace of the actual movement.

### CHAPTER 7 REVIEW

Onomatopoeia is the use of words whose sounds imitate their meaning ("bang"); or words whose sounds suggest their meaning ("thunder").

### For your interest

- Cartoonists love onomatopoeia.
- It is a major feature in many cartoons.

## 8. Assonance, Consonance, Word Sounds

### Assonance and consonance

In the section on rhyme, near-rhyme was discussed and defined as occurring when the final sounds of words are similar, but not identical as in "thinner" and "dimmer."

**Consonance** and **assonance** are names for special cases of near- or part-rhymes. In consonance, only the consonant sounds of

the words are similar; in assonance, only the vowel sounds are similar.

### Examples

Consonance: raider, rider / simmer, summer

Assonance: time, nine / summer, thunder

### Features of consonance

- The consonants sound the same
- The vowel sound is different.

### Features of assonance

- The consonants are different
- The vowels sound the same.

Poets choose to use devices such as these so that the sounds enrich the poetry without being as obvious and sometimes as intrusive as rhyme. The repetition of similar sounds in adjacent words can create interesting effects and add to the sound of the poetry. A lot of poetry is written to be read aloud or recited, so the sound patterns are just as important as the word pictures.

### Other word sounds

The sounds of individual words can help create atmosphere. Words with short vowel and consonant sounds create a sense of speed and movement; words with longer sounds slow down the pace of the poem.

### Creating atmosphere

**Mood, tone, and atmosphere** are all created by careful choice of words. Words used to describe mood, atmosphere and tone in poetry are the same used to describe them in our everyday lives. Moods we can be in—happy, lively, thoughtful, etc.; Atmosphere which can be created around us—brooding, stormy, sunny; Tones of voices which can be used—harsh, comforting, bitter, etc.

### CHAPTER 8 REVIEW

- **Assonance, consonance** and **word sounds** all help to create mood, tone and atmosphere.
- **Assonance** is a form of rhyme with words whose vowel sounds are the same.
- **Consonance** is a form of rhyme with words whose consonant sounds are the same.