

Opening the Door to

Poetry

Lesson 1

Introduction

Imagine opening the door to a roomful of people you've never met before. At first, you don't recognize anyone. You see groups standing together chatting. There are loud, charismatic types and quieter, soft spoken people. Some have warm smiles and others look sad and sullen. Stepping into this unfamiliar group may feel intimidating, but the only way you will get to know them is to spend some time with them.

Likewise, many students are unfamiliar with poetry. This course is designed for the student who may not have read much poetry in the past. Just like meeting new people, though, and getting to know all the different personalities of a new group, we must spend time getting to know poetry before it becomes familiar and comfortable.

In this course we will learn how to read and think about poetry. You will read a variety of poems and hopefully find some that you really love. You may also find a few that you don't like much, but overall you will grow more familiar with poetry.

Additionally, this course will include vocabulary, discussion of literary devices such as metaphor and simile, opportunity for copy work and memorization, and writing activities.

What is a Poem?

You're probably better at identifying poetry than you realize. Try this. Can you tell which of the following selections is a poem just by looking? You may not even need to read the words.

Between winter's cold and the unrelenting heat of summer is the precious breath of spring. Spring is a time of birth and growth. It is a time when nature renews itself. Seeds and bulbs that lay dormant underground awake and search out the light above. Hibernating animals, everything from insects to bears, begin to stir and come out of hiding. Flowers blossom and bees buzz; the world is awake again!

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold,
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

The passage on the left is a paragraph. The passage on the right is a poem. Literature written in paragraph form is called **prose**.

Compare the two samples. What differences can you spot?

Paragraphs follow certain rules. In poetry, the beauty and rhythm of the words is more important than the rules, though they often follow certain patterns.

Poetry expresses thoughts using language chosen not only for
meaning, but also for *beauty*.

Paragraph	Poetry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First line indented. • Writing goes to end of line, then continues on the next. • Capital letters begin sentences and proper nouns only. • Change paragraphs when changing topics. • Language is chosen for meaning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No need to indent. • Lines can be broken. • First letter of each line is capitalized (usually). • Verses or stanzas separate ideas. • Language chosen for meaning and for beauty.

Rhyme, Rhythm, and Meter

Rhyming words end with the same sound. They are pleasant to the ear and can be used to emphasize certain words. Do poems have to rhyme? No, but many do.

Rhythm refers to the flow of accented and unaccented syllables. Rhythm is present in all speech and may or may not follow a pattern. **Meter** is the measured pattern of accented and unaccented syllables in a poem. Many, but not all, poems follow a metered pattern.

Meter and rhymes make poems enjoyable to listen to and make them easy to memorize, but not all writers choose to use them. **Free verse** poetry has no regular meter or rhyme scheme.

Why Read Poetry?

Poetry is a form of art, just like painting or sculpting. Writers create poems to do more than just give information. They carefully choose the words to express a thought in a way that is both beautiful and meaningful.

Some poems are easy to understand the first time you read them; others use figurative language that requires more time and thought to understand.

Though poetry not be familiar to you yet, you're likely to enjoy it once you get to know a few good poems.

SAMPLE

Review for Lesson 1

1. Poets choose language for what two reasons?

2. List at least three differences between poems and paragraphs.

3. Do poems have to rhyme?

SAMPLE

Reading Aloud for Lesson 1

One of the best ways to get familiar with poetry is with daily reading aloud. The first time you read a poem, you may stumble on the words. The rhythm may not come out quite right, but as you read it a few more times, the words will flow more smoothly. Often a poem needs a few readings before it starts to make sense. Even if it doesn't make sense yet, try to enjoy the rhymes and rhythm of the poems.

Read each of the following poems aloud each day this week.

Nothing Gold Can Stay
by Robert Frost

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold,
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

Excerpt from
The Law of the Jungle
by Rudyard Kipling

Now this is the Law of the Jungle --
as old and as true as the sky;
And the Wolf that shall keep it may prosper,
but the Wolf that shall break it must die.
As the creeper that girdles the tree-trunk
the Law runneth forward and back —
For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf,
and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.

Vocabulary for Lesson 1

Define the following words. All definitions can be found in the lesson.

prose

rhyming words

rhythm

meter

free verse

SAMPLE

Works Cited

Frost, Robert. "Nothing Gold Can Stay". *Robert Frost: Seasons*. Ed. Edward Connery Lathem. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992.

Kipling, Rudyard. "The Law of the Jungle". *Poetry Lovers Page*, n.d. Web. January 13, 2016.

SAMPLE