What, Why, and How?

Poetry
Types of Poetry

Poetry can be written in two general categories, **formal** or **free verse**. **Formal verse** has set rules and structures that dictate how it must be written. For example, a **sonnet** is written in fourteen lines that follow a set rhyming pattern. **Free verse** follows what poet, Denise Levertov, called “organic form,” meaning that a poem can be any shape or size it needs to be to communicate its message.

**Some different types of Formal Verse:**

- **Sonnet**: a poem that is metered and rhymed of 14 lines usually in iambic pentameter
- **Villanelle**: a French form of 19 lines in iambic pentameter with only two rhymes
- **Sestina**: an unrhymed poem that places the same six words in varying patterns through six stanzas, ending with a two-line stanza
- **Haiku**: a Japanese form of three lines in which the first and third lines contain 5 syllables and the second line contains 7 syllables

**Types of poetry styles:**

- **Narrative**: tells a story
- **Imagist**: uses rich sensory imagery
- **Lyrical**: expresses strongly felt emotion and is written in a shorter form
- **Persona**: relies on a character whose voice speaks the poem
- **Confessional**: speaks openly about a poet’s personal life
- **Satirical**: uses humor to make a point
- **Sound**: relies on sounds rather than ideas to create meaning
- **Concrete**: takes on the literal shape of its subject
- **Experimental**: creates its own style through experimentation with language, shape, meaning and form
- **Epic**: deals with a mythic, legendary or historic event and often focuses on a hero and is written in a longer form
- **Occasional**: marks a particular occasion, like a birthday, dedication, death or marriage
POETRY TERMS:

Poetry shares many elements with its sister genres, fiction and drama such as characterization, plot, and theme. Most poems, however, do not offer a “story” in the conventional sense. They are usually brief and apparently devoid of “action.” Even so, a plot of sorts may be implied, a place and time may be important, a specific point of view may be operating, and characters may be dramatizing the key issues of the poem.

SPEAKER: In any poem there is always one “character” of the utmost importance which is the speaker, the “I” of the poem. Often the speaker is a fictional personage, not at all equivalent to the poet.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

- Who is speaking?
- What characterizes the speaker?
- To whom is he or she speaking?
- What is the speaker’s tone?
- What is the speaker’s emotional state?
- Why is he or she speaking?
- What situation is being described?
- What are the conflicts or tensions in the situation?
- How is setting—social situation, physical place, and time—important to the speaker?
- What ideas is the speaker communicating?

IMAGERY: Descriptive Language: Although the word imagery calls to mind the visual sense, poetic imagery appeals to all the senses. Sensuous imagery is pleasurable for its own sake, but it also provides a concreteness and immediacy. Imagery causes the reader to become personally, experientially involved in the subject matter of the poem.

IMAGERY: Figurative Language: The conscious departure from normal or conventional ways of saying things. This could mean merely a rearrangement of the normal word order of a sentence. A much more common category of figurative language is tropes. Tropes (literally “turns”) extend the meaning of words beyond their literal meaning, and the most common form of trope is metaphor. A metaphor is a type of analogy which is a similarity between things that are basically different.

QUESTIONS ABOUT IMAGERY:

- What senses does the poet appeal to?
- What analogies are implied or stated directly?
- Why does the poet use these particular images and analogies?
- Is metaphor used in the poem? To reveal what?
- How are the descriptive images used to create atmosphere and mood?
- What is the relationship between the descriptive images and the speaker’s state of mind?
- What dominant impression do the images make?
MORE POETRY TERMS:

**ALLITERATION:** the repetition of the same sound at the beginning of words, as in "he clasps the crag with crooked hands."

**ALLUSION:** a reference in a poem to a historical or literary character, event, idea or place outside the piece of writing.

**AMBIGUITY:** a quality of certain words and phrases whereby meaning is unclear -- often used intentionally to create multiple layers of meaning.

**BALLAD:** a songlike, narrative poem with a recurring refrain and four-line stanzas.

**CONCEIT:** an extended, elaborate and often farfetched comparison that continues throughout a poem.

**CONCRETE POETRY:** poems that use the physical arrangement of words on the page to mirror meaning such as a poem about a car that is car-shaped.

**CONSONANCE:** repetition of similar sounds in the final consonants of words as in torn/burn, add/read, heaven/given.

**COUPLET:** two rhymed lines of verse -- when separated or self-contained, called a closed couplet.

**DICTION:** Refers to the poet’s choice of words. Poets are sensitive to the subtle shades of meaning of words, to the possible double meanings of words, and to the *denotative* (the object or idea that the word represents) and *connotative* (the subjective, emotional association of a word) meanings of words.

**ELEGY:** a poem of mourning and lamentation often associated with death.

**END RHYME:** a rhyme in which the last words of two or more lines of poetry rhyme with each other.

**END-STOPPED LINE:** a line of poetry that ends with a period, colon or semi colon.

**ENJAMBMENT:** the continuation of a line in a poem so that it spills over into the next line.

**EPIC POEM:** a lengthy narrative poem, ordinarily concerning a serious subject containing details of heroic deeds and events significant to a culture or nation.

**EXTENDED METAPHOR:** a metaphor that continues throughout the piece of writing.

**FREE VERSE:** poetry with no regular pattern of meter or rhyme. It avoids strict adherence to metrical patterns and to fixed line lengths. But it is not entirely “free,” for it uses other ways of creating rhythm and sound patterns.

**HYPERBOLE:** extreme exaggeration such as "he's as strong as an ox".

**LINE BREAKS:** where a poet chooses to end one line and start another.
**METAPHOR:** comparison between two essentially unlike things without the use of "like" or "as".

**METER:** the underlying regular beat in a poem; ex: pentameter has five stressed syllables to a line.

**PERSONIFICATION:** figurative language that endows something nonhuman with human qualities as in "the trees whispered in the wind."

**PROSE POEM:** a poem written with straight left-hand margins in paragraph form like prose.

**REFRAIN:** the same line or group of lines repeated at intervals in a poem.

**RHYTHM:** All human speech has rhythm, but poetry regularizes that rhythm into recognizable patterns. These patterns are called *meters*. Metrical patterns vary depending on the sequence in which one arranges the accented and unaccented syllables of an utterance. The unit that determines that arrangement is the foot. A *foot* is one unit of rhythm in verse.

**SIMILE:** a comparison between two unlike things using "as" or "like" or "as if".

**SOUND:** Poets delight in the sound of language and consciously present sounds to be enjoyed for themselves. They also use them to emphasize meaning, action, and emotion, and especially to call the reader's attention to the relationship of certain words. Rhyme, for example, has the effect of linking words together. Among the most common sound devices are the following:

* **Onomatopoeia**—the use of words that sound like what they mean ("buzz," "boom," "hiss")
* **Alliteration**—the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words or at the beginning of accented syllables ("the woeful woman went wading Wednesday")
* **Rhyme**—the repetition of accented vowels and the sounds that follow.

**STANZA:** a grouping of lines, somewhat like a paragraph in prose.

**STRESS:** an accent that makes one syllable stand out from the others in a word or phrase --used in metrical poetry.

**STRUCTURE:** Poets give structure to their poems in two overlapping ways: by organizing ideas according to a logical plan and by creating a pattern of sounds. Perhaps the most common sound device by which poets create structure is end rhyme, and any pattern of end rhyme is called a *rhyme scheme*. Rhyme scheme helps to establish another structural device, the *stanza*, which is physically separated from other stanzas by extra spaces and usually represents one idea.
**Poetry Chart**: Poetry is challenging and requires the reader to actively engage to illicit meaning. Here is a chart to help you apply poetry concepts to analyze a poem:

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Paraphrase</strong>: Put the poem into your own words to better understand it. Read the poem several times out loud before you try to summarize it.</th>
<th><strong>Form and Style</strong>: What form does the poem use? Formal? Free verse? Is the rhythm fast or slow? What is the style of the poem? Narrative? Confessional? Epic? How does the form and style shape the content?</th>
<th><strong>Title</strong>: What is revealed in the title? How does it connect to the content of the poem? Is the title referenced again in the poem? Does it connect to the poem’s theme?</th>
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<td><strong>Speaker</strong>: Who is the speaker? Is the speaker (or narrator) the same person as the author? How do we know? What are the speaker’s concerns? Mood? What are the main traits of the speaker? Is the speaker interacting with anyone else in the poem?</td>
<td><strong>Setting</strong>: Is the setting described or made clear? Where does it take place? When? What time of day? What season? Is the historical, political or social context important?</td>
<td><strong>Turning Points</strong>: Are there turning points or moments of change? How does it begin? Is there a moment when the story, ideas, thoughts or descriptions change in order to get to the point at the end of the poem?</td>
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<td><strong>Tension</strong>: What is the conflict or point of tension in the poem? Is there an external or internal conflict? Physical, spiritual, moral, philosophical, or social? How is the tension in that conflict developed with poetic elements? Is it resolved? If so, how?</td>
<td><strong>Diction</strong>: What can you learn by examining the particular word choices in the poem? Are certain sounds, words or phrases repeated? How is language used to evoke the senses? Set the tone? Is metaphor used? What imagery is present?</td>
<td><strong>Theme</strong>: Is there a mood or overarching aspect of the poem? Are there repeated patterns in the poem that work together? How do the parts of the poem contribute to a connecting theme?</td>
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Use the Poetry Chart and the additional study questions to analyze the following poem:

Katharine Harer’s poems have been published in literary journals, anthologies, and newspapers and on poetry websites, and she has written five books of poetry. Katharine has worked as a poet-teacher and as Statewide Coordinator of the California Poets in The Schools program, and she served as the Director of Small Press Traffic Literary Arts Center in San Francisco. For almost a decade, she co-ordinated the popular Poetry & Pizza series in downtown San Francisco. For the last thirty-six years she has taught English and Creative Writing at Skyline College (she started teaching at Skyline in 1978). She served as the faculty editor for the literary magazine, Talisman, for over twenty years. Katharine loves to perform her work, especially when accompanied by jazz musicians.

Rockaway  by Katharine Harer

They stare at the ocean as if they’re looking for something, a certain curl a ripple a break in the lacy foam that unravels from the hearts of waves

Slowly they undo their pants all the while looking out beyond themselves pull their wet suits on carefully like women easing nylons over their legs all without looking away chests bare and soft the rubber suit flapping at their waists they savor every step that takes them toward the waves

Some run like children boards strapped to their wrists others walk a slow, jagged line disappearing and reappearing patiently stroking the water slipping inside the crashing and coming out whole skimming the thunder slick as glass for as long as it lets them

When they come in and stand dripping by their cars faces calm from the tossing and riding hair tangled a salty wet glaze on their skin when you’d think they’d had enough of water their eyes are still searching the waves
Additional study questions on the poem “Rockaway”:

Questions About Craft:

1. Do you see any examples of figurative language (similes or metaphors) in the poem? Identify one or more examples.
2. What do the similes add to the poem?
3. Do you notice any alliteration in the poem? Identify one or more examples.
4. What does the alliteration add to the poem?
5. Try reading the poem out loud: what do you notice about the sounds and rhythms?
6. Look at some of the poet’s word choices (diction): pick out a few examples of words that help to create the scene and/or the feeling of surfing.

Questions About Structure:

1. Is this poem written in free verse? Explain.
2. Why do you think the poem is organized into four stanzas?
3. Why do you think the poet uses very little punctuation, such as commas and periods? How does the lack of punctuation affect the “feel” of the poem?

Questions About Theme:

1. How does the poem make you feel about the surfers it describes?
2. Notice how the poem begins and ends: what do you think the poet wants to tell us about the surfers?