

# POETRY'S LANGUAGE

Poetry uses language in many different ways. By noticing the techniques poets use with language, it becomes easier to understand and talk about a poem. If you are a writer, consider using some of these language techniques to emphasize certain ideas, themes or images.

# Imagery

Plain and simple, imagery is the word used to describe the types of images a poet uses throughout the poem. Images are references to a single mental creation; they are the verbal representation of a sense impression. However, there are many different types of imagery that can be used.

Visual Images (sight)

• Example:

"The look-out man will see some lakes of milk-color light on the sea's night-purple"

"The Purse-Seine" **Robinson Jeffers** 

Tactile Images (touch)

• Example:

"The only things moving are swirls of snow. As I lift the mailbox door, I feel its cold iron."

"Driving to Town Late to Mail a Letter" Robert Bly

Auditory Images (sounds)

• Example:

"she quietly rolled flour tortillasthe 'papas' cracking in the hot lard would wake me"

"My Grandmother Would Rock Quietly and Hum" Leonard Adamé

Gustatory Images (tastes)

• Example:

"Take out a three-pound leg of lamb, rub it with salt, pepper and cumin, then push in two cloves of garlic splinters"

"How to Eat Alone"

Daniel Halpern

Olfactory Images (smells)

• Example: "The morning comes to consciousness Of faint stale smells of beer From the sawdust-trampled street With all its muddy feet that press To early coffee-stands" "Preludes" T. S. Eliot

# Diction

Diction is the type of words poets choose to use in their poems. A poem that uses slang expressions can be just as powerful as a poem that uses a lot of big words. And feel free to mix up your diction in a poem. There is no reason why you have to use just one.

## Formal Diction:

Words that appear a bit more elegant or extravagant. Often formal diction will contain words that are polysyllabic (many syllables).

## Neutral Diction:

Words that appear ordinary and that you hear everyday. Contractions are often used in poetry that has neutral diction, as well as a simpler vocabulary.

### Informal Diction:

Words and phrases that are slang expressions, or the colloquial – the language of relaxed activities and friendly conversations.

### Rhyme

A poem does not have to rhyme. However, rhyme can be an important part of poetry, and there are many different types of rhyme.

## Exact (perfect) rhymes:

Words that rhyme because both the concluding consonant and vowel sounds rhyme.

• Example: "Then be not coy, but use your *time*; And while ye may, go *marry*: For having lost but one your *prime*, You may for ever *tarry*" "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" Robert Herrick

### Inexact (near) rhymes:

Words that rhyme because they have similar, not identical, sounds, like *bleak/break* and *loud/bird*.

• Example: "Between my finger and my *thumb* The squat pen rests; *sung* as a *gun*." "Digging" Seamus Heaney

*End rhymes:* Words at the ends of lines that rhyme, either exactly or inexactly.

• Example: "The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand" "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" Adrienne Rich Internal rhymes:

Words in the beginning or middle of a line that rhyme with each other, either exactly or inexactly.

• Example: "And I who gave Kate a blackened eye Did to its vivid changing colours Make up an incred*ible* music*al* sc*ale*" "Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom" Irving Layton

## **Techniques and Devices**

There are many other tools that poets use to achieve a certain sound or rhythm

# Alliteration

The repetition of a consonant sound in the beginning of words that are found close together in a line.

• Example:	"O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being"
	"Ode to the West Wind"
	Percy Bysshe Shelley

# Assonance

The repetition of similar vowel sounds in words that are close to each other in a line.

<ul> <li>Example:</li> </ul>	"and let the coffee-pot boil over on the stove"
	"Living in Sin"
	Adrienne Rich

## Consonance

The repetition of identical consonant sounds but different vowel sounds found close together in a line

<ul> <li>Example:</li> </ul>	"And b <i>ro</i> ils <i>roo</i> t out of the work of masonry"
	"Not Marble Nor the Guilded Monuments"
	William Shakespeare

### Euphony

When the sounds of words in a line create an effect that is pleasing to the ear

<ul> <li>Example:</li> </ul>	"There is no silence upon the earth or under the earth like the
	silence under the sea"
	"Silences"
	E.J. Pratt

### Cacophony

The opposite of euphony, when the sounds of words in a line create a discordant or jarring effect when heard

• Example: "For growl and cough and snarl are the tokens of spendthrifts Who know not the ultimate economy of rage" "Silences" E.J. Pratt Onomatopoeia

Words that imitate a sound; a verbal echo of the action being described, such as *buzz*, *hum*, *slap* 

Example:

quiet clicks, cups of black coffee, *click, click* like facts" "Sonrisas" Pat Mora

"I hear

## Figure of speech

An expression where certain words are arranged in a particular way to achieve a particular effect. The following are all different figures of speech commonly used in poetry:

#### Metaphor

A comparison device where two things are compared directly. Something will be described as though it is actually something else.

• Example: "The apparition of these faces in the crowd; Petals on a wet, black bough." "In a Station of the Metro" Ezra Pound

# Simile

A comparison device where "like" or "as" is used as the clause.

• Example: "Eyes like the morning star, Cheeks like a rose" "The Colorado Trail" Anonymous

#### Apostrophe

Words that are addressed to an absent or imaginary person, an object, or an abstract thought

• Example: "Love, O love, O careless love" "Careless Love" Anonymous

*Denotation* The precise definition of a word, the "dictionary" meaning

*Connotation* All the meanings, definitions or associations that a word suggests