

Poetry Words Worth Learning

Alliteration, Assonance, Consonance: Similar sounds repeated, as in *little lights* (**alliteration** of the letter “L”), *dreams seem real* (**assonance** of vowel “E”), and *thunder drums in the distance* (**consonance** of consonant “D”).

Allusion: A direct or indirect **reference** to something else, such as a literary work, character, or event. A literary work can “allude” (*mention* or *refer*) to one or more other works, characters, historic persons, myths, and so on.

Apostrophe: When the **speaker of a poem** talks to *someone* or *something* imagined or *no longer around*.

Concrete Poetry: When words are arranged in the *shape of the subject* the poem is about (e.g. a *heart for love*).

Connotation / Denotation: Words can *imply* or *suggest* (*connote*; be *connotative*) or *speak clearly, directly*, and *mean just what they say* (*denote*; be *denotative*).

Couplet: Two lines of verse (poetry). Couplets can often *end in the same sound* (**rhyme** – see below).

Epic: A long poem often about a hero’s adventure. *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, and *The Aeneid* are all **epic poems**.

Foot: A unit of measurement used along with **meter** (see below) to describe the regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a poem’s lines. Such “feet” include the **iamb** (as in *iambic pentameter*, unstressed followed by a stressed syllable), the **trochee** (as in *trochaic tetrameter*, stressed followed by an unstressed syllable), the **anapest** (two unstressed syllables followed a stressed syllable), the **dactyl** (a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables), the **spondee** (two stressed syllables in succession), and the **pyrrhic** (two unstressed syllables in succession).

Form: Poems written in a **poetic form** (also known as **formal verse**) generally adhere to the **structure and rules** of that form. Many different forms of poetry exist. Popular poetic forms include **haiku** and **sonnets** (see below).

Free Verse: Poetry without regular rhythms (**meter** – see below) or **rhyme scheme** (see below). AKA **vers libre**.

Haiku: Classic **Japanese poem**, often about **nature** and arranged in **three lines** (5, 7, 5 syllables respectively).

Imagery: Vivid verbal pictures of persons or things (e.g. *frog* and *calm pond* in *a frog leaps into the calm pond*). Just like painters, poets can “paint” with words in various styles and artistically express things creatively.

Interpretation: Interpretation is **what you believe a poem means**. Each person interprets things uniquely due to her or his experiences in life, ideas, expectations, beliefs, and so on. This means each poem can be interpreted *any number of ways* by people. One poem can, in fact, mean *many things*! This is one of the most important and rewarding concepts of poetry! Also, your interpretations can *change* when you reread poems later.

Metaphor: When something is **described** as (or figuratively **equated** with) something *else*: *The world is a stage*.

Meter: A measurement of regularly stressed and unstressed accented syllables in lines of poetry. Some poems (such as **Sonnets** – see below) are fairly *metrical*. Some popular meters are trimeter (three stressed syllables a line), tetrameter (four), and pentameter (five). Many sonnets have iambic pentameter.

Onomatopoeia: “*Onomatopoeic*” words **sound like** what they *mean*: *buzz, click, fizz, hum, pop, splash, whoosh!*

Poetic License: Freedom to express regardless of rules, logic, expectations, etc. Also known as *artistic license*.

Rhyme Scheme: The pattern of **rhyming words** (words ending with similar sounds) within a poem. Many contemporary poems (especially those written in **free verse** – see above) do *not* have a rhyme scheme.

Rhythm: The general rise and fall of stressed / unstressed syllables (stressed word parts) in a poem. Most classic poetry and poems written in **forms** using **meter** (see above). **Free verse** (see above) usually has *irregular rhythms*.

Simile: When something is compared with something else: *as bright as the sun* or *like as two peas in a pod*.

Sonnet: A classic poetic **form** (see above) traditionally **14 lines** long. Different kinds of sonnets exist: Petrarchan, Shakespearean, each with their own **rhyme scheme** (see above). Some poets who wrote in this form include Elizabeth Barrett Browning, John Donne, Petrarch, and William Shakespeare, who wrote over 150 sonnets.

Speaker of a Poem: The **person** (represented by the letter “I”) narrating the poem. That person could be a **fictitious character** or the *poet* speaking. It is usually best *never to assume the speaker is the poet*.

Stanza: A **group of lines** in a poem. A two-line stanza is often called a couplet. A **3, 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8-line stanza** is respectively called a **tercet, quatrain, quintet** (or *cinquain* or *quintain*), **sestet, septet, or octet**.