

Experiencing Epics and Poetry

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Lesson 1 – Introduction to Epic Poetry

Epic poetry has been an important part of literature, even before stories were recorded in writing. The nature of these long poems, including heroism, adventure, and friendship, have made them surprisingly compelling, even today. The memorability and durability of these poetic stories is due largely to their basis in oral tradition and cyclical pattern of events.

Read a history of epic poetry: https://www.poetrysoup.com/article/the_history_of_epic_poetry-1399

Read a definition of epic poetry: <http://www.chegg.com/homework-help/definitions/epic-poem-39>

Answer the following questions:

- What makes a poem an epic?
- What is the basic structure of epic poetry?
- What is the background and the purpose of epic poetry in history?
- What are some famous epic poems?
- Try to name some newer stories that are epics (The Lord of the Rings series, Star Wars)

Lesson 2 – The Epic Hero Cycle

Epic poetry has a definite structure to the story, as well as particular elements that identify it as an epic. Learn about the epic hero style by printing the following chart showing the [elements of the epic hero style](#).

Other elements of epic poetry include:

- Formal, florid language; opening invocation, use of epithets, connection of hero to homeland
- Written in a high style (with ennobled diction, for example). It may be written in hexameter verse, especially dactylic hexameter, and it may have twelve books or twenty-four books
- The deeds of the hero are presented without favoritism, revealing his failings as well as his virtues

- The action, often in battle, reveals the more-than-human strength of the heroes as they engage in acts of heroism and courage
- The setting covers several nations, the whole world, or even the universe
- The episodes, even though they may be fictional, provide an explanation for some of the circumstances or events in the history of a nation or people
- The gods and lesser divinities play an active role in the outcome of actions
- All of the various adventures form an organic whole, where each event relates in some way to the central theme
- A set of conventions (or epic machinery). Such as:
 - Poem begins with a statement of the theme (“Arms and the man I sing”)
 - Invocation to the muse or other deity (“Sing, goddess, of the wrath of Achilles”)
 - Story begins in the middle of things
 - Catalogs of participants on each side, ships, sacrifices
 - Histories and descriptions of significant items (who made a sword or shield, how it was decorated, who owned it from generation to generation)
 - Epic simile (a long simile where the image becomes an object of art in its own right as well as serving to clarify the subject).
 - Frequent use of epithets (“Aeneas the true”; “rosy-fingered Dawn”; “tall-masted ship”)
 - Use of patronymics (calling son by father’s name): “Anchises’ son”
 - Long, formal speeches by important characters
 - Journey to the underworld
 - Use of the number three (attempts are made three times, etc.)
 - Previous episodes in the story are later recounted

Examples of famous epics include *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* by Homer, *Aeneid* by Virgil, *Jerusalem Delivered* by Tasso and *Paradise Lost* by John Milton.

Read the opening paragraphs from [The Iliad](#) and [Beowulf](#), then identify the distinguishing elements.

Choose an epic story you are familiar with. Fill in examples of the epic hero style on your chart. If you are working with other students, share your results. Notice if there are any discernable patterns in your answers. Describe your hero. Is he remote or relatable? Identify ways your hero’s behavior may be teaching a lesson or presenting an example to follow. What is your hero’s relationship with his homeland (whether it is real or imaginary)?

Lesson 17 - Hebrew Poetry

Learning about Hebrew poetry will help you in your Biblical studies. Because it is primarily thought-based as opposed to being sound-based, it is peculiarly broad in its ability to speak to people of many cultures and languages.

[Hebrew Poetry Structure](#)

The chiasmic structure is explained in more detail here:

[Chiasm in the Bible](#)

Choose a psalm, a passage from Proverbs, a narrative, or prophetic declaration and study its literary structure. Describe the structure and determine what idea is being emphasized.

Lesson 18 - 21st-century Poetic Forms

Read through the articles on visual poetry, ads and mass media, performance poetry, song lyrics, node poems, and synthetic poetry.

[21st-century Poetry](#)

Over the next few days, look for poems in everyday life. Pay attention to TV and magazine ads, music, and social media. Don't restrict yourself to books of poetry.

Which form appeals to you most? Create an advertising jingle, performance poem, song lyrics, node poem, or synthetic poem.

Poetry is a part of our lives. Be purposeful about your own poetic expression. In this way, bring beauty and art to your own life and enrich the lives of those around you.

Portions of these lessons are drawn from the lesson plans made available by <https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans> and used with permission.