

{classical subjects creatively taught}

The art of
POETRY



CHRISTINE PERRIN, MFA

The Art of Poetry
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	v
Close Reading	vii
How To Use This Book	ix

The Elements of Poetry

<i>Chapter One</i>	Images.....	1
<i>Chapter Two</i>	Metaphor	13
<i>Chapter Three</i>	Symbols.....	27
<i>Chapter Four</i>	Words	39
<i>Chapter Five</i>	Sound and More Sound	50
<i>Chapter Six</i>	Rhythm.....	66
<i>Chapter Seven</i>	Shape: Stanza and Line.....	78
<i>Chapter Eight</i>	Tone: Putting It All Together.....	92

The Formal History of Poetry

<i>Chapter Nine</i>	History of Form, Movements, Genres	105
<i>Chapter Ten</i>	Verse Forms.....	111
<i>Chapter Eleven</i>	Shaping Forms	136
<i>Chapter Twelve</i>	Emily Dickinson: A Case Study in Form.....	154
<i>Chapter Thirteen</i>	Open Verse.....	167
<i>Chapter Fourteen</i>	Walt Whitman: A Case Study in Open Verse.....	184
<i>Chapter Fifteen</i>	Narrative Poems: An Anthology	200

Application

<i>Chapter Sixteen</i>	Growing Your Interest	216
	Starting a Poetry Group, Workshop, or School Elective Group	216
	Writer's Journal.....	218
	Favorite Poem Notebook	219
	Poetry Slam or Public Recitation	222
	Hosting a Reading Series or Coffeehouse.....	223
	Hosting a Summer Camp or Attending a Summer Camp.....	223
	Finding Dead and Live Mentors	223

	Acknowledgments.....	224
<i>Appendix A</i>	Short Biographies of Poets in This Book.....	225
<i>Appendix B</i>	The Art of Poetry Online	251
<i>Appendix C</i>	A Simplified Plan: Poetry in the Classroom or at Home.....	252
	Glossary of Terms.....	255
	Bibliography	260
	Index of Authors and Titles.....	264

INTRODUCTION

There has never been a civilization without poetry. From the beginning of time, people have sought to turn their thoughts, feelings, and stories into memorable speech to share with others. Using language, the poet preserves something precious in the world by allowing us to live next to her, to see what she sees, to enter the experience she has built for us with her words and attention to the moment. Poetry acknowledges something deep within our nature—an urge to name, say, sing, grieve, praise, out of our solitariness, to another person. It makes words into a material thing, hard and solid as a table, dense with significance. It comes from the body and the body is its instrument. It knows our body is as intelligent as our mind, and that the two intelligences are happily married.

From poets we can learn much about what it is to be truly alive. In the poem *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge names the state which is worse than death itself, “Life in Death.” The name suggests that we are capable of having a heartbeat without being fully alive to the world around us. Human forgetfulness allows fresh beginnings, but it is also an infirmity for which we need to be treated. We need a daily pin-prick of awareness to bring us back to what surrounds us. Poems are one dramatic source of this alertness. From Gerard Manley Hopkins, for instance, I’ve learned how to mourn and how to exalt, and how close the two lie next to each other. I talk myself out of despair for the ugliness of the industrialized world with his poem *God’s Grandeur*:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
5 Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
10 There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

On my dark days, this poem reminds me I am not alone, that Father Hopkins and his precise images and sounds have gone ahead of me and meet me in my own sorrow and disgust. His bright-winged, warm-breasted, holy-ghost bird hovers over me and my imagination. The poem insists that the image of the sun rising at the brink of the darkened world to bring another day is true beyond its scientific explanation, and encourages us to believe that literal and figurative light continues to renew and tend the earth. Hope is given to us not only in the message of the words but in language that exults: the words spring up with their blending of sounds and movement to embody the movement of the sun bursting over the cusp of earth. The speaker,

consoled and warmed, experiences an encircling by the “Holy Ghost,” pictured as a bird who closes her wings around the world. The repetition of “b” sounds, “w” sounds, and long “o” sounds in lines thirteen and fourteen, along with the relieved and delighted interjection “ah!,” creates the physical expression of solace. We experience the sensation of the movement and sound at the same time that we register the images and consider the ideas. The poet has wrought his experience of hard-won hope in such a way that we can feel, momentarily, his glad assurance. We turn from the poem back to our lives revitalized. This is only one example of the process by which the word renews the world for us. This example holds true whether or not you embrace the religious views of the poet. As a reader you can enter the sensation of transcendence over the trampled world regardless of the poem’s theology.

Because they are made by other human beings at a moment of full awareness, and they are spoken from privacy to privacy into the grave of our hearts, poems enliven us. They challenge us to find meaning, they defend the importance of individual lives and allow all sorts of voices to be heard. In addition to speaking to us, poems talk to other poems, and teach us how to read conversationally. Writing is, after all, simply the highest, most intense form of reading; when you write you hone your thoughts and analysis toward precision, you attend to a text closely. All of the poets in this book have had some contact with each other and are, in some way, in dialogue with each other. In reading these poems and thinking about them you are entering a great conversation that has gone on for years and will continue.

Poetry is also a witness to human cruelty. You might think of poems as just words, but during the Russian Revolution poets and writers were killed or threatened with death. Osip Mandelstam, one of those killed, said in a poem, “And for you, I am here, to burn—a black flare, to burn.” Nearly a century later, his words are still passed like a torch from reader to reader, illuminating Stalin’s unspeakable acts. Throughout time poets and writers have borne witness to history.

What does this have to do with me, you ask? Well, your days are long and crammed with obligation and information and technology. You are at risk for thinking that this is knowledge. Poetic knowledge insists that beauty and truth can’t be separated. It reminds us that the rational alone will not take us to full knowledge and that we should be astonished by what is true. J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis believed that myth restores reality to its mythic proportions, that we are living a lyric truth, a story where every action has consequence, and that reading a myth or a poem makes us conscious of its enormity anew.

You will find that there are other benefits to studying poems, benefits that accrete like layers of silt in a mountain stream. Poetry fundamentally changes our relationship to language—we can no longer see words as merely serviceable vehicles. Poetry instructs us to look for the structure in any written piece. Poetry teaches us the principles of interpretation, because such questions naturally arise in the discussion of a poem. Poetry reminds us that the metaphor is the basic way of knowing the unknown and that we often describe one thing in terms of another. Poetry gives us images to cherish and to invigorate our daily experience. In April, I remember that T.S. Eliot claimed it is the cruelest month: “breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain.” I possess Rilke’s picture of *The Panther* when I am caged or when I meet someone who is. Language seems to me unimaginably deep, a record of human consciousness. And because I write poems in response to my love of what I see, I know what Adam felt like in the garden of the world naming and naming.

CLOSE READING

A soldier at attention stands erectly with heels together, arms at his side, eyes looking forward, waiting for instructions. A nurse or midwife checks the vital signs of the mother and child. A suitor notices every glance of his beloved. Close reading is learning how to pay attention to a text. This is not particularly difficult but it is hard in our times; it has to be a discipline, a habit of mind. We are busy, we are used to being active, we are addicted to being connected to other people through cell phones, the Internet, iPods, and video games. Close reading is another way to be connected, but it is different from the ways to which we are accustomed and it requires more of us. It requires time. It requires slowing down. It requires commitment. Television, magazines, and most movies don't demand your attention. They are designed to be understood easily and quickly so that you can move on—be entertained but not inconvenienced. In a botanical garden or an aquarium you take time to look at the parts of the flower or fish, you smell it or watch it swim. The same is true for a book of poems. When you read a poem, you must take time and learn to be observant. Like sea diving, there are fathoms of depth. You go to one level for awhile, then deeper, then deeper. You discover there is a vast ocean to explore in any piece of art, that continues to deliver something new and unexpected with each encounter.

Being engaged to a person involves committing yourself to that person completely, making a promise to that person. Being engaged with a piece of writing is similar. There is a conversation—sometimes even an ongoing relationship—between you and the book, you and the writer. Your successful summary of a poem's structure and meaning is only a part of what you and that poem can accomplish together. The poem and its reading can't be reduced to a three-point outline or a five-paragraph essay, just as a relationship between friends can't be summarized or contained this way.

To read closely, listen to the sounds and rhythms, look at the patterns which create these, hear the language of the poem intensely, see if you can put yourself into the physical environment that the poet is creating. Start with questions that you might ask yourself about a poem. Discipline yourself to look at the images, to hear the sounds working together, to think about the subject the poet has introduced. Ask yourself if you have read anything else which would comment upon this idea. Link what is in front of you to your experience both in books and in life. Wonder at the difficult parts. Disagree. Close your eyes after you have read it a few times and see which images and words have stuck. Look up words in a dictionary, the ones you don't know but even the ones you do to see if there are nuances you might be missing. See how the rhymed words make suggestions about what the poem is saying. If you are having trouble slowing down, start with memorization and see what happens to your understanding as you commit the words and lines to memory. Try writing formally or informally on the piece in front of you.

One can't read every poem with this depth but one must learn the practice of it over time. T.S. Eliot said that "poetry may make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves." If you should accept this challenge you will find some clarity and a language which more accurately reflects and sheds light on your experience. William Meredith in his poem *A Major Work* draws a parallel between learning to serve an art form so that we truly "read," "see," "hear" it, and learning to care for another person.

A Major Work

Poems are hard to read
 Pictures are hard to see
 Music is hard to hear
 And people are hard to love.

5 But whether from brute need
 Or divine energy
 At last mind eye and ear
 And the great sloth heart will move.

There are two lists of four items in this poem—can you identify them? Can you see how the two lists are linked together in a parallel structure? This is the beginning of close reading, but let's go further: why do you think the poet chose the word "move" as the final destination of the poem? Can you identify ways that you personally have experienced "brute need" or "divine energy"? What language in the poem suggests that the poet locates the actual power of poetry not in the poems themselves but in the hard work of reading them? These are the kinds of questions that you will begin to ask and answer as you are drawn more thoroughly into the skill of close reading.

In the chapters that follow, you will be guided through the elements of a poem. You will learn to look at a poem's images, metaphor, words, symbols, sound, rhythm, shape, and tone. You will combine these elements and categorical thinking in a chapter called "Putting It All Together." It wouldn't hurt to begin the book by reading the "Putting It All Together" chapter first, and then starting the elements of the poem. Later, you will examine the formal categories that poems fall under, such as genre, verse form, and shaping forms, and examine some poets who found formal strategies that were a natural part of the lives they lived. The book closes with a section on how to apply these learned skills in your home or school or with your friends. As your reading skills grow, your poetic intelligence and pleasure will grow as well. You are beginning a great work shoulder-to-shoulder with the writers in this book—wrestling, sifting, puzzling with the collection of words they have set down. May your great sloth heart move toward love.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

First Principles

Do not let this book overwhelm you. If all you do is give this book to your students as a resource that you only minimally engage, you have already made a great step. Consider having each student read around to find a poem she would like to read aloud to the class. Start your day this way. If you can't do it daily, do it weekly. Even this small step will begin to cultivate a relationship between the students and poetry that the students are free to pursue independently. Because students will fish for poems to read to the class or to family, they will likely discover other parts of this book's text as well. If some chapters seem particularly difficult given your educational background, consider using these chapters only for the anthology of poems and the activities in them. Poetry is such a natural pleasure to us, so much in harmony with our instinct and experience, we cannot help but be drawn to it, if it is introduced with pleasure. For a simplified plan on how to use this book, see Appendix C.

The Teacher's Manual

Available for purchase is a manual that “reads” or explains approximately 75 of the book's 125 poems. This is in addition to the book's “Learning to Read Closely” section, which thoroughly discusses a poem in nearly each chapter. Observing the skill we are meant to acquire is a great aid to learning it. *The Art of Poetry Teacher's Manual* is meant to help provide you, the teacher, with confidence as you lead a discussion. There are often suggestions for the discussion as well.

Three Timetables

This book is meant to fit your curriculum scheduling needs. It is conceivable that it could be used as an intense **month-long unit**, during which your class would work on a lesson each day and limit the activities at the end of each section. An alternative would be to work on **two sections per month (or two weeks for each section) and spread it out over the school year**. If you'd like a slower pace, consider doing **several chapters a year over the course of several years**. This would be more poetic education than many receive in their high school years, especially if the student enjoys the work and is ignited to search for more poems. Considering the book according to its chapters and significant division—the elements of poetry and the formal tradition of poetry—is a helpful way to think about your use. Check artofpoetryonline.com or ClassicalAcademicPress.com for a sample weekly schedule.

Academic Levels

If you are teaching younger students, cull the lessons for key points that you'd like them to receive and ignore more in-depth subject material. “The Elements of Poetry” chapters at the beginning of the book are accessible and basic to all language levels. You could save “The Formal History of Poetry” sections for later, or study those sections only for the content of their poems. You could read the poems aloud, one a day, for the remainder of the book. Have the students pick out images and metaphors or words that strike them. Have them listen for sounds that function according to the descriptions in earlier chapters. In other words, you need not teach your seventh and eighth graders the intricacies of a villanelle in order to use this book, though there is no reason why they can't learn this. You may introduce students to “The Elements of

Poetry” chapters and then move on to “Growing Your Interest,” where they can use and apply some of the skills they’ve learned. Each lesson has activities at the end of the chapter, and the later chapters demonstrate how to establish a writing group and the habits of a writer. These include keeping a poetry notebook, keeping a poetry journal, having a poetry slam, hosting a reading series, and selecting readings and resources. Older students (high school) should do very nicely with the standard approach to the text according to your curriculum needs and the time you have to spend on this activity.

Other Skills

You can also use the book to teach other skills beyond reading poetry. Poetry is a good way to learn to analyze and begin to ask questions about how to interpret. The “Learning to Read Closely” sections in the book are meant to be a guide for working out the complexities of reading. Being educated in metaphoric thinking or analogical thinking (comparing one thing to another) is essential to all thought—knowing how far a comparison can be taken and where the metaphor breaks down, or loses its parallel properties, is important. Learning to write analytically about poems strengthens writing skills. Studying the elements of a poem will reinforce your students’ skills in rhetoric and in other literary reading. They will begin to think in terms of figurative language and of *how* a piece of writing means and not simply *what* it means. They will begin to write with language that is fresh and consider imaginative comparisons, even for their more analytical work. Hence, this book dovetails nicely with rhetoric and writing units as well as with literature class. Educating the imagination is an important aspect of studying poems.

Out of the Standard Classroom Use

In addition to the formal classroom, this book will work nicely for an elective class, a homeschooling cooperative group, or for at-home instruction among several students of different ages. It could also work as a poetry circle group in which students participate outside of school and with or without a teacher (perhaps a summer poetry circle). If this is your interest, start with “Growing Your Interest” to see how a workshop functions and how to keep a writer’s journal and a favorite poem notebook. Plan a grand finale in which participating students have a poetry slam. Have a special recording session in which students make their own CD of cherished poems, reading them aloud. If your student is particularly musical, have her compose songs using the poems as lyrics, record the songs, and give the CDs away as gifts. There are endless creative possibilities.

Memorization

Another approach to this text is through memorization. Memorized language has long been a part of education. I had a friend whose study of sixteenth-century poetry revolutionized his own writing. When I asked him how he was able to internalize that century's work, he said he had a short attention span and so he started with memorization. (He was an English Ph.D. student.) He'd learn a poem and mull over it. What he learned about the poem was from the inside out, because he knew the lines and joints of the poem intimately. Sound and rhythm, the music of poetry, come alive when you say poems aloud from memory. One approach to this text is to start memorizing its poems and talk about the elements and formal traditions after you've committed portions of it to memory. We have included a CD of poems read aloud with many voices to aid you in this endeavor. Time spent in the car and doing tasks with your hands is an excellent way to begin memorizing. If you have a hard time getting started, create hand motions to the words to help you remember the language visually. Observe your own best practices for memorizing (perhaps cue your memory through the poem's images, sound, line, or sentence) and observe also how you approach the poem differently when it is something you are memorizing. This is an excellent way to store up a treasure trove for moments when your mind is idle or needs distraction. I have seen young children memorize poems in minutes. It is also a wonderful word gift to recite or write to someone for a special occasion.

Christine Perrin in Your Classroom

If you are interested in having author Christine Perrin lead your school or group in a seminar regarding this book or help you to get started in any of these activities, contact information is available at artofpoetryonline.com or at the offices of Classical Academic Press at 717-730-0711 or toll free at 866-730-0711.

O 1

IMAGES

{the elements of poetry}

An **image** is a **literal** or **concrete** detail that is sensory—a word or phrase that calls on the **senses** of sight, smell, taste, touch, and sound. In poems, these details are made from language and create pictures or sensations. In life we are inundated with images: the smell of bread, the blue in the sky after the sun sinks below the horizon, the feel of sand in your bathing suit, the first taste of black bottom pie. Some of these images carry great importance and emotion; some of them exist without our noticing. All images, no matter how ordinary or unusual, can be used to great effect in a poem.

Think about some of the mental pictures related to your senses that have been lodged in your brain simply because you have been alive for a decade or so. So often our memories are held in images. You can remember the flicker of afternoon light on the creek in front your house, or perhaps singing carols with your sister at the piano, the fish you ate fresh from the stream and fried in butter that time you vacationed in the Adirondacks. Images of all textures abound: figuring out your locker combination for the first time, kicking the soccer ball and smelling the cut grass, hearing the guitar riff in a favorite song. Because we live by collecting images without even trying to, they become especially important and powerful in poetry; they move us and help to bring us to the moment and the place in which the poet is speaking. Hence they become a kind of time travel machine that transports us back into our past or into the present of the speaker of the poem. A poet uses images to construct our experience of a poem because we use the received images of our daily lives to construct our own experience, identity, and culture. Poems aren't summaries or sermons or scientific equations; they are worlds that we enter and

experience for a time, as if we were going to the Renaissance Faire where people are dressed in costumes, speak in accents, eat drumsticks, and joust on horses.

When we use images in our writing, we bring those to whom we speak right next to us. Poet Stanley Kunitz says that “the artist in the modern world is probably the only person, with a handful of exceptions, who keeps alive that sense of the sharing of this life with others. When he watches that leaf fall, it’s falling for you. Or that sparrow....” W.B. Yeats has said, “Art bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world, and shrinks from what Blake calls mathematic form, from every abstract form, from all that is of the brain only.” He is making the argument that all art, poetry included, depends on the senses, on direct experience, and not just on the mind. Art moves us by appealing to our physical bodies. The art of poetry appeals to our bodies most directly when it uses images to cause us to see, touch, taste, hear, and smell the world with which the speaker of the poem would like to bring us into contact. Abstract language, such as “love,” “peace,” “despair,” and “truth” is of deep interest to a poet, but, according to Yeats, the actual process of making or reading a poem never starts with these. Instead, poetry starts in the body, in the senses, and therefore in images.

Think about how it feels when a friend returns from a wonderful vacation and you eagerly listen for the physical details that reconstruct her experience for you. It is as close as you can come to being there and sharing the experience. At times the vividness of a retold story or event can be more intensified than the experience itself, depending both on the storyteller and the listener. This extra intensity is one quality that distinguishes poems that endure, loved by thousands of readers, from poems that are quickly forgotten.

Here’s another thing to think about. Part of our experience of life is its transience—its quality of passing quickly. Philosopher Hans Gadamer says this:

Whenever we have to hold something, it is because it is transient and threatens to escape our grasp. In fact, our fundamental experience as beings subject to time is that all things escape us, that all the events of our lives fade more and more, so that at best they glow with an almost unreal shimmer in the most distant recollection.

This writer goes on to suggest that poems and the poetic word bring time to a standstill. In particular, images in a poem mark the intersection between what is passing and what is eternal. Images bring us alive to memory—smelling the new paint of the room you worked on with your father, riding the Ferris wheel on your family vacation and feeling your stomach jump as it turned downward, or watching a face behind a rain streaked window on the day you found out about your friend’s illness. They remind us that we are alive in bodies and that time is passing.

As you study this book you will learn that many other **figures of speech**, or **figurative language**, use images. For instance, **metaphors**, or **word pictures**, make a direct and deep connection between a concrete image and an abstract idea—*my love is a rose*—or between two different concrete images—*her hair is a shining metal helmet*. **Symbols** use a person, object, image, word, or event to evoke a range of meaning beyond the thing itself: the dove of peace, the cross, the Star of David, or a host of personal symbols built over the course of a single poem. (See an example of this in the poem *The Crow*, in which the image of the crow comes to stand for a prophet who is trying to get the speaker’s attention, just as prophets in all traditions come

to deliver a burning message to people who do not want to hear it.) Many of the things you will notice poems doing begin with image as their basement. Images in a given poem often work together (what we might call a **family of images**) to create a larger whole. *Storm Ending* achieves this. Sometimes a single deep image is developed throughout a poem, as in *The Swing*. Jay Parini, in his introduction to the *Wadsworth Anthology*, describes the literary image this way:

An image is a complex emotional unit, involving the whole of the reader's mind. It compels attention by its sound as well as its visual element. It conjoins thought and emotion, making a unified impression. In the very best poems, images lodge deep in the mind, where they cannot be easily removed.

As you read the following poems—closely!—may an image lodge itself deeply also in you.

LEARNING TO READ CLOSELY

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926)
Translated by Edward Snow

The Panther*

His gaze has from the passing of the bars
grown so tired, that it holds nothing anymore.
It seems to him there are a thousand bars
and behind a thousand bars no world.

5 The supple pace of powerful soft strides,
turning in the very smallest circle,
is like a dance of strength around a center
in which a great will stands numbed.

10 Only sometimes the curtain of the pupils
soundlessly slides up— Then an image enters,
glides through the limbs' taut stillness,
dives into the heart and dies.



*images are underlined

From the second line we understand that the speaker is investing the panther with meaning beyond the literal; in other words, we are aware that the panther means more than a panther in this poem as soon as we get to the word “tired” to describe his gaze. Then the perspective of the panther is further unspooled for us when the speaker says, “It seems to him.” Though we have all looked at an animal and imagined what it might be thinking, very few of us have declared with such certainty that we know precisely what it thinks. Notice that the first **stanza** puts great emphasis on the bars by bringing them physically before us as they are, always, before the panther: three times in three **lines** they are mentioned and thus they pass inescapably before our eyes, too.

This poem uses stanzas deliberately and skillfully, demonstrating the way that stanzas function as rooms (the meaning of the Italian root of the word). Each one serves a different purpose in the poem. Notice how they end—definitively. The first stanza ends with “no world;” the second, “stands numbed;” the third, “dies.” Each stanza ending (“world” at the end of the first; “numbed,” the second; “dies,” the third) lets the reader stay awhile in the reality of the stanza just finished. The white space between stanzas produces a longer pause than that at the end of the line.

The second stanza reveals to us the strength and agility and potential power of the panther, which is currently impotent. Unlike the first stanza, which is clipped and broken into two sentences, this stanza has a single sentence that, with each line, paces and spills onto the following line, much like the motion of the cat.

The third stanza formally demonstrates the emotional movement of the poem for us. The **caesura** (or middle of the line interruption, in this case a dash) of the second line records the possibility and hope of change represented by the entering image. The text is interrupted by an image, and the poem pauses, causing the reader to pause as the image “enters” and “glides” and “dives.” Utter despair and paralysis follow when hope cannot be realized or acted upon and the image “dies.” The image that “dives into the heart and dies” represents the failed possibility of a life outside the bars, of an image other than bars. The poem ends on the word of death. This poem was written originally in German, which means that in translation it is a new creation, a new poem made by poet and translator where some of the original skill and intent are lost and replaced with different sounds and shapes and words which, though changed, are often equally beautiful.

This poem is a wonderful example of how the ideas and the **shape** of a poem can work together. Poetry uses all of its lines and spaces, which prose doesn't have, to create meaning. Rilke's poem *The Panther* operates largely on the basis of **symbolism**, using images to create a picture that has meaning beyond itself. The panther is real but it is also a symbol of a state of utter despair and cagedness. There are many occasions in which an individual, a community, or even a people group experiences hopelessness and cannot imagine escaping the situation or state of mind which cages them. Rainer Maria Rilke, the poet, doesn't spell out for us whether or not this panther is meant to represent something specific, like slavery, or being trapped in a bad relationship, or an emotional or economic depression. He lets us fill in the specifics according to our own experience. He does, however, clearly express what it feels like to be in a cage and lose all hope. This cage is not simply the literal cage of the panther (though it is that); it is also the many cages that are possible in the human experience. Though many powerful poems do assign more specific meaning to their images—see the next chapter on metaphor—symbolism gives more interpretative freedom to the reader. In a poem like *The Panther*, such freedom actually helps us feel more intensely the imprisonment of the animal. We are free to assign meaning to his plight; he is not.

ANTHOLOGY

Jean Toomer (1894–1967)

Storm Ending

Thunder blossoms gorgeously above our heads,
Great, hollow, bell-like flowers,
Rumbling in the wind,
Stretching clappers to strike our ears.
5 Full-lipped flowers
Bitten by the sun
Bleeding rain
Dripping rain like golden honey—
And the sweet earth flying from the thunder.

1. Notice how Toomer's poem takes you to a distinct place, a specific experience constructed by image layered upon image. Make a list of all the verbs in the poem, then all the nouns, then all the adjectives, and adverbs.
2. We may expect images in poetry to always be nouns, *things* we can see, touch, smell, etc., but in this poem the primary image is announced by a verb—can you name it?
3. How would you describe the atmosphere created in this poem? Is the overall feeling of this poem negative or positive? Dark or light? Fearful or comforting? What specific evidence can you point to in the poem to defend your answer?

Robert Frost (1874–1963)

Dust of Snow

The way a crow
shook down on me
the dust of snow
from a hemlock tree

5 Has given my heart
a change of mood
and saved a part
of a day I rued.

1. What is the small story in this poem and what are its images?
2. What does the word “rue” mean?
3. Has anything like this ever happened to you?
4. What can you guess about the change of mood in the poet’s heart? Why doesn’t he name his emotions more specifically?
5. Think about the title of the poem: the image of snow dust was significant enough to the poet that in this very short poem he included its exact wording twice. Why?

Judith Kunst (1970–)

The Crow

	Was it because at last I cleaned the window		His long claws scuffed at the pane and I yelled "Crow!
5	that he threw himself against the glass? I thought, poor crow—	20	go away!" Again his body slapped the glass,
	he doesn't know the evergreens and blue sky		again, and then again, and then at last
10	are behind him. I turned back to my page	25	he caught my eye— oh, prophet, terrified.
15	but <i>whumpp</i> — the bird attacked the glass again.		

1. This poem gives us another encounter between a crow and a human being. What are the specific images that place us in the scene of the poem?
2. Who is the main character? What specific evidence can you point to in the poem to support your answer?
3. How many different feelings can you find in this poem?
4. At exactly what point in the poem do we discover the crow is more than just a crow? How do you know?
5. What is a prophet? What images or feelings does that word call up for you? Why do you think the poet composed the last stanza of the poem so that it is not totally clear who is "terrified"?
6. Look again at the first sentence of the poem; what might be the significance of the speaker cleaning the window glass?

Walt Whitman (1819–1892)

Cavalry Crossing a Ford

- A line in long array where they wind betwixt green islands,
 They take a serpentine course, their arms flash in the sun—hark to the
 musical clank,
 Behold the silvery river, in it the splashing horses loitering stop to drink,
 5 Behold the brown-faced men, each group, each person a picture, the
 negligent rest on the saddles,
 Some emerge on the opposite bank, others are just entering the ford—
 while,
 Scarlet and blue and snowy white,
 10 The guidon flags flutter gayly in the wind.



1. What are we looking at in this poem?
2. How do the images draw you into the long ago time period portrayed in the poem?
3. The poet uses two verbs that make *you* as the reader a character in this poem—what are they?
4. What, to you, is the most interesting or powerful image?
5. Have you seen anything that looks like this, or any part of this kind of scene elsewhere? How many sentences does this poem use? What is the effect of that number?
6. How does the way in which the poem is structured echo or help express the pictures?
7. What different physical senses do we get to experience through this poem?
8. Is there a mood established in the poem through the images? What is it?

Ezra Pound (1885–1972)

In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.

1. What are we looking at in this picture? What are the petals? What is the black bough?
2. What kind of mood does the imagery (the second line) give us?
3. Why do we need the title?
4. How is the length and shape of this poem perfectly chosen to help lodge the single image in our minds?
5. What color are the petals you imagine as you read?
6. What images or experiences in your own life are similar to those portrayed in the poem?
7. Why do you think the poet chose the word “apparition”?

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894)

The Swing

How do you like to go up in a swing,
Up in the air so blue?
Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing
Ever a child can do!

- 5 Up in the air and over the wall,
Till I can see so wide,
River and trees and cattle and all
Over the countryside—

- 10 Till I look down on the garden green,
Down on the roof so brown—
Up in the air I go flying again,
Up in the air and down!

1. Does this poem remind you of your own experience?
2. What are some of the images that create the experience portrayed in the poem?
3. What are some of the words that create the experience?
4. What is the effect of the rhymes? Circle the rhymes. Underline the images.
5. Why do you think the poet uses the word “down” three times in the last stanza?
6. What are some feelings one might feel on a swing? Can you find one or more of these feelings in the language of this poem?
7. Is the poem about anything more than childhood swinging? How can you tell?

ACTIVITIES

1. Take five minutes and freewrite about images from one of the four seasons. (In freewriting, you write for the entire time, not planning what you say, but simply writing anything that comes to your mind, even when nothing comes to your mind. It helps to generate ideas.)
2. Describe an image that is important to you. Discuss and identify an image that's important to your class. What kind of images did you choose? Could they be called symbols? Why or why not? If they are symbols, what multiple meanings do your images represent?
3. Describe the past school year through four images.
4. Figure out which sense (of our five) is most important or strongest to you.
5. Cut out a series of images from a magazine that describes you or a relationship that's important to you. Make a collage with the images—does it matter how the pictures are arranged? Do two different arrangements convey two different feelings in you? Why?
6. Write your own version of the Ezra Pound poem. Its title should announce your location (“At...”), and the two-line body should present one glimpse, one impression of that location, using an image from nature.
7. Play an **association** game with a partner or have a single person leading the class. The leader says a word and you respond with a word that comes to your mind and then the other person (or you could go around the room with this) responds with another word. Continue for a while and see how the brain makes a necklace of these words and thoughts.
8. Write a poem like the poem titled *The Panther* but with a different animal, perhaps a snake. Describe the motion of a snake by demonstrating it. Use the lines and the stanzas to help you. If you'd prefer a different animal (say, an elephant) feel free.
9. The words “the way...” are commonly used to introduce an image that is a complete experience—not just the crow himself but *the way* he shook the snow; not just the thunder and rain but *the way* it looked and moved in the sky. Write your own version of the poem *Dust of Snow*, keeping Frost's structure but replacing his story and images with your own, either real or imagined, serious or silly.



Ezra Pound

VOCABULARY

Abstract language: words that suggest concepts, ideas, and generalizations, such as peace and justice.

Association: a leap that the mind makes when one thing or idea makes you think of another.

When this is recorded it is called stream of consciousness—the stream of thought that the mind runs along at any given time.

Caesura: a pause in the middle of a line of poetry marked by punctuation.

Concrete language: words that describe particular things (bug, table, nose) as opposed to words that are abstract.

Family of images: a collection of images in a single poem that work together to form an intentional group of concrete details that create a larger picture of significance.

Figure of speech: saying one thing and suggesting another, so that words have significance beyond the literal meaning. To compare one thing to another. Literally, to superimpose a figure upon the surface of what is truly there.

Figurative language: language that imposes a figure on the surface or content of what is actually there (the literal). Metaphor, simile, and symbol all do this; they suggest something beyond what they say.

Image: a concrete detail that speaks to the senses.

Line: the place where the poet deliberately ends a line, a distinctive feature of poetry, as opposed to prose in which the lines are not broken by the writer but by the margins of the page. Also referred to as “verse” or “stich.”

Literal: that which actually is there, concrete.

Metaphor: a comparison between two things that are unlike; a resemblance forged in the mind of the poet between two unlike things.

Senses or sensing: our ability to perceive with our sense organs—touch, taste, hear, see, smell.

Shape: the element that most closely involves the visible form of the poem on the page. Also referred to as “form.”

Stanza: the equivalent of the paragraph in prose, a group of lines gathered as a unit in a poem.

Symbol: use of a person, object, image, word, or event to evoke a range of meaning beyond the thing itself; an important image in a poem that has multiple, unspecified meanings and suggestions in its use.

Symbolism: representing things by symbols, or investing things with a symbolic meaning or character.

Word pictures: another name for a metaphor.