



Reading On The Move

Poetry: Form, Syllables, Mood, and Tone

A **poem** is a group of words that are written to express or draw out emotion, paint a picture, or give a sense of beauty. There are certain ways to identify *poetry* from *prose*. **Prose** is a group of words written in sentences and paragraphs, like you would read in a novel or essay. **Poetry** is written with breaks in the lines of text to create a certain sound. Poetry has a beat, or *rhythm*, and sometimes it *rhymes*. It is often written in *stanzas* and uses *imagery* and *figurative language* to express emotions or ideas to the reader. This lesson will explore all of these *poetry terms*.

There are some basics of poetry that are important to know. These basics give poetry organization and help it to flow. A **stanza** is when the lines of a poem are grouped together, as with a paragraph in prose. Stanzas may have any number of lines. It is important to note that a line in a stanza is not necessarily the number of sentences. Some lines are a complete sentence; some lines are only part of a sentence.

The **form** of a poem is the way it looks on the page. The form includes the number of lines in each stanza and the length of each line. Like a paragraph in prose, each stanza is separated by a blank space. Sometimes a stanza ends at the end of a complete idea, sometimes it ends in the middle of a sentence. Poets may do this to give the poem a certain flow.

Some poems are even written in the shape of the thing they are written about. For example, if the poem is about an apple, the words in the poem are arranged in a way that creates the shape of an apple on the page. These poems are called **concrete poems**. The poem below is about arrows and the words create the shape of an arrow.

Example:

Which way do I go? Up? Down? Left? Right? How do
 I find my way
 in this
 maze? Just follow the arrows...

Poems that don't follow set patterns are written in **free verse**. Free verse is the trickiest type of poetry to tell apart from prose. Free verse is when poets write without any rules. He/she just write however he/she feels they can express themselves best. The example below is the concrete poem you just read written in free verse.

Example:

Arrows

Which way do I go?
Up?

Down?

Left? Right?
How do I find my way in this maze?
Just follow the arrows...

The syllables in the poem play a major part in the **meter**. *Meter* is the rhythmic structure of verse, so in other words, the *beat* of the poem. The meter relies on the placement and pattern of syllables in the verse. Syllables in a poem can be **stressed** (\) or **unstressed** (u). The stressed syllable is the long syllable and the unstressed syllable is the short syllable. Remember, words can have more than one syllable.

Example:

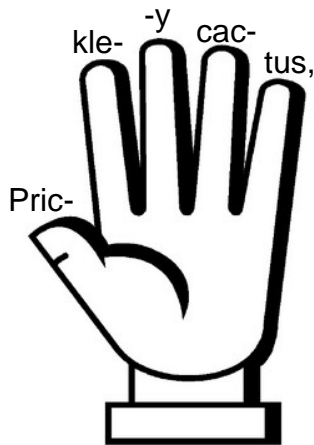
\	u	u	\	Roses are red,
\	u	u	\	Violets are blue.
\	u	u	\	Sugar is sweet,
u	\	u	\	And so are you.

You can see in this poem that the pattern of the syllables, or the *meter*, is the same for the first three lines and different for the last line.

One type of poetry that is written based on syllables is Haiku. **Haiku** is a form of Japanese poetry in which an idea is expressed in just 17 syllables. The format of these syllables is: line one is five syllables, line two is seven syllables, and line three is five syllables. Traditional Japanese haiku usually describes ideas that have to do with nature or the different seasons. As haiku has spread across the nations, the content of this poetry has broadened, but the format remains the same: **5-7-5**.

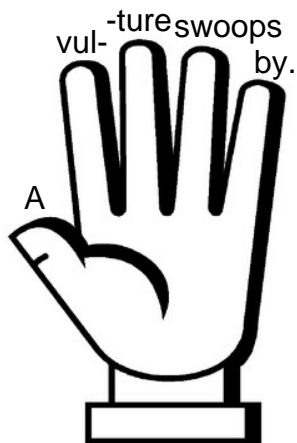
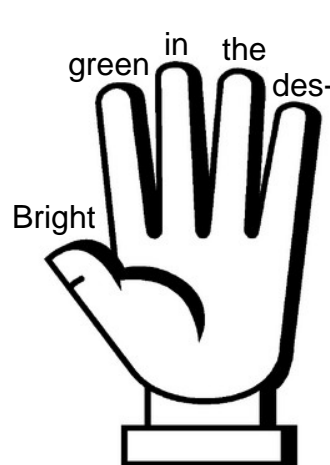
Example:

- 1 Prickly cactus,
- 2 Bright green in the desert sun.
- 3 A vulture swoops by.



← Line 1: 5 syllables

Line 2: 7 syllables →



← Line 3: 5 syllables

1. Try writing your own haiku in the space below. Remember:

- ✓ It must be three lines long.
- ✓ Line one has five syllables.
- ✓ Line two has seven syllables.
- ✓ Line three has five syllables.
- ✓ It should be about nature.

Mood is the feeling created by the poet for the reader. **Tone** is the feeling displayed by the author toward the subject of the poem. Mood and tone often depend on one another to get across what the author is trying to portray.

Example: Some words that can describe the *mood* of a poem might be:
romantic, realistic, optimistic, pessimistic, gloomy, mournful, sorrowful, etc.

Some words that can describe the *tone* of a poem might be:
serious, humorous, amused, angry, playful, cheerful, sad, gloomy, etc.

Example:

Deadly Winter

Barren branches pierce the sky,
 Chattering in the shivering breeze.
 The clouds hold captive
 Rays of the gloomy sunshine.
 Blades of grass brown and tattered
 From frost's sharp fingernails.
 Winter squeezes the last breath
 Out of all that once thrived.

This poem's mood could be described as gloomy because the poem is about death.

The tone might be described as serious. The words used in the poem give clues as to how the author feels about winter. Words like: barren, chattering, shivering, gloomy, tattered, sharp fingernails, squeezes the last breath...all show that the author does not look at winter in a good way.

Now, see how the mood and tone change when it is written a little differently:

Wondrous Winter

Long sleek branches
Sway to the music of the wind.
A game of hide and seek
The clouds and sun do play.
Blades of grass sleep
Under a sparkly blanket of frost.
Winter's beauty transforms
Landscapes into wonderlands.

This poem's mood could be described as optimistic because the poem is about the beauty of winter.

The tone might be described as cheerful.

This poem uses words like: sleek, sway to the music and hide and seek (which have a playful tone to them), sparkly, beauty, wonderland. These words suggest the author looks forward to winter.

Read each mood below. Decide whether the mood is positive or negative. Write a P on the line if it is positive and an N if it is negative. Use your dictionary skills if you come across a word you are unsure of. The first one is done for you.

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| <u> N </u> 2. angry | _____ 14. disappointed |
| _____ 3. anxious | _____ 15. offended |
| _____ 4. bored | _____ 16. optimistic |
| _____ 5. joyful | _____ 17. passionate |
| _____ 6. embarrassed | _____ 18. reassured |
| _____ 7. excited | _____ 19. relaxed |
| _____ 8. frustrated | _____ 20. relieved |
| _____ 9. guilty | _____ 21. restless |
| _____ 10. happy | _____ 22. sad |
| _____ 11. heartbroken | _____ 23. scared |
| _____ 12. irritated | _____ 24. flattered |
| _____ 13. mournful | _____ 25. threatened |

Read this poem and answer the questions on the following page.

Loneliness

Katherine Mansfield

Now it is Loneliness who comes at night
 Instead of Sleep, to sit beside my bed.
 Like a tired child I lie and wait her tread,
 I watch her softly blowing out the light.
 Motionless sitting, neither left or right
 She turns, and weary, weary droops her head.
 She, too, is old; she, too, has fought the fight.
 So, with the laurel she is garlanded.

Through the sad dark the slowly ebbing tide
 Breaks on a barren shore, unsatisfied.
 A strange wind flows... then silence. I am fain
 To turn to Loneliness, to take her hand,
 Cling to her, waiting, till the barren land
 Fills with the dreadful monotone of rain.

26. Which word best describes the tone of this poem?

- a. inspired
- b. somber
- c. optimistic
- d. frustrated

27. Which word best describes the mood of this poem?

- a. excited
- b. playful
- c. angry
- d. gloomy

28. How many stanzas does this poem have?

- a. 1
- b. 14
- c. 2
- d. 12

29. How many syllables does each line have?

- a. 5
- b. 7
- c. 10
- d. 14

Now, read the poem and answer the questions that follow.

I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud

William Wordsworth

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er* vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly* dance.

The waves beside them danced, but they
Out-did the sparkling leaves in glee*;
A poet could not be but gay*,
In such a jocund* company!
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft*, when on my couch I lie
In vacant* or in pensive* mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude*;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

Vocabulary to know...

o'er – over

sprightly – lively

glee – joy

gay – happy

jocund – joyful

oft – often

vacant – empty

pensive – thinking

solitude – alone

30. What is the mood of this poem?

- e.** playful
- f.** sorrowful
- g.** excited
- h.** cautious

31. What is the tone of this poem?

- i.** gloomy
- j.** angry
- k.** cheerful
- l.** agitated

32. This poem is made up of four...

- m.** sentences
- n.** stanzas
- o.** lines
- p.** paragraphs

← Answer Key

1. You should write a haiku. It should be about nature. The first line should be 5 syllables, the second line should be 7 syllables, and the third line should be 5 syllables.
2. N
3. N
4. N
5. P
6. N
7. P
8. N
9. N
10. P
11. N
12. N
13. N
14. N
15. N
16. P
17. P
18. P
19. P
20. P
21. N
22. N
23. N
24. P
25. N
26. b
27. d
28. c
29. c
30. a
31. c
32. b