



Introduction to Poetry: Forms and Elements Study Guide by Judy Cook

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Introduction to Poetry: Forms and Elements Study Guide

A Progeny Press Study Guide

by Judy Cook

edited by Andrew Clausen

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Study Guide Author

Judy Cook received her undergraduate degree in mathematics in 1981. She worked as a weights and mass properties engineer for Rockwell International at NASA's Johnson Space Center for seven years. In 1990, she received a J.D. from the University of Houston Law Center and practiced law part-time for several years. During this time, she homeschooled her three children. Judy lives in The Woodlands, Texas.

Table of Contents

Study Guide Author	5
Peer Review Panel	6
How to Use this Guide	8
Introduction	10
Historical Timeline	12
List of Poems Studied	14
Part One: Types of Poetry	16
Part Two: Elements of Poetry	19
<i>Lines</i>	19
<i>Words</i>	22
<i>Sounds</i>	26
<i>Rhyme</i>	29
<i>Meter</i>	33
<i>Imagery</i>	39
<i>Analogy</i>	41
<i>Tone</i>	46
Part Three: Forms of Poetry	49
<i>The Sonnet</i>	49
<i>The Villanelle</i>	54
<i>Blank Verse</i>	57
<i>The Haiku</i>	59
<i>The Ballad</i>	62
<i>The Limerick</i>	65
<i>Terza Rima</i>	67
<i>Parody</i>	69
<i>Free Verse</i>	71
Concluding Exercises	73
Answer Key	75
Related Resources	84

How to Use This Guide

This guide differs from other Progeny Press guides in that the works to be studied are short. For that reason, you are free to divide the study into as many parts as you deem appropriate. As a guideline, you may want to assign a particular section and the corresponding exercise as a unit.

The topics and exercises build upon one another. If you and your students are unfamiliar with the elements of poetry, you should begin at the beginning and proceed through the guide in a straightforward manner. Students who are interested only in studying particular elements of poetry and who have engaged with poetry previously can be more selective about the order in which they complete the lessons.

The questions in each exercise deal with such issues as poetic devices, interpretation, Biblical perspective, and creative attempts on the part of the students. You are free, of course, to select the questions that you believe are most helpful to your students. However, students generally gain a deeper appreciation of any art when they attempt to engage in it themselves. For that reason, the creative writing portions of the exercises, while requiring the most thought, will yield the fullest result.

Biblical passages used and referred to in this guide are generally from the New International Version of the Bible. We have indicated where other versions are used.

The Bible itself is filled with poetry and songs. These poems, while beautiful and worshipful as well as divinely inspired, are structurally very different from poetry written in western languages and influenced by western culture. None of the poetic devices studied in this guide, such as alliteration, rhyme, and meter apply to the psalms and Hebrew poetry. Much discussion takes place in ivory towers about what devices are used in Hebrew poetry, but scholars generally agree that parallelism and repetition are the primary ones. For these reasons, this guide does not attempt to include poetry of the Bible as study material. Many fine Bible studies, some extremely scholarly, exist and we would direct you to those for a study of poetry of the Bible.

Finally, a note about the texts selected for this study. All poems in this study guide are found in *100 Best-Loved Poems*, edited by Philip Smith, *101 Great American Poems*, edited by The American Poetry and Literacy Project, and *Great Short Poems*,

Introduction to Poetry: Forms and Elements Study Guide

edited by Paul Negri. All three books are published by Dover Publications and are available from Progeny Press. In this guide, the three volumes are referred to as BLP, GAP, and GSP with the page numbers following this designation. These books are *very* inexpensive; please encourage your students to write in these books—circle words with unclear meanings, identify rhyme schemes, make metrical marks, and jot interpretations and personal notations in the margins. Their study will be richer for it.

Introduction

Poetry, in many ways, defies definition. Any restrictions would disqualify some works that are, nevertheless, poetry. The only statement about poetry that we can make with absolute certainty is that good poetry uses what is known as “compressed language.” That means that it says a lot but uses few words to do so. Every word is very valuable; the poets make their choices only after much deliberation, and we must understand each word to grasp the meanings of the poems.

This word compression is the primary reason that most students claim not to understand poetry. Students who are accustomed to skimming over their lessons once and dashing off correct answers in record time will find that poetry asks much more of us than this. It invites us to calm down, sit still, and think. Speed and accuracy are invaluable in mathematical computation but useless in poetry appreciation. You must not be frustrated or feel like a failure when (not if) you find it necessary to read a poem several times. This repetitive activity is standard operating procedure for the study of any art.

This guide takes a topical approach to the study of poetry, rather than an historical approach. It focuses on the elements of poetry and selected forms. As you study an element, you will consider specific poems that are particularly good examples of that element. However, almost all poems will contain most of the elements that you study. Therefore, after completing a portion of the guide on a particular element, such as sound devices, you should be able to identify and discuss that element in relation to the poems you study subsequently.

Some poetry study guides approach the study of poetry from an historical perspective. They will begin with the early epic poems like *Beowulf*, *The Iliad*, and *The Odyssey*, then move forward through Shakespeare’s time and those following him. To compensate for dropping this historical approach, we have provided a timeline on pages 12 and 13 for you to use in the course of your study. Every time you read a new poem, make a notation on the timeline. Include the poet’s name, the approximate date of the poem (or use the middle of the poet’s life), and the type of poem. The first poem we will consider, “Abou Ben Adhem,” has been added as your example.

Introduction to Poetry: Forms and Elements Study Guide

Finally, poetry is primarily an auditory experience. From earliest history, poetry was transferred to subsequent generations through oral presentation. You, too, should read aloud the poems studied here. They will yield their meanings more readily that way, and you will enjoy them more.

List of Poems Studied

In Alphabetical Order by Title:

<i>Annabel Lee</i>	Edgar Allen Poe
<i>A Red, Red Rose</i>	Robert Burns
<i>About Ben Adhem</i>	Leigh Hunt
<i>Acquainted with the Night</i>	Robert Frost
<i>Because I Could Not Stop for Death</i>	Emily Dickinson
<i>Builders, The</i>	Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
<i>Charge of the Light Brigade, The</i>	Alfred, Lord Tennyson
<i>Cinq Ans Après</i>	Gelett Burgess
<i>Destruction of Sennacherib, The</i>	Lord Byron
<i>Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night</i>	Dylan Thomas
<i>Dream Deferred</i>	Langston Hughes
<i>Holy Sonnet XIV</i>	John Donne
<i>I Died for Beauty</i>	Emily Dickinson
<i>I Hear America Singing</i>	Walt Whitman
<i>I'm Nobody! Who are You?</i>	Emily Dickinson
<i>In a Station of the Metro</i>	Ezra Pound
<i>I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud</i>	William Wordsworth
<i>L'art, 1910</i>	Ezra Pound
<i>Mending Wall</i>	Robert Frost
<i>New Colossus, The</i>	Emma Lazarus
<i>Noiseless Patient Spider, A</i>	Walt Whitman
<i>On His Blindness</i>	John Milton
<i>Passionate Shepherd to His Love, The</i>	Christopher Marlowe
<i>Purple Cow, The</i>	Gelett Burgess
<i>Red Wheelbarrow, The</i>	William Carlos Williams
<i>Requiem</i>	Robert Louis Stevenson
<i>Richard Cory</i>	Edward Arlington Robinson

Introduction to Poetry: Forms and Elements Study Guide

<i>Road Not Taken, The</i>	Robert Frost
<i>She Walks in Beauty</i>	Lord Byron
<i>Sir Patrick Spens</i>	Anonymous
<i>Sonnet XVIII (Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?)</i>	William Shakespeare
<i>Sonnet CXVI (Let me not to the marriage of true minds)</i>	William Shakespeare
<i>Sonnet CXXX (My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun)</i>	William Shakespeare
<i>Still Here</i>	Langston Hughes
<i>Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening</i>	Robert Frost
<i>Sympathy</i>	Paul Laurence Dunbar
<i>This is Just to Say</i>	William Carlos Williams
<i>Tyger, The</i>	William Blake
<i>To Celia</i>	Ben Jonson
<i>To Lucasta, Going to the Wars</i>	Richard Lovelace
<i>To My Dear and Loving Husband</i>	Anne Bradstreet
<i>To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time</i>	Robert Herrick
<i>Trees</i>	Joyce Kilmer
<i>Upon Julia's Clothes</i>	Robert Herrick
<i>Village Blacksmith, The</i>	Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
<i>We Wear the Mask</i>	Paul Laurence Dunbar
<i>When I Was One-and-Twenty</i>	A. E. Housman

Words

Because poetry is a compressed method of expression, every word the poet chooses is important. To understand what a poem is saying, you must understand what every word means. The dictionary meaning of a word is called the *denotation*. Many words also have more subtle undertones to their meanings. These shades of meaning are called the *connotation* of the word. Consider the word “aroma.” Its dictionary meaning is “scent,” but beneath the meaning is a positive *connotation*. When we hear the word “aroma,” we think of something that is pleasant to smell. The word “odor” also means “scent,” but we get a much different, generally negative feeling when we hear the word “odor.”

The word choice itself is called *diction*. The poet may choose sophisticated diction or use a more homespun verbiage depending on what he or she is trying to say.

Exercise III:

In poetry, you will find that general words are rarely used. Poets choose specific words that have more precise denotations and particular connotations. In the following exercise, you are given a neutral word. Find two other words that are more precise, one that has a *positive connotation*, and a second that has a *negative connotation*. You may use a thesaurus if you like.

<u>Word</u>	<u>Positive Connotation</u>	<u>Negative Connotation</u>
1. chase	_____	_____
2. unusual	_____	_____
3. honor (verb)	_____	_____
4. trusting	_____	_____

Sounds

Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds. Alliteration may be initial (at the beginning of words) or internal (in the middle of words). This device directs our attention to the alliterated words and the ideas or feelings that the poet is trying to convey. *Assonance* is the repetition of vowel sounds within words. Like alliteration, it may be internal or initial. A third type of sound device is *onomatopoeia* (ON uh MAT uh PEE uh), in which words resemble the sounds they are portraying. The words *crash*, *boom*, *smash*, or *clip-clop* are examples of onomatopoeia. Onomatopoeiac words are also common in comic strips.

Exercise V:

Circle the *alliterated* sounds in the following lines of poetry:

1. The sun was warm, but the wind was chill.
2. Grieve and they turn and go.
3. I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable.
4. The watchful night-wind as it went
5. Between the dark and the daylight
6. What I was walling in or walling out
7. Her hardest hue to hold.
8. Miniver mourned the ripe renown
9. Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
10. But ah, my foes and oh, my friends

Introduction to Poetry: Forms and Elements Study Guide

Exercise VII:

Read “To the Virgins, To Make Much of Time,” by Robert Herrick (GSP, 4).

1. What is the rhyme scheme?
2. The *theme* of a poem is the poem’s main idea or subject. You might view it as the conclusion or solution to the ideas or questions presented in a poem. The central theme of “To the Virgins, To Make Much of Time” seems to be “Live for today; tomorrow is uncertain.” This theme is so prevalent in literature, prose, poetry, and drama, that it has its own name: *carpe diem* (CAR-pay DEE-um), Latin for “seize the day.” What are your thoughts about this philosophy?
3. Read Matthew 6:26–34, Ephesians 5:15–17, and James 4:13–17. How do these passages compare or contrast to the theme of “To the Virgins, To Make Much of Time”?

Exercise VIII:

Read “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” by Robert Frost (GAP, 50) aloud, remembering to soften the rhyme by pausing only briefly at the ends of unpunctuated lines.

1. What is the rhyme scheme of this poem? (Hint: do not restart letter designations with each stanza.)