

Poetic Devices

Poetic devices are literary techniques not exclusively limited to poetry. Poetic devices are used by good writers in all professions, from novelists, to journalists, to advertisers. This is because poetic devices are pleasing to hear. The use of poetic devices is separate from the study of poetic devices. For example, someone can have an advanced perception of what words sound good next to each other without knowing the technical terms applied to these techniques (perhaps you can think of a musician to whom this description might apply). Conversely, one might have mastery of the technical terms without any ability to create original poetic assemblages.

Poetic devices are often lumped together with figurative language techniques (simile, metaphor, personification, understatement). Often, state tests evaluate both skills simultaneously, but I find that it's better to teach these skills in separate units as the material is more digestible if taken in small bites.

I will define each poetic device and provide an example or two, as well as offer some worksheets and activities to help you or your students review.

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of the initial consonant sound in words. An easier (though less exact) way to say this is that alliteration is when the first sounds in words repeat. Alliteration often works with assonance and consonance to make phonetically pleasing arrangements.

Jakia jumped in the jar of jelly.

Notice the repetition of the "j" sound? Alliteration is not always so *jarringly* (ha) obvious. Sometimes it is very subtle, such as in the following example:

He keeps the kitchen clean.

Though this example is still pretty obvious, it shows that even when one word starts with a "k" and another word starts with a "c," it is still considered an instance of alliteration. When we study alliteration, we are concerned with the *sounds* of the words, not just the letters.

Assonance

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds. It is often used in combination with consonance and alliteration.

He saw the cost and hauled off.

Notice the repetition of the "awe" sounds? (Depending on your dialect I suppose). Assonance can be subtle and may go unnoticed if you're not scanning for it.

Consonance

Also known as *near rhyme*, *off rhyme*, or *slant rhyme*, **consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds in the middle or at the end of words.** Using consonance is a sophisticated poetic technique that can create subtle yet beautiful lyrics or lines of poetry. Here is an example of consonance:

Her finger hungered for a ring.

Though the above statement is also an example of personification, we are interested in the repetition of the "nger" and "ng" sounds. If nobody is around you right now, **say out loud, "hungry and angry."** Notice how similar the words sound? What you are hearing is consonance, or the repetition of the "ngry" consonant sounds.

Enjambment

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Enjambment is when the writer uses line breaks meaningfully and abruptly to create dual meanings or for emphasis. When a poem is read, the reader will conventionally make a slight pause (shorter than a comma) when transitioning from line to line in a poem. When a writer uses enjambment, he or she uses this space to spread an idea.

*Rolling through the field in the
dead
of winter.*

When the word “dead” is placed on a line in isolation, it invites the reader to focus on that idea. Surrounded by blank audio space, the idea may resonate powerfully. Though enjambment could be used during a speech, the term “enjambment” is generally exclusive to the study of poetry.

Imagery

Imagery is when the writer or speaker uses their descriptions to access the senses of the reader of listener. Sometimes this is called, using *sensory* details. When I say “senses” or “sensory,” I am referring to the five senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell.

An old lump of snow melted in the corner.

As you read this, you might be visualize it, because the description accesses your sense of sight.

Repetition

Repetition is when the writer or speaker knowingly repeats a word or group of words for effect. This is a strong rhetorical technique that can also be used to build a theme in a speech or poem. It is important to note that it is not considered using repetition when a writer or speaker repeats essential articles, prepositions, pronouns, or conjunctions that are frequently used unintentionally as the mechanics of language dictate.

Nobody, oh nobody can make it out here alone.

In the above example, only one word in the sentence is repeating: *nobody*. Nonetheless, this is still considered repetition. A poet, writer, or speaker may also repeat more than one word to have a greater impact or to highlight the importance of an idea, such as in the following example:

Free at last. Free at last. Lord Almighty, we are free at last.

In this example a whole group of words repeats: *Free at last*. Each method of repetition can effectively embolden a message.

Rhyme

Rhyme is when the end or final sound of two or more words are identical. If the end sounds are not identical, then the speaker or writer is using consonance or assonance instead. Rhymes can also occur internally or on the inside of words or lines of poetry. A rhyme may also be monosyllabic (a one syllable rhyme) or polysyllabic (rhyme two or more syllables), such as in the following example:

I left my punch card on the lunch yard.

This is the technique that students most often associate with poetry, but I encourage my students to try writing free or blank verse, as it takes much poetic skill to freely maneuver within the confines of a rhyme scheme.

Rhythm

Rhythm is when the arrangement of words creates an audible pattern or beat when read out loud. A good way to check to see if a passage of text is using rhythm is to just hum the sounds that the

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words make rather than clearly pronouncing them. If you can hear a song or identify a form in the sounds, then the text is rhythmic.

There once was a guy from Chicago / Who drank away all of his problems

Instead of reading the words, trying saying "Dun-dun-dun-dun-dun-dun-dun-dun / Dun-dun-dun-dun-dun-dun-dun-dun." Do you hear how it sort of bounces? This is a rhythm.

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Name: _____

Poetic Devices Worksheet 5

Directions: Read the lines of poetry. Slash marks show where the lines break in the original poems. Identify two or more poetic techniques being used in each example and write them on the line. There may be more than two techniques being used. In the boxes below, explain each of your answers.

Answers: Alliteration, Consonance, Onomatopoeia, Repetition, Rhyme, Rhythm

1. I'm growing fonder of my staff; / I'm growing dimmer in the eyes;
I'm growing fainter in my laugh; / I'm growing deeper in my sighs;

Which techniques are being used (list two or more)? _____

Alliteration, Consonance, Onomatopoeia, Repetition, Rhyme, and/or Rhythm

How do you figure?

Explain how you got your answer

2. Confound the cats! All cats--away-- / Cats of all colors, black, white, gray;
By night a nuisance and by day-- / Confound the cats! All cats, always.

Which techniques are being used (list two or more)? _____

Alliteration, Consonance, Onomatopoeia, Repetition, Rhyme, and/or Rhythm

How do you figure?

Explain how you got your answer

3. I dreamed a dream next Tuesday week, / Beneath the apple-trees;
I thought my eyes were big pork-pies, / And my nose was Stilton cheese.

Which techniques are being used (list two or more)? _____

Alliteration, Consonance, Onomatopoeia, Repetition, Rhyme, and/or Rhythm

How do you figure?

Explain how you got your answer

4. O Sea! whose ancient ripples lie on red-ribbed sands where seaweeds shone;
O moon! whose golden sickle's gone,

Which techniques are being used (list two or more)? _____

Alliteration, Consonance, Onomatopoeia, Repetition, Rhyme, and/or Rhythm

How do you figure?

Explain how you got your answer

5. Across the moorlands of the Not / We chase the gruesome When;
And hunt the Itness of the What / Through forests of the Then.

Which techniques are being used (list two or more)? _____

Alliteration, Consonance, Onomatopoeia, Repetition, Rhyme, and/or Rhythm

How do you figure?

Explain how you got your answer

6. Big Balloons Bounce into the / Big Blue Sky / Up, up, and away / There they go

Which techniques are being used (list two or more)? _____

Alliteration, Consonance, Onomatopoeia, Repetition, Rhyme, and/or Rhythm

How do you figure?

Explain how you got your answer

7. BANG!!! There goes another building, / BOOM!!! And there go 2 more,
Said the man who took target practice / In the seat of a military tank.
BAM!!! There goes another. / Life is hard when you don't have a father to guide you.
BOOM!!! You could end up in jail, / BANG!!! You could end up crazy,
AHHHH!!! Or you could end up dead / Because you pressed the wrong button.

Which techniques are being used (list two or more)? _____

Alliteration, Consonance, Onomatopoeia, Repetition, Rhyme, and/or Rhythm

How do you figure?

Explain how you got your answer

8. Buzz, goes the blue fly, / Hum, goes the bee,
Buzz and hum they cry, / And so do we:

Which techniques are being used (list two or more)? _____

Alliteration, Consonance, Onomatopoeia, Repetition, Rhyme, and/or Rhythm

How do you figure?

Explain how you got your answer

9. There was a crow sat on a stone, / When he was gone, then there was none.

Which techniques are being used (list two or more)? _____

Alliteration, Consonance, Onomatopoeia, Repetition, Rhyme, and/or Rhythm

How do you figure?

Explain how you got your answer

10. Tiger, Tiger burning bright, / in the forests of the night,

Which techniques are being used (list two or more)? _____

Alliteration, Consonance, Onomatopoeia, Repetition, Rhyme, and/or Rhythm

How do you figure?

Explain how you got your answer

13. The lion's mighty roar could be heard across the Savannah and the Zebra ran in terror.

What made the noise? _____

14. Wow, the race car zoomed past the finish line.

What made the noise? _____

15. My brother is the coolest because he can burp the alphabet.

What made the noise? _____

16. You could hear the slap from across the room, but the teacher did not seem to notice.

What made the noise? _____

17. Jake was doing the dishes and the clanging pots and pans awoke the baby.

What made the noise? _____

18. Even after several months in captivity, the prisoner was still terrified to hear the crack of the whip.

What made the noise? _____

19. Billy will cry if you pop his balloon and then you will get in trouble.

What made the noise? _____

20. Janet rested her head on the window pane and meditated as the rain trickled down the gutter.

What made the noise? _____

21. Kristen looked away as the lunch lady plopped a scoop of something on her tray.

What made the noise? _____

22. After making a rude remark, Jade snapped her fingers and rolled her neck.

What made the noise? _____

23. The dim-witted pigeon repulsed us with its nerve crawling coo.

What made the noise? _____

24. Having never left the city, Juan eagerly sniffed the country air.

What made the noise? _____

25. We all were taken back when Dad released a belch from the pit of his stomach.

What made the noise? _____

Name: _____

Onomatopoeia Worksheet 1

Directions: Read each sentence and circle the onomatopoeic word. Also explain what makes this noise.

1. During a dangerous mission on the foreign planet, Spaceman Spiff zapped the alien with his ray-gun.

What made the noise? _____

2. As Daryl was gargling his mouthwash, he regretted starting his day with orange juice.

What made the noise? _____

3. Keith threw his brother on the ground and the dishes fell to the floor with a clatter.

What made the noise? _____

4. As the solider ran through the field, a bullet whizzed by his ear.

What made the noise? _____

5. Juan had a hard time hearing the teacher over his grumbling stomach.

What made the noise? _____

6. Dissatisfied with her work, Beth crinkled up the paper and threw it in the trash.

What made the noise? _____

7. The patient sounded like he was hacking up a lung.

What made the noise? _____

8. I secretly ripped up the birthday checks that my grandmother sent me.

What made the noise? _____

9. Jake was pleased when he heard the new pencil sharpener hum efficiently.

What made the noise? _____

10. When he pressed on the gas, he took off so quickly that his tires screeched.

What made the noise? _____

11. We all knew she was in the kitchen because the cabinet opened with a distinct creak.

What made the noise? _____

12. If you're going to cough, it is polite to cover your mouth.

What made the noise? _____