



Beginning Poetry – Syllabus

Course Description: This class introduces poetry in its most basic components—including rhyme, meter, literary devices, and theme—across varying styles and eras of poetry. Students will become acquainted with a number of well-known poets including A.A. Milne, Shel Silverstein, Christina Rossetti, Mary Ann Hoberman, Ogden Nash, Robert Louis Stevenson, Robert Frost, and William Blake.

Course Outline:

Week One: What Is Poetry? – with A. A. Milne

Week Two: Rhyme & Meter – with Shel Silverstein

Week Three: Literary Devices – with Christina Rossetti

Week Four: Repetition & Questions – with Mary Ann Hoberman

Week Five: Humor – with Ogden Nash

Week Six: Storytelling – with Robert Louis Stevenson

Week Seven: Theme & Mood – with Robert Frost

Week Eight: Making Connections – with William Blake

Grading Information: All assignments will be graded using *The Beginning Writer* grading rubric and will be averaged to receive a final course grade.



Beginning Poetry

Lesson Two: Rhyme & Meter

SAMPLE LESSON

The next element of poetry to study is the rhyme. When a poem uses rhyme, we can label it using a **rhyme scheme**—that is, how the rhyme is organized throughout the poem. When we are reading poetry, we usually notice the rhyme scheme first. In fact, we often define poetry as lines of expression that *rhyme*. Remember, though, that not all poems must rhyme. However, rhyming words are a prominent part of poetry structure.

WHAT IS RHYME? –

A rhyme, of course, is the repetition of similar sounds. In poetry, the most common type of rhyme used is an **end rhyme**—this occurs when words at the ends of two or more lines rhyme. There are several end rhyme schemes, which are the pattern of the end rhyme. The rhyme scheme is referred to by using letters to designate which lines rhyme.

As you will see below, rhyme scheme is labeled by **capital letters**. The first rhyming line is labeled with an A, and any lines that rhyme with this first line are also labeled with an A. The new rhyme is labeled with a B, and subsequent rhyming lines are also labeled with a B. The process is continued with as many capital letters as necessary. Below are the two most common end rhyme schemes.

ABAB (Alternate or Open Rhyme) –

From “Friends” by Abbie Farwell Brown

How good to lie a little while **(A)**

And look up through the tree! **(B)**

The Sky is like a kind big smile **(A)**

Bent sweetly over me. **(B)**

Notice in the poem excerpt above that the ending words of Lines 1 and 3 rhyme (while/smile), while the ending words of Lines 2 and 4 also rhyme with each other (tree/me). The rhyme scheme of this poem is ABAB, sometimes referred to as alternate or open rhyme. (You may also see this rhyme scheme expanded, if the poem has more than one stanza. For example, a longer poem might be labeled as ABAB CDCD EFEF. This means that Lines 1 and 3 rhyme, Lines 2 and 4 rhyme, Lines 5 and 7 rhyme, Lines 6 and 8 rhyme, Lines 9 and 11 rhyme, and Lines 10 and 12 rhyme.)

AABB –

From “Teddy Bear” by A.A. Milne

A bear, however hard he tries, **(A)**
Grows tubby without exercise. **(A)**
Our Teddy Bear is short and fat, **(B)**
Which is not to be wondered at; **(B)**

This rhyme scheme is composed of a section of four lines, divided into two rhyming couplets (two subsequent lines that end with rhyming words). You can also expand on this idea by creating a longer version of the scheme, such as AABBCC or even AABBCDD. This means that Lines 1 and 2 rhyme, Lines 3 and 4 rhyme, Lines 5 and 6 rhyme, Lines 7 and 8 rhyme, etc. (If you read the entire poem “Teddy Bear,” you can see how A.A. Milne used a rhyme scheme of AABBCDD throughout.)

BUT WHAT IF THERE IS NO RHYME?

When the end of a certain line does not rhyme with any other line in the poem, we use the letter X. See below how non-rhyming lines are labeled in end rhyme schemes.

XAXA –

From “Allie” by Robert Graves

Allie, call the birds in, **(X)**
The birds from the sky. **(A)**
Allie calls, Allie sings, **(X)**
Down they all fly. **(A)**

Notice in the poem excerpt above that the ending words of Lines 1 and 3 do not rhyme (in/sings), while the ending words of Lines 2 and 4 *do* rhyme (sky/fly). We label the non-rhyming lines with X, and then use capital letters to show the rhyming lines. You might also see XXAA, or AAXX, or even something like AAAX.

WHAT ABOUT METER? –

Besides rhyme, another important thing to study about poetry is the ***meter***. The meter is made up of two slightly complicated components, but the basics of meter come back to the syllables in each line of poetry. We are not going to attempt to study meter in this class, as it is far too complex a subject for younger students. Still, you should learn how to determine the number of syllables in each line of poetry.

Do you know what a **syllable** is? A syllable is a part of a word, usually a section of a word containing a single vowel sound. You can easily determine the number of syllables in each word by clapping. How many times can you evenly clap in each word?

Look at the following words and clap along to hear the number of syllables:

- snow = 1 syllable
- cup = 1 syllable
- water = 2 syllables
- keyboard = 2 syllables
- paper = 2 syllables
- hamburger = 3 syllables
- happiness = 3 syllables

Now, read this poem excerpt and see how many syllables are used in each line.

From “We never know how high we are”

by Emily Dickinson

We never know how high we are
Till we are called to rise;
And then, if we are true to plan,
Our statures touch the skies—

Syllable Counts:

- Line 1 = 8 syllables
- Line 2 = 6 syllables
- Line 3 = 8 syllables
- Line 4 = 6 syllables

When studying the number of syllables in each line of poetry, you should begin to see patterns, just as you see in the end rhyme. These syllable patterns are the foundation for meter.

MEET THE POET –

This week, we meet Shel (Sheldon) Silverstein. He was born in 1930 in Chicago, Illinois and passed away in 1999. During his lifetime, Silverstein wrote numerous stories, cartoons, poems, songs, and plays. He is perhaps most well-known for his iconic story *The Giving Tree* and his thought-provoking poem “Where the Sidewalk Ends.” His poetry takes a humorous and honest look at being a kid, discussing subjects such as being annoyed with a sibling or faking being sick to get out of going to school. In addition, his written work is often accompanied by simple but humorous line drawings. Shel Silverstein's books have been translated into dozens of languages and have sold more than 20 million copies worldwide.

Assignment 2A: Read the following poems by Shel Silverstein attached with this week's lesson. Then, write down the end rhyme scheme for each poem.

- “Dirty Face”
- “Homework Machine”
- “Snowball”

Assignment 2B: Read the following poems by Shel Silverstein. Then, write down the number of syllables in each line.

Put Something In –

Draw a crazy picture,
Write a nutty poem,
Sing a mumble-grumble song,
Whistle through your comb.
Do a loony-goony dance

'Cross the kitchen floor,
Put something silly in the world
That ain't been there before.

- **Line 1:**
- **Line 2:**
- **Line 3:**
- **Line 4:**
- **Line 5:**
- **Line 6:**
- **Line 7:**
- **Line 8:**

Assignment 2C: Choose ONE of Shel Silverstein's poems which you have read this week or read one of the additional poems noted below. Answer the following questions using complete sentences.

1. What is your favorite word, phrase, or line in this poem? Why?
2. What does this poem remind you of in literature, your life, or the world? Why?

**Some other works by Shel Silverstein
that you may enjoy –**

- *The Giving Tree*
- “Eighteen Flavors”
- “Invitation”
- “Pancake?”
- “Where the Sidewalk Ends”

You may also enjoy reading his poetry collections, titled *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1974) and *A Light in the Attic* (1981). Check your local library for these books full of Shel Silverstein's poems!