**POETRY AND FIGURES OF SPEECH**

**Poetry** is the communication of feeling and thought through the carefully organized arrangement of words for their sounds, rhythm, and connotation, as well as their meaning.

In *figurative language* words, phrases, or expressions convey more than their literal meaning.

A *figure of speech* is an expression in which words are used in a non-literal sense to create a more forceful or dramatic picture or image.

**The Most Common Figures of Speech:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. simile</th>
<th>C. personification</th>
<th>E. litotes</th>
<th>G. symbol</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. metaphor</td>
<td>D. hyperbole</td>
<td>F. apostrophe</td>
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**SIMILE:** A simile is a direct comparison between two usually unrelated things indicating a likeness or similarity between both things. A simile uses *like* or *as* to indicate the comparison.

In the expression “John swims like a fish,” the grace and naturalness with which John swims is compared with the grace and naturalness with which a fish swims. Literally, it would be impossible for John to swim like a fish because of his human nature. However, we can imagine the figure or image of a very skilled and graceful swimmer beneath the surface of the water.

a. He is sleeping like a dog.
b. The ball was thrown like a bullet.
c. Marie eats like a bird.
d. She's as pretty as a picture.

**METAPHOR:** A metaphor is an implied comparison between two usually unrelated things indicating a likeness between qualities found in both things. A metaphor, unlike the simile, does not use like or as to indicate the comparison.

a. All the world's a stage.
b. She was peaches and cream.
c. Fred's a pig at the table.
d. Life's a short summer, man a flower.

**IDENTIFYING METAPHORS AND SIMILES:** Read the following lines from poems; then try to answer the corresponding questions.

**Lines**
The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas

. . . the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings,

**Questions**

- a. Is the poet using similes or metaphors in this line?
- b. To what is the moon compared?
- c. To what is the sky being compared?
- d. To what is the Holy Ghost being compared in these lines?
- e. What words imply this comparison?
- f. To what is the world being compared?
- g. Judging from these comparisons, how does the poet see the relationship between God and man?
The Open Door

Out of the dark
To the sill of the door
Lay the snow in a long
Unruffled floor,
And the lamplight fell
Narrow and thin
Like a carpet unrolled
For the cat to walk in.
Slowly, smoothly,
Black as the night,
With paws unseen
White upon white,
Like a queen who walks
Down a corridor,
The black cat paced
The cold smooth floor
And left behind her,
Bead upon bead,
The track of small feet
Like dark fern-seed.
--Elizabeth Coatsworth

There are five comparisons in this poem. Underline them. Beside each phrase, write whether it is a metaphor or simile. Draw a line between the two things that are being compared in each phrase.

EFFECTIVE COMPARISONS are based on more than one area of similarity between the objects being compared. Tennyson's comparison in the following poem is excellent because of the many similarities between the two unrelated objects.

The Eagle
He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.
--Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Eagle Diving Thunderbolt
fast ---------------- fast
sudden -------------- unexpected
charged with energy --- charged with energy
frightening ------------ frightening
comes from the sky --- comes from the sky

List the common qualities in each pair of frequently compared objects below.
1. a log and a crocodile
2. a city and a bee hive

3. a football game and a war

4. adolescence and a roller coaster ride

**PERSONIFICATION:** Personification is the giving of human characteristics to non-human things such as objects, ideas, or animals.

- The wind whistled.
- Her heart cried out.
- Bright April shakes out her rain-drenched hair.
- The screams of cut trees....
- The waves beside them danced.
- Time, the subtle thief of youth . . .

**EXAMPLES FROM THE ADVERTISING MEDIA:** Advertisers frequently present products as if they were human, perhaps to make us feel more affectionate toward these products. List below advertisements (past or present) which use personification. When making your list, consider the following types of advertisements: pet food, soft drinks, candy, cereal, household cleaning supplies, fast food restaurants, etc.

**HYPERBOLE (OR OVERSTATEMENT):** Hyperbole is an exaggeration for the sake of emphasis and is not to be taken literally. It is not the same as a fish story. If you say, "I'm starved!" or "You could have knocked me over with a feather!" or "I'll die if I don't pass this
course!" you do not expect to be believed; you are merely adding emphasis to what you really mean.

- sweat to death
- rivers of blood
- as old as time
- a million times a day
- hungry enough to eat a horse
- as big as a house

**LITOTES (OR UNDERSTATEMENT):** Litotes is an understatement which is achieved by saying less than one means. The understatement may exist in what one says or in how one says it. If, for example, you have a loaded dinner plate and you say, "This looks like a good bite," you are actually stating less than the truth. If a man who holds his hand for half an hour in fire says, "I am experiencing a sensation of excessive and disagreeable warmth," he is stating what is literally true but with a good deal less force than the situation demands. Litotes can also be achieved by saying the opposite of what one means. An example would be to call a fat boy *Skinny* or to call a slow boy *Speedy*.

**APOSTROPHE:** Apostrophe is closely related to personification. It consists of addressing someone absent or something non-human as if it were alive and present and could reply to what is being said.

A. 0 Captain! My Captain! our fearful trip is done.

B. Death, be not proud, though some have called thee Mighty and dreadful . . .

C. Break, break, break,
   On they cold gray stones, 0 Sea!

D. Beware, 0 Asparagus, you've stalked my last meal.
   You look like a snake and slip down like an eel.
   I'd prefer drinking a bottle of turpentine,
   Rather than eating a tidbit so serpentine.

**MORE POETRY TERMS**

**alliteration**—the repetition of initial consonant sounds--serves important purposes: it is pleasing to the ear and it emphasizes the words in which it occurs

Example: *Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before*
**allusion**—a seemingly brief reference to something in history, politics, literature, art, or music which the writer expects the reader to understand and relate to the work
Example: *Then Eden sank to grief*

**assonance**—the repetition of vowel sounds
Example: *flee* *flee* *flee* *swipe* by *sleeping geeks*

**ballad**—a story told in verse and usually meant to be sung. Ballads tell of love, death, the supernatural, or a combination of these. Two characteristics of the ballad are incremental repetition and the ballad stanza. Incremental repetition repeats one or more lines with small but significant variations that advance the action. The ballad stanza contains four lines.

**concrete poetry**—a poem that visually resembles its subject

**consonance**—the repetition of similar consonant sounds typically within or at the ends of words, as in the succession of echoing *d* sounds in this line
Example: *I could* *shed* my name in the middle of life

**couplet**—two consecutive lines of poetry that rhyme
Example: *The sun that brief December day*  
*Rose cheerless over hills of gray*

**enjambment**—a run-on line of poetry in which logical and grammatical sense carries over from one line into the next. An enjambed line differs from an end-stopped line in which the grammatical and logical sense is completed within the line.
Example:

*While here I stand, not only with the sense  
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts  
That in this moment there is life and food  
For future years.*

**free verse**—a form of Poetry composed of either rhymed or unrhymed lines that have no set fixed metrical pattern. The early 20th-century poets were the first to write what they called "free verse" which allowed them to break from the formula and rigidity of traditional poetry. The poetry of Walt Whitman provides many illustrations of Free Verse including his poem "Song of Myself."

*I celebrate myself, and sing myself;  
And what I assume you shall assume,*
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
I loaf and invite my soul,
I lean and loaf at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

**haiku**—a Japanese form of poetry which attempts to capture a single experience: a striking picture, a moment of insight, or a brief emotion. The haiku always reflects in some way a season of the year. It consists of 3 lines with 5, 7, and 5 syllables respectively.

Two Examples:

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The falling flower  
I saw drift back to the branch  
Was a butterfly.

The cabin is small  
In the vast whiteness. Only  
the smoke reveals it.
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**image**—a mental picture

**imagery**—the use of words to form mental images. It is also the use of language to represent actions, persons, objects, and ideas descriptively. This means encompassing the senses also, rather than just forming a mental picture.

**internal rhyme**—the matching of the final vowel or consonant sounds in two or more words that occur within the same line of poetry (these rhymes usual occur at the middle and end of the line)

Example:

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I enjoyed the shade in the hidden glade  
And spread out the picnic that I had made.
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**inversion**—words arranged in an unusual order in a poetic line

Example:

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You may have met him—did you not,  
His notice sudden is.
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**light verse**—verse that is intended to be humorous or entertaining rather than serious or profound

**metonymy**—the use of one word to stand for a related term.

Example: Many people believe that the White House mishandled the situation in Iraq.

**meter**—a regular pattern of unstressed and stressed syllables in a line or lines of poetry.

Below is an illustration of some commonly used metrical patterns:
narrative poem—a poem that tells a story

onomatopoeia—words that imitate sounds
Examples: crack, pop, bang, murmur, hiss, purr, kerplunk

oxymoron—a figure of speech that combines opposite or contradictory ideas or terms
Examples: living death, dear enemy, sweet sorrow, wise fool, tight slacks, same difference, almost exactly, silent scream

refrain—a line or group of lines that is repeated throughout a song, often at the end of stanzas, sometimes with some changes in the words.
Example: Quoth the Raven: “Nevermore.”

rhyme—the repetition of sounds in two or more words or phrases that appear close to each other in a poem

A. end rhyme
Example: The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have promises to keep.

B. internal rhyme
Example: Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary.

C. slant rhyme, also called imperfect rhyme or approximate rhyme
Example: glorious / nefarious
**rhyme scheme**—the pattern of rhyme used in a poem, usually indicated by matching lowercase letters to show which lines rhyme

The time I’ve lost in wooing, ___
In watching and pursuing ___
The light that lies ___
In woman’s eyes, ___
Has been my heart’s undoing, ___
Tho’ wisdom oft has sought me, ___
I scorned the love she brought me, ___
My only books, ___
Were woman’s looks, ___
And folly’s all they’ve taught me. ___

**Shakespearean sonnet** (also called Elizabethan sonnet or English sonnet)—a lyric poem consisting of fourteen lines. The sonnet consists of three quatrains (four lines each) and a concluding couplet (two lines).

**synecdoche**—the use of part to represent the whole
Examples: “hands” to refer to workers—all hands on deck
“head” for cattle—The farmer has 50 head of cattle.
“mouths to feed” for hungry people—My grandmother had many mouths to feed.
“threads” for clothing,
“wheels” for car,

**Explanatory Note:** Metonymy and synecdoche are similar, but metonymy uses something more generally or loosely associated with the concept to stand in for it. When Americans speak of the Oval Office, for example, they are really referring to the activity within it, the position or function of the President. British writers refer similarly to the Crown, when they are really discussing the powers, authority, and responsibilities of the monarchy. The difference between synecdoche and metonymy is that in metonymy the word is linked to the concept, but it isn’t actually part of it.

**tankas**—a Japanese poetic form which dates back to the seventh century. It is very similar to haiku, but a tanka has more syllables. It also uses simile, metaphor and personification. There are five unrhymed lines in a tanka.

- **Line one** - 5 syllables: *Snow falling sideways*
- **Line two** - 7 syllables: *Ice bars outside my window*
- **Line three** - 5 syllable: *Wind bitterly cries*
- **Line four** - 7 syllables: *As winter mocks spring’s first day*
- **Line five** - 7 syllables: *Here in the Catskill mountains*

Tankas are written about nature, seasons, love, sadness and other strong emotions.
TRADITIONAL SYMBOLS

A symbol is a word or image that signifies something other than what is literally represented, and the use of symbols is called symbolism. Three common symbols: The cross is a symbol for Christianity. The donkey (Democrat) and elephant (Republican) are symbols of two American political organizations.

There is generally some logical connection between the symbol and what it stands for. Spring, because it begins the yearly cycle of seasons and marks a time of renewal in nature, is traditionally a symbol for hope, youth, life, and rebirth. Similar associations exist between most traditional symbols and the qualities they represent. Most proverbs make use of symbols. Analyze the symbolism in this proverb: “Every rose has its thorn.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYMBOLS</th>
<th>WHAT THEY REPRESENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. spring (new growth)</td>
<td>rebirth, childhood, hopefulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. summer (flowers, sun, warmth)</td>
<td>youth, ease, luxury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. fall (harvests, full moon)</td>
<td>middle age, fullness, loss of youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. winter (snow, ice, cold)</td>
<td>old age, death, solitude</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. bride (a maiden, roses)</td>
<td>the church, purity, innocence</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. groom</td>
<td>Christ</td>
</tr>
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<td>7. serpent</td>
<td>Satan, evil</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. cross</td>
<td>Christianity, the crucifixion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. moon</td>
<td>fickleness, inconstancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. sun (fire, heat)</td>
<td>passion, strong feelings, love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. stars (light, brightness)</td>
<td>faith, eternity, the unattainable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. rain</td>
<td>loss, death, tears, trouble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. sea (tides, sand)</td>
<td>the passage of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. roads (rivers, paths, voyages)</td>
<td>the journey through life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. crossroads</td>
<td>a place or time of decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. heights (mountains, hills)</td>
<td>the difficult to attain, heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. threshold</td>
<td>gateway to a new world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. house (building, monument, stone)</td>
<td>death, the grave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. music (bird call, a song)</td>
<td>enchantment, oblivion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. sunshine (light)</td>
<td>happiness, goodness, hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. night (darkness)</td>
<td>evil, the unknown, despair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. maze</td>
<td>puzzling dilemma, great uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. fog</td>
<td>uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. red</td>
<td>blood, passion, sacrifice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. green</td>
<td>growth, youth, hope, fertility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. blue</td>
<td>highly positive, security, tranquility spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. gold</td>
<td>luxury, ease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. silver</td>
<td>fickleness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. white</td>
<td>light, purity, innocence, timelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. black</td>
<td>evil, darkness, death, the unknown, chaos</td>
</tr>
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EXPLICATING A POEM

In order to explicate or give a detailed literary analysis of a poem, it is useful to ask the following questions. You do not necessarily have to follow this order or use all of these items.

1. What is the literal sense of the poem?
   - How could the poem be paraphrased: restated in prose form?

2. What is the diction of the poem?
   - What sort of language does the poem use: formal or colloquial, abstract or concrete, vivid or vague, archaic words, slang?
   - Does it create vivid expressions or innovative ideas by manipulating syntax (word order), semantics (word meaning), structure, effects or associations of normal language?
   - Do any words have other connotations: associations beyond the standard denotation, or definition?

3. What is the tone of the poem?
   - What sort of attitude, mood or emotion does it convey?
   - Is there irony: a discrepancy between what is stated and what is meant?

4. What is the rhetorical situation implied by the poem?
   - Who is speaking? to whom? on what occasion? for what purpose?
   - What is the speaker's relationship to you, the reader? Are you being spoken to directly?
   - Are you being ignored? Are you overhearing the speaker?

5. Does the poem use figurative language (simile, metaphor, etc.)? If so, give examples.

6. What kind of imagery does the poem use?
   - What do you see, hear, taste, smell, touch in your imagination through the words of the poem? (A poem ALWAYS has imagery!)

7. Does the poem use symbolism? If so, give examples.

8. How does sound contribute to the effect of the poem?
   - Does it have rhyme, either exact or approximate repetition of a final sound?
   - Does it use repetition of sounds, words, lines, refrains?
   - Does it contain alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia?
   - Is the effect of these devices cacophony: harsh or discordant sounds, or euphony: pleasing, harmonizing sounds?

9. How is the poem structured?
   - Does it have stanzas, or is it free verse: having no formal structure?
   - What is the rhyme scheme?

10. What is the theme of the poem? Be able to state the theme in one complete sentence.