

Introduction to Poetry: What is a poem?

Lesson 1 of 8

English

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The History of Poetry

Task 2: read the following information about the history of poetry:

Poetry has been around for almost as long as human beings have existed. Some of the earliest known poems were epic poems. These poems told a story, had vast settings and followed the journey of heroes. 'Beowulf' is a famous English epic, but the earliest epic poem, 'The Epic of Gilgamesh', is over 4000 years old.

There are many other forms (types) of poetry including sonnets, lyrics, ballads, haikus and odes. Some poems follow structural rules whilst others, such as 'free verse', have no rules. We often think that poetry means text that rhymes but that is only true of some poems.



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Task 2 continued

Most poems have rhythm which means there is a beat which directs how you should read the poem. This is a bit like music when you speed up, slow down and put emphasis on different words.

One of the most important things to know about poetry is that when poets write, they choose their words really carefully. Each word has been chosen to make you think or feel what the poet wants you to think or feel. There are often lots of emotions in poetry.



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Task 2 continued

Poets also use figurative language to express these emotions and ideas. This means that poetry can sometimes be difficult to understand because the poet is not talking 'literally'.

We don't need to always understand every part of a poem, instead we need to look at the words and images (language), rhymes and rhythms (structure), and type of poem (form).



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Task 2 continued

We use these parts of the poem to help us think about what types of emotions and thoughts the poet wants to express.

These emotions and thoughts can be personal to the poet or can be making a political or social point. We can use the context (background) of the poem to help us work this out!



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Task 3: Using the text we have just read, answer these five questions in full sentences. Sentence starters have been given to help you.

1. What is the oldest epic poem and how long ago was it created?

The oldest epic poem is...

2. What are sonnets, lyrics, ballads, haikus and odes?

Sonnets, lyrics, ballads, haikus and odes are all...



The History of Poetry

Task 3 continued

3. Why is word choice important in poetry?

Word choice in poetry is important because...

4. Why can poems sometimes be difficult to understand?

Poems can sometimes be difficult to understand because...



The History of Poetry

Task 3 continued

4. What should we look at when we study a poem?

When we study a poem, we should look at...

