

SECTION

8

POETIC ELEMENTS



POETRY

KNOWING YOUR POETIC ELEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to another section. You are going to be introduced to another genre of literature, **Poetry**. The aim of this section is to expose you to narrative and lyrical poems. In this section, you will gain a comprehensive understanding of the distinctive forms and features of poetry. You will also look at epics, ballads, sonnets, elegies and odes. Your diligence in going through these poems, will grow your love for reading for pleasure; you will also come to appreciate the craft of the poets while recognising the distinct features that distinguish one poem from another. This deeper understanding will enhance your ability to analyse and interpret various poetic works.

By the end of the section, you should be able to

- Analyse different forms of narrative poems (Epics, Ballads, Idyll, Lay) with increasing complexity of meaning and effect.
- Distinguish between the features of narrative poems and lyrical poems in context.

Key Ideas

- Poetry is one of the three main genres of literature.
- Poetry is frequently imaginative, fictive or creative writing in which language, sound and rhythm are combined to create special emotional effects.
- It is often written in lines and stanzas.
- It often uses compressed and dense language.
- Based on the form of writing, poetry can be grouped into three main types: narrative poem; lyrical poem and dramatic poem.
- Narrative poetry is a poem that tells a story. Examples include epics, ballads, many sonnets, elegies and odes.

Poetry

Poetry is one of the three genres of literature that can be understood in several ways such as:

1. It refers to creative writing that combines language, image, sound and rhythm to create special emotional effects.
2. It can be the rhythmic overflow of words to express a thought.

- Poetry can also be seen as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings which take their origin from the notion of “emotion in tranquillity” as the famous English poet, Wordsworth considered.

Many poems are divided into stanzas which are like paragraphs. Poetry uses figurative language and relies more on imaginative language than other genres of literature.

Characteristics of Poetic Forms

Let us now look at some of the key characteristics of poetry.

- Poetry can be written in verses.
- It can use metre, rhyme, rhythm and lines, especially in formal poetry.
- Its main parts lines and stanzas.
- It often uses compressed and dense language.
- It aims to evoke emotions in listeners and readers.
- It can use imagery like metaphor, simile, personification, metonymy and synecdoche.
- It can have aesthetic power (beauty).

Types of Poems

Depending on the form of writing, poems can be grouped into three main types:

- Narrative poems:** These are poems that take the form of narratives. Narrative poems often tell a story. The story can revolve around a particular character or many characters and what they experience. Narrative poems might also focus on the deeds, the weakness(es) and strengths of an individual or a society. It can be very long or short enough to still make readers feel like they are reading a story. Narrative poems can take the form of epic, ballad and romance in key examples. Specific examples of narrative poems include Samuel Tyler Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Marina* and *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer.
- Lyrical poetry:** Just like its name, a lyrical poem is a short ‘musical’ poem which started in ancient Greece. It expresses the poet’s strong personal feelings, thoughts or emotions on a topic or issue. Originally, lyrical poems were sung a minstrel to the music of a lyre or harp. Today, lyrical poetry is still short, rhythmic and sometimes, can be sung. This also explains why we call the words in poems such as odes, elegies and villanelles “lyrics”.
- Dramatic poetry:** This is a type of poem which contains elements of drama. It is meant to be performed on a stage or read aloud. The poem often features a character with a unique voice. It includes different speakers who have their own distinct voice. Dramatic poetry is usually in the form of a monologue or dialogue in voice and structure.

Features of Narrative Poems

A narrative poem tells a story through elements of poetry and storytelling. Here are some of the key features of a narrative poem:

1. **Plot:** A narrative poem has a clear plot with a beginning, middle and end. It involves events that unfold in a sequence, leading to a resolution. The poem features characters who participate in the action. These characters can be people, animals, or even personified objects.
2. **Setting:** The poem establishes a specific time and place where the story occurs. The setting helps the reader to understand the story's context.
3. **Dialogue:** Characters often speak directly in narrative poems. Dialogue can advance the plot and reveal character traits.
4. **Narrative Voice:** The story is told from a particular point of view (the angle from which the story is told). This could be first-person (from a character's perspective) or third-person (an outside observer).
5. **Structure:** Narrative poems are organised into stanzas, which are groups of lines. Each stanza may represent a different part of the story or a shift in action. While not always required, many narrative poems use a rhyme scheme, which can add rhythm and musicality to the storytelling.
6. **Imagery:** Narrative poems often use vivid imagery and descriptive language to create a strong sense of place and character, making the story more engaging.
7. **Themes:** Like other forms of literature, narrative poems explore themes or messages. These themes are often conveyed through the story's events and characters. Common themes usually explored include love and identity.
8. **Tone and Mood:** The tone and mood of a narrative poem can vary depending on the story being told. The choice of words and the way the story is narrated contribute to the overall emotional effect.
9. **Verse Form:** The lines in a narrative poem can vary in length and are typically written in a rhythmic pattern, though they don't always have to follow a strict arrangement.

Let us turn our focus on how to analyse a narrative poem, using the guide below.

Narrative Poetry Analysis Guide

This guide will help you to do an in-depth analysis of a narrative poem. Remember to read/ listen to the poem several times.

Poem Title:

Author:

Date of Publication (if known):

1. **Summary:** Write a brief summary of the poem in your own words:
2. **Structure:** How is the poem structured? Answer the following:
 - a) Number of Stanzas:

- b) Number of Lines per Stanza:
 - c) Rhyme Scheme: (e.g., ABAB, AABB)
3. **Setting:** Where and when does the poem take place? Describe the setting.
 4. **Characters:** Who are the main characters in the poem? Describe them briefly.
 5. **Theme:** What is/are the main themes of the poem?
 6. **Language and Imagery:** Identify and explain any vivid imagery or figurative language used in the poem. Provide at least two examples:
 - a) Example 1:
 - i. Example of Figurative Language (e.g., metaphor, simile):
 - ii. Explanation:
 - b) Example 2:
 - i. Example of Figurative Language (e.g., personification, hyperbole):
 - ii. Explanation:
 7. **Tone and Mood:**
 - a) What is the tone of the poem? (How does the speaker feel about the subject?)
 - b) What is the mood of the poem? (How does the poem make you feel?)
 8. **Speaker:** Who is/are the speaker/speakers of the poem? Describe their perspective and voice.
 9. **Sound Devices:** Identify any sound devices used in the poem by using the following as a guide:
 - a) **Alliteration:** (Repeated consonant sounds at the beginning of words)
 - b) **Assonance:** (Repeated vowel sound)
 - c) **Onomatopoeia:** (Words that imitate sounds)
 Provide examples for each if applicable.
 10. **Personal Reflection:** How does the poem make you feel? What are your personal thoughts or reactions to the poem?

Activity 8.1

Storyboard revision on narrative writing

Let us do a little revision of what we know on features of narrative writing. You will need a number of manila cards (about 5 or more), a marker or pencil.

1. With a friend, discuss and agree on the plot of a short story to be used for a storyboard. A storyboard is a series of illustrations or drawings displayed in sequence to visualise the scenes of a story.

2. Outline the story by determining which parts of the story should be drawn to represent that part of the plot on the story board.
3. Draw each if the items outlined to depict the plot of your chosen story on each of manila cards.
4. Now answer the following with evidence from the storyboard
 - a. Briefly describe what is happening in each drawing on each manila card briefly.
 - b. With the help of your storyboard, outline what the plot is and the elements of plot in the story
 - c. Identify the major and minor characters and tabulate them.
 - d. Which type/types of conflict are evident in the story and how are these conflicts resolved?

Activity 8.2

Features of oral narrative poems

1. Click the link below to watch a video on an oral narrative poem.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O63QIqCSfkw>
2. Discuss the features of oral narrative poems as seen in the above video.
3. Write down your responses and present using PowerPoint.
4. Search for a sample epic or ballad or idyll on your tablet/phone.
5. Look for the distinct features of the poem you just searched for and present your findings to the whole class for feedback. Think critically; you can do this.

Lyrical and Narrative Poem

A lyrical poem is a short poem, often with songlike or musical qualities, that expresses the poet/speaker's personal emotions and feelings. It is originally meant to be sung and accompanied by instruments while a narrative poem is a poem that tells a story.

Characteristics of Lyrical and Narrative Poems

Characteristics of Lyrical Poetry	Characteristics of Narrative Poetry
1. Expresses personal emotions.	1. Tells a story with a clear plot and characters.
2. Shorter and often in the form of songs, sonnets or odes.	2. Can be longer. Examples include ballads and epics.

3. Features regular metre and rhyme schemes.	3. Focuses on story elements and may/may not have regular metre elements.
4. Uses figurative language, imagery and symbolism.	4. Uses descriptive and narrative language.

Features of Lyrical Poems

Lyrical poems have certain features that set them apart from other types of poetry. Here are the main ones:

1. **Emotional Expression:** Lyrical poems are primarily concerned with expressing personal emotions, feelings, and thoughts. They explore the poet's inner world and reflect on deeply personal experiences.
2. **First-Person Perspective:** They are often written from the first-person point of view ("I" or "we"), creating an intimate and personal connection between the speaker and the reader.
3. **Musical Quality:** Lyrical poems frequently employ rhythmic and melodic elements, such as metre, rhyme, and alliteration, to create a musical flow. The structure and sound patterns contribute to the overall beauty of the poem and make it easy to be memorised.
4. **Imagery and Symbolism:** They often employ clear imagery and symbolic language to arouse emotions and create a sensory experience. This helps to convey abstract concepts and personal feelings in a more authentic way.
5. **Concision and Focus:** Lyrical poems tend to be brief, usually focusing on a single theme or emotion. The shortness of the poem and the clarity of the message allow for strong and compressed expression.
6. **Subjectivity:** The tone of lyrical poems is highly subjective and personal, reflecting the poet's individual view and emotional state rather than presenting an objective viewpoint.
7. **Exploration of Abstract Themes:** Lyrical poetry often explores abstract themes such as love, nature, beauty, and mortality, using metaphor and symbolic language to convey deeper meanings.
8. **Varied Form:** While there is no strict form, lyrical poetry can be written in various structures, such as sonnets, odes, or elegies, each with its own rules but still maintaining a focus on personal expression and musicality.

Activity 8.3

A panel discussion on lyrical poems



The picture above is a panel discussion of a mixed ability and mixed gender group.

1. Team up with two more classmates of different abilities / gender (where applicable) and arrange your chairs and tables in a similar manner.
2. Each of you should search for the key features of lyrical poetry using your tablets and note your findings.
3. Compare your answers with the rest of the group and write your best responses down.
4. Your teacher will lead a discussion on the features of lyrical poems. Present your findings boldly when it is your turn to speak.

Activity 8.4

Sample Lyrical Poems with features.

In your groups, your teacher will guide you to identify the features of lyrical and narrative poems as seen in the following poems (or a poem of his/her choice).

Lyrical Poem: I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud by 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:
 The thousand saw I at a glance,
 Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.
 The waves beside them danced; but they
 Outdid the sparkling waves in glee:
 A poet could not but be 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,
 The flash upon that inward wye
 Which is the bliss of solitude;
 And then my heart with pleasure fills,
 And dances with the daffodils.

The following questions will guide you to identify the features of lyrical poems (in the absence of your teacher).

1. Emotional Expression:
 - a. How does the speaker feel when he/she sees the daffodils?
 - b. What emotions are described in the poem?
 - c. Can you find words that express joy or happiness?
2. Imagery and Symbolism:
 - a. What pictures do you see in your mind when you read the poem?
 - b. What words does the poet use to describe the daffodils?
 - c. How does the description of the daffodils make you feel?
 - d. What do daffodils mean to the poet/persona?
3. Musical Quality:
 - a. Can you find a pattern in the rhyming words?
 - b. How does the rhythm of the poem sound when you read it aloud?
 - c. Do you think this poem could be sung? Why or why not?
4. Personal Experience:
 - a. How does the poet describe his/her own experience of seeing the daffodils?
 - b. What does the poet remember about the daffodils later?
 - c. Why do you think the memory of the daffodils is important to the poet?

Narrative Poem: Rime of the Ancient Mariner by Samuel Tyler Coleridge

Excerpt from Part I

It is an ancient mariner

And he stoppeth one of three.

--"By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,

Now wherefore stoppest thou me?

The bridegroom's doors are opened wide,

And I am next of kin;

The guests are met, the feast is set:

Mayst hear the merry din."

He holds him with his skinny hand,

"There was a ship," quoth he.

"Hold off! unhand me, grey-beard loon!"

Eftsoons his hand dropped he.

He holds him with his glittering eye--

The wedding-guest stood still,

And listens like a three-years' child:

The mariner hath his will.

The wedding-guest sat on a stone:

He cannot choose but hear;

And thus spake on that ancient man,

The bright-eyed mariner.

"The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,

Merrily did we drop

Below the kirk, below the hill,

Below the lighthouse top.

The sun came up upon the left,

Out of the sea came he!

And he shone bright, and on the right

Went down into the sea.

Higher and higher every day,

Till over the mast at noon--"

The wedding-guest here beat his breast,

For he heard the loud bassoon.

The bride hath paced into the hall,
 Red as a rose is she;
 Nodding their heads before her goes
 The merry minstrelsy.
 The wedding-guest he beat his breast,
 Yet he cannot choose but hear;
 And thus spake on that ancient man,
 The bright-eyed mariner.
 “And now the storm-blast came, and he
 Was tyrannous and strong;
 He struck with his o’ertaking wings,
 And chased us south along.

a) Story Elements:

- i. Who are the main characters in the poem?
- ii. What events happen in the poem? Can you describe the plot?
- iii. Where does the story take place?

b) Characters:

- i. What do we know about the Ancient Mariner?
- ii. How does he interact with other characters in the poem?
- iii. What happens to the other sailors?

c) Conflict:

- i. What is the main problem or conflict in the poem?
- ii. How does the conflict affect the characters?

d) Narrative Structure:

- i. How is the poem divided into different parts or sections?
- ii. Can you identify the beginning, middle, and end of the story?
- iii. How does the story move from one event to the next?

e) Imagery and Descriptions:

- i. What images stand out in the poem?
- ii. How does the poet describe the sea and the ship?
- iii. Can you find examples of vivid or striking language?

Activity 8.5**Categorising Narrative and Lyrical Poems**

1. Below is a list of poems. Using your tablet, search the internet for each of the poems and read.
2. Now categorise the poems listed under the headings ‘Lyrical Poetry’ or ‘Narrative Poetry’.
 - i. “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” by William Wordsworth
 - ii. “The Highwayman” by Alfred Noyes
 - iii. “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge
 - iv. “Paul Revere’s Ride” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
 - v. “Sonnet 18” by William Shakespeare
3. Give evidence based on each of the poems to support the fact that they are truly what you say they are and not otherwise.

Review Questions

1. What is poetry?
2. Mention three characteristics of poems.
3. Explain the three types of poems.
4. List three features of narrative poems.
5. Tabulate the narrative features of Daffodils.
6. Do an analysis of one of your selected poems using the poetry analysis guide provided earlier.

Answers to Review Questions

1. Poetry refers to creative writing that combines language, image, sound and rhythm to create special emotional effects.

2. Poetry can be written in verses.

It can employ metre, rhyme and lines, especially when it is formal.

Its primary units are lines and stanzas.

It often uses compressed and dense language.

3. Narrative poems: These are poems that take the form of narratives. Narrative poems often tell a story.

Lyrical poetry: Just like its name, a lyrical poem is a short ‘musical’ poem which started in ancient Greece.

Dramatic poetry: This is a type of poem which contains elements of drama. It is meant to be performed on a stage or read aloud.

4. Plot

Setting

Dialogue

Narrative voice

Structure

Themes

Imagery

5.

Narrative Feature	Description
Point of View	The first person point of view is seen in the poem as the speaker shares his personal reflections in lines such as “I wandered lonely as a cloud”, “Ten thousand saw I at a glance”, “And then my heart with pleasure fills”, etc.
Setting	A natural setting is revealed as the persona implies places like the countryside, near a lake, during springtime when daffodils bloom.
Imagery	Vivid imagery is employed through lines like “A host of golden daffodils,” “fluttering and dancing in the breeze,” and “continuous as the stars”.
Mood	The tranquil and uplifting mood, evokes a sense of peace and joy.

Structure	The poem is made up of four six-line stanzas (quatrains) with a rhyme scheme of ABABCC.
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6. The poem Daffodils has been used as a guide.

Poem Title: Daffodils

Author: William Wordsworth

Date of Publication: 1807

1. Summary: The poem describes the speaker's encounter with a field of daffodils and the lasting impact of this experience on his mind and emotions. The sight of the flowers brings joy and inspiration, serving as a source of comfort and happiness in times of solitude.
2. Structure:
 - a) Number of Stanzas: 4
 - b) Number of Lines per Stanza: 6
 - c) Rhyme Scheme: ABABCC
3. Setting: The poem takes place in a natural setting, likely in the countryside, where the speaker encounters a vast field of daffodils beside a lake, beneath the sky. The time is not specified but can be inferred to be during the day in spring when daffodils bloom.
4. Characters: The main character is the speaker, who is a nature lover and finds solace in the beauty of the daffodils. The daffodils themselves are personified and play a significant role as the source of the speaker's joy and inspiration.
5. Theme: The main themes of the poem include the beauty of nature, the power of memory, and the emotional and spiritual upliftment derived from nature.
6. Language and Imagery:
 - a) Example of Figurative Language: Simile ii.
Explanation: "I wandered lonely as a cloud" compares the speaker's wandering to that of a solitary cloud, emphasizing his initial loneliness.
 - b) Example of Figurative Language: Personification
Explanation: "Fluttering and dancing in the breeze" gives the daffodils human-like qualities, making them seem lively and joyful.
7. Tone and Mood:
 - a) Tone: The tone is reflective and joyous, as the speaker fondly remembers the sight of the daffodils.
 - b) Mood: The poem creates a feeling of tranquillity and happiness, making the reader appreciate the beauty of nature.
8. Speaker: The speaker is likely Wordsworth himself, who appreciates the beauty of nature and finds deep emotional and spiritual connection in the natural world. His perspective is introspective and celebratory of nature's impact on his inner life.
9. Sound Devices:

- a) Alliteration: “Fluttering and dancing in the breeze” - The repetition of the ‘f’ sound.
 - b) Assonance: “A host, of golden daffodils” - The repetition of the ‘o’ sound.
10. Personal Reflection: The poem makes me feel a deep sense of peace and appreciation for the natural world. Wordsworth’s vivid descriptions and use of imagery transport me to the scene of the daffodils, and I can almost feel their presence and the joy they bring. It reminds me of the importance of finding beauty and solace in nature, especially during times of solitude.

Additional Reading

1. The Road Not Taken – Robert Frost
2. Annabel Lee – Edgar Allan Poe
3. The Nun’s Priest’s Tale – Geoffrey Chaucer

References

1. https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/25/Coleman_Poem_Do_not_go_gentle_into_that_good_night.pdf
2. <http://triggs.djvu.org/djvu-editions.com/MILTON/LOST/Download.pdf>
3. <https://literaryterms.net/glossary-of-literary-terms>
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXH9DVS76yM>
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJNZwuamwj0>

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