

Senior Poetry Syllabus

What is Poetry?

Poetry is the practice of creating artworks using language. Poets use techniques like: attentiveness, concentration, experiment, originality and form to enhance everyday language (Poetry for Dummies).

How is poetry different from everyday language?

- Poets are extremely careful with how they use their language. They pay attention to everything from spelling to the way the words sound and what they mean.
- Poetry has more meaning, music and emotion per word.
- Poets use language in as many new, surprising and challenging ways as they can come up with.
- Poetry says or does something new; it makes something new happen in the reader's mind.
- It makes nice with the gods.
- It tells the stories of their communities.
- It records history.
- It commemorates a moment of personal history.
- It is a clear snapshot of experience.
- It embodies feelings.

How to study poetry

S - structure
P - poetic devices
I - imagery
T - tone
T - theme

What is Poetry?

Poetry and the understanding of poetry are as unique to the individual as their own fingerprints. Your experiences, beliefs and interests will allow you to see or think you see things in poetry that may, or may not be there. The goal of this unit is to make more evident the things that are really there so that you can enjoy the things that you experience within a poem.

Ars Poetica – Archibald MacLeish

Key Poetic Devices: simile – personification - imagery

Questions:

- The Latin title “The Art of Poetry” is a traditional title for works that deal with what poetry is. What is this poet’s philosophy on poetry? Why?
- How does the poet use simile to make his philosophy clear? Which comparison do you find most intriguing? Why?

Introduction To Poetry – Billy Collins

Key Poetic Devices: simile – metaphor - imagery - hyperbole

Questions:

- What words and images stand out in this poem? Choose one that really speaks to you. What about it intrigued or appealed to you?
- What do you think Collins is saying about the study of poetry? According to Collins, what is the real goal of reading poetry?
- Compare stanzas 5 and 6. How does the humour used in these stanzas bring his theme to light?

Structure

Within structure we explore the make up of a poem. Does the format require a specific number of lines? Is the poem broken into couplets, quatrains, an octet? Is there specific repetition of lines or words? We will be looking at the sonnet, the villanelle and the ode. Some requirements are structural, some are content based but the poem is what it is because of its format.

Sonnet 87 by William Shakespeare

Shakespeare was born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. He grew up to become a respected theatre player in London and his first published poem, *Venus and Adonis*, gave him notability in 1593. Also in that year, the plague forced many acting theatres to close, for fear of infection, and his theatre company, Lord Chamberlain's Men, moved to perform in the Theatre in London. Shakespeare wrote many plays for the company, and about two were written every year. The possibility of losing the Theatre in London in 1597 caused it to be torn down, and the timbers were used to build another theatre, the most famous in England, called the Globe Theatre. Shakespeare died in 1616, ironically on his birthday, at the age of 52. He left behind 37 plays, 154 sonnets, and many other poems.

Key Poetic Devices: double entendre – rhyme scheme - imagery

Questions:

- What do you know about the format of the sonnet?
- How is the structure of the poem used to convey the message?
- How does Shakespeare use ambiguity and double meaning to express his sense of loss in this poem?
- How does Shakespeare explore the idea of “worth” in the poem?
- Have you ever felt devalued as a person? How does this poem express how Shakespeare feels devalued?

Do Not Go Gentle – Dylan Thomas

Another traditional poetic form is the villanelle. A villanelle is a medieval verse form that continues to be written today. It consists of nineteen lines (five tercets and a quatrain;

5x3 + 4), and it is built on two rhyming sounds. It has a rhyme scheme of aba aba aba aba aba abaa. But notice that it is not only the rhyming sounds that repeat: whole lines recur throughout the poem. The first line is also repeated as line six, line twelve, and line eighteen. Line three appears again as line nine, line fifteen, and line nineteen.

The beauty of villanelle --

". . . the form [of villanelle] has remarkable unity of structure. The echoing and reechoing of the refrains give the villanelle a plaintive, delicate beauty that some poets find irresistible."

Difficulties of villanelle --

"Since it has only two rhymed endings, the poem can easily become monotonous. The risks of monotony are increased by the incessant appearance of the refrains that constitute eight of the poems' nineteen lines -- nearly half of the poem " (The Heath Guide to Literature 637).

Key Poetic Devices: repetition – rhyme scheme – imagery – inductive/deductive

Questions:

- Explore how Thomas moves from the general to the specific within the poem. How does this intensify his point?
- Explore the development of the “men” image. What does this reveal about tone?
- What tone is created through the repetition of lines?
- Explore the imagery in the poem. How does imagery relate to theme(s)?

Ode to Meaning – Robert Pinsky

An ode is a lyric poem that expresses subjects of elevated stature using stately and elaborate language. Lyric poetry is highly emotional and personal. But as with most things in English, there are exceptions; not all odes are lyrics. Odes usually have some sort of Grecian (Greek) reference in them as well as the elevated language. The best English odes were written by John Keats – “Ode on a Nightingale”, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and so on. Ode to Meaning is a modern version of a 17th century format.

Key Poetic Devices: repetition – imagery – allusion – apostrophe - paradox

Questions:

- Explore how Pinsky uses allusion to broaden his audience appeal. What does this do to his poem?
- Explore the development of the images. What images stood out to you? Why?
- How does the poet use paradox to explore the ambiguity of meaning?
- The poet calls meaning “Dire one, desired one, saviour and sentencer”. How do these ideas sum up his theme?

Poetic Devices – Personification & Metaphor

There are many poetic devices or figures of speech as they are sometimes called. We will be looking at personification, metaphor, paradox and irony in details and other devices in passing. Make sure that you understand what each of these devices is and

what they do in the poem. The poetic devices create the imagery and the tone of the poem.

The Last Lesson by D.H. Lawrence

Key Poetic Devices: imagery – alliteration – extended metaphor – simile - point of view

Questions:

- Discuss the effectiveness of the images that the poet uses to express his disillusionment with school?
- What extended metaphor is the poem based on?
- How does the tone change within the poem? How does the syntax (sentence structure) show us the tone?

Digging by Seamus Heaney

Key Poetic Devices: simile – onomatopoeia – imagery – colloquialism – monosyllabic words – repetition - alliteration

Questions:

- What attitude does Heaney have towards the work that his grandfather and father did? How is this expressed? What tone is used that makes us understand his feelings?
- How does Heaney make his reader live this experience with him? Give specific examples.
- What does the addition of colloquialism add to the poem and its intensity?

Poetic Devices – Paradox & Irony

Irony is one of the most difficult ideas to understand. It is often confused with sarcasm. When people say “I was being sarcastic”, more often than not, they were actually being ironic. Here’s the difference: Verbal irony (where one says the opposite of what they mean) is most often confused with sarcasm. Sarcasm is bitter and intends to wound. The word is derived from the Greek meaning “to tear flesh”. Irony can be used without any sarcastic intent.

Here are examples: Student says: “I don’t understand”. Teacher says: “well I wouldn’t expect *you* to.” – that’s sarcasm.

Teacher says: “I have some *bad* news - you all got an A on the project.” – that’s irony.

The Unknown Citizen – WH Auden

Key Poetic Devices: irony – paradox

Questions:

- Explore the allusion and irony in the title. Why was the citizen “unknown”?
- How does Auden use irony throughout the poem to give an account of the citizen’s life? Pick one or two images that stand out to you. Why do they stand out as more intensely ironic than other images?
- What trends in “modern” life and social organization does the poem satirize?

Ironic – Alanis Morissette

Key Poetic Devices: irony (maybe)

Questions:

- Explore the shaded lines in the song. Which of the lines are really ironic?
- What is the true irony of this song?

Imagery

Imagery is best described as “the representation through language of sense experience” (Arp & Johnson 54). More often than not, in literature, we are given visual imagery which allows us to create a mental picture of what is written about. There are four other types of imagery: sound (auditory), smell (olfactory), touch (tactile) and taste (gustatory). Great poets give a complete sensory experience in the poetry (54).

After Apple Picking – Robert Frost

Key Poetic Devices: imagery – symbolism - repetition

Questions:

- What images does the poet use to convey the experience of “apple-picking”? Which senses does he appeal to? Which sense appeals to you most strongly? Why?
- The poet describes a dream that he has not yet had. How are the dream and real experiences explored in the poem?
- The poem uses the word sleep six times. Does it, through repetition, come to mean more than just sleeping? What is the poet’s attitude towards its’ deeper significance?
- If sleep is symbolic, this changes other elements of the poem. How do you interpret the ladder, the seasons, the harvesting and the glass is sleep is symbolic? Does this fit or is it a stretch?

Blackberry Picking – Seamus Heaney

Key Poetic Devices: simile – onomatopoeia – imagery – colloquialism – monosyllabic words – repetition – alliteration - metaphor

Questions:

- How does Heaney make his reader live this experience with him? Give specific examples.
- This poem is not just about the childhood joy of picking blackberries, what is the underlying message?
- How is this message explored? What images, words, and metaphors does Heaney use to make his point?
- There are two voices in this poem, whose voice do we hear? How is this key to the theme of the poem?

Tone

Tone is described in literature as the writer or speaker's attitude towards the subject or the reader. It is the emotional colouring of the piece. Try saying "How you doin'?" in a number of different ways to change the meaning of what you are asking – that is part of tone. Tone words are words like: ecstatic, despairing, resigned, elegiac, mournful etc (155).

What Teachers Make by Taylor Mali

Key Poetic Devices: imagery – repetition – colloquialism – parallelism - point of view

Questions:

- Discuss the effectiveness of the images that the poet uses to express his disillusionment with those who are disdainful towards teachers?
- Whose point of view is the poem told from? How does the point of view change the poem?
- Who are the speakers in the poem? What tone is used for each speaker? How does this help the poet get his message across?
- How does seeing the poet slam his poem make the message so much clearer?

Wodwo by Ted Hughes

Key Poetic Devices: enjambment – punctuation – repetition – imagery – stream of consciousness

Questions:

- How does the imagery express the search for meaning?
- How does Hughes use punctuation and repetition to express the search for meaning?
- What is the tone in the beginning of the poem? What is the tone at the end of the poem? How does lack of punctuation help to create this tone?
- Discuss the imagery in the poem. How does the poet use imagery to make the reader feel what Wodwo feels?

Theme

Theme is the meaning of the work as a whole, the message that the poet is getting across. The theme is not hidden in-between the lines, all there is in-between the lines, is space. If you have looked at the S P I and T of the poem, the theme should be obvious. If it isn't, read it again. And again. Then discuss with a friend. Then we'll talk.

To Fight Aloud is Very Brave – Emily Dickenson

Key Poetic Devices: your turn – what are the key devices

SPIT on the poem and tell us its theme.

If – Rudyard Kipling

Key Poetic Devices: your turn – what are the key devices

SPIT on the poem and tell us its theme.

Song Lyrics as Poetry

In this day and age people don't go to poetry readings like they used to, they don't write poetry with the same reverence – instead we spend our time listening to songs. Music is such a major part of most lives that a poetry unit would be incomplete without a look at the poetry of our every day lives – the songs that we listen to. The lyrics of many modern songs are lost as we can't hear or discern what the lead singer is saying. But the lyrics are part of the message of the song. Yes the music is key, without the music, the song is not as memorable but let's take a look at the lyrics of two of our favourite songs.

Sing Our Own Song – UB40

This is a protest song that UB40 released in 1986 while South Africa was still strictly under the apartheid regime. Blacks had no voting rights in the country, sanctions were in place and tensions were starting to run high. This song was played during a concert held by UB40 to support the release of Nelson Mandela from Robbin Island prison.

Hummingbird – Wilco

Wilco is an American rock band based in Chicago, Illinois. Wilco's music is typically categorized as alternative rock and alternative country. Wilco draws influence from bands from a variety of musical genres, but primarily from music created between 1966 and 1974. Listen to Hummingbird – what emotions does it raise in you?

In Class Poetry Slam – September 18 & 19th, 2008

You will slam any poetic piece – this includes song lyrics. **Memorize** your piece, practice your performance; be ready to present the poem in class as part of the poetry slam. The presentation / slam is worth 50.

Requirements:

- Piece must be at least 14 lines long
- Must be school appropriate
- Presentation may not be longer than two minutes
- Pieces must be memorized
- Must have a copy of the poem with you for the accuracy check

This is the rubric that will be used to judge your presentation of your poem.

Criteria	Explanation	Points	Total
Tone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control and variation of volume. • Use of emphasis in appropriate places. • Use of varied tone of voice, e.g. upset, angry etc. 	5 5 5	/15
Clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity of speech • Enunciation of words • POW factor 	2 2 3	/7
Use of facial and physical gestures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eye contact with audience • Appropriate facial expressions and hand gestures • Appropriate use of motion and lack of motion 	3 3 2	/8
Memorization & Accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poem is completely memorized. 	20	/20
			/50

Culminating Assignment

Pick ONE of the assignments listed below as your culminating assignment for this unit.

Final Paper: Pick either one poem that we have studied or any poem that is considered part of the canon and is written by a British author and find a modern song that has the same theme. In a well written 750 essay, compare and contrast the poem and its modern lyrical counterpart. Compare and contrast on the basis of: structure, poetic devices, imagery, tone and theme. Relate to the time period to which they are specific to explore the unique appeal and then draw the comparisons to explore their universal and timeless appeal.

Play the critic: Pick the poem that you most dislike. Play the part of the educated critic. Write a 750 word editorial in which you give your critique of the poem. What elements of the poem fail? Reference SPITT.

Art Piece: Pick your favourite poem or song lyrics (must be school appropriate). Prepare an art work that is a visual representation of the poem. The piece should tell the same story as the poem. Poetic devices should become visual devices. Write an accompanying description (300 words) that explains how the piece represents the poem. Elements that should be obvious in the visual are: imagery, tone and theme.

Create your own: Pick one poem that we have studied, and use this poem as a model for a poem of your own creation. For example if you choose Heaney as your model poet, you will use alliteration, imagery that appeals to all five senses, colloquialism and monosyllabic words to create your own poem.