

Note to teachers and students

This piece, *Understanding and Appreciating poetry*, an essential component of language learning, aims to emphasize the relevance of poetry in our study and in our lives. It supports the material presented in the *Comprehensive English series* course.

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UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATING POETRY

Let us read this poem.

THE TOWN CHILD

I live in the town in the street;
It is crowded with traffic and feet;
There are buses and motors and trams;
I wish there were meadows and lambs.

The houses all wait in a row,
There is smoke everywhere I go.
I don't like the noise I hear-
I wish there were woods very near.

There is only one thing that I love,
And there is the sky far above.
There is plenty of room in the blue
For castles of cloud and me, too!

When you read a poem you look for the following:

1. The **theme** of the poem expresses or conveys the main idea in the poem.
This poem tells us or conveys the various aspects of town life which the poet dislikes. It also tells what he really wishes for. This is the theme or main idea, which runs through the poem as you read it.
2. The **intention** of the poet
The intention of the poet is his reason for writing the poem or what he wants to tell the readers or what message he wants to send to the readers.
To find the intention of the poet, look for the main thought or idea in the poem.

In the poem '*The Town Child*' the poet wants to show why the Town child dislikes living in the city.

This is the *intention* of the poet.

3. The *mood* of the poem

You look for the mood of the poem. The mood is the feeling the poem conveys – how you feel as you read the poem.

Mood tells of feeling – sadness, joy, disgust, excitement, longing, anger are words that show feeling.

In the poem the Town Child the town child has a feeling of sadness and longing.

He is sad because of the hustle, bustle and the various sounds and the smoke of the city.

He is longing for things in the country – meadows, lambs, and woods which give happiness.

Read this poem carefully.

Caps, caps. bottle broken,
Rotted foodstuff makes vast mounds,
A jungle of rotten remains
Fill the air with odours sour,
The here is only the smell of rot,
The stench of rotted, decayed dogs,
Only worms compete with flying vultures
To thrive on vast expanse of filth.

Here is no beauty anymore,
Here is no caring anymore,
No beauteous scenes adorn
With flaming poui and rich green shrubs,
No lovely sights to please the eye,
No sweet smell to steal our senses.
Can't we transform this filthy path
And bless it with nature's freshness?

Anon

1. What is the **theme** of the poem?

The poet presents a picture of a dump filled with garbage and foul smell. He gives all the details which tell of the polluted area.

Do you see the details he presents to describe the decay and rot? Select the details.

2. The poet's **intention**

The poet wishes to let us imagine how polluted the dump area is in Stanza one.

He regrets the place has lost its natural beauty.

Flowers, trees and vegetation have been destroyed because no one cares. He wonders whether the place can be changed back to its natural beauty (Stanza 2).

The poet expresses a longing to see lovely sights and to smell the fragrance of flowers and shrubs.

3. **Mood and feeling**

The poet expresses his disgust with the unpleasant dump which pollutes the environs. The language he uses tells of his disappointment that the place is abandoned because no one cares.

Imagery

In poetry as well as in prose writing, writers use words to create mental pictures or pictures in the mind. We imagine these pictures through the mind's eye. These word pictures are called images. The images or imagery help us to see vividly or clearly the things or ideas, which are being described.

For example, in the poem, The Town Child, the poet presents an image of traffic (human and vehicular) when he says:

“It is crowded with traffic and feet

There are buses and motors and trams”

All the details – buses, motor, trams, feet – give us a picture of a crowded town filled with people and vehicles.

Here the poet appeals to our sense of sight. He makes us imagine the crowded street.

In the second poem, an abandoned and uncared for garbage dump is presented in stanza one – caps, bottles, and mounds of rotted food.

The appeal here is to our sense of sight. The picture of dump with its decaying objects is striking to our eyes.

The **odour sour** and **decaying dogs** tell how filthy and unpleasant and polluted the place has become.

Expressions such as odour sour and **stench of rotted dogs** appeal to our sense of smell.

The images presented all make the scene vivid and striking. The descriptions make the idea of theme more meaningful to us.

Figurative language

Sometimes poets use images figuratively. They compare the things they are describing with something else. In doing so, they make the description lively, vivid and meaningful for the reader. Poets use figures of speech, for example, the simile or metaphor, to make the descriptions more vivid and interesting.

The simile

This is a form of writing in which one thing is compared with another, with the use of **like** or **as**.

Examine the use of similes in these pieces:

(a) “To the dwarf, the giant seemed as tall as a mountain.”

Here the giant and the mountain are compared because of their great height.

- (b) “The wind howled like a wolf waiting to leap when the door was opened.” Here the sound of the wind is likened or compared to the cry of a wolf waiting for its prey or wanting to attack.

Practice

Examine these examples and see the comparisons and how vivid they are. Do they make the writing more interesting and lively?

1. He stands on the road like a lean tree blown by the wind.
2. I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high over valley and hills.
3. Sometimes I tremble like a storm-swept flower.
4. The airplane soared like a bird in flight.

The Metaphor

A metaphor is a figure of speech which takes the comparison further, by saying that one thing is another, by giving the qualities of one thing to another thing which is totally different.

See how a canefield is described here:

- (A) “You are an army
of massed and waving beauty.”

The canes swaying are compared to an army, well-attired.

Do you find this description lively?

- (B) “the children flitted across the
room in shouts of joy and laughter.”

The word **flitted** compares children to butterflies.

Note: The Metaphor makes a comparison without using **like** or **as**.

- (C) I heard the rain drumming on the rooftop and saw the lightning
spears cut across the darkened sky.

The sound of the raindrops on the roof is compared or likened to the sounds of a drum. Does this comparison give the full effect of the sound of the rain as it falls on the rooftop?

The lightning as it strikes seems like spears piercing or stabbing the dark sky.

(D) ***The spread of leaves was a brown carpet under the tree.***

Here the writer compares fallen dried (brown) leaves under the tree with a carpet. Brown carpet conveys the idea that it looks beautiful and it is comfortable to sit or walk or rest on. We can imagine a full spread of leaves under the tree, looking like a full spread carpet.

Practice:

Examine these examples and see the comparisons and how vivid and interesting they are. Select them and comment on them.

1. The sea is a hungry dog,
Giant and grey
He rolls on the beach all day.
2. The sun was a red balloon floating in the sky.
3. He was a lion in the fight.
4. The night was a black cloak covering the land.

Onomatopoeia

When the sounds of words reflect their meanings, the device is called ***Onomatopoeia***.

Examples:

1. The leaves ***rustled*** on the floor when they were blown by the wind.
2. The doors ***banged*** when the storm raged wildly.
3. The ***crashing*** waves danced upon the shore.
4. The coconut fell with a ***thud***.

Practice

Select the sound words which reflect their meaning:

1. The brakes screeched as the car hit the rock.
2. The wind howled as if a wolf were about to attack.
3. Did you hear the tinkle of the church bell?
4. The rising water gushed as it made its way to the street.

Now read this poem and select the sound words.

See how effective they are. Do these make the writing richer and more meaningful?

NOISE

I like noise.
 The whoop of a boy, the thud of a hoof,
 The rattle of rain on a galvanized roof,
 The hubbub of traffic, the roar of a train,
 The throb of machinery numbing the brain,
 The switching of wires in an overhead tram,
 The rush of the wind, a door on the slam,
 The boom of the thunder, crash of the waves,
 The din of a river that races and raves,
 The crack of a rifle, the clank of a pail,
 The strident tattoo of a swift-slapping sail-
 From any old sound that the silence destroys
 Arises a gamut of soul – stirring joys.
 I like noise

Jessie Pope

Personification

When the poet endows or gives human qualities of feeling and action to something that is not human, he uses the technique called ***personification***.

Example:

1. The wind **stood** up and gave a **shout**;
He **whispered** on his finger and **kicked** the withered leaves.
The winds here behave like a living thing with feeling and movement. The wind is active and furious as it goes on its way.
2. After the flower withers the dew weeps at night.
The dew is given the feeling or emotion of a human being.
The feeling of sadness or sorrow for the dying flower is captured in the image of the dew pouring its tears on the flower.

Practice

Create or make up some examples in which life or human qualities are given to things that are not human.

Alliteration

Read these lines taken from a poem:

The noise gathers as children shout
To rival the **waging wind without**

The highlighted expression is an example of literary device called **alliteration**.

When similar (consonant) sounds are used in succession or at short intervals, we use this device of **alliteration**. The similar sounds are usually at the beginning of words. These sound words are used to gain emphasis. In poetry, this device creates musical sounds and enacts meaning.

Here are other examples of the use of alliteration:

1. Three miles meandering with a mazy motion through wood and dale the sacred river ran.

2. I shall return to laugh and love and watch with wonder the forest fires
flame.
3. He tossed and turned towards the door that banged and beat against
the board.
4. The fear of the furious fire faded as raindrops drenched the dry earth.

Sensory images

Poets use the senses – sight, sound, taste, smell and touch to create images. In this way the language becomes more interesting, exciting and meaningful. See how the different senses are used.

SENSE OF SIGHT

“The sun, our sun came staring! Blazing!

“The sun, our sun came firing in”

“We moved from warm houses,
Houses hedged with bougainvilleas,
And poincianas, and orange blossoms
Yellow in the morning light.”

Does the poet make you see nature and natural life as you read these lines?

Is the picture or image clear in your mind’s eye?

Comment on these images.

SENSE OF SOUND

Here the poet uses sound words to describe a windy night. Read this piece and select the sound words.

The dustbin lids clang on the ground
The tree – top groan,
The wind down the bedroom chimney
Begins to moan
I hear a sudden roar
Through the blankets covering my face,

The clatter and rattle of the wheels
At a furious pace.

SENSE OF TASTE

Here are words which describe taste:

sour, sweet, bitter, salty, delicious, bland, peppery, minty, spicy.

The sour sauce made my throat sore.

The mango's sweet nectar dripped through my fingers as I sucked it.
Jack was driven to tears as he bit the peppery plum.

SENSE OF TOUCH

Read these examples of the sense of touch.

1. Like feathers of a bird the soft silken shirt feels on my skin.
2. The slimy, slippery mud struck on my skin and I was left to wash with care.
3. As I lay on the floor the woolen rug was comforting to my tired body.

SENSE OF SMELL

Here are words which depict smell;

sweet, fresh, fragrant, pungent, fetid, rancid, smoky, stale, rotten, minty, spicy

How pleasant is the room with fragrant roses!
How tasty is the fruit that fills the basket!

In this poem the poet appeals to our five senses. He makes us see, smell, taste, touch and hear as we read the poem.

Can you remember – I've forgotten-
The heat of the sun, and the cooling breeze
And the warm wet smell of the sea?
Can you remember – I've forgotten
What it's like to take my ease
Under the shade of the almond trees?

Can you taste what I have eaten,
Chicken and pepper and rice and peas,
Ripe red melon with smooth black seeds,
Sweet – sop, sour-sop, avocado pear,
Boiled banana and ginger beer?

Can you see what I have seen,
The John crow's glide, and the pelican's dive

Waterspouts far out to sea,
A rainbow touching the top of the hill,
Clouds like castles, royal palms,

And a big green lizard on the window sill?
Can you hear what I have heard,
The crack of thunder and rattle of rain,
Tree toads cackle, and donkey's bray,
Cocks in the morning, dogs at night,
And a conch shell blowing at break of day?
I can't remember, I've forgotten,
For I live now in a faraway place,
Where the nights are long,
And the winds are cold,
The stars hidden, the moon is dim,
And everyone seems to be growing old.

1. To which senses does stanza one appeal?
2. Which lines appeal to your sense of hearing?
3. Select
 - (A) taste words
 - (B) touch words
 - (C) sound words
 - (D) words or images which appeal to your sense of sight.

Practice

Read the poem and discuss the questions which follow.
Examine theme, mood and sense of sound

THE WEEDING GANG

I know the girls are coming,
 For I hear the gentle humming
 Of choruses they're singing on their way;
 I hear their saucepans jingling,
 And their cutlasses a-tingling,
 Which as their music instruments they play.

They fill the silence after,
 With their peals of merry laughter

Which float upon the pinion of the air,
 And also ease their walking
 With some idle silly talking,
 With *kheesaz and +boojhowals very queer.

Then once again their singing
 They resume, until the ringing
 Of their voices mingles with the whistling breeze;
 I love to see their faces
 With their smiles and subtle graces,
 And I love to hear their charming melodies.

❖ stories + riddles

C.E.J. Ramcharitar-Lalla

1. What do you think is the **theme** of the poem?
2. Select all the words that **appeal to the sense** of hearing.
3. What are the musical instruments to which the poet refers?
4. What is the **mood** of the girls?
5. What is the girls' attitude to their work?
 Support your answer with quotations from the poem.
6. Look at the words – jingling, tingling, whistling, ringing, humming.
 The sound of each of these words gives a clue to its meaning.

Example:

Jingling – Its sound tells that when objects hit against each other they make a jingling sound.

Find the meaning of the other words in the list, by listening to their sounds.

7. What response does the poet have towards the girls?
 8. Have you enjoyed reading this poem? Why?

Read the poem and discuss the questions based on it.

HURRICANE PASSAGE

(Owen Campbell)

But dawn came with a rush and lightning blazed
 Far fiercer than sunflash about and above.

Music was wilder than ever, - louder
 Sky letting her tresses fly, gazed,
 5 Glared madly at us.

Foam swirled in a ballet of waves and shouted,
 And the spray hurled aloft, pirouetted
 Foam spun on before us and swirled with the wind
 We were frightened,
 10 And lowered mainsail and jib

The wind.

Horn-blasting, and wind spun away, sped in the spirals,
 Armed with the spray and the rain;
 Struck wildly at cloud torn to tatters and tassel,
 15 Swung again and again;

Spun a tassel-shaped cloud to the sea,
 Tore a rent in the smoke
 And sped through the flue that was there
 It blundered and broke.

The sea.

20 The sea gnashed its teeth at the wind
 Gaped, clacked its jaws like gunfire
 Brazen-bellied, it bellowed,
 Reared higher.

25 The sea whirled and growled in its temper
 The sea was a hunger;

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Rushed to wrestle out vessel,
Mouth agape to its iron maw.

The ship.

Bounded or plunged, hounded,
We yawned, but still pounded to southward
30 Sea engulfed us.
And belched us again in its rage
The day was an age.

1. Who are the “we” speaking in the poem?
2. What incident are they describing?
3. What is the rhythm of the poem?

The poet describes the intensity of the hurricane and its impact on the crew; the sea and the ship. He employs several devices to bring the incident alive. He uses imagery, figures of speech, sound devices and appeal to the senses.

4. To which senses does the poet appeal?
Select relevant details to support your answer.
5. What device does each of these expressions exemplify?
 - (A) “Sky letting her trusses fly, gazed
Glared madly at us.” (lines 4 & 5)
 - (B) “Foam swirled in a ballet of waves and shouted.” (line 6)
 - (C) “Horn-blasting, the wind spun away, sped in spirals,
Armed with the spray and the rain” (lines 12 & 13)
 - (D) “The sea gnashed its teeth at the wind” (lines 20- 21)
 - (E) “Gaped, clacked its jaws like gunfire” (line 22)
 - (F) “Brazen-bellied, it bellowed” (line 23)
6. Which lines tell you of the crew’s response to the raging storm?
7. What effect has the wind on the vessel?
8. Select two examples of onomatopoeia in the poem.
9. Why does the poet conclude that “The day was an age”?
10. What is the mood conveyed in the poem?

Read this poem and discuss it in class.

THE WIND IN A FROLIC

William Howitt

The wind one morning sprang up from sleep,
Saying, "Now for a frolic! Now for a leap!
Now for a mad-cap galloping chase!
I'll make a commotion in every place!"

So it swept with a bustle right through a great town,
Cracking the signs and scattering down
Shutters; and whisking, with merciless squalls,
Old women's bonnets and gingerbread stalls.
There never was heard a much lustier shout,
As the apples and oranges trundled about;

And the urchins that stand with their thievish eyes
For ever on watch ran off each with a prize.

Then away to the fields it went blustering and humming,
And the cattle all wondered what monster was coming.
It plucked by the tails the grave matronly cows,
And tossed the colts' manes all over their brows;
Till, offended at such an unusual salute,
They all turned their backs, and stood sulky and mute.

So on it went, capering and playing its pranks,
Whistling with reeds on the broad river's banks,
Puffing the birds as they sat on the spray,
Or the traveller grave on the King's highway.

It was not too nice to hustle the bags
Of the beggar, and flutter his dirty rags;
'Twas so bold that is feared not to play its joke
With the doctor's wig or the gentleman's cloak.
Through the forest it roared, and cried gaily, "Now,
You sturdy old oaks, I'll make you bow!"

And it made them bow without much more ado,
For it cracked their great branches through and through,

Then it rushed like a monster on cottage and farm,
 Striking their dwellers with sudden alarm;
 And they ran out like bees in a mid-summer swarm;
 There were dames with their kerchiefs tied over their caps,
 To see if their poultry were free from mishaps;
 The turkeys they gobbled, the geese screamed aloud,
 And the hens crept to roost in a terrified crowd;
 There was rearing of ladders, and logs were laid on,
 Where the thatch from the roof threatened soon to be gone
 But the wind had swept on, and had met in a lane

With a schoolboy, who panted and struggled in vain;
 For it tossed him and twirled him, then passed – and he stood
 With his hat in a pool and his shoes in the mud!

Then away went the wind in its holiday glee,
 And now it was far on the billowy sea,
 And the lordly ships felt the staggering blow,

And the little boats darted to and fro.
 But, lo! It was night, and it sank to rest
 On the sea-bird's rock in the gleaming west,
 Laughing to think, in its fearful fun,
 How little of mischief it really had done.

For Discussion

This poem deals with movement and sounds of the wind on a windy day and its effect on all aspects of nature.

Read the poem and discuss the following questions.

1. What is the mood conveyed in the poem?
 (a) sadness (b) excitement (c) frustration (d) disgust
2. (A) Is the pace of the poem slow or fast?
 (B) Which words and expressions show the pace with which the wind moves?

Observe the words which tell of the sounds made by the wind.

When a word imitates the sound of the thing to which it refers, the device is called **Onomatopoeia**. Through the sound of the word you can tell its meaning.

Example:

The bacon **sizzled**.

The fire **crackled**.

The water **trickled**.

3. Select all the **sound** words in the poem.

Try to get their meanings through their sounds.

Poets use images or pictures to make their writing more vivid. For

example, poets use **comparisons** to associate one thing with another.

These draw the reader's mind to an image or a picture by saying

something is like something else. This device is called a **simile**.

It compares two things, with the use of "like" and "as".

Examples:

1. His **eyes** like tiny **stars** shone in the darkness.

2. His **speed** was like **lightning** as he ran to safety.

Observe what two things are compared in each sentence.

3. Select two similes in the poem. Explain what each means.

What are the points of comparison in each?

4. What is the effect of the wind on

(a) humans (b) animals (c) other aspects of nature.

5. Is the title appropriate? Give reasons to support your answer.

Rhyme helps the poem to achieve rhythm.

Observe the rhyme pattern in the poem.

You would observe that the poem consists of pairs of rhyming lines, one after the other.

Examples:

*"The wind one morning sprang up from **sleep**,*

*Saying, 'Now for a frolic now for a **leap!***

*Now for a mad-cap galloping **chase!***

*I'll make a commotion in every **place!**"*

Read the poem and discuss the questions based on it.

JEALOUSLY

Carissa Marley

Jealously is a monster
Creeping up from behind.
It slides its way into us
And tries to make us blind.

A writhing, wriggling snake,

It wraps around our heart.
We want to try and stop it,

But don't know where to start.
Jealousy is a feeling
We all get deep inside
When someone else achieves that dream

We wanted all the time.

It drowns out all the good things –
Our life crashes to the floor.
We start to do and say things
We never would before.

But slowly we defeat it,
Despite the lengthy haul.
Although it's slow and painful,
We finally let it fall.

Jealousy is a monster,
But when finally put to rest
It teaches us the truth that
We won't always be the best.

1. In this poem the poet has used the concept of jealousy as the 'green eyed monster' and extends it in a series of metaphors.

(i) Identify the metaphor in stanza one of the poem.

Show how the poet develops the metaphor in the stanza.

(ii) Does the word "blind" indicate (a) a physical state (b) a mental state?

2. (A) What is the metaphor in stanza two of the poem?

- (B) What does jealousy do to the human heart?
3. Why do we envy other people?
 4. What effect does jealousy have on our thoughts and actions?
 5. Identify the lines which reveal that man can overcome jealousy.
 6. Why, do you think, the poet uses the pronouns 'we', 'us' and 'our' instead of 'he' or 'she'?
 7. What is the mood of the poem?
How does the rhythm of the poem help to lift the mood?
 8. What is the message the poet wishes to convey?
 9. Identify all the examples of alliteration in the poem.
 10. Underline every line that expresses something that couldn't literally be true.

Read the poem and discuss the questions which follow:

ON KILLING A TREE

It takes much time to kill a tree,
Not a simple jab of the knife
Will do it. It has grown
Slowly consuming the earth,
Rising out of it, feeding
Upon its crust, absorbing
Years of sunlight, air, water,
And out if its leprous hide
Sprouting leaves.

- 10 So hack and chop
But this alone won't do it.
Not so much pain will do it.
The bleeding bark will heal
And from close to the ground
Will rise curled green twigs,
Miniature boughs
Which if unchecked will expand again
To former size.

- No
- 20 The root has to be pulled out –
Out of the anchoring earth;

It has to be roped, tied,
 And pulled out – snapped out
 Or pulled out entirely,
 Out from the earth-cave,
 And the strength of the tree exposed,
 The source, white and wet,
 The most sensitive, hidden
 Four years inside the earth.
 30 Then the matter
 Of scorching and choking
 In sun and air,

 Browning, hardening,
 Twisting, withering,
 And then it is done

Gieve Patel

1. Why does it take much time to kill a tree?
 Refer to stanza one of the poem.
2. What is the meaning of “its leprous hide”?
3. Examine the words *pain* (line 12) and *bleeding* (line 13). The poet here has given human qualities to an inanimate object. When human qualities and feelings are given to things without life, the device is called **Personification**.
 When you read prose or poetry passages look for the device known as **Personification**.
4. What happens to the tree if it is hacked and chopped?
5. What steps must one take in order to kill a tree?
6. What do you think is the poet’s attitude to killing a tree, by presenting the difficulties in stanza three.
7. Suggest some other things which, like the tree, are not easy to destroy.
8. What images of the tree evoke in you a feeling of disgust? Refer to stanza three.
9. Have you enjoyed reading the poem? Support your answer.
10. Do you think the poet is sending a message to humanity? If so, what is the message?