

Poetry and Drama Introduction

Poetry and Drama: Introduction

Spark

Poetry and drama are the oldest forms of storytelling. The earliest poetry was epic poetry, most of which was shared orally centuries before it was written down. The ancient Sumerian text “The Epic of Gilgamesh” is one of the earliest poetic works; it recounted the journey of a hero on a quest for immortality.

Poetry and performance were inseparable in ancient times, and the themes of the earliest works were scholarly, religious, or historical in nature. The works of the ancient Greek philosophers Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes were performed on Greek stages in the early days of theater. Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined myth and history, recounting the epic journeys of classical Greek heroes.

Tragedy and comedy arose in ancient Greek; the earliest dramatic tragedies were based on Greek myths, while the earliest comedies often ridiculed politicians or philosophers. Both combined elements of poetry and prose.

In medieval times, poets and playwrights began to experiment with language and performances became more accessible to commoners. Then, during the Renaissance, William Shakespeare came into the picture and incorporated poetry into the scripts of his plays.

Activate Prior Knowledge



Source: 3djuice. 123rf.com

Masks that represent comedy and tragedy are commonly used to symbolize all things theatric. Think about the concepts of comedy and tragedy as you know them from movies or TV shows. What makes a scene humorous? Maybe a misunderstanding or a mistaken identity, for example. What makes it tragic, or what today we would call a “tear-jerker?” Maybe the main character in the story suffers due to human frailties we recognize in ourselves. When you read dramatic comedy and dramatic tragedy, look for these types of connections.

When you read poetry, you might look for links to contemporary songs. Songwriting is a form of poetry—artists such as Joni Mitchell, Paul McCartney, Tupac Shakur, Lin-Manuel Miranda, and many others are renowned as poet songwriters. In fact, in 2016, folk music legend Bob Dylan won the Nobel Prize for Literature for his poetic song lyrics.

Activity

Many people are more familiar with fiction in the form of novels or short stories than they are with the genres of poetry and drama. Although poetry and drama are distinct forms of written expression, within each genre, the writing and style can be vastly different; consider, for example, the difference between a three-line haiku and an epic poem like the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*.

Think about instances in which you've not only read poetry and drama, but really experienced it. Have you seen a play performed on a stage, whether it be professional or at a community theater? Have you ever gone to a poetry reading or a poetry slam? Have you fallen in love with the poetic language of a song's lyrics? Complete this organizer to consider your past experiences with poetry and drama as well as your impressions of the genres.

Learning Coach Guide

This section will help you guide students through their learning.

[View Learning Coach Guide](#)

[Hide Learning Coach Guide](#)

Learning Goals

Throughout this unit, your student will read Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, a dramatic tragedy about a Scottish general whose greed for power leads him to commit deadly deeds. Your student will also read a variety of shorter poems and dramas. As they read and respond to the texts, your student will be asked to analyze and evaluate complex ideas and to write about their observations and conclusions.

Spark

1. Have your student read the information in Spark. Tell your student that poetry and drama are typically considered literary text. However, they follow specific conventions and consist of specific elements unique to their genres. Stress the idea that throughout history, however, the two genres have been intricately linked.
2. Tell your student that over the course of this unit, they will read several examples of poetry and drama, and although the structures of the two genres will differ, they will have common elements in terms of language and themes. Encourage your student to keep this in mind as they read the unit texts and to note the commonalities in their mind when they recognize them.

Activate Prior Knowledge

1. Have your student read the two paragraphs in this section. Point out that some poems and dramatic works that are considered classic might seem so outdated in language and style that they appear to be irrelevant today. However, drawing links to modern mediums can help your student see the relevance and recognize the themes. They might even have moments of inspiration when ideas in poems and dramas hit home and affect them in surprising ways.
2. Give your student a copy of the Four Square graphic organizer and have them respond to the prompts by describing their experiences with poetry and drama and their opinions and feelings about these genres. Tell them to tap into any experiences they might have had with these genres in school and in their personal lives.

Poetry and Drama: Introduction

The Basics of Poetry and Drama

Poets and playwrights convey meaning by utilizing techniques that might be different from what you are used to. Poems and plays are considered literary works, but each is a genre in itself, a unique mode of expression with specific conventions that dictate its effectiveness.

Poetry relies on figurative language as well as rhythm and cadence to convey meaning; rhythm and cadence is established by combining patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables to achieve different effects.

Drama can also include figurative language and rhythm and cadence, but its primary purpose is to tell a story. It has characters and a plot driven by action, and a conflict that comes to a climax and is somehow resolved.

When you read a poem or a drama, it's important to do so in the context of the conventions that a poet or playwright follows when writing the text. Keeping these conventions in mind as you analyze the work will help you uncover its patterns and subtleties. Ask yourself questions like these as you read the poems and dramas in this unit, and record your answers in your Reading Log:

- Does the language frustrate or intrigue me?
- What reference sources can I use to help me interpret the language?
- Would it help me understand the text better if I saw it performed or heard it read? If so, how would it help me?
- What do I picture when I read the words? Do the words convey images that help me understand the words?
- What do I notice about the sound of the language? Can I pick out different patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables?

- How does the rhythm convey meaning?
- How is the rhythm of the language different in different parts of the text?

Poetry and drama are also different in terms of perspective: a poem conveys the perspective of the speaker (which may or may not match that of the poet); a drama conveys the perspective of the characters. Dramatic works don't have narration, like stories; instead, they have stage directions that tell the actors what to do on stage. The story is told through the actions of the characters and through the words they express through dialogue, monologue, and soliloquy.

Activity

Poets have a lot more freedom than playwrights in terms of form and structure. Use your knowledge of these genres to discuss with your Learning Coach why this might be so. You can use any conclusions you draw later in this unit, as you will have an opportunity to write several different forms of poetry, each utilizing techniques that will help readers interpret the feelings and ideas the speaker of your poem conveys.

Learning Coach Guide

This section will help you guide students through their learning.

[View Learning Coach Guide](#)

[Hide Learning Coach Guide](#)

The Basics of Poetry and Drama

1. Assure your student that while the unique structures of poetry and drama might be challenging at first, it can be both enlightening and refreshing to read what are essential stories told in a different manner. Have your student read the opening paragraph and the list of bulleted questions. Suggest that they copy and keep the questions in their Reading Log to refer to as they read the unit text.
2. Continue with the second paragraph. Have your student define first- and third-person perspective as it applies to fiction and then

discuss why these perspectives don't necessarily translate to drama and poetry. In fiction, the first-person perspective is the perspective of the main character. In poetry, the perspective is always that of the speaker. (As needed, point out that the narrator in a poem is referred to as a speaker.) In drama, stage directions take the place of narration. The characters' perspectives are revealed solely through their words and actions, as described in the stage directions. Remind your student that dramas are written to be performed on stage.

- 3.** Have your student read and respond to the question. If necessary, encourage them to compare and contrast each of these genres with fiction. Like fiction, drama must present ideas in a way that carries the characters through an established plot sequence. Poetry is not confined to such a structure. Reiterate that your student will be writing their own poetry later in the unit, so it will be important for them to be able to interpret the structure of poetry so that they can replicate it on their own.

Previewing the Unit Text: *The Tragedy of Macbeth*

About the Author

William Shakespeare was born in the English town of Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564. By the 1590s, he had made a name for himself as both a poet and playwright, and by the time of his death in 1616, he had profoundly molded literary tradition. Shakespeare leaves a legacy that includes 38 plays, two narrative poems, 154 sonnets, and a variety of other poems. Although he is best known for his plays, the impact of his poems is equally profound.

Much of Shakespeare's professional life was spent in London, but he traveled back and forth from Stratford throughout his life and was active in theater in both places. In London, he was one of the founding members of the acting group called the King Chamberlain's Men. As a dramatist for the company, he composed some of his most famous tragedies, including *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*. For centuries Shakespeare has been praised as "the Bard of Avon," the most important figure in English literature; in a nutshell, for demonstrating to the world how language can convey beauty and truth and for making poetry a tool for playwrights.

Watch the flipbook to learn more about the Bard and his wide-ranging influence on literature and culture.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

About the Text

The Tragedy of Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's best-known plays and most popular tragedies. It tells the tale of a Scottish general whose lust for power leaves him vulnerable to the prophecy of witches, who tell him that he is destined to become king of Scotland and that nothing can stand in his way. Macbeth becomes obsessed with the prophecy, and as is characteristic of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, his obsession leads to deadly consequences.

The Tragedy of Macbeth explores the complexity of kingly ambition and human weakness. As Macbeth lives out the witches' prophecy, we are provided insight into his thoughts and feelings through seven soliloquies that chronicle his descent into madness.

Activity

Soliloquies serve an important function in *Macbeth*. They occur when a character speaks their thoughts out loud without the knowledge that their words are being heard by other characters or by the audience. Think about other soliloquies you have read or seen a character deliver; you may even consider examples of times you've delivered a "soliloquy" to yourself. How might talking to oneself help a person—or a character—better understand or interpret a particular situation? How might it provide a clearer understanding of one's own feelings or motivations?

Learning Coach Guide

This section will help you guide students through their learning.

About the Author

1. Make sure that your student can access the text. Supply your student with a graphic organizer that they can use as a Reading Log; or, if they prefer, they may jot down observations, questions, and evidence in their notebook as they read the novel. Explain that they will record their opinions and impressions as well as answers to some specific questions about the text. They may also record any ideas and questions that emerge from their reading to discuss with you.
2. Ask your student to read the brief biography of William Shakespeare. Explain that during the 16th century, Shakespeare's plays became so popular that Shakespearean drama became virtually inseparable from live theater. Point out that Shakespeare commonly used the language of the theater as a metaphor for the themes in his plays.
3. Have your student watch the flipbook, and then discuss with them their own experiences with and opinions toward Shakespeare. Have them suggest other present-day artists who might fit the description of a *bard*.
4. Read the following quote:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts.

Tell your student that the quote is from *As You Like It*, one of Shakespeare's comedies. Tell them that they will read *Macbeth* for the unit text, which is one of his tragedies. There is a theater metaphor in *Macbeth*, too. Encourage them to look for it.

Macbeth

Reading Log: The Tragedy of Macbeth

About the Text

- 1.** Point out that *Macbeth* is characteristic of dramatic tragedy in form and structure, in themes, and in the use of literary sound devices to convey mood and tone. Point out that Shakespeare used different sound patterns to achieve different effects. In *Macbeth*, the scenes with the witches sound different from Macbeth's soliloquies, for example.
- 2.** Have your student read this section and then complete the activity either orally, through a discussion with you, or in writing.

Previewing the Unit Text: *Macbeth*

Pace and Prepare Yourself

Shakespeare’s plays can be challenging for modern readers, and *Macbeth* is no exception. You will have approximately two weeks to complete the text, which contains five acts divided into 28 scenes. It’s important to pace yourself so that you can read with understanding and finish the text in time to complete the Apply activities at the end of the unit. The plan below may allow for a day or two to reread particular scenes (or take a break!) and still complete the reading on time, but feel free to adjust your plan in any way that works for you and your schedule.

Daily Reading Plan

Days	How Much to Read
Day 1 (today)	The first three scenes of Act I
Reading Day	The last four scenes of Act I, all of Act 2
Other days	Three scenes per day

In the Apply activities at the end of the unit you will find questions that assess your understanding and your ability to analyze poetry and dramatic text. You can prepare for these activities by thinking about some key questions as you read. As you finish each day's reading, take notes in your Reading Log that offer potential answers to these questions:

- What qualities does Macbeth exhibit that are characteristic of kings and leaders? What are his strengths? What are his weaknesses?
- How would you characterize Lady Macbeth? How does she contribute to the plot?
- How does Shakespeare use soliloquies and other dramatic techniques to unravel the plot and reveal the complexity of the characters?
- How do the poetic elements of the play support its dramatic elements?

Begin Reading

The Tragedy of Macbeth begins with three witches brewing up a wicked plan.

“Something wicked this way comes” is uttered later, by one of the witches in Act IV, Scene 1, when, through Shakespeare’s masterful use of language, the irony of this statement has become shockingly clear.

Based on Act I, Scene 1, describe the purpose of the witches in *Macbeth*. What do you think their subsequent appearances will be like? Write your initial feelings about this line in your Reading Log before you continue reading.

Macbeth

Reading Log: The Tragedy of Macbeth

Learning Coach Guide

This section will help you guide students through their learning.

[View Learning Coach Guide](#)

[Hide Learning Coach Guide](#)

Pace and Prepare Yourself

1. Read the information in this section with your student. Review the chart and compare it to your student's calendar to help your

student devise a reading schedule that will work for their needs.

2. Review the bulleted questions with your student. Explain that after they complete the play, they will apply skills they learn in this unit to *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. The questions here will help them organize their thoughts as they read and prepare them for the analytical questions that they will encounter in Apply.

Begin Reading

1. With your student, locate Act 1 Scene 1 of *Macbeth* and read the scene together. Discuss the purpose of this scene and what it reveals and foreshadows about the plot. (We learn that there is a battle taking place and that the witches will meet with Macbeth. We can infer that they have evil plans for him and that he will succumb to their evil.)

2. Point out that the words have a certain rhythm and rhyme scheme that makes them sound like a chant. Read the following lines aloud, emphasizing the first syllable in each syllable pair, making clear the sound pattern of stressed/unstressed syllables:

When the hurley-burley's done,

When the battle's lost and won

Tell them that this sound pattern is called trochaic tetrameter, and it is one that Shakespeare typically uses in scenes that involve magic. He typically uses iambic pentameter in other parts of the text.

3. Have your student begin reading, making sure that they have their Reading Log available for note-taking. Remind them that they will have more reading time available on Day 2.

23/24 Honors English 11 A - Poetry and Drama

Poetry and Drama Reading Day

Unit Reading Information

In this unit, you will read *Macbeth* unless otherwise directed by your teacher.

Select the links to access the text and reading log.

Macbeth

Reading Log: The Tragedy of Macbeth

Reading Day

Please use today's lesson to read from the designated text for this unit. Use your reading log to take notes based on the guidance in the unit introduction reading preview. Refer to the pacing guide to plan your reading time during the rest of the unit. In the final lesson of the unit, you will be asked to apply skills learned during the unit to analyze the designated text.

Structure of Poetry

Unit Reading Information

In this unit, you will read *Macbeth* unless otherwise directed by your teacher.

Select the links to access the text and reading log.

Macbeth

Reading Log: The Tragedy of Macbeth

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will explain how poetic structure affects the meaning and aesthetic impact of a poem.

Key Words

- **aesthetic impact** – how a poem affects the reader's senses
 - **couplet** – a set of two lines
 - **iambic pentameter** – a poetic meter in which each stressed syllable is preceded by an unstressed syllable and there are five accented syllables per line
 - **meter** – the number of beats or stressed syllables per line of poetry
 - **rhyme scheme** – the ordered pattern of rhymes at the ends of the lines of a poem
 - **stanzas** – groups of lines in a poem
 - **structure** – how a poem is organized, including rhymes, rhythm, number of lines, and more
 - **sonnet** – a type of poem that follows a specific structure and was made popular by Shakespeare and Petrarch
-

Poetic Structure



Source: Minerva Studio. Shutterstock

When it comes to poetic structure, there's nothing like a sonnet. Sonnets are one of the most structured types of poetry, meaning they're organized in a very specific way—they follow particular structural rules. But what makes a sonnet a sonnet? Differences in how poems are structured, or organized, is a large part of what differentiates one type of poetry from another. Structure can also tell readers about the meaning of the poem.

Get Ready to Read

As most people know, William Shakespeare is famous for his plays, but before he wrote those, he was well-known as a poet. A collection of 154 of his sonnets was published in 1609, and while the poems touched on themes of jealousy, beauty, and mortality, the most prevalent theme was love. You're about to read Sonnet 116, in which the speaker claims that true love is eternal and that if he's wrong about that, then no one ever truly loved.

Did You Know?

In Line 10 of this sonnet, the speaker refers to a sickle. A sickle, or long curved blade attached to a stick, is an old tool that is sometimes still used for harvesting crops. The image of a sickle or of a skeletal figure holding a sickle has been associated with death since the Middle Ages, when harvest became a metaphor for death—since just like a harvester plucking apples off a tree, people are plucked off the earth when they die.

Take Notes as You Read

As you read Sonnet 116, look carefully at the way the poem is organized. Notice the rhymes and the rhythm and think about the effect they have on the poem. Record your ideas in your Reading Log.

Useful Vocabulary

- **bark:** ship
 - **impediments:** obstacles; inconvenient challenges
 - **tempests:** storms
-

Poetic Structure

Describing a Poem's Structure

The thing that makes a sonnet different from a haiku and a ballad different from a nursery rhyme is structure. A poem's structure refers to its stanzas; rhythm, or meter; and rhyme scheme. Different types of poetry have different structural rules.

Shakespeare's "Sonnet 116" fits the structural characteristics of a sonnet for the following reasons:

- The poem is one stanza of fourteen lines.
- The first twelve lines can be divided into three groups of four, each with the rhyme scheme *ABAB*.
- The last two lines, or couplet, rhyme.

Structure and Aesthetic Impact

Another structural characteristic that is unique to sonnets is the meter. Sonnets are written in a meter called iambic pentameter. This means that each line contains five stressed syllables, and that each stressed syllable is preceded by an unaccented syllable. Look at the following line from Sonnet 116:

Love's *not* Time's *fool*, though *rosy lips* and *cheeks*

Notice that each word or syllable in italics is an accented syllable. Each one has an unaccented syllable that comes before it. Each of these pairs is called an *iamb*. The fact that there are five of these pairs per line is why this meter is called iambic pentameter (the prefix *penta* signifies *five*).

Understanding the meter of a poem helps you read it aloud. Sound is a large part of a poem's aesthetic impact, or the sensory impression the poem gives the reader. The

meter and rhyme scheme of a poem, when heard aloud, draws the listener in and engages them.

Question

How does “Sonnet 116” fit the structure of a sonnet?

Reveal Answer

It has fourteen lines, and the first three sets of four lines have a rhyme scheme of *ABAB*. It ends with a couplet that contains an assertion, and the poem is written in iambic pentameter.

Poetic Structure

Structure and Meaning

A poem's structure does not always impact its subject matter, but there are some exceptions to this rule. A sonnet is defined by the structural characteristics previously listed, but it also has one more characteristic: the final couplet should contain a revelation, realization, or strong assertion. Reread the final couplet of Sonnet 116:

The speaker in the poem is asserting that if anyone can prove them wrong about the rest of the poem, then they never wrote anything and no one ever loved anyone. This is a strong assertion to make—the speaker clearly believes strongly in what they're saying. In this way, the structure of the poem influences the meaning.

Did You Know?

You might notice that the last couplet of “Sonnet 116” doesn't *exactly* rhyme: *proved* and *loved* don't have the same vowel sound even though they're spelled as if they would. In poetry, this is called an *eye rhyme* because the words appear to the eye as though they rhyme, but don't sound that way to the ear.

Question

Why is including a revelation, realization, or strong assertion at the end a good way to structure a sonnet?

Reveal Answer

It allows readers to hear explicitly what the speaker has learned or what conclusions they have drawn from the thoughts they have shared over the course of the rest of the poem.

Sonnets are not the only type of poem whose structure impacts its meaning. An *ode*, for example, is a type of poem that doesn't have any structural rules or characteristics.

What makes an ode an ode is the subject matter. An ode is always about someone or something the speaker loves, and it is written as a direct address to that person or thing. An *elegy* is similar: there are no structural rules, but the content of the poem is always about the speaker's grief over the loss of someone or something.

When you read a poem, look carefully at the poetic structure. Ask yourself:

- How many stanzas does the poem have? How many lines are in each one?
- Is there a rhyme scheme? If so, what is it?
- Does the poem have a consistent meter? What does the rhythm sound like?
- How does this rhythm affect the aesthetic impact of the poem?
- Do I know of a specific type of poetry that includes these structural elements?
- How do these structural elements contribute to the meaning of the poem?

These questions will help you describe the structure of a poem and better understand how it affects both meaning and aesthetic impact.

Check-In

Think about poetic structure, meaning, and aesthetic impact as you answer these questions.

Question 1

How does the structure of a sonnet contribute to its meaning?

Reveal Answer

The revelation in the final couplet, which is part of the structure of a sonnet, influences the meaning of the poem because it allows the speaker or poet to make a final assertion that sums up the poem. The speaker could also conclude the sonnet by stating what the rest of the poem has caused them to realize. Either one of these endings contributes to the overall meaning of the poem.

Question 2

How does the structure of a sonnet contribute to its aesthetic impact?

Reveal Answer

The rhyme scheme and meter of a sonnet determine how the poem sounds when it's read aloud. The way the poem sounds to listeners is a large part of its aesthetic impact.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Practice

Read the following poem.

Alone in the House

I am all alone in the house to-night;
They would not have gone away
Had they known of the terrible, bloodless fight
I have held with my heart to-day.
With the old sweet love and the old fierce pain
I have battled hour by hour;
But the fates have willed that the strife is vain.
Alone in the hour my thoughts have reign,
And I yield myself to their power.

Yield myself to the old time charm
Of a dream of vanished bliss,
The thrill of a voice, and the fold of an arm,
And a red lip's lingering kiss.
It all comes back like a flowing tide;
That brief, but beautiful day.
Though it oft is checked by the dam of pride,
Till the waters flow back to the other side,
To-night it has broken away.

I gave you all that I had to give,
O love, the lavish whole.
And you threw it away, and now I live
A starved and beggared soul.
And I feed on crumbs that memory throws

From her table over-filled,
And I lay awake when others repose,
And slake my thirst when no one knows,
With the wine that she has spilled.

I go my way and I do my part
In the world's great scene of strife,
But I do it all with an empty heart,
Dead to the best of life.
And oftentimes weary and tempest tossed,
When I am not ruled by pride,
I wish ere the die was thrown and lost,
Ere I played for love without counting the cost,
That I, like my heart, had died.

By Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Activity

In one or two paragraphs, analyze the structure of “Alone in the House,” and explain how it affects the meaning and the aesthetic impact.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The poem has four stanzas of nine lines each. The rhyme scheme of each stanza is *ABABCDCCD*. The first, third, fifth, seventh, and eighth lines of each stanza have four stressed syllables, and the rest have three. This affects the aesthetic impact by giving the poem a rhythmic, song-like quality.

The structure of the poem determines how the thoughts in it are organized. The first three stanzas describe how the speaker feels now that love is lost and what he or she thinks about when left alone in the house or while others are sleeping. They all lead up to the last stanza, which describes the speaker's state of mind: wishing he or she were dead.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I responded to the prompt without veering off-topic.
 2. _____ I described the structure of the poem in a clear, coherent way.
 3. _____ I connected the structure to both the meaning and the aesthetic impact of the poem.
 4. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

Objective and Key Words

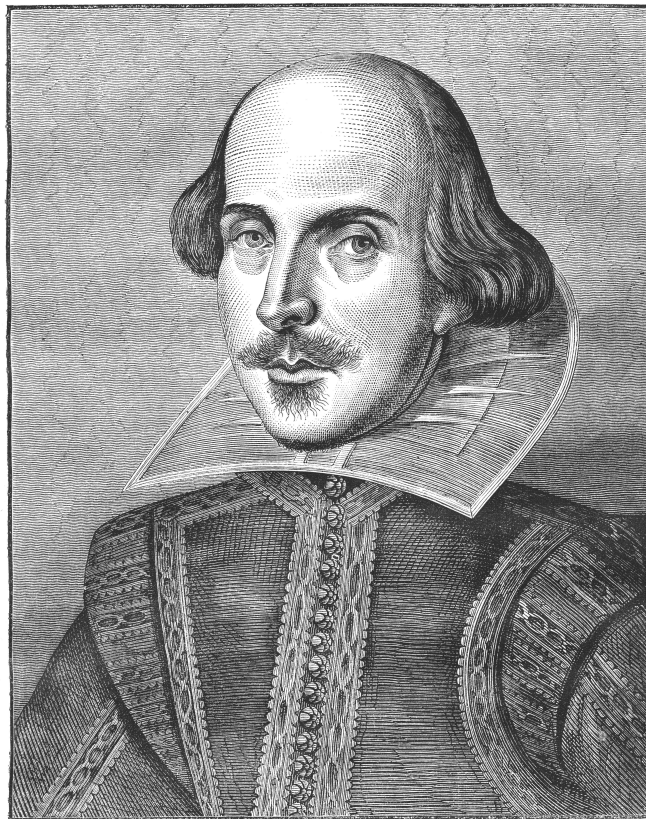
Objective

In this section, you will draw conclusions about a poem based in part on its structure.

Key Words

- **couplet** – set of two lines
 - **iambic pentameter** – a poetic meter in which each stressed syllable is preceded by an unstressed syllable and there are five accented syllables per line
 - **meter** – the number of beats or stressed syllables per line of poetry
 - **rhyme scheme** – the ordered pattern of rhymes at the ends of the lines of a poem
 - **structure** – how a poem is organized, including rhymes, rhythm, number of lines, and more
 - **sonnet** – a type of poem that follows a specific structure and was made popular by Shakespeare
-

Structure of Poetry



Source: Stocksnapper. Shutterstock

When you think of William Shakespeare, the first thing that comes to mind is most likely his large collection of plays. And right after that: the [sonnet](#). In his volume of 154 sonnets, Shakespeare wrote about subjects like beauty, jealousy, and death, but the majority of the poems are about love. Even though sonnets are relatively short poems, with only fourteen lines, there's a lot going on beneath the surface—aspects of their [structure](#) contribute to their meaning and aesthetic impact.

Get Ready to Read

What makes a sonnet a sonnet? The way a poem is structured can tell you about what type, or form, the poem is written in. Structure is what differentiates one type of form from another. Sonnets, like many other poetic forms, have a specific set of rules and constraints that dictate how the poem is written. Most of the time, those constraints are limited to the structure of the poem, but sometimes they affect the subject matter or content.

You are about to read a sonnet that exemplifies all the characteristics of a sonnet—see if you can spot them.

Did You Know?

When you think of sonnets, you probably think of Shakespeare, but he wasn't the first poet to construct them, and he certainly didn't invent them. Sonnets originated in Italy during the thirteenth century and were made popular by a poet named Francesco Petrarca.

Take Notes as You Read

As you read “Sonnet 116,” pay close attention to how the poem is organized; for example, notice how many lines there are or how the [rhyme scheme](#) works. Then,

think about why Shakespeare might have made these structural choices and what ideas he wanted them to represent. Record your thoughts in your Reading Log.

Reading Log: Sonnet 116

Useful Vocabulary

- **bark:** ship
 - **impediments:** obstacles; inconvenient challenges
 - **tempests:** storms
-

Structure of Poetry

Poetic Structure

A poem's structure is made up of several characteristics: the number of stanzas it contains, the number of lines in each of those stanzas, whether or not it has lines that repeat, the meter, and the rhyme scheme. When you read "Sonnet 116," you may have noticed some things about the structure of the poem:

- The poem is all one stanza, which has fourteen lines.
- The first twelve lines can be divided into three groups of four, each with the rhyme scheme *ABAB*.
- The last two lines, or couplet, rhyme.
- The meter is iambic pentameter, which means that each line has five accented syllables, and each accented syllable is preceded by an unaccented syllable.

These are all of the structural characteristics of a sonnet. If we didn't know the title or author of this poem, those characteristics would help us apply reasoning and draw the conclusion that the poem is a sonnet.

Another feature of sonnets is seen in the final couplet: in the last two lines of a sonnet, the speaker usually makes a claim or assertion or has a realization. (In Italian, the language in which sonnets originated, the word for this couplet is the *volta*.) Reread the final couplet of Sonnet 116:

The speaker is saying that if someone can prove him wrong about the statements he makes in the rest of the poem, then he never wrote anything and no one ever loved anyone. As assertions go, this one is pretty strong.

Question 1

Why do you think the speaker of “Sonnet 116” ended the poem with a strong assertion instead of a realization?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The statement emphasizes how strongly the speaker feels about this subject and how firmly they believe themselves to be correct. A realization would show that the speaker was still in the process of understanding whatever was described in the first twelve lines of the poem.

Drawing Conclusions Based on Structure

Looking at a poem’s structure can help you draw conclusions about the type of poem you’re reading. Compare those characteristics to the structural rules of poems you know about. Do the poem’s characteristics match a particular type of poetry? You can use reasoning to draw the conclusion that the poem is an example of that type, just like the structural characteristics of “Sonnet 116” show that the poem is a sonnet.

Now, think about two characteristics of sonnets that do not have to do with structure:

- The last couplet contains a realization or assertion.
- Sonnets are frequently about love.

This means that a poem that has all of the first set of characteristics, the structural ones, is likely to have the last two characteristics, as well. So, when you read a poem that has those structural characteristics and you conclude that it’s a sonnet, you can then apply reason to draw two more conclusions: the poem is likely to be about love, and the last [couplet](#) will probably contain an assertion or realization.

As you read any poem, take note of its structural characteristics. Compare them to types of poems you know about and see if you can use reasoning to effectively draw conclusions about the type, or form, of poem you’re reading. Pay attention to how the

structural elements like meter and rhyme scheme are used, and see what conclusions they can help you draw about other aspects of the poem.

Question 2

What do you think is the purpose of the realization or assertion in the last couplet of a sonnet?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: A realization or assertion is often found in the conclusion of other types of writing, like informational, narrative, and argumentative essays. Maybe the final couplet of a sonnet is like the poem's conclusion, where the speaker or poet can sum up their ideas in a rhyming realization or assertion.

Check-In

Answer the questions below.

Question 1

What conclusions can you draw from the structure of “Sonnet 116”? What parts of the structure help you reach those conclusions?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: “Sonnet 116” has one stanza of fourteen lines, and the first twelve lines can be divided into three sets of four lines, each with the rhyme scheme *ABAB*. It is written in iambic pentameter, which means there are five beats per line and each accented syllable is preceded by an unaccented syllable. From this information, I can conclude that the poem is a sonnet.

Question 2

How can you use effective reasoning to draw conclusions about a poem?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: I can examine the poem’s structure. Then, I can use reasoning to compare the structure to the structural characteristics of other types of poetry I know about. Then, I could see if the structure of the poem matches any of those types and draw a conclusion about what type of poem it is.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Practice

Read the following poem and then complete the activity.

Alone in the House

I am all alone in the house to-night;
They would not have gone away
Had they known of the terrible, bloodless fight
I have held with my heart to-day.
With the old sweet love and the old fierce pain
I have battled hour by hour;
But the fates have willed that the strife is vain.
Alone in the hour my thoughts have reign,
And I yield myself to their power.

Yield myself to the old time charm
Of a dream of vanished bliss,
The thrill of a voice, and the fold of an arm,
And a red lip's lingering kiss.
It all comes back like a flowing tide;
That brief, but beautiful day.
Though it oft is checked by the dam of pride,
Till the waters flow back to the other side,
To-night it has broken away.

I gave you all that I had to give,
O love, the lavish whole.
And you threw it away, and now I live
A starved and beggared soul.
And I feed on crumbs that memory throws

From her table over-filled,
And I lay awake when others repose,
And slake my thirst when no one knows,
With the wine that she has spilled.

I go my way and I do my part
In the world's great scene of strife,
But I do it all with an empty heart,
Dead to the best of life.
And oftentimes weary and tempest tossed,
When I am not ruled by pride,
I wish ere the die was thrown and lost,
Ere I played for love without counting the cost,
That I, like my heart, had died.

By Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Activity

Look carefully at the structure of “Alone in the House.” Write a few paragraphs to explain how the structural elements can help you draw conclusions about this poem. Make sure to explain how reasoning effectively helped you draw your conclusions.

Reveal Answer
Hide Answer

Sample answer: The poem has four stanzas of nine lines each. The rhyme scheme of each stanza is *ABABCDCCD*. The first, third, fifth, seventh, and eighth lines of each stanza have four stressed syllables and the rest have three. This gives the poem a rhythmic, song-like sound.

The first three stanzas build on each other in succession to show the greater and greater despair of the speaker. The fourth and last stanza is like the poem's

conclusion, almost like the last couplet of a sonnet. In the last stanza, the speaker sums up the rest of the poem by describing the emptiness of their present life and finally making the strong assertion (again, like a sonnet) that their heart is dead, and they wish they were dead too.

These structural elements help me apply reasoning and draw the conclusion that, when the speaker in the poem is left alone in the house, they spiral downward into misery over lost love until they wish they were dead.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I responded to the prompt without veering off topic.
 2. _____ I included a thorough description of the poem's structure.
 3. _____ The conclusions I drew followed logically from the observations I made about the poem's structure.
 4. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

23/24 Honors English 11 A - Poetry and Drama

Poetic Elements

Unit Reading Information

In this unit, you will read *Macbeth* unless otherwise directed by your teacher.

Select the links to access the text and reading log.

Macbeth

Reading Log: The Tragedy of Macbeth

Objective and Key Words

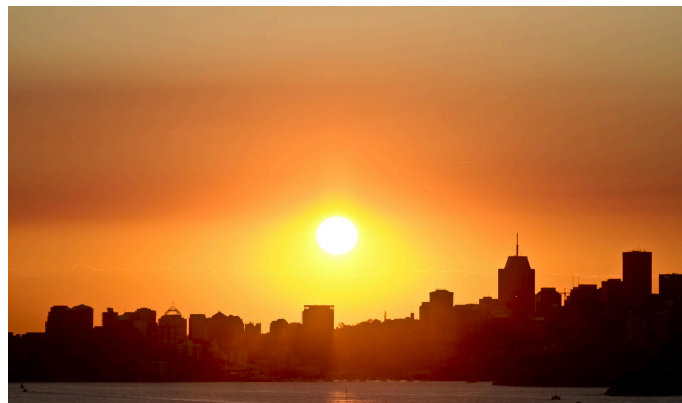
Objective

In this section, you will describe the use of multiple poetic elements in a poem.

Key Words

- **assonance** – when several words in a short section all contain the same vowel sound
 - **alliteration** – when several words in a short section begin with the same sound
 - **caesura** – when a pause (as created by a period or comma) occurs in the middle of a line
 - **consonance** – when several words in a short section contain the same consonant sound
 - **enjambment** – when a line break occurs in the middle of a sentence or phrase in a poem
-

Poetic Elements



Source: Kate Fredriksen. Shutterstock

“The sunset years” is a term many people use to refer to the time that lies at the end of one’s life. If you compare a lifetime to a day, with a person being born at dawn, then sunset would be the final years of life. The experience of aging, of approaching those sunset years, can trigger many emotions, often bringing out a certain kind of melancholy in people. While it’s not as popular a topic for poems and songs as love, there are some great works with themes that reflect the idea of growing older. Even if a sunset represents anxiety about what comes next, it’s still beautiful, just as aging can still be a beautiful part of the human experience.

Get Ready to Read

Gwendolyn Brooks was an extraordinarily accomplished poet and, to some, the voice of a generation. She was a Black woman from Topeka, Kansas who wrote powerful poetry about what life was like for Black people in urban areas. The poem you're about to read, "A Sunset of the City," is about the speaker's experience of growing older and feeling forgotten by the world because she's no longer young and attractive.

Did You Know?

Gwendolyn Brooks was named poet laureate (the person in charge of raising national awareness of and appreciation of poetry) for the state of Illinois in 1968 and went on to become the first Black woman to work as the poetry consultant for the Library of Congress. Brooks died in 2000, and during her career, she wrote more than twenty volumes of poetry and several novels.

Take Notes as You Read

Read "A Sunset of the City" aloud and listen to how it sounds. Notice any sounds that repeat and think about what effect that has on the overall feeling of the poem. Record your thoughts in your Reading Log.

Useful Vocabulary

- **heed:** listen to
 - **intimations:** hints or indications
 - **Kathleen Eileen:** the person whom Brooks names as the poem's speaker
 - **lechery:** lustfulness; excessive sexual desire
 - **muffed:** handled badly or clumsily
 - **pallor:** paleness
 - **tremulous:** weak; shaky
-

Poetic Elements

Describing Poetic Elements

Poetry is meant to be read aloud, so poets pay careful attention to how their words sound. They apply a variety of different poetic elements by arranging words in particular ways, both to create a desired effect and to convey the message they want readers and listeners to understand.

Consider how poet Gwendolyn Brooks manipulates language in “A Sunset of the City”:

Already I am no longer looked at with lechery or love.

You may have noticed the string of words that start with *l*: *longer*, *looked*, *lechery*, and *love*. Alliteration is the term that describes the use of multiple words in a row (or in a short section, separated by small words like *at*, *or*, *the*, and so on) that begin with the same sound.

Another poetic element that’s similar to alliteration is called consonance. Consonance occurs when a consonant sound appears in several words within a short section, but not necessarily at the beginning of the word. Read the following example from “A Sunset of the City”:

Question 1

Describe Gwendolyn Brooks’s use of consonance in these lines. How is it different from alliteration?

Reveal Answer

The words *still*, *summer*, *sun*, *stays*, and *sing* all begin with an s sound, but there is also an s sound somewhere in *deceived*, *is*, *because*, and *birds*. Those s sounds at the ends and in the middle of words—rather than at the beginning—are what make that phrase an example of consonance and not alliteration.

Now reread this line aloud, paying attention to how it sounds.

It is a real chill out. The fall crisp comes.

You may have noticed that the words *It*, *is*, *chill*, and *crisp* all contain a short *i* sound. The use of several words with the same vowel sound in a line or short section is known as assonance. Like alliteration and consonance, this repetition affects the way the poem sounds.

Poetic elements can also be applied to the way a poet structures a particular line or set of lines. One example is caesura, which can be seen in the above line from “A Sunset of the City.” To apply caesura, a poet includes more than one sentence in a line and does not add a line break; doing this adds a pause in the middle of a line. The use of caesura highlights these short, choppy sentences and draws attention to that part of the poem.

The opposite of a caesura, enjambment, happens when one single sentence or clause is broken by a line break. Look at the following example from “A Sunset of the City”:

Question 2

Describe how Gwendolyn Brooks uses enjambment in the example. What is the effect of her use of both enjambment and caesura?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Brooks uses enjambment by adding line breaks between words that do not represent natural breaks in the clause: *my/Desert* and *relief/Come*. The use of these elements helps Brooks draw attention to certain parts of the poem. In the caesura example, the short, choppy sentences are highlighted. In the enjambment example, the reader's attention is drawn to the last word of one line and the first word of the next.

Because poetry is so much about sound, when you come across any poem, make sure to read it aloud and listen to the sounds the words make. The poetic elements used by a poet make a poem sound a certain way, and there's a reason behind that. Different sounds have different effects on listeners; they can strengthen the effect of a poem and make it more memorable. The poetic elements can guide you in understanding the meaning of the poem.

Check-In

Read the following poem, and then use it to complete the activities.

Outdoor Musings

I lay on the grass and look
up at the house.
I am glad
for the greenness
of the grass.

Activity 1

Identify two poetic elements the poet uses in “Outdoor Musings.”

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The poet uses enjambment and alliteration.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Activity 2

Describe how the poet applies the elements you identified in the first activity and tell what effects they have.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Enjambment is used to break up both of the poem's sentences. A line break after *look* divides the first sentence into two lines; breaks after *glad* and *greenness* break the second sentence into three lines. This use of enjambment slows the pace of the poem and gives it a lazy, relaxed tone well-suited to musing. Alliteration is evident in the hard *g* sound at the beginning of *glad*, *greenness*, and *grass* in the second sentence. The alliteration gives the poem a playful sound that could be described as the equivalent of hopping or skipping.

Practice

Reread “A Sunset of the City” and use the poem to complete the activity.

Activity

In a paragraph, describe additional examples of at least three poetic elements used in “A Sunset of the City,” and explain how Gwendolyn Brooks applies the elements in each example.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: One poetic element that appears in “A Sunset of the City” is consonance. For example, in this quote: “I am aware there is winter . . .” the *r* sound is repeated. These lines exemplify both caesura and enjambment: “Consult a dual dilemma. Whether to dry/ In humming pallor or to leap and die.” The first line has a caesura—there is a period, showing the end of one sentence and the start of another within the same line. There is also enjambment because the beginning of the sentence in the first line continues into the second line and creates another poetic element, rhyme: *dry* and *die*.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I responded to the prompt without veering off topic.
 2. _____ I described at least three poetic elements that were used in the poem and pointed out where they occurred.
 3. _____ I explained how each example conveyed a particular poetic element.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will draw conclusions about a poem based in part on its use of poetic elements.

Key Words

- **assonance** – when several words in a short section all contain the same vowel sound
 - **alliteration** – when several words in a short section begin with the same sound
 - **caesura** – when a pause (as created by a period or comma) occurs in the middle of a line
 - **consonance** – when several words in a short section contain the same consonant sound
 - **enjambment** – when a line break occurs in the middle of a sentence or phrase in a poem
-

Poetic Elements



Source: lassedesignen. Shutterstock

The passage of time brings out emotions in nearly everyone; memories, nostalgia, and thoughts of the past can be powerful triggers for strong feelings, both positive and negative, and those feelings can be difficult to articulate. But in poetry, feelings aren't always described or explained—they're evoked in subtle ways, through images and sounds that everyone can understand. Great poets use tiny details to create a bigger picture, and that picture can express a great deal of emotion.

Get Ready to Read

Gwendolyn Brooks was born in 1917 in Topeka, Kansas, and she began publishing poems when she was only thirteen years old. She grew up to become a prolific poet who wrote about the experience of life as a Black person in urban areas; she was one of the first Black women to do so. She wrote before, during, and after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, and her work reflected the desire for change. She brought attention to the ways in which Black people were struggling, but she did it with subtlety and compassion for her subject.

In the poem you're about to read, "A Sunset of the City," Brooks writes about the experience of aging from a female perspective. Through her use of poetic elements, she's able to convey her message even to people who may not have shared her own experiences.

Did You Know?

You may notice that between the poem's title and author and its first line, a name appears: *Kathleen Eileen*. Technically, that name is not part of the text of the poem; instead, it's meant to identify the speaker. As you read the poem, think about why Gwendolyn Brooks explicitly named the speaker and how the name impacts your interpretation of the poem's meaning.

Take Notes as You Read

Read the "A Sunset of the City" aloud as you listen to the sounds the words make. Evaluate what kind of effect they have on the poem's aesthetic impact, and then ask yourself what that might indicate about the poem's themes and the message about a woman's experience with aging that Brooks intended to convey to readers. Record your thoughts in your Reading Log.

Reading Log: A Sunset of the City

Useful Vocabulary

1. **heed:** listen to
2. **intimations:** hints or indications
3. **lechery:** lustfulness; excessive sexual desire
4. **muffed:** handled badly or clumsily
5. **pallor:** paleness
6. **tremulous:** weak; shaky

Poetic Elements

Poetic Elements

When a poet like Gwendolyn Brooks writes a poem, they use a variety of poetic elements, or devices that make their work more compelling to read, hear, and interpret. Here are examples of some of the poetic elements that can influence how a poem sounds:

- alliteration, or the use two or more words that begin with the same sound
- consonance, or the use of the same consonant sound in different parts of several words
- assonance, or the use of several words with the same vowel sound
- rhyme, or the use of words with the same ending sound
- repetition, or the use of repeated words

The purpose of all of these poetic elements is to repeat sounds.

Question 1

What is similar about the way these poetic elements treat sound? Give an example of an effect their use might have on a poem.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: All the poetic elements listed feature repeated sounds that poets can use to create different emotional effects. For example, depending on the context of the poem, a repeating *p* sound might sound like raindrops hitting the roof, possibly evoking a dreary feeling, or like popping bubbles, evoking a celebratory feeling.

A subtle sound effect created through the use of a poetic element can make a poem more powerful if the effect underlines the subject matter. For example, a poem about a snake that has a repeating *s* sound causes the *s* to sound like hissing. This adds another layer of meaning and gives the poem a greater aesthetic impact.

Other poetic elements focus less on sound and more on how the words are arranged or which words or ideas are emphasized:

- caesura, or a pause that appears in the middle of a line
- enjambment, or a line break in the middle of a sentence or phrase
- figurative language, or the use of words and phrases in nonliteral ways, or ways in which they were not intended to be used

Select the button. Then, select each of five pins to see how Gwendolyn Brooks uses poetic elements in the fourth stanza of “A Sunset of the City.”

Aquila JS Demo Poetic Elements Hot Spot Master Theme: Plus Color Theme: Default 100%

1 It is a real chill out. The fall crisp comes.

2 I am aware there is winter to heed.

There is no warm house

That is fitted with my need.

I am cold in this cold house this house 3

4 Whose washed echoes are tremulous down lost halls.

I am a woman, and dusty, standing among new affairs.

I am a woman who hurries through her prayers. 5

Drawing Conclusions Based on Poetic Elements

Now that we've evaluated some of the poetic elements found in "A Sunset of the City," we can use them to draw conclusions about Brooks's work and intent. The use of figurative language, consonance, caesura, repetition, and rhyme evoke a bigger picture that can often lead to revelations about a poem's theme, mood, tone, or message.

You have already seen that Brooks's use of caesura in the first line of stanza 4 emphasizes the short length and choppiness of the two sentences in the line: "It is a real chill out. The fall crisp comes."

Question 2

Why might Brooks have chosen to use caesura this way?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Brooks might have wanted to use the caesura to create a choppy rhythm because she wanted to create an angry or irritated tone. Sometimes when people speak in short, choppy sentences, it's because they're angry or irritated.

The growling sound made by the repeated *r* sounds in the next line helps to confirm this idea.

The repetition and the figurative language used in the poem, such as *cold house* and *washed echoes*, both contribute to the unhappy mood of the poem. An echo in a cold house evokes a feeling of loneliness, abandonment, and remembering better times.

Question 3

What conclusion can you draw from this use of repetition and figurative language?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: I can draw the conclusion that the speaker feels lonely and abandoned and that she's thinking about the past now that she's growing older.

When you read a poem, be sure to evaluate the poetic elements you find in it. They can help you draw conclusions about how the speaker feels about their subject and what kind of overall mood the poem has; focusing in on small details like the sounds repeated in words can give you a surprising amount of information about the themes, message, or bigger picture of the poem.

Check-In

Use what you know about poetic elements and their importance to answer the questions below.

Question 1

How do poetic elements work together to help you understand the bigger picture of a poem?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: All of the poetic elements in a poem were chosen by the poet to contribute to the bigger picture. They might not necessarily make sense on their own—for example, a repeating *p* sound could sound like rain or like someone spitting their words in distaste, depending on the subject matter of the poem and the other poetic elements that are used. But if you evaluate the repeating *p* sound in combination with figurative language that compares the speaker’s feelings to a rainy day, you can understand more about the meaning of the poem.

Need a little extra support?

Get Help Here

Question 2

Evaluate the use of rhyme in the last two lines of the second-to-last stanza of “A Sunset of the City.” What conclusions can you draw based on how this poetic element is used?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The two rhyming words in these lines are *dry* and *die*; both words are emphasized by this rhyme. From this emphasis, I can conclude that the speaker is focusing on the ideas of drying up and dying—both of which she associates with the concept of growing old. This helps me conclude that the major themes of the poem are aging and death.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Question 3

What use of poetic elements might create a fearful tone?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Alliteration or consonance using a repeated *t* sound might create the effect of the speaker's teeth chattering from fright. Figurative language that emphasizes the scariness of something could also create a fearful tone.

Practice

Use the poem below to complete the activity.

Activity

Evaluate the poetic elements used in “An Autumn Day.” In a few paragraphs, describe the poetic elements and explain what conclusions you drew from them about the meaning of the poem as well as the speaker’s feelings.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: In the line “When the heart is dulled with a dumb despair,” alliteration is used to create a repeating *d* sound. When you consider the context of these words, which is a line about a despairing heart, the *d* sound is reminiscent of a heartbeat. A heartbeat is a sign of life, which contrasts with the words *dead*, *dulled*, and *dumb*. I can therefore conclude that one of the poet’s intended themes may involve a contrast between life and death.

Another poetic element that appears in “An Autumn Day” is figurative language. In the first stanza, summer is personified as a woman wearing a dress with a “gorgeous train.” Often, brides wear dresses with trains, so in this example the poet may be comparing summer to a woman in the prime of youth and happiness. From this, readers can draw the conclusion that youth is another theme of the poem, and that the speaker feels nostalgic about the summer of their youth.

The poem has a rhyme scheme, which causes the last words of each line to be emphasized. The choices of these word pairings, such as *pane* and *vain* and *never* and *ever*, contribute to the meaning of the poem because they all have negative connotations. They show the speaker’s negative feeling toward the subject.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I responded to the entire prompt without veering off topic.
 2. _____ I evaluated how poetic elements were used in the context of the poem.
 3. _____ I drew conclusions that followed logically from the poetic elements I evaluated.
 4. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

Language in Poetry

Unit Reading Information

In this unit, you will read *Macbeth* unless otherwise directed by your teacher.

Select the links to access the text and reading log.

Macbeth

Reading Log: The Tragedy of Macbeth

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will analyze the effects of diction on the meaning of a poem.

Key Words

- **connotation** – the thoughts and associations a word evokes
 - **denotation** – the literal meaning, or dictionary definition of a word
 - **diction** – a poet's choice and use of words
 - **meter** – the number of accented syllables per line of poetry
 - **mood** – the overall emotional feeling of a poem or literary work
 - **rhyme scheme** – the pattern of end sounds at the ends of lines of poetry
-

Language in Poetry



Source: Erkki Makkonen. 123rf.com

Poems can paint a picture, almost like a snapshot, of a scene, but they can also tell a story. Narrative poems, or poems that tell stories, come in many forms. Unlike prose narratives, the conventions for plot, character development, and so on are a bit looser—poets are free to add depth and interest to their work in other ways.

Just as a painter's medium is paint, a poet's medium is words. Poets choose their words as carefully as a painter mixes paint, and they make sure that every word they use fits

in with the meaning and emotion they want to convey. Just as a painter might mix a particular shade of blue, a poet chooses a word to impart a particular shade of meaning.

Infer Meaning

William Rose Benét, the author of “The Skater of Ghost Lake,” lived from 1886 to 1950. During his life, he published several collections of poetry. “The Skater of Ghost Lake” is a rhythmic poem full of sound, motion, and atmosphere, making it a joy to read aloud. It tells the story of a couple who go ice skating on a frozen lake at night and get spooked by a night bird . . . or was it something else? This poem requires you to “read between the lines” and think carefully about the words the poet includes.

Take Notes as You Read

As you read “The Skater of Ghost Lake,” pay close attention to the specific words the poet uses and how the words and phrases are arranged. Think about how those words and phrases affect the meaning of the poem. Record your thoughts in your Reading Log.

Useful Vocabulary

- **sentineled**: made into guards to keep watch over something
 - **reel**: a lively Scottish or Irish folk dance
 - **stride**: a long, relaxed step
-

Language in Poetry

What Is Diction?

Diction is how poets select the words to employ in their poetry. Since poems are usually shorter than other types of writing, such as narrative stories or informative essays, poets really have to make their words count. They carefully consider the optimal way to say what they want to say, which is why it's so critical to take note of the word choices a poet makes. Diction also encompasses how those words are arranged and how they are punctuated. Poets make these choices for maximum emotional and aesthetic impact, but they still want to convey their message in a clear, concise way.

Diction and Its Effects

To analyze diction within a poem, it's important to evaluate how convincingly the words the poet has chosen reflect a particular feeling or atmosphere. A word's **denotation** is its literal, dictionary definition and its **connotations** are the associations, thoughts, and feelings that a word stirs up in your mind. Reread the first stanza of the poem:

There are a few things to notice about the diction in this stanza. For one thing, we know that Benét chose words and arranged them in order to fit the **meter** and **rhyme scheme** of the poem, which, if you've ever written a metered, rhyming poem, you know is no small challenge—it's a strict set of limits. Benét chose powerful, evocative words in order to create as vivid a picture in the reader's or listener's mind as possible while still following the constraints of his chosen form.

In this stanza, the word *deep* appears twice: in the first line, it describes the lake and in the last line of the stanza, it describes the fir trees. This helps the poem's audience understand the meaning of the poem because it emphasizes the depth of both the lake and the trees. The denotation of *deep* tells us that the water in the lake is deep and that there is a thick forest around it; but the word *deep* has connotations too: it can mean

dark, as in *deep red*, or, when describing a person, it can mean that they have a lot going on beneath the surface. These connotations are brought to mind when you hear or read the word *deep*, and they add meaning to the poem. Maybe the lake and the trees, which we know are dark, have something hiding beneath the surface. This is how the connotations of the words in a poem affect the mood, or emotional undercurrent of the poem.

The other word to take note of in this first stanza is *sentineled*. It's an unusual word to include in a poem that seems to describe what is normally an enjoyable activity—a sentinel is a guard or a watchperson. The idea that the trees are *sentineled* means that they have been made into guards, standing watch over the lake. The poet could have said the trees stood tall over the lake and it would have had the same literal meaning, but the word *sentineled* adds both imagery, showing that the trees stood straight as guards or soldiers, and connotation, conjuring the thoughts and associations that go along with *guard*, *soldier*, or *sentinel*.

Question

How does the word *sentinel* affect the meaning of the poem?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The word *sentinel* has the same denotation as *guard*, but it has a more formal connotation. This affects the meaning of the poem by showing that the trees stood even straighter than guards—they were straight and tall with the posture of sentinels. It also makes the reader or listener wonder what the trees might need to guard the lake from, which builds suspense.

Diction also includes words that repeat; evaluating why a poet might choose to repeat a word or phrase can lead to some intriguing conclusions. Reread the third stanza of “The Skater of Ghost Lake”:

The words *leaning*, *stride*, and *skates* all appear twice in this stanza. The first line, “Leaning and leaning with a stride and a stride,” contains two sets of repeating words. This was no accident—Benét clearly meant to evoke the rhythm of a skater leaning

from side to side. A *stride* is a long, relaxed step, so that particular choice of word helps the audience understand what's happening in the poem. It indicates that Jeremy Randall is not a timid skater—he's clearly competent and confident. The fact that his hands are locked behind him and his scarf is blowing wide tell us that he doesn't need to keep his arms out for balance, and his speed is fast enough that his scarf is blowing behind him. These word choices impact meaning by conveying to the audience an image of how Jeremy looks when he skates: quick, confident, and rhythmic. This further affects the meaning of the poem by alluding to the kind of person Jeremy is.

Another word to take note of in this stanza is *locked*. Benet could have just as easily said that Jeremy's hands were *clasped* behind him, or *held* behind him. But the word *locked* has strong connotations: It can imply that someone or something is captured and locked in somewhere, or it can suggest safety and security, the way you lock the door of your house when you leave. Both of these connotations add meaning to the poem by contributing to the sense we have of Jeremy Randall as a secure, confident person . . . but they also infuse a certain sense of foreboding: Will something bad happen?

Poets continuously and carefully consider the words they use and how those words should be arranged. They choose every detail to enhance the mood, themes, and message of a poem, so analyzing diction is a key step toward evaluating the poet's intentions and better understanding the poem's meaning.

Check-In

Use your understanding of diction in “The Skater of Ghost Lake” to answer the questions.

Question 1

How do the connotations of words a poet chooses affect the meaning of a poem?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The connotations of words are the feelings and associations evoked by those words. By using words with positive or negative connotations, the poet can show how the speaker feels about their subject. The connotations of words can also influence the mood, or atmosphere of a poem—for example, words that have scary or uncomfortable connotations can create a mood that is frightening. Both mood and tone affect the meaning of a poem by controlling how the audience interprets the emotions in it.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Question 2

In the line, “Pressed close to Jeremy, laced to his side,” how does the word *laced* affect the meaning of the poem?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: In this context, the word *laced* is used to show how close Cecily was to Jeremy. The denotation of *laced* is “secured or fastened with string,” but we know that that isn’t really the case and that the poet is using nonliteral language to

make a point, which is that Cecily was pressed as close to Jeremy as possible, as if they were laced together.

The word *laced* also has several connotations: For one, it evokes an ice skate, which must be laced up before it can be used, and that reflects the overall context of the poem. But *lace* is usually delicate, and it contrasts with how Jeremy's hands were *locked* behind him before Cecily arrived, implying that Jeremy treats Cecily in a delicate manner.

Question 3

Evaluate the poet's choice of language in the line, "Cecily only—yes it is she!" What does the poet's use of diction say about the meaning of the poem?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Instead of saying simply, "Cecily arrived," the poet arranges the words to show that someone, most likely Jeremy, has just spotted Cecily and isn't sure it's her, but then confirms that it *is* her. The exclamation point indicates excitement. This affects the meaning of the poem by showing that Jeremy is happy to see Cecily.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Practice

Reread “The Skater of Ghost Lake” and then complete the activity.

Activity

Choose a stanza from “The Skater of Ghost Lake” and evaluate the poet’s use of language. Then, in a few paragraphs, analyze the effect of the diction in the stanza on the meaning of the poem.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: In the fifth stanza of the poem, the second line reads, “Stealing to Ghost Lake, tree after tree.” This line is about Cecily sneaking to the lake at night, presumably to go skating with Jeremy Randall. The poet’s choice of the phrase “tree after tree” doesn’t make sense in a literal way—but it is used to explain how Cecily didn’t simply walk from her house to the lake; instead, she had to sneak there by hiding behind one tree, then hiding behind the next tree, and so on in order to make sure she wasn’t seen. This affects the meaning of the poem because it shows that Cecily wasn’t supposed to be there.

The last line of the stanza reads, “Rising with feet winged, gleaming, to glide.” Cecily’s feet did not actually have wings on them—the wings are her ice skates. This choice by the author affects the meaning of the poem because it explains that Cecily is, like Jeremy, a good skater. If she were just starting out, the skates would not be like wings on her feet, and she wouldn’t be gliding. Also, the connotation of wings is positive, almost like Cecily is an angel. This affects the meaning of the poem because it tells us that Cecily is most likely good. We know from the first line, “Cecily only—yes it is she!” that the speaker, or Jeremy, is excited to see her.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I responded to the whole prompt without veering off topic.
 2. _____ I effectively analyzed and evaluated the diction in the poem.
 3. _____ I explained logically how the diction affects the poem's meaning.
 4. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will analyze the effects of imagery in a poem.

Key Words

- **imagery** – descriptions in a poem that evoke mental snapshots that appeal to all five senses
 - **mood** – the overall emotional feeling or atmosphere of a poem
-

Language in Poetry



Source: lightpoet. Shutterstock

Have you ever had the experience of reading a novel or story and seeing the whole scene in perfect detail in your mind? Maybe you could even feel what a character was holding, smell what that object smelled like, and hear what it sounded like.

A good piece of writing can transport the reader to different realms by engaging one, two—or even all five senses. This is something that poets, by the very nature of their writing, aim to do.

Read Strategically

Visualizing with your mind's eye is a good way to engage with any text, but especially with a poem. It's even better if you visualize with not just your eyes, but the rest of your senses as well. The poem you're about to read, William Rose Benét's "The Skater of Ghost Lake," includes details that appeal to different senses and help to draw you into the story; they make the reader or listener feel like they're there in the scene, watching the action, maybe even participating in it. As you come across a new detail, no matter how small or seemingly minute, stop and close your eyes. Consider what you picture in your mind's eye and think about how that image might lend meaning to the poem.

Take Notes as You Read

As you read "The Skater of Ghost Lake," pay attention to the descriptions the poet uses to describe the scene and the action. Notice how these descriptions appeal to different senses. Record your thoughts in your Reading Log.

Useful Vocabulary

1. **reel**: a lively Scottish or Irish folk dance
 2. **sentineled**: made into guards to keep watch over something
 3. **stride**: a long, relaxed step
-

Language in Poetry

The Effects of Imagery

One thing that makes “The Skater of Ghost Lake” such a powerful and intriguing poem is imagery. Imagery is not limited to the sense of sight—the word represents description that applies to all five senses. For example, reread the first three lines of the poem:

In the very first line, there are already two examples of imagery that draw the reader or listener in. The words *dark* and *deep* both appeal to the sense of sight, while the word *cold* appeals to the sense of touch. The sense of touch encompasses more than what we touch with our fingers—it also includes feelings such as cold, or thirst, or a pounding heart. All of these images draw the reader in and engage them immediately. From the first line, readers and listeners can already imagine that they’re right there by the lake, feeling the cold just as the speaker is.

In the second line, “Ice black as ebony” appeals to both touch and sight: Readers can see what the ice looks like, while the word *ice* itself evokes the feeling of touching something cold and frozen, smooth, and hard. In the third line, “Far in its shadows” helps the audience see what’s being described, and “a faint sound whirs” helps them hear what’s happening in the poem.

Question

What effects do these examples of imagery have on the poem?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: They make the poem more vivid and compelling. They engage the reader or listener and make them want to find out where the events the poem describes will go.

Now, read another example from “The Skater of Ghost Lake”:

These lines contain several examples of imagery. The line “Swayed to a swift stride, brisker of pace,” may not seem like it involves the senses, but it does—it appeals to the sense of touch. Remember that touch isn’t limited to what you can feel with your hands; it also includes the rest of your body. While reading those first two lines in the stanza, try to feel what it might be like to race on ice skates. Think about the rhythm of leaning from side to side as you glide faster and faster over the ice. This, too, is a sensory detail that the poet uses to create imagery. In the second two lines, the words *whirring* and *crisp sound thin* that are then compared to the string of a violin being plucked appeal to the sense of hearing.

In addition to making a poem more vivid and drawing the reader in, imagery can also enhance the mood of a poem, or the overall emotional feeling or atmosphere. Watch the video to experience more examples of imagery from “The Skater of Ghost Lake.”

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Ghostly Imagery Transcript

Whenever you read a poem, pay close attention to the imagery it contains. Imagery can affect a poem by drawing the reader or listener in and creating a vivid sensory experience for them, but it can also build the mood of a poem, which can help you

understand the meaning. Analyzing the imagery in a poem can help give you as complete an understanding of a poem, including the feelings and emotions it contains, as possible.

Check-In

Read the following poem and use it to answer the questions.

Longing

by Paul Laurence Dunbar

1. If you could sit with me beside the sea to-day,
 2. And whisper with me sweetest dreamings o'er and o'er;
 3. I think I should not find the clouds so dim and gray,
 4. And not so loud the waves complaining at the shore.
-
1. If you could sit with me upon the shore to-day,
 2. And hold my hand in yours as in the days of old,
 3. I think I should not mind the chill baptismal spray,
 4. Nor find my hand and heart and all the world so cold.
-
1. If you could walk with me upon the strand to-day,
 2. And tell me that my longing love had won your own,
 3. I think all my sad thoughts would then be put away,
 4. And I could give back laughter for the Ocean's moan!

Question 1

What are two examples of imagery from the poem and what senses do they appeal to?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Two examples of imagery in the poem are “clouds so dim and gray,” which appeals to the sense of sight, and “loud the waves complaining at the shore,” which appeals to the sense of hearing.

Question 2

The second stanza contains multiple images that have to do with feeling cold. How does this affect the poem?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: These sensory details help to make it clear that the speaker in the poem feels cold—their hands and heart are both cold because they don’t have the person they love with them. This affects the mood of the poem by emphasizing the sadness and loneliness the speaker feels.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Practice

Reread “The Skater of Ghost Lake” and then complete the activity.

Activity

Choose a stanza from “The Skater of Ghost Lake” and, in a paragraph or two, analyze the imagery in the stanza. Explain the effect the imagery has on the poem.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The fourth stanza of “The Skater of Ghost Lake” contains several examples of imagery. The line “black is the clear glass now that he glides” appeals to the sense of sight but also of touch—it helps the reader visualize the ice and also how it feels to glide on it. “Crisp is the whisper” describes what Jeremy’s skates sound like on the ice and “long lean strides” describes what it feels like to glide on the ice as well as what Jeremy looked like while skating. The words “pricked ears hark” appeal mostly to the sense of touch because they describe what it felt like to listen out for something, but also the sense of hearing because it implies that Jeremy hears a sound.

The effect of these images is to help develop the character of Jeremy—they show how he skates and help the reader or listener visualize how he skates. Words like *glides* and *strides* tell us that Jeremy is a confident and able skater. The imagery also helps the audience visualize the entire scene: how the ice looks in the dark and how quickly Jeremy is moving on it.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I responded to the entire prompt without veering off topic.
 2. _____ I identified several examples of imagery and pointed out where they occurred.
 3. _____ I analyzed how the imagery affected the poem.
 4. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

Objective and Key Words

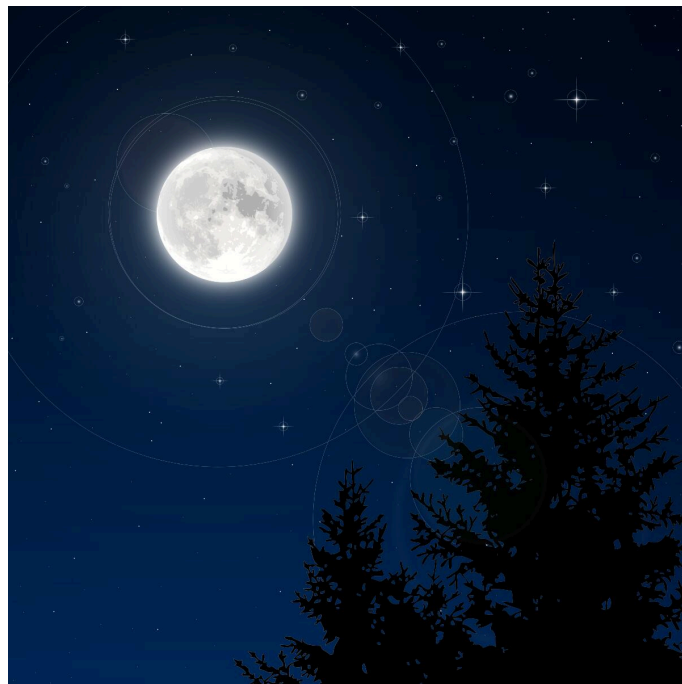
Objective

In this section, you will analyze the effects of figurative language in a poem.

Key Words

- **figurative language** – words that are used in a way that differs from their dictionary definitions
 - **metaphor** – when two things are compared without the use of the words *like* or *as*
 - **onomatopoeia** – when a word's pronunciation sounds like the thing it describes
 - **personification** – when an author or poet gives human characteristics to something nonhuman
 - **simile** – when two things are compared with the use of the words *like* or *as*
-

Language in Poetry



Source: Gregor Buir. Shutterstock

Poems and stories have a lot in common. Some poems, which we call narrative poems, tell stories. But the main difference between these two types of writing is that stories rely on devices like plot and character development, while poetry is more about

emotion, imagery, and the creative use of language. That's why poets often use vivid language in unexpected or surprising ways.

Visualize

Poets use language to paint pictures in readers' and listeners' minds. In order to do this effectively, words are sometimes used differently from how they are in other types of writing. Poets often take liberties this way because they are not writing a research paper or informational essay that needs to be formal and logical—they want to reach past their audience's sense of formality in order to create vivid images that touch people's emotions. So, while reading poetry, try not to get caught up in the exact meanings of various words and instead, let them create images in your mind.

Take Notes as You Read

As you read “The Skater of Ghost Lake,” pay attention to how words are used—does their meaning align with their dictionary definition, or are they used some other way? Notice the context of these words and phrases and think about how they affect the poem. Record your thoughts in your Reading Log.

Useful Vocabulary

1. **reel**: a lively Scottish or Irish folk dance
 2. **sentineled**: made into guards to keep watch over something
 3. **stride**: a long, relaxed step
-

Language in Poetry

The Effects of Figurative Language

Figurative language is a powerful tool used by poets in order to create vivid images in readers' and listeners' minds as well as to help the audience connect with the poem's subject in a deeper way. "The Skater of Ghost Lake" tells a story that's set on a frozen lake at night, lit by the full moon. The atmosphere is sinister and a bit spooky, but also very beautiful—and it's evoked by the poet's liberal use of figurative language.

In "The Skater of Ghost Lake," the poet William Rose Benét uses several types of figurative language, including personification, which is when a nonhuman thing is given human characteristics; simile, which is when two things are compared using the words *like* or *as*; and onomatopoeia, which is a word that sounds like the thing it describes. Another type of figurative language included in the poem is metaphor, in which two things are compared without the use of the words *like* or *as*. All of these types of figurative language come together to create a poem that is vivid and memorable.

As you watch the following video, observe how the student analyzes each example of figurative language and explains the overall effect it has on the poem.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Now, answer the questions.

Question 1

Why do poets use personification? What effect does personification have on “The Skater of Ghost Lake”?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Poets use personification in order to help readers and listeners develop a deeper connection with the poem. It also helps to create imagery. In “The Skater of Ghost Lake,” personification is used to emphasize or develop aspects of the meaning of the poem: the “sentineled trees” help readers understand that the trees are standing over the lake like guards, which tells readers that the lake might be a secret place. The “moon for a mate” example helps readers understand that Jeremy is completely alone on the ice with only the moon for company, but it also helps create a vivid image of the moon shining down, watching over Jeremy.

Question 2

Find an example of a metaphor in this stanza of “The Skater of Ghost Lake” and describe the effect it has:

Cecily only—yes it is she!

Stealing to Ghost Lake, tree after tree,

Kneeling in snow by the still lake side,

Rising with feet winged, gleaming, to glide.

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The line "Rising with feet winged, gleaming, to glide" is a metaphor that compares the skates on Cecily's feet to a bird. The metaphor evokes an image of a bird gliding through the air; it helps readers picture Cecily with skates on, gliding smoothly over the ice like a bird in flight.

Check-In

Use what you have learned about figurative language to complete the activity.

Question

What effect do examples of onomatopoeias have on poetry?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Because onomatopoeia is words that sound like the thing they describe, examples can help to create vivid sound-images in poems.

Practice

Reread “The Skater of Ghost Lake” and then complete the activity.

Activity

Choose a stanza from “The Skater of Ghost Lake” that contains at least two examples of figurative language. In a paragraph or two, identify the examples of figurative language in the stanza, and then analyze the effect the figurative language has on the poem.

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The eighth stanza of “The Skater of Ghost Lake” contains several examples of figurative language used to compare. In the first line, “Black as if lacquered the wide lake lies,” there is a simile that creates a vivid image in readers’ minds: The surface of the lake is so black and shiny that it looks to the speaker like it’s been lacquered. Another simile in this stanza that creates a vivid image is “Breath as a frost-fume.” Again, the word *as* signals that this is a simile that compares the skaters’ breath to a “frost-fume,” or the foggy cloud that emits from a block of ice, essentially telling readers that it’s so cold, you can see your breath. Finally, the line “souls are a sword edge tasting the cold” is a metaphor—it compares Jeremy and Cecily’s souls to a sword edge. “Sword edge” reminds the reader of the blade of an ice skate and evokes the feeling that Cecily and Jeremy’s souls are concentrated down to that one thin blade, “tasting” the ice.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I responded to the entire prompt without veering off topic.

2. _____ I identified at least two examples of figurative language and pointed out where they occurred.
 3. _____ I analyzed how the figurative language affected the poem.
 4. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

Writing Poetry Portfolio

Unit Reading Information

In this unit, you will read *Macbeth* unless otherwise directed by your teacher.

Select the links to access the text and reading log.

Macbeth

Reading Log: The Tragedy of Macbeth

Writing Portfolio Poetry



The poet W. H. Auden said, “Poetry might be defined as the clear expression of mixed emotions.” Poetry is, at its core, about emotions. When poets write poetry, they think carefully about their own feelings, and sometimes they imagine the feelings of others. This imagining of others’ feelings is what psychologists call *empathy*. To be able to see the world from the perspective of someone else is an important life skill, and it takes practice. When you read a poem, you learn about how someone else perceives the world. When you write a poem, you have a choice: you can explain how you, yourself,

view things, or you can explore the world through the eyes of a fictional character.

Both of these methods can help you see things in a new way.

Poetry isn't only about emotions, however—it's also very much about words. In order to express yourself precisely, you need to use the right words, and if you can make those words sound exciting or striking when they're read out loud, your poems will be even more effective and memorable.

In this portfolio, you will explore all these ideas as you write two poems in response to this prompt:

Write two poems using different forms; they can be from your own point of view about something you feel strongly about, or they can be from the perspective of someone else.

Portfolio Introduction

Over the next lesson, you will write a Poetry Portfolio. You will have one day to address the learning goals and complete the portfolio.

Type of Writing Definition

When poets write poetry, they think carefully about their own feelings, and sometimes they imagine the feelings of others. Poetry is also using the right words to make poems even more effective and memorable.

Portfolio Topic

Write two poems using different forms; they can be from your own point of view about something you feel strongly about, or they can be from the perspective of someone else (or an alternate topic as assigned by your teacher).

Rubric

Use this rubric to ensure you are meeting all the goals of the portfolio.

Poetry Portfolio Rubric

Example Portfolio

Use this example of a completed portfolio as a guide for your writing. The portfolio topic this student chose was a villanelle about Autumn and an elegy for Winter.

"Autumn Villanelle" and "Elegy for Winter"

Poetry Portfolio Continued

Watch the video to see some examples of poets and poetic forms that might inspire you.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

"Autumn Villanelle" and "Elegy for Winter"

Autumn Villanelle

by Julio Saldaña

The frost came early this year,
the sky is a cold shade of white.
The roses shed petals like tears.

If you listen, you can almost hear
the fading away of the light.

The frost came early this year.

In darkness, there's so much to fear.

All creatures dread the night.

The roses shed petals like tears.

We know that winter is near

by the air's new chilly bite.

The frost came early this year.

The flowers we held so dear

belong only to summer, by rights.

The roses shed petals like tears.

The change closes in on us here,

just when we thought we would not have to fight

the frost that came early this year.

The roses shed petals like tears.

Elegy for Winter

by Julio Saldaña

In the dead, scorched wasteland of summer,

a thought travels up my spine like a chill—

I miss the black-branched winter.

I miss all of the things you could see in the trees,

the hidden nests and gnarls,

the spindly twigs.

Now it's all green upon green upon green, forever,

and the sun stretches its dragonfly wings

past nine o'clock.

Flannel pajamas hibernate in the backs of drawers;

the fireplace is all cool, empty ashes.

The windows are wide and let in the flies.

The closet, hot, dark, and never opened anymore,

is shrouded with coats like ghosts

that know the door won't be shut forever.

Activity 1

Explain which poets and forms discussed in the video you are most interested in learning more about and why you feel that way.

As you undertake the process of writing your own poetry, the instructions in this portfolio will guide you as you plan, write, and revise your work. They will help you decide on forms to use for your two poems, come up with ideas for what to write about, and even help you brainstorm some language you can use.

As you develop your ideas and get them onto paper, you will also learn how another student, Julio, wrote his poems. Read Julio's poems now and think about the thoughts as well as the emotions he expresses. Notice the complexity of the emotion in each poem.

Activity 2

Explain which parts of Julio's poems you think were most effective or striking and why you think so. If there were any parts you didn't think worked well, explain what you might do to fix them.

Using the Poetry Portfolio Rubric

Even though poems aren't necessarily very long, there is a lot of thought that goes into them. There are several criteria to think carefully about as you work on your poems;

this can make it difficult to know where to begin. The portfolio rubric, or checklist, will help guide you through the process by helping you make sure your poems contain all the elements that make poetry satisfying to read and to listen to.

Poetry Portfolio Rubric

Activity 3

Identify which part of the rubric you believe will be most important to keep in mind while writing your poems and explain why.

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will write two poems using different poetic forms (e.g., sonnets, ballads).

Key Words

- **assonance** – when several words in a short section all contain the same vowel sound
 - **alliteration** – when several words in a short section begin with the same sound
 - **consonance** – when several words in a short section contain the same consonant sound
 - **elegy** – a type of poem that laments the loss of something or someone the speaker loved
 - **ghazal** – a type of Middle Eastern poetry that dates back to the Middle Ages
 - **onomatopoeia** – when a word's pronunciation sounds like the thing it describes
 - **poetic form** – a type of poem that follows a particular set of rules
 - **structural characteristics** – a poem's stanza length, number of stanzas, rhyme scheme, number of beats per line, and repetition
-

Writing Poetry Portfolio

Poetry allows the poet to express emotions that are sometimes hard to convey in other types of writing. It's meant to create emotions for the reader or listener. Therefore, poetry is less about the conventions of writing than it is about the imagery and figurative language it takes to touch people's feelings.

However, using a particular poetic form correctly can take poetry to a new level by adding an element of sound—the structural characteristics of any poetic form determine the poem's rhyme scheme, meter, and repetition. All of these elements control how a poem sounds when it's read aloud—when a poet creates a particular sound for a poem in order to have a specific effect, it creates a complete sensory experience for the listener.

In addition to these structural characteristics, some poetic forms are also characterized by their subject matter. For example, a ghazal, a type of Middle Eastern poetry that dates back to the Middle Ages, is usually about the speaker's feeling of longing for something. An elegy is always about the speaker's sense of loss over something or someone they loved—that's what makes it an elegy.

When you're planning to write a poem, it's important to choose a form that's well-matched to your subject. If you want to describe a scene that has a lot of sound elements, a lyric poem might be the right choice. If you want to write about how much you love someone or something, then you may want to write an ode.

Did You Know?

The narrator, or speaker, of a poem is not always the poet. Many times, the poem is told from the point of view of a person the poet made up. This is why we refer to the narrator of the poem as the *speaker* and not the *poet*. The poet is the one who makes

choices about what structure to use, what poetic elements to add, and who the speaker will be.

There are many, many poetic forms that you can research. Here are some of them:

Descriptions of Various Poetic Forms

ballad	A poem that tells a story, usually with four-line stanzas and an <i>ABCB</i> rhyme scheme
sonnet	A fourteen-line poem that can be divided into three quatrains and a couplet, often containing a revelation or strong assertion in the final couplet
haiku	A three-line poem with lines of five, seven, then five syllables; the subject is usually an observation from nature
lyric poem	A poem with rhythmic, musical qualities that expresses the feelings of the speaker
ode	A poem that addresses someone or something the speaker loves; often has formal characteristics of a lyric poem

rap	A poem that's spoken aloud, usually over music, to a particular rhythm with a specific rhyme scheme
litany	A poem in which each line must start with the same word or phrase
villanelle	A poem containing five stanzas of three lines each followed by a stanza with four lines; includes two refrains, or lines that repeat throughout the poem

You have already read two poems by Julio, a student writer: a villanelle called “Autumn Villanelle” and an elegy called “Elegy for Winter.” As you watch the following video, pay attention to which forms Julio chose for his two poems. Note the steps he took to plan out his poems, including how he chose specific words and phrases to use.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Peer Model Video Transcript

Question 1

How did Julio go about writing a villanelle?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: He came up with two refrains to use, and then he made a list of rhyming words that would fit the villanelle structure. Then, he chose which words from the list fit the diction and mood he wanted for his poem and crafted lines around them.

Julio wrote his second poem, “Elegy for Winter,” in free verse. He mentioned that free verse poems don’t have any structural characteristics, but they don’t give you a free pass on punctuation, either. Poets such as Emily Dickinson and E. E. Cummings take liberties with punctuation, meaning they use punctuation in unconventional ways in order to create a specific effect. If you write a free verse poem, remember that the rules for punctuation still apply, but they can, in some cases, be broken, as long as the poet has a good reason for doing so.

Question 2

What effects might be created by using punctuation in an unconventional way?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: By omitting punctuation entirely, a poet could create the effect of a dreamlike, straight-from-the-soul, outpouring-of-emotion quality. By putting periods or commas where they wouldn’t normally belong, a poet could create pauses for effect, emphasizing certain words or phrases.

Writing Poetry Portfolio

Planning and Writing a Poem

Because poetry is different from other types of writing, the rules for how to approach writing one are a little looser. Instead of choosing a topic, formulating a research question, or making an outline, it's sometimes easiest to just start writing and see where you end up.

If you already know what you want to write about and what forms you want to use, great! If you want to write a villanelle, for example, you could do what Julio did and come up with the refrains first, then make a list of possible rhyming words that could fit in each stanza. (Making lists of rhyming words is helpful for any form that uses a rhyme scheme, not just villanelles.) Then, pare your list down to words that fit with the mood and diction you want your poem to have. You can craft the rest of the lines of your poem around these words.

If you're not sure what you want to write about or what forms you want to use, there are a few exercises you can try. They can help you generate ideas for subjects and forms of a poem as well as some usable lines.

1. Take a walk and bring a notebook with you. Walk slowly and as you go, pay close attention to everything you see. Come up with some similes and metaphors that compare the things you notice to other things. Write down everything you think of—but don't edit yourself yet. When you finish, put your list away for a while and do something else. Then come back to it later and see if any of your metaphors or similes spark the idea for a poem.
2. Start freewriting, paying close attention to the sounds made by the words. Your writing doesn't even need to make sense—it just has to sound interesting. Use alliteration, assonance, consonance, and onomatopoeia to play with the sounds made by words. This will get you thinking about the sound possibilities in language.

3. Choose five abstract concepts—these can be anything, as long as they are not tangible (for example, you could choose friendship, bliss, rivalry, anger, or anything else). Write down what each concept looks like, sounds like, smells like, tastes like, and feels like. Don't worry if they don't make perfect "sense"—your aim is to find the emotional truth, not the logical truth. There are no wrong answers, as long as you write down something concrete and not another abstract concept (for example, "friendship sounds like bells ringing" works; "friendship sounds like beauty" does not).
4. Experiment with forms. Choose a poetic form at random and go with it, even if it looks like a difficult one to follow. Brainstorm a list of rhyming words if you need to, and see where you end up. You might be surprised by which forms are easiest for you to follow.
5. Avoid clichés! A cliché is a phrase, usually a description, that's overused and no longer evokes any meaning (for example, "old as the hills" or "sick as a dog"). The whole point of poetry is to describe things in fresh new ways that startle readers into paying attention.

And remember: you're just getting started. If you get stuck, just keep putting words on paper and don't worry about editing yourself—there will be time later in the process for you to polish up your work and make sure it says exactly what you want it to say. For now, just keep generating ideas.

Check-In

Practice

Activity

It's time to start planning and drafting your own poems. Reread the writing prompt:

Write two poems using different forms; they can be from your own point of view about something you feel strongly about, or they can be from the perspective of someone else.

Follow these steps.

1. Brainstorm a list of subjects and ideas or concepts you might want to write about and then choose two. Both choices should be meaningful to you personally; given that your job as a poet is to instill emotion and passion in your audience, it's important that the subject you choose instills these things in your own mind and heart.
2. Determine poetic forms that align with each subject and your purpose for writing about it. Remember to keep in mind the criteria of a particular form and how closely that criteria matches your own “poetic personality”—if you like to organize your writing, use a form with significant poetic structure, and if not, use a more freeform form.
3. When you're ready, begin drafting your poems. Approach the task in a way that makes you feel comfortable—you might create a sort of template that reflects the structure you're using, or you might simply choose to freewrite.

You will have more time later to finish your poems, so don't feel rushed—take the time you need to luxuriate in what you are doing.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I chose two topics for my poems from a list of ideas I compiled.
 2. _____ I chose a form for each poem that lends itself well to the subjects I plan to write about.
 3. _____ I drafted several lines that will work well in my poems.
 4. Then, review the full Poetry Portfolio rubric to prepare for what you will do next.
-

Poetry Portfolio Rubric

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will write poems using a variety of poetic techniques (e.g., structural elements, figurative language).

Key Words

- **figurative language** – words that are used in a way that differs from their dictionary definitions
 - **half-rhyme** – words that have similar end sounds, but don't exactly rhyme (e.g., *wide* and *flies*)
 - **poetic form** – a type of poem that follows a particular set of rules
 - **sensory details** – words and phrases that appeal to any of the five senses
 - **structural elements** – aspects of poetic form such as stanza length, number of stanzas, rhyme scheme, number of beats per line, and repetition
-

Writing Poetry Portfolio

When poets write poetry, they use a variety of poetic techniques. These techniques include structural elements, which are usually dictated by the poetic form the poet chooses to use; structural elements include the number of stanzas in the poem, the number of lines per stanza, and the poem’s meter and rhyme scheme.

Other poetic techniques have to do with sound. Because poetry is meant to be read aloud, the purpose of these sound elements is to create a complete sensory experience for the listener that uses language in a way that’s aesthetically pleasing to hear. Look at the chart below to see some examples of poetic techniques that have to do with how a poem sounds when it’s read aloud:

Effect of Poetic Techniques in Poems

Term	Definition	Example
alliteration	when multiple words in a short section begin with the same sound	. . . <i>black-branched</i> . . .

assonance	when multiple words in a short section contain the same vowel sound	<i>the spindly twigs.</i>
consonance	when multiple words in a short section contain the same consonant sound	<i>. . . hidden nests and gnarls,</i>
internal rhyme	two rhyming words in the same line of poetry	<i>The windows are wide and let in the flies.</i>
repetition	when a word or phrase is repeated more than once throughout a poem	<i>. . . green upon green upon green . . .</i>

Note that in the example of internal rhyme, a **half-rhyme** is used: the words almost rhyme because they use the same vowel sound, but their endings are slightly different. Poets sometimes use half-rhymes when they're working with a strict rhyme scheme. This example is both an internal rhyme and a half-rhyme.

Poetry also includes lots of **sensory details** in order to create imagery. Poets incorporate a variety of sensory details that relate to all five senses to give readers and listeners a complete sensory experience.

Another factor that differentiates poetry from other types of writing is **figurative language**; while words and phrases are used figuratively in all forms of writing, they are particularly strong choices for poetry, as they effectively convey emotion and strong feeling. Read the information in the chart below to review some types of figurative language and examples of how Julio, the student poet, used figurative language in his poems:

Effect of Figurative Language in Poems

Term	Definition	Example
simile	when two things are compared using the word <i>like</i> or <i>as</i>	<i>. . . shrouded with coats like ghosts . . .</i>
metaphor	when two things are compared without the words <i>like</i> or <i>as</i>	<i>and the sun stretches its dragonfly wings</i>
personification	when a poet or author gives human qualities or abilities to something nonhuman	<i>The roses shed petals like tears.</i>
onomatopoeia	a word whose pronunciation sounds like the thing it describes	<i>The rain patters on my umbrella.</i>
hyperbole	an extreme exaggeration used in order to make a point	<i>Now it's all green upon green upon green, forever,</i>

Note that the example of personification in the chart is also a simile because the word *like* is used to compare the way the roses shed petals and the shedding of tears. The figurative language helped Julio give the roses the human ability to shed tears, which is personification, and described this ability using a simile.

Use Poetic Techniques

Reread Julio's two poems, "Autumn Villanelle" and "Elegy for Winter."

Autumn Villanelle

by Julio Saldaña

The frost came early this year,
the sky is a cold shade of white.
The roses shed petals like tears.

If you listen, you can almost hear
the fading away of the light.
The frost came early this year.

In darkness, there's so much to fear.
All creatures dread the night.
The roses shed petals like tears.

We know that winter is near
by the air's new chilly bite.
The frost came early this year.

The flowers we held so dear
belong only to summer, by rights.
The roses shed petals like tears.

The change closes in on us here,
just when we thought we would not have to fight
the frost that came early this year.
The roses shed petals like tears.

Elegy for Winter

by Julio Saldaña

In the dead, scorched wasteland of summer,
a thought travels up my spine like a chill—
I miss the black-branched winter.

I miss all of the things you could see in the trees,
the hidden nests and gnarls,
the spindly twigs.

Now it's all green upon green upon green, forever,
and the sun stretches its dragonfly wings
past nine o'clock.

Flannel pajamas hibernate in the backs of drawers;
the fireplace is all cool, empty ashes.

The windows are wide and let in the flies.

The closet, hot, dark, and never opened anymore,
is shrouded with coats like ghosts
that know the door won't be shut forever.

Once Julio got his thoughts down on paper and chose a form for each of his poems, he wrote a draft of each one. After that, he revisited his work to make sure he had effectively used poetic techniques throughout both poems. He looked for places where he could revise by adding figurative language or sensory details, or rephrase parts to use sound elements. As you read the *Before* and *After* versions of the first two stanzas

of his poem, “Autumn Villanelle,” think about how Julio changed his first draft to include more poetic techniques.

Autumn Villanelle

Before	After
The frost came early this year, the sky is nothing but white. The roses shed petals like tears.	The frost came early this year, the sky is a cold shade of white. The roses shed petals like tears.
The winter is drawing near and we no longer have so much light. The frost came early this year.	If you listen, you can almost hear the fading away of the light. The frost came early this year.

Question 1

What poetic technique did Julio add to his draft? How does this technique improve the poem?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Julio added sensory details to his draft. For example, he changed “the sky is nothing but white” to “the sky is a cold shade of white.” The phrase “cold

shade of white” is more powerful than “nothing but white” because it relates to the senses of both touch and sight. This helps the audience to feel like they’re in the world of the poem. He also added sensory details to the second stanza: he changed “The winter is drawing near/ and we no longer have so much light” to “If you listen, you can almost hear/ the fading away of the light.” The second version is more effective because it includes details that relate to both hearing and sight. Also, the phrase “fading away of the light” is more vivid and precise than “we no longer have so much light.” It creates imagery in a way that the first version doesn’t.

Now, read an excerpt from Julio’s first draft of “Elegy for Winter.” Again, think about how he improved his draft by adding more poetic techniques.

Elegy for Winter.

Before	After
Flannel pajamas are stuffed in the backs of drawers; the fireplace is cold as ice. The windows are open and let in the flies.	Flannel pajamas hibernate in the backs of drawers; the fireplace is all cool, empty ashes. The windows are wide and let in the flies.

The closet, hot, dark, and always shut,
is full of forgotten jackets and coats.

The closet, hot, dark, and never opened
anymore,
is shrouded with coats like ghosts
that know the door won't be shut forever.

Notice that Julio's first draft included a cliché: *cold as ice*. This simile is so overused that it doesn't evoke any images or emotion in readers—the audience is likely to gloss right over that phrase. It was a wasted opportunity to use fresh language that people have never heard before. Julio revised his draft by deleting the cliché and replacing it with language that was more vivid and powerful because it is unusual.

Question 2

How else did Julio change his first draft to include more poetic techniques?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: In the first line, he changed “stuffed in” to “hibernate.” While both versions work, *hibernate* is a more unusual word that isn't normally associated with pajamas. This causes readers to think of the pajamas as little furry animals that are sleeping through the summer, which is more vivid and interesting than the version in the first draft. In this same stanza, he also added an internal half-rhyme by changing the word *open* to *wide*, which almost rhymes with *flies*. In the second stanza, Julio added figurative language by comparing the coats to ghosts that know they will eventually be let out of the closet.

As you read the first drafts of your own two poems, look carefully for any clichés you can replace. Make sure that your poems contain the appropriate structural elements for your chosen forms and look for places where you could add figurative language, sensory details, or sound elements. These poetic techniques will make your poetry as vivid, compelling, and effective as it can be.

Check-In

Reread “Elegy for Winter” and then answer the questions.

Elegy for Winter

by Julio Saldaña

In the dead, scorched wasteland of summer,
a thought travels up my spine like a chill:
I miss the black-branched winter.

I miss all of the things you could see in the trees,
the hidden nests and gnarls,
the spindly twigs.

Now it's all green upon green upon green, forever,
and the sun stretches its dragonfly wings
past nine o'clock.

Flannel pajamas hibernate in the backs of drawers,
the fireplace is all cool, empty ashes.
The windows are wide and let in the flies.

The closet, hot, dark, and never opened anymore,
is shrouded with coats like ghosts
that know the door won't be shut forever.

Question 1

Julio used several poetic techniques that had to do with sound in “Elegy for Winter.” What effect do these techniques have on the poem?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: “Elegy for Winter” contains examples of alliteration, assonance, and consonance. There is also an internal half-rhyme and repetition. These sound elements create a complete sensory experience for the reader because they make the poem aesthetically pleasing to listen to. The repetition in the line, “Now it’s all green upon green upon green forever” helps the audience envision how the world looks during the summer, but it also tells us that the speaker finds it boring.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Question 2

How did Julio use figurative language in “Elegy for Winter”? Do you think his choices are effective? Why or why not?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Several examples of figurative language appear in “Elegy for Winter.” The simile in the first stanza, “a thought travels up my spine like a chill” is effective because the word “chill” relates to the idea of winter versus summer, which is the meaning of the poem. In the third stanza, the metaphor “the sun stretches its dragonfly wings” compares the sun to a dragonfly, which creates vivid imagery because it reminds me of how the sun looks when you squint at it, which is what you do in the summer. The simile in the last stanza that compares the coats in the closet to ghosts is also effective because it underscores part of the

meaning of the poem: every year, winter dies and becomes a ghost, but then it gets resurrected.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Practice

Activity

At this point, you've already done some significant work on your two poems. You have decided what subjects you will write about and chosen forms that suit both subject and purpose. You've completed some writing exercises to help you think about sensory details, imagery, and figurative language you can use in your poems. Now it's time to finish writing and polish up your poems.

Follow these steps.

1. First, check to make sure you are using the right structural elements for the form you chose for each poem. Make sure these elements remain consistent throughout each poem.

Pro Tip

If you're having a lot of trouble trying to fit your poem into a specific poetic form, that particular form might not be the best choice for the poem you want to write. Try experimenting with different forms—you might find, for example, that the constraints of a villanelle don't lend themselves well to the subject you want to write about. Maybe a sonnet would work better. Try several different forms before you settle on the one you want to use.

-
2. Read your work aloud. You don't have to read it to anyone else—go somewhere quiet where you won't be disturbed or overheard and read your work *as if* you were reading to an audience. Speak slowly and clearly and notice any places where the meter is off, where the rhymes sound forced, or where your phrasing might be awkward or clunky. Mark those places as you read and come back to them later.

Pro Tip

If you find it difficult to fit your poem into your chosen meter, if your rhymes sound forced or silly, or if your phrasing sounds awkward in places, try using a thesaurus to find synonyms for the words you want to use. Sometimes a word that means almost the same thing but has a different number of syllables or a different end sound can solve the problem.

3. Monitor your work for any clichés. Remember that a cliché is a phrase, often a simile, metaphor, or piece of personification, that you've heard so many times before that it no longer even registers. "White as snow," "dark as night," "dead as a doornail," and "silence is golden" are all examples of clichés—you've probably heard them thousands of times before. Make sure they don't show up in your writing! Any time you spot a cliché is an opportunity to replace it with language that is brand new and completely original. You might have to think deeply about a new simile or metaphor to use, but chances are, you'll come up with something no one has heard before and it will be more effective than any cliché.

Before you consider your draft final, give it a quick edit. Remember that unlike prose, poetry doesn't necessarily need to follow conventions of grammar or style; that said, these elements do help readers better understand the language and important ideas in your poem. Here are some general rules poets follow:

- If your poem is following traditional structural rules, begin each line with a capital letter.
- Include space between each stanza.
- Determine whether or not punctuation belongs at the end of each line.
- Give your poems a meaningful title. Remember that the meaning does not need to be evident right away—often, an effective title is one readers need to

think about in order to understand what it signifies.

How Did I Do?

Assess your poems by completing the full Poetry Portfolio rubric. Check each item you have accomplished. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ Each of my poems adheres to the formal structure I chose.
 2. _____ The structural elements are consistent throughout each poem.
 3. _____ A number of poetic techniques such as figurative language, sound devices, and imagery, are used effectively and without cliché.
 4. _____ I revised and edited as needed so that my poems are readable.
-

Writing Portfolio Poetry

Reflect

Read over your finished poetry portfolio while comparing it to the poetry rubric. Think about how well your work fulfills the criteria on the rubric—also consider the process you undertook to complete your two poems.

Poetry Portfolio Rubric

Then, choose three of the questions below and answer them to reflect on the experience of writing your two poems. Write your answers in your notebook.

1. Which form, besides the two that you used to write your poems, do you think you might like to experiment with in the future?
2. What was the biggest obstacle you faced while writing your poems? How did you overcome this challenge? What would you do differently next time?

3. What did the experience of writing poetry teach you about yourself as a writer? What are your strengths? What can you try to improve in the future?
4. Which of the writing exercises from the previous lessons did you find most helpful? Why?

Now, imagine that you have the opportunity to give advice to a student writer who is just beginning the process of writing two poems in different forms. In a paragraph, address the following questions: What advice would you give this student? What parts of the process would you advise them to pay special attention to? How would you help them overcome any challenges they might face?

Dramatic Structure

Unit Reading Information

In this unit, you will read *Macbeth* unless otherwise directed by your teacher.

Select the links to access the text and reading log.

Macbeth

Reading Log: The Tragedy of Macbeth

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will describe variations in play structure and the effect on the development of central ideas and themes.

Key Words

- **climax** – the turning point in a play's action
 - **dramatic structure** – the organization of a story or drama's plot
 - **exposition** – the part of a drama's plot that introduces the setting, the characters, and the conflict or problem
 - **falling action** – the events that tell what happens after the climax and show its impact
 - **resolution** – the solving of the problem or outcome of the conflict at a play's center
 - **rising action** – a series of events that build toward the climax, in which the conflict grows more complicated
 - **structure** – the way parts of a play are organized
-

Dramatic Structure



The ruins of the ancient Dionysus Theater in Athens, Greece

Source: vlas2000. Shutterstock

The first plays we are aware of were written in 4th century BC Greece and performed for an audience as early as the next century. (In fact, the word *drama* comes from a Greek verb meaning "to do" or "to act.") Initially, the cast of characters consisted of a single male protagonist, or hero, and an accompanying chorus to help narrate his story. Modifications to that original form soon followed, included the addition of an antagonist, or villain, the reduction of the size of the chorus, and the introduction of a third character, as well as a prologue. In the centuries since ancient Greece, such

"rules" for a drama's structure have undergone considerable change. In fact, in the twentieth century, playwrights are as likely to rebel against any prescriptions as they are to follow them!

Get Ready to Read

Today, you will have a chance to compare two works that focus on families and span more than 500 years: William Shakespeare's classic tale of star-crossed love, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Thundermuffs*, a modern-day take on a family's idiosyncrasies. Though you will not read the full text of *Romeo and Juliet*, you are probably familiar with the drama's main plot—essentially, boy meets girl, boy and girl secretly marry, boy and girl die at the end.

For a good summary of the overall plot, however, look no further than the opening lines of the Chorus at the beginning of the play:

Take Notes as You Read

As you read the excerpt from *Romeo and Juliet* and the full text of *Thundermuffs*, think about what Shakespeare's scene accomplishes compared to what Blobaum's play does. What do the plays communicate to you, and how do they do so through their structures?

Romeo and Juliet

Reading Log: Romeo and Juliet

Useful Vocabulary from *Romeo and Juliet*

1. **procure**: obtain, acquire
 2. **rite**: ceremony
 3. **beseech**: beg
 4. **strife**: trouble, conflict, discord
 5. **wanton**: cruel, malicious
-

Dramatic Structure

Play Structure and Its Effects

Playwrights choose and execute a particular structure, or pattern of organization, to suit a specific purpose. For example, Shakespeare's plays always follow a traditional five-act structure, with each act further broken into different numbers of scenes. This allows Shakespeare to convey all elements of traditional dramatic structure. Each act or scene may contain important exposition, build rising action, heighten a conflict, see that conflict come to a head in a climax, or show what happens during the falling action and eventual resolution of the key conflicts. Sticking to this structure allows Shakespeare to communicate meaning in a way that's recognizable to his readers.

And yet, despite this conventional use of structure, Shakespeare's plays can surprise you by what the parts are able to do. One scene can play many roles: it can provide exposition through stage directions and dialogue while adding to the rising action and developing a key idea through a progressing conflict, for example.

Consider this passage from *Romeo and Juliet*'s Act 2, scene 2:

In this piece of the scene, the stage directions provide important exposition by indicating that Juliet's Nurse is disrupting the lovers' conversation. Readers already know that Nurse is an authority figure in Juliet's life, though one she has some power over. Juliet expresses irritation with her Nurse, whose "strife" is interrupting Juliet's grieving for her cousin, who Romeo has accidentally stabbed and killed.

Question

What conflict might Shakespeare be using this structure to develop?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Shakespeare might be using the structure to develop a conflict

Juliet has with authority.

Dramatic Structure

Variations in Structure

While playwrights often structure their work by distributing the action over the course of multiple acts and scenes, that's not always the case. In her play *Thundermuffs*, Cindy Blobaum presents one scene without pause that is focused on the actions of a family during a thunderstorm. All elements of dramatic structure are contained in that single scene.

As you read this passage from the play, consider the role of the stage directions in conveying exposition.

Question

How does the exposition in the stage directions concerning the family members' reaction to Mitchell's view of the storm contribute to the play's conflict between Mitchell and his family?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

The increasing frenzy of the family members' behaviors as indicated by the stage directions bring the conflict between the quiet Mitchell and his boisterous parents and siblings to a head: to escape their noisy antics, he leaves the stage to enter the storm.

When you read a play, think about how the playwright has chosen to structure the content and convey the various elements of dramatic structure, as well as the effect of that structure on key ideas or themes in the play. Ask yourself:

- What does any exposition add to my understanding of what characters say or do?

- What conflicts are developing between characters within and between scenes?
- What is happening onstage during the rising action, and how does it build the tension between and among the characters?

Check-In

Think about how the varied structures of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Thundermuffs* impact each play's dramatic structure and key ideas as you answer these questions.

Question 1

Which of the following could be effects of the one-scene structure of *Thundermuffs*? Choose all that apply.

- a.** A lack of distinction between exposition and conflict
- b.** Tension that builds quickly
- c.** A lack of distinction between exposition and resolution
- d.** Limited opportunities for readers to reflect on what happens

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

- b.** Tension that builds quickly
- d.** Limited opportunities for readers to reflect on what happens

Need a little extra support?

Get Help Here

Question 2

Which of the following statements is accurate?

- a.** The climax of a play is strengthened by multiple conflicts preceding it.

- b.** The greater a play's emphasis on conflict, the less exposition it requires.
- c.** The more rising action in a play, the more convincing its climax.
- d.** The impact of elements of dramatic structure vary from play to play.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

- d.** The impact of elements of dramatic structure vary from play to play.

Need a little extra support?

Get Help Here

Question 3

The full text of *Romeo and Juliet* covers five acts. What advantages did this structure lend Shakespeare in terms of developing important ideas and themes?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Using a five-act structure gave Shakespeare the luxury of being able to take his time with the story. He could incorporate a number of different plots, present multiple conflicts, and convey several big themes as a result.

Question 4

What resolution do the final lines of *Thundermuffs* offer?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Mitchell has taught his family to see him and his needs more clearly as he simultaneously finds a solution to his problem.

Practice

Reread *Thundermuffs* and the excerpt from *Romeo and Juliet*.

Activity

In a paragraph or two, reach one conclusion about the development of a central idea or theme each text conveys based on an aspect of its structure.

How does the form affect your understanding of the content?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: In the excerpt from the balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, exposition is provided by the stage directions and implied by what the characters say. This exposition highlights some of the obstacles facing Romeo and Juliet. The Nurse keeps asserting her authority over Juliet, calling her into her father's house and—inadvertently, as the Nurse does not know he's there—away from Romeo. Juliet in turn is forced to go in and out multiple times, interrupting her conversation with Romeo, as their relationship will also be interrupted by authority figures. In *Thundermuffs*, exposition indicates that Mitchell's family creates a storm within the storm. They do so because they misunderstand Mitchell. This internal storm mimics the chaos of the external storm and creates a space that Mitchell must remove himself from. The exposition reveals that the family essentially forces Mitchell out into the storm. The fabricated storm indicated by stage directions directly shapes the ensuing action.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I responded to the prompt without veering off-topic.

2. _____ I explained the impact of form on content.
 3. _____ I included specific details and examples from the plays in my analysis.
 4. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will draw conclusions about a play based in part on its structure.

Key Words

- **climax** – the turning point in the play’s action
 - **dramatic structure** – the organization of a story or drama’s plot
 - **exposition** – the presentation of background, setting, and other information the audience needs to understand the play
 - **falling action** – the events that tell what happens after the climax and show its impact
 - **resolution** – the solving of the problem or outcome of the conflict at the play’s center
 - **rising action** – a series of events that builds toward the climax, in which the conflict grows more complicated
 - **structure** – the way parts of a play are organized
-

Dramatic Structure



Source: Idutko. Shutterstock

How might you describe the sound of a popular band? To answer this question, you must first consider all the variables. For example, an electric guitar will convey a powerful sound with vibrations you can feel in your chest, while the sound of an acoustic guitar might be lighter and more complex. Who is singing and how fast or slowly—or enthusiastically or poignantly—will also affect how you as a listener process and react to the music. Music’s meaning for you comes from your interactions with both its form, or how it’s delivered, and its content, or what it tries to say.

You can say the same thing about a reader's or audience's interaction with a play. Two plays may have a similar structure, but convey two distinct plots to an audience. Similarly, the same plot told through different structures will, by definition, end differently by bringing different meanings to each play's resolution.

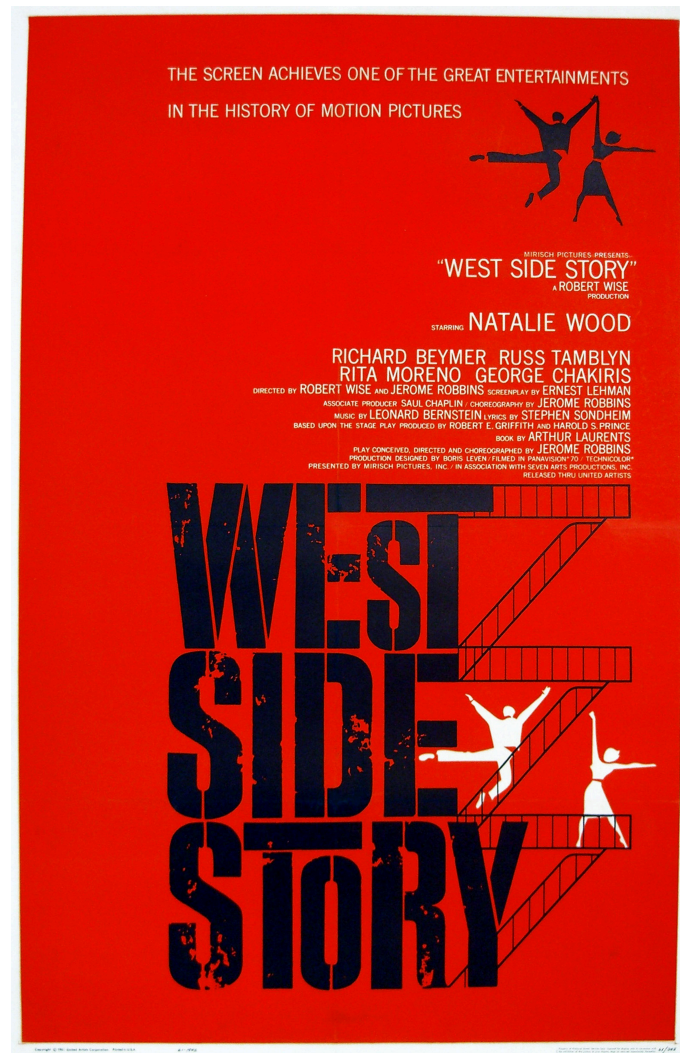
Read Strategically

On the surface, the two works you will read today couldn't be more different:

- William Shakespeare's classic tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* was written sometime around the end of the 16th century. The excerpt you will read—a portion of the famous balcony scene—is part of a five-act tale that features star-crossed lovers, feuding families, and a devastating ending.
- Cindy Blobaum's short play *Thundermuffs* is a modern-day look at one family's obsession with thunderstorms.

Often, though, two works may have more in common than meets the eye. Consider this: The plots of both plays revolve around families that behave in ways one could certainly regard as idiosyncratic. As a reader, thinking about how this common element might impact the traits and behaviors of the characters, events and their outcomes, and the themes each playwright conveys can lead to a better understanding of each individual work.

Did You Know?



Source: World History Archive. Alamy Stock Photo

It's undeniable that Shakespeare's plays have spawned similar work from others; in fact, more than 500 films credit Shakespeare as a writer, whether of the full text or as a contributor to an adaptation. One such example, the musical *West Side Story*, uses Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as inspiration, but provides a different setting as well as a different cast of characters. According to the Rotten Tomatoes website, especially impressive examples of adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* include India's *Bollywood Queen*, a Yiddish comedy, and a thriller featuring a zombie.

Take Notes as You Read

As you read the excerpt from *Romeo and Juliet* and the full text of *Thundermuffs*, take notes about elements common to both plays, and consider how the common elements might bring a greater understanding of each text.

Romeo and Juliet

Useful Vocabulary from *Romeo and Juliet*

1. **beseech**: beg
 2. **procure**: obtain, acquire
 3. **rite**: ceremony
 4. **strife**: trouble, conflict, discord
 5. **wanton**: cruel, malicious
-

Dramatic Structure

Dramatic Structure

The playwrights of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Thundermuffs* both use traditional dramatic structure, but the way in which they do so differs a bit. The plots of both plots follow traceable paths from their openings through their resolutions

- Each play begins with exposition that introduces the characters and setting (including historical and cultural elements) and sets up one or more conflict faced by the major characters. In *Romeo and Juliet*, this exposition is delivered by a prologue; in *Thundermuffs*, it is conveyed via stage directions.
- Events in the rising action of each play develop and deepen the conflict.
- Eventually, the plot's climax raises the stakes to their highest point.
- Post-climax, events in the falling action lead to the resolution of the conflict

Both texts use structure to create rising action, which complicates conflicts and leads to the climax, falling action, and resolution. However, while Shakespeare is able to fit an entire dramatic structure arc into a single act or scene, as he does in the excerpt you have read, the shorter play *Thundermuffs* presents all its content (and meaning) in a single act.

Draw Conclusions from a Play's Structure

Today's excerpt from *Romeo and Juliet* is not only part of the play's overall rising action, but includes its own exposition, rising action, conflicts, climax, and falling action. Following this dramatic structure as you read can help you draw conclusions about what's happening.

Reread Juliet's words to Romeo and think about the impact they might have:

Readers are aware that Juliet's father not only hates Romeo's family but also wants Juliet to marry a more eligible bachelor, Paris. As a result, readers can conclude that the exchange between Romeo and Juliet on the balcony has deepened Juliet's conflict with her father because it indicates that will transfer her allegiance from her father to Romeo, her great love.

As their dialogue continues, the lovers both do and say things that advance the action. Each time Juliet returns to the balcony, she adds a vow or an intention that raises the stakes, to which Romeo responds in kind. Their exchange is moving them toward a climax within the scene itself.

The one-act play *Thundermuffs* is far more restricted by its physical structure as well as by its use of dramatic structure. The single act in this case allows for development of a single idea, appropriate for the play's intended younger audience. The dramatic structure takes you from exposition through resolution within the span of a few pages, allow you to draw conclusions in a more explicit manner.

As you watch the following video, observe how the students draw conclusions about these texts based in part on their physical and dramatic structures.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Now, answer the questions.

Question 1

The students discuss Shakespeare's "stingy" use of stage directions. Think about how he indicates Juliet's entrances and exits in the scene you read. Then, draw a conclusion about what her entrances and exits might indicate about a conflict.

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Juliet keeps having to respond to the Nurse and even obey her, which conflicts dramatically with where her heart is. It indicates that Juliet is beginning to rebel against the authority figures in her life.

Question 2

Recall that the students discuss the opening stage directions of *Thundermuffs*: While Mitchell reads *Silence Is Golden*, everyone and everything else is making noise—a TV, an electric mixer, a hammer, the radio, a lawnmower, drums, and alarm clock all contribute to the chaos. In addition to establishing context, what else does this exposition achieve? What does it contribute to either rising action or conflict?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

The moment when the curtain rises clearly defines the conflict between Mitchell and his family: he differs from his family in his love of and need for quiet.

Check-In

Use the complete excerpt from *Romeo and Juliet* and the entirety of *Thundermuffs* to answer these questions.

Question 1

How do Juliet's exits and entrances affect the scene's rising action?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Juliet's frequent exits and entrances illustrate both conflicts she acts out in this scene, the first with her father, and the second with her Nurse. She is beginning to resist the adults' authority each time she returns to her balcony and Romeo. As those conflicts gain substance, the rising action intensifies.

Question 2

What conclusion can you draw about where the scene from *Romeo and Juliet* reaches a climax? Support your assessment with one or more examples.

Show Answer

Hide Answer

The scene's climax could be at Juliet's parting words before her final exit: "Sweet, so would I [wish Romeo were her bird]: Yet I should kill thee with much cherishing." Her words are especially ominous given that their love will be partly responsible for their deaths. The scene also ends on a key turning point, as Romeo announces his intentions to seek Friar Lawrence's help in marrying Juliet.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Question 3

How does the exposition around the Storm family's performance of a storm add to the rising action in *Thundermuffs*?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

The family's performance is loud, which is the opposite of what it should be to affect Mitchell the way they want. It accentuates the play's essential conflict.

Practice

Reread both texts one more time to complete this activity.

Activity

In one or two paragraphs, explore an aspect of each text's rising action, and then draw a conclusion about what conflict or conflicts that rising action develops.

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Juliet's entrances and exits create rising action and contribute to her conflicts with her father and her Nurse. Those movements draw out her encounter with Romeo and extend its risks. The longer they talk, the more likely they will be discovered. In addition, each time she re-enters is a new event that draws her and Romeo in deeper and further defies her Nurse in the moment and her father in the broader context.

In *Thundermuffs*, even the opening exposition contributes to the rising action, as in the initial stage directions that set up a dramatic contrast between Mitchell and his family. That contrast is reinforced by the ensuing action that involves the Storm family getting ever louder. Eventually, the contrast develops into a full-blown conflict by the play's climax when Mitchell goes missing. To reunite the family, the falling action will have to lead to that conflict's resolution.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I responded to the entire prompt.

2. _____ I used an analysis of the rising action of each text to draw a conclusion about one or more conflicts within each play.
 3. _____ I used specific evidence from the text to support my idea.
 4. _____ I used correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
-

Dramatic Elements

Unit Reading Information

In this unit, you will read *Macbeth* unless otherwise directed by your teacher.

Select the links to access the text and reading log.

Macbeth

Reading Log: The Tragedy of Macbeth

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will explain how monologues and soliloquies enhance dramatic texts.

Key Words

- **monologue** – a speech given by one character
 - **soliloquy** – a speech in which a character, believing they are alone, expresses their inner thoughts
-

Dramatic Elements

Love can make us want to say things we're scared to say—and maybe even shouldn't—but we want to say them anyway! Thankfully, William Shakespeare's famous young lovers, Romeo and Juliet, find ways to express their love despite their fears.

Speeches that Solve Problems

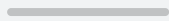
Great playwrights are not only talented writers—they're adept at solving problems. For example, depending on the way a playwright has structured a work, it may be challenging to figure out how to reveal important information vital for the audience to know. One way playwrights solve this problem is through the use of monologue, or a speech spoken to others, and soliloquy, or a speech said only to oneself.

Who better to explain more about how these elements aid a playwright than the author of today's reading from *Romeo and Juliet*, the Bard himself, William Shakespeare? As you listen to the podcast, consider how each type of speech helps a playwright achieve a particular purpose.

Audio: Long Lost Literary Legends



0:00 / 0:00



Long Lost Literary Legends Transcript

Consider the podcast Shakespeare’s perspective that “performing a soliloquy” by talking to yourself can be a beneficial and even freeing experience. Think about whether you agree or disagree with that viewpoint. How might a conversation with yourself help you make sense of a problem or an issue with which you might be struggling? What sort of questions might you ask yourself to get to the bottom of a particular problem and determine how to solve it?

Setting the Scene

Romeo and Juliet is one of literature’s most popular stories, so you’d be hard pressed to find someone who hasn’t experienced, if not the play itself, at least one of the many, many adaptations of the “boy meets girl, they fall in love, it doesn’t end well” story arc. Today, you will read Act II, Scene 2. This is where the famous balcony scene takes

place in which Romeo and Juliet, having met at a party earlier in the evening, profess their love for one another and their intention to be together despite the obstacles presented by their feuding families.

Take Notes as You Read

As you read the text, compare what Romeo says when alone on the stage with what he says when Juliet is there too. Note your impressions and thoughts about the choices Shakespeare makes regarding conveying information in your Reading Log.

Romeo and Juliet

Useful Vocabulary

procure: obtain, acquire

rite: ceremony

beseech: beg

strife: trouble, conflict, discord

wanton: cruel, malicious

Dramatic Elements

How Monologues and Soliloquies Enhance Dramatic Texts

Defining Monologue and Soliloquy

Element	What It Does
Monologue	<p>A monologue will likely have a clear organization, an implicit or explicit intended audience, and a solid goal.</p> <p>A monologue is designed to communicate with others.</p> <p>A monologue gets something done by persuading or motivating its audience—whether that audience consists of other characters or of those reading or watching the play—or by serving as a vehicle for the development of an idea.</p> <p>How other characters react to a monologue can determine plot.</p>

Soliloquy	<p>A soliloquy will have no listeners onstage, may meander, and will include surprise revelations that even the speaker might not see coming. Because a soliloquy states a character's inner thoughts, it can reveal aspects the speaker might not purposely divulge.</p> <p>Soliloquies can be confessional because there's no risk of judgment from a listener.</p> <p>They can also lead characters to understandings they didn't have when they started speaking. Those understandings can be the prelude to action.</p> <p>How the speaker reacts to their own soliloquy can affect plot.</p>
-----------	--

Question 1

Identify one monologue and one soliloquy you've encountered in a movie, TV show, or play and tell why it is designated as such.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Darth Vader telling Luke Skywalker that he is Luke's father is a monologue because Vader addresses it directly to Luke. Macbeth's "Is this a dagger which I see before me" speech in *Macbeth* is a soliloquy because Macbeth is addressing himself and does not intend for anyone else to hear his thoughts.

Question 2

Is "Good evening, good people" more likely the start of a monologue or soliloquy? Explain how a playwright might use a speech beginning with that line to enhance a particular aspect of the play.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The line is likely the start of a monologue, as it directly addresses its listeners—i.e., it has an explicit audience in mind. A monologue beginning with

this line would be particularly effective coming from a character who serves as a narrator and is meant to engage the audience and stir their curiosity about the upcoming events.

Question 3

Why might ending the scene with a soliloquy be an effective way for a playwright to advance a plot?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Often in soliloquies, characters discover something. Their thinking through something can lead to formulating the next step in a plan. Followed by action, the plot moves forward.

As you read or reread the excerpt from the balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, consider Romeo's soliloquy that ends the scene and the information you learn from it.

Question 4

How might delivering a monologue or soliloquy at the end of a scene impact a character?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Ending a scene with either a soliloquy or monologue would give the character speaking it the last word. It would offer that character's perspective as the dominant perspective of the moment and focus the audience on how that character especially has shaped or been shaped by the drama.

Check-In

Reread Romeo's soliloquy that ends the passage you read earlier.

Question 1

Given what you know of the play, why is it important that Shakespeare convey this information in a soliloquy rather than a monologue? What is the soliloquy's tone? Explain the impact of the lines.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Romeo is beginning to formulate his dangerous plan to wed Juliet and, therefore, does not want anyone else to hear him plotting. Hence, he delivers this information alone on stage rather than as part of a monologue addressed to other characters. Because the lines are delivered in soliloquy, there is no one to stop Romeo from moving forward with his plan. The fact that Romeo and Juliet have vowed to be together—whatever it takes—lends the soliloquy an ominous tone.

Question 2

Analyze what Romeo reveals during the soliloquy about his feelings toward night and assess the potential impact of this information.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Romeo refers to “the frowning night.” He also describes the darkness as ‘reeling’ like a drunkard as the sun takes over the sky. He seems to be afraid of the daylight, as if it could expose some truth he doesn’t know about the night before or about his and Juliette’s intentions for going forward. It could reveal some misgiving or other anxiety.

Need a little extra support?

Question 3

What does Romeo reveal about both his feelings and his character in this part of the soliloquy?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Romeo's words allow him to reveal his insecurity, his fear that what is happening with Juliet is not real. It must be, he reasons, because what appears to be happening is too "flattering"; in other words, he is not worthy of it. Romeo's insecurities could illustrate how young he is, but there is also a worldliness in his fear that love is not real.

Question 4

At some moments in the excerpt you read, Juliet speaks in brief monologues. How does this affect your understanding of Juliet's character?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Juliet is clear enough to describe figuratively and in detail her feelings for Romeo. She's also bold, stating plainly, "If that thy bent of love be honourable . . . [then] all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay." Her eloquence throughout suggests control even while her feelings are so profound.

Practice

Read the opening Prologue of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Activity

Analyze the content and purpose of the Prologue, identifying whether it is a monologue or a soliloquy and evaluating what it accomplishes, including how it solves a particular problem.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The Prologue follows a very clear outline, which reinforces that it is a classic monologue rather than a soliloquy. The Chorus provides intriguing hints about what's to come ("a pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life"), as well as other very compelling context about the "ancient grudge" between these families. The first two lines establish the setting ("fair Verona"), the next two the basic conflict, the next four Romeo and Juliet's situation as the offspring of those families, and the next four the play's violent outcome. The final two lines assert the Chorus' primary goal: that we not let knowing the ending prevent us from paying attention to the performance because there's much more to come.

The Prologue is a classic monologue in that the Chorus speaks to an explicit audience (albeit not others on the stage). Like other monologues, it also has an explicit goal: that the audience will "with patient ears attend" to their performance. Shakespeare's goal as a playwright was ultimately to determine how to keep audiences riveted; the Chorus' monologue may well persuade audiences to choose to stay, to see what the play adds to the Chorus' provocative summary.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

_____ I used structural details to identify the Prologue as a monologue.

_____ I analyzed what the Prologue accomplishes.

_____ I included strong evidence from the text to support my analysis.

_____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will explain how dramatic irony enhances dramatic texts.

Key Words

- **dramatic irony** – a contrast between a character's expectations and the audience's or reader's knowledge
-

Dramatic Elements



Source: Dusit. Shutterstock

Experiencing a drama as part of an audience can be wonderfully exciting. Watching real people bring characters and their stories to life engages us in their dramas. We feel connections with the characters, including sympathy or empathy. And sometimes, therefore, we feel called upon to respond! We want to warn them of what we think we know is coming.

Today, you will experience two plays in which it's often hard for members of the audience to stand idly by while characters act in certain ways. As you read, be aware of moments when you want to intervene. You may even want to yell out loud at the characters—and if so, go right ahead! (We won't tell.)

Get Ready to Read

Today's two selections—an excerpt from *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare's tragic love story, and *Thundermuffs*, a short play by Cindy Blobaum—couldn't be more different. One is a glimpse into one of the most famous plays there is, one that has had significance for centuries of readers and viewers. It has resonated for so many in part because of the frustrations the audience feels as we watch a tragedy unfold that feels both inevitable and preventable.

Thundermuffs, on the other hand, is a sketch of a quirky family with a simple message at its core. Though in that case too, you may find yourself wanting to affect what happens by intervening in the events onstage.

Take Notes as You Read

As you read Act II, Scene 2 from *Romeo and Juliet* and the full text of *Thundermuffs*, note the moments when you feel called upon to intervene. What do you know at those moments that the characters don't? Record your ideas in your Reading Log.

Romeo and Juliet

Reading Log: Romeo and Juliet

Useful Vocabulary

1. **procure**: obtain, acquire
 2. **rite**: ceremony
 3. **beseech**: beg
 4. **strife**: trouble, conflict, discord
 5. **wanton**: cruel, malicious
-

Dramatic Elements

How Dramatic Irony Enhances Dramatic Texts

Dramatic irony occurs when the audience knows something that the characters in a drama do not. That knowledge affects the audience's or reader's experience as well as their understanding of what's happening in the text or onstage.

Dramatic irony is an essential part of any medium that incorporates an audience and wants to keep that audience laughing, in suspense, or otherwise entertained. Today's most successful playwrights and filmmakers know this; after all, just try to name a popular action film, mystery, or even romantic comedy that doesn't use dramatic irony to keep the audience on the edge of their seats.

Walt Disney recognized the power of dramatic irony, and even today, years after his death, the element is regularly incorporated into Disney's animated films. View the flipbook to see just a few examples of how dramatic irony can impact an otherwise basic fairy tale.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Dramatic irony (often in the form of mistaken identity) is a hallmark of the work of William Shakespeare. You have already read part of the famous balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, where the lovers confess their feelings for one another and acknowledge the difficulty that the conflict between their families will bring to their relationship. Now, read the Chorus's Prologue at the very beginning of the play. As you do, think about the information the chorus shares with the audience and the reasons why they might do so.

Question 1

How does the Prologue prepare the audience for the dramatic irony they will experience?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

In the prologue, the Chorus summarize the major conflict of the play and how it impacts events, right up to Romeo's and Juliet's suicides. It ensures that we have that knowledge firmly in mind as the play unfolds.

Now, read this passage from just before the balcony scene. The young lovers have just met and fallen in love at a party at Juliet's house and are only now discovering with whom.

Question 2

Given what you know of the play, including the information in the Prologue, what is the dramatic irony in what Juliet says?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

The audience knows, while Juliet does not, that Romeo and Juliet will go to their graves because of their love.

Finally, reread Juliet's last words from the excerpt you read earlier.

Question 3

What is the dramatic irony in what Juliet says here?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

The audience knows that her “much cherishing” of Romeo will, in fact, contribute to his death.

When you read a play, look for the dramatic irony by asking yourself:

- When do I know something that the characters don't?
- When do I want to intervene to affect the outcome?
- How do these moments affect my understanding of the play?

Check-In

Use your understanding of dramatic irony to answer the questions.

Question 1

Reread this excerpt from *Thundermuffs*:

MITCHELL (*Matter-of-factly*): I don't hate storms. I just like it quiet.

MOM: Now, kids, teasing isn't going to solve anything. We're a family. Let's put our heads together and think of a way to help Mitch feel more comfortable during a storm so he'll join us on the porch. (*As family members get into a huddle, thunder rumbles. MITCHELL looks around and sneaks off to bedroom, where he curls up on the bed.*)

DAD (*Breaking away from the group*): O.K., that settles it. (*Louder thunder is heard.*) And here's our chance to try to the plan. (*Calls*) Mitch? (*He looks around and notices that MITCHELL is gone*). Mitch? (*Everyone looks at each other, then all march to the bedroom as rain starts to fall. DAD sits on bed.*) Mitchell, my boy, listen to me. Maybe you'll feel better if you know more about storms. Did you know that you can often tell when a storm is coming by looking at the clouds? Large cumulus clouds that look like big piles of cotton can be up to around 12 miles tall, so you can see them from miles away. (*RYAN stands on chair near bed with handfuls of cotton balls, then drops them on MITCHELL.*)

MITCHELL (*Brushing cotton off his bed*): I like clouds. But I also like it quiet.

Which of the following describes the dramatic irony in the excerpt?

- a.** The audience knows Mitchell's family doesn't respect his fear of storms, but Mitchell doesn't.
- b.** The audience knows Mitchell is not afraid of storms, but his family doesn't.
- c.** The audience knows why Mitchell fears storms, but his family doesn't.
- d.** The audience knows Mitchell's family loves storms, though Mitchell doesn't.

Show answer

Hide Answer:

- b.** The audience knows Mitchell is not afraid of storms, but his family doesn't.

Need a little extra support?

Get Help Here

Question 2

Reread the ending of *Thundermuffs*:

ALL (*Ad lib*): Where is he? I don't see him. Is he still scared?
(*Etc.*)

RYAN (*Proudly*): Look! (*Throws open the curtains. MITCHELL is sitting on*

the porch, his back to the family, earmuffs over his ears.)

MOM (*Shaking her head*): I don't believe it!

STEPHEN: Would you look at that!

OLIVIA: He figured it out for himself! (*Family files out the door to the porch.*

MITCHELL turns and notices them.)

MITCHELL (*Lifting up one side of earmuffs*): I don't mind a good storm. I just like it quiet. (*Large crack of thunder is heard.*)

DAD: All right, everybody—inside! It's not safe to be out here during an electrical storm. We'll enjoy the show from the comfort—and safety—of the living room. (*Another large crack of thunder is heard and family ad libs excited chatter and laughter as curtain falls.*)

Do you think the “secret” the audience knows has been revealed to the other characters, or will the dramatic irony continue? Explain your reasoning.

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Based on the final stage directions, which indicate that the family is chattering excitedly, I think the dramatic irony is still at play and the family is still in the dark in terms of Mitchell's real reason for acting afraid.

Question 3

Reread one of Juliet's many efforts to say goodnight to Romeo in this portion of the excerpt from *Romeo and Juliet*:

Three words, dear Romeo, and good night indeed.

If that thy bent of love be honourable,

Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow,

By one that I'll procure to come to thee,

Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite,

And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay

And follow thee my lord throughout the world.

What does the audience know that Juliet does not, and how does that affect the intended response to these lines?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The audience knows that the rites, or ceremonial acts, that will be performed will not be the marriage rites Juliet wants or anticipates. This element of dramatic irony elicits a response of doom and foreboding.

Practice

Activity

In one or two paragraphs, propose some changes you would make to *Thundermuffs* to highlight the play's dramatic irony. You can work with any aspect of the play you want, including the stage directions, dialogue, props, or characters. What new or different props could you use, what new character could you introduce, or what changes could you make to the setting, for example? Begin by summarizing the play's dramatic irony and its effect in your own words.

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The dramatic irony in *Thundermuffs* is in the audience's knowledge throughout the play that though his family is convinced otherwise, Mitchell is not afraid of storms. He just likes quiet. He says so frequently, but the Storm family doesn't listen carefully enough to take that in. The use of dramatic irony motivates readers to keep reading to see how—or even if—Mitchell's family will learn the truth.

To highlight the Storm family's failure to listen to Mitchell, I would have the title of Mitchell's book change each time he speaks, getting a little more assertive and obvious with each one. After *Silence is Golden*, the title could become, *Quiet: A Basic Human Need*, to *You're Not Listening*, and then *Please Stop Talking!* None of these changes would affect any of the characters' actions.

I would also briefly stop all the action around Mitchell when he speaks his few lines. I'd spotlight him and put the rest of the stage in darkness. After he speaks his line, followed by a brief pause, the lights and noise around him would return. This would highlight Mitchell's solitude that results from not being understood by his family.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I summarized the play's dramatic irony and its impact on readers.
 2. _____ I proposed a change or changes to the play to highlight its dramatic irony.
 3. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will explain how dramatic elements enhance dramatic texts.

Key Words

- **character** – person or other being whose words and actions move the plot forward
 - **dramatic elements** – essential features of a performance, including character, language, plot, spectacle, and tension
 - **language** – how the playwright and characters convey the plot through words
 - **monologue** – a character's speech
 - **plot** – the arrangement of events or incidents on the stage
 - **soliloquy** – speech in which a character, believing they are alone, expresses their inner thoughts
 - **spectacle** – aspects of production that appeal to the senses
 - **tension** – the audience's experience of anticipation as they watch the plot unfold
-

Dramatic Elements



Source: Cienpies Design. Shutterstock

We're often told to be careful what we say. That's because words have power—not only what we say but how we say it can affect others. Both in the theater and real life, the words we choose to say aloud can literally change the course of events.

That fact is certainly at play in the two dramas you will read today. In each case, the playwright's choice of words and phrases is deliberate and meant to convey the events—and the message they represent—in a very pointed manner.

William Shakespeare's classic tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* tells the story of two young people whose families have long been enemies. Romeo and Juliet fall in love, but knowing that their parents will object to their union, decide to elope.

Today, as you read Act II, Scene II (known to most audiences as “the famous balcony scene”), you'll likely find the two lovers' exchange is full of words that matter to them. Each time one speaks, the other responds with keen attention to what they've said, why they've said it, and even how. The way they build on each other's expressions reflects the growing love they have for each other.

Did You Know?

Theories abound about whether *Romeo and Juliet* is based on a true story. One theory has it that the play is based on two lovers who did indeed die for each other in 1303 Verona, whom Shakespeare read about in Arthur Brooke's 1562 poem “The Tragical History of Romeo and Juliet.” Another story often told is that of a young man wounded in a war in 1511. He loved his wife very much, but when he returned from the war a paraplegic, she left him and married another man. To ease his suffering, the young man wrote a novel based on his love for his wife. Shakespeare, that theory goes, based his play on that novel.

While *Romeo and Juliet* is full of the drama, swordplay, and romance common to many a Shakespearean tale, *Thundermuffs*, a short play by Cindy Blobaum, tells the story of an incident in the life of a typical (or so it seems) modern-day family. Blobaum's characters are also playful with language. They're fond of sayings that rhyme, and wordplay is part of how they communicate—or fail to, as readers eventually realize.

As you read each play, keep in mind that language represents action—actions of the characters, action driven by the plot events, and actions (or reactions) of the reader or audience—and remember that a character’s words and their intended meaning are not always the same thing.

Take Notes as You Read

As you read Act II, Scene 2 from *Romeo and Juliet* and the play *Thundermuffs*, note in your Reading Log any words or phrases characters use that stand out for you—for their beauty, precision, cleverness, implications, or consequences, for example.

Romeo and Juliet

Reading Log: Romeo and Juliet

Reading Log: Thundermuffs

Useful Vocabulary

1. **procure**: obtain, acquire
2. **rite**: ceremony
3. **beseech**: beg
4. **strife**: trouble, conflict, discord

5. **wanton:** cruel, malicious

Dramatic Elements

How Dramatic Elements Enhance Dramatic Texts

Dramatic elements are all the aspects of a play that make it an entirely unique medium to experience. Some dramatic elements are similar to those in other genres of writing; others give the category of drama its own spin.

As you watch the following video, consider the elements the student discusses—including **monologue** and **soliloquy**—and how they exemplify the genre for readers and audiences alike.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Peer Model Video Transcript

Question 1

In the video, the student discusses the use of both soliloquy and monologue as tools a playwright uses to convey specific ideas to an audience. Why might these elements be particularly effective when used in drama?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: In a drama, these elements are meant to be recited onstage by actors; an actor's own particular performance and perspective can add feeling and meaning to the playwright's words.

In the 3rd Century B.C.E., Greek philosopher Aristotle identified specific dramatic elements he believed were essential to all plays. Aristotle's elements focused not only on the dramatic work itself, but also on the impact of the audience on the overall theatrical experience.

- Plot is the arrangement of all the events that convey the particular story the drama tells. Just about everything that is seen or happens on stage does so in service to the plot.
- Character represents the people, animals, or other beings portrayed by actors on the stage. The play's plot unfolds in large part through their words and actions.
- Tension is the anticipation experienced by the audience as they watch the plot events unfold and wonder what might happen next. Tension builds suspense that develops as the conflict moves closer to a resolution.
- Language is the words, phrases, and expressions used to communicate the plot.
- Spectacle is all the “stuff of drama”—the sets, lights, costumes, sound effects, and unconventional aspects that make theater a uniquely sensory experience.

Thinking About Language

For Aristotle, language, or the words characters speak and how they speak them (“how” because words take their meaning in part from the tone, or attitude, in which they’re spoken), can serve various functions in a play. Language can help determine theme, develop character, and advance the plot. Patterns reflected in the use of language, such as the repetition of words and phrases or repeated interruptions, are also an aspect of a play’s language. So is how a verbal exchange is structured, through dialogue, monologue, or soliloquy.

The impact of language and how it enhances a drama is clear in both texts you have read today.

- In the excerpt from *Romeo and Juliet*, verbal sparring advances both the lovers’ relationship and the plot.
- In *Thundermuffs*, the Storm family’s dysfunctional verbal exchanges create tension whose resolution leads to the play’s conclusion.

Whether you are reading a play or watching it being performed, take language into account by analyzing both the words a character says and the meanings behind the words. Ask yourself:

- What do the character’s words mean? Are they meant to be taken literally, or do they have a more figurative or deeper meaning?
- Why did the playwright choose this particular character to express an idea? How might meaning of the words change if stated by another character?
- How do the words impact your experience as an audience? How do they contribute to your understanding of the plot as well as the critical message the playwright is trying to convey?

Question 2

Explain how the word *hello*, spoken to Juliet, could have different meanings depending on whether Romeo or the Nurse says it.

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The word *hello* would likely be spoken by Romeo with awe or longing, given his feelings for Juliet. As spoken by the Nurse, it would likely indicate suspicion or accusation, given the Nurse's character and relationship to Juliet.

Check-In

Use what you have learned about dramatic elements—and specifically, language—to respond to the questions.

Question 1

Reread this exchange between Romeo and Juliet.

1. ROMEO.
2. Th'exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine.
3. JULIET.
4. I gave thee mine before thou didst request it;
5. And yet I would it were to give again.
6. ROMEO.
7. Would'st thou withdraw it? For what purpose, love?
8. JULIET.
9. But to be frank and give it thee again.
10. And yet I wish but for the thing I have;
11. My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
12. My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
13. The more I have, for both are infinite.

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Juliet reveals herself as a straight talker here. She responds to Romeo's playful question about why she might take back her vow with a "frank" assertion of what she would do next.

Question 2

Reread this passage from *Thundermuffs*:

DAD: Meeting time! Everyone to the living room for a family meeting! (*Leans out on porch to yell again, repeats the same line until STEPHEN, THERESA, MOM, and RYAN have gathered in living room. Everyone is talking loudly and jostling for a space to sit. MOM stands in doorway, DAD stands near her.*

THERESA sits on floor in front of chair. MITCHELL remains seated, his nose in his book during the following dialogue.) O.K., quiet, everyone. I heard on the news last night that it's Severe Weather Awareness Week.

STEPHEN (*Interrupting*): Cool. Did they say when we'll get our first thunderstorm? DAD: No, it wasn't a forecast. They were talking about storm safety . . . what to do if severe weather comes along.

Analyze Dad's exchange with Stephen and explain what the language accomplishes.

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Dad's words are ironic, as he yells repeatedly for the family to quiet down. Then Stephen interrupts him and indicates that he is not listening carefully, beginning a pattern that plays out throughout the play.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Practice

Reread Act II, Scene 2 from *Romeo and Juliet* and use it to answer the question.

Romeo and Juliet

Activity

In one or two paragraphs, explain how the language Romeo and Juliet use helps to develop their relationship as the audience see it.

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Juliet and Romeo spend the excerpt either declaring their love or asking the other to amplify their declarations. The language they choose helps the audience recognize their banter as flirty and teasing: “What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?” Juliet asks, to which Romeo adds at first, only “Th’exchange of thy love’s faithful vow for mine.” But Juliet doesn’t let it end there. She elaborates that she wants to be “frank,” to give her vow again to express how “deep” her love for Romeo is becoming.

Their exchange continues in this pattern, with the Nurse regularly interrupting to draw Juliet away. Each interruption, however, brings Juliet back with more force. After one exit and entrance, she wishes she had a “falconer’s voice” to say Romeo’s name with. Eventually, the two think of their voices as one. Romeo responds, “It is my soul that calls upon my name.” By the end of the excerpt, they have used words to get as close to a marriage as they can at this point, and they use words to take their leave: “Parting is such sweet sorrow / That I shall say good night till it be morrow,” Juliet declares. Their parting is only sweet because they now know they will see each other again.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I explained how language develops Romeo and Juliet’s relationship.

2. _____ I connect their language to the audience's perception of the relationship.
 3. _____ I used specific evidence from the text to support my ideas.
 4. _____ I used correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
-

23/24 Honors English 11 A - Poetry and Drama

Mood, Tone, and Theme

Unit Reading Information

In this unit, you will read *Macbeth* unless otherwise directed by your teacher.

Select the links to access the text and reading log.

Macbeth

Reading Log: The Tragedy of Macbeth

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will analyze development of mood and tone in a dramatic text.

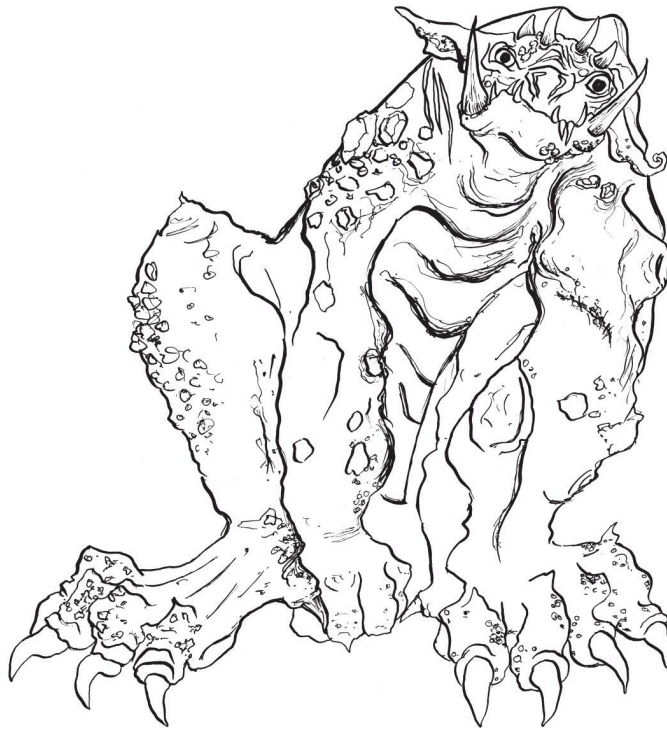
Key Words

- **mood** – a text's atmosphere; the feelings it evokes in the reader or viewer
 - **spectacle** – everything we see and hear in the theater
 - **tone** – a playwright's or text's attitude
-

Mood, Tone, Theme

You're not alone if you were once afraid of monsters—and maybe you still are. Our fear makes sense. Monsters are different from humans, unpredictable and powerful in ways we are not. Triumphant over monsters, as we have done throughout time in works of art, makes for extraordinary humans.

Get Ready to Read



One artist's rendering of Grendel's mother, one of the deadly monsters portrayed in *Beowulf*

Source: PDQ Digital Media Solutions Ltd. Pearson Education Ltd

Today, you will read a play titled *Beowulf*, an adaptation of an epic poem widely considered to be one of history's most timeless and universal stories. Written in Old English, the first manuscript of the poem was produced sometime before the year 975; the author is unknown, though it's speculated that they are perhaps from Scandinavian origins.

Beowulf takes place in the sixth century in a world where monsters tear people apart and feast on their bodies, and it includes a classic hero and villain and the triumph of good over evil. The poem has proven remarkably popular, having been translated, read, and performed for more than 1,000 years.

Note that the modern adaptation you will read is just that—an adaptation, or version that omits elements of the original's plot and adds in some of its own. As you read the play, consider how the playwright, Eddie McPherson, might have changed the text and certain plot elements and for what purpose.

Did You Know?

As you read the text, you will likely notice references to the biblical character of Cain, the eldest son of Adam and Eve. When *Beowulf* was written, the Anglo-Saxons saw the Old Testament's Cain as symbolic of the prevalence of evil because Cain killed his brother, Abel—an act regarded by many as the ultimate sin. Grendel and his mother are presented in *Beowulf* as Cain's descendants. As such, fighting them means fighting evil, which positions *Beowulf* as symbolic of the prevalence of good.

Take Notes as You Read

Read the play and note in your Reading Log your own feelings in response to characters and their actions. What stands out to you as remarkable in some way in something a character says or does?

Reading Log: Beowulf

Useful Vocabulary

1. **bards:** poets
 2. **Cain:** biblical figure who is the oldest son of Adam and Eve and who murders his younger brother, Abel
 3. **demeanor:** manner, conduct, behavior
 4. **epic:** heroic or classic
 5. **frailty:** fragility
 6. **haughtily:** proudly
 7. **lair:** home or den, hideout
 8. **offspring:** children, descendants
 9. **raze:** destroy
 10. **refuge:** sanctuary, shelter
 11. **smite:** hit
 12. **viler:** more evil, more dreadful
-

Mood, Tone, Theme

Development of Mood and Tone in Dramatic Texts

Sometimes difficult to distinguish from one another, mood and tone are essential elements of a dramatic text. Mood is also known as atmosphere. We determine what atmosphere is by asking ourselves how what we can see and hear has made us feel. We can use the same words to describe both the mood and our feelings: If you are angry at the end of a play, its dominant mood is angry too.

In today's reading, the physical environment particularly affects the play's overarching moods. Mood can be developed by additional elements, including:

- plot
- character
- spectacle, which includes the physical setting and the use of light, sound, and props
- use of imagery, or words that help the audience visualize what is happening

Listen to this podcast for some conversation about the development of mood in *Beowulf*.

▶ 0:00 / 0:00 ———— 🔊 ⋮

Beowulf Transcript

While mood is about how we in the audience or as readers feel, tone is about how the characters feel. Tone refers to a character's or playwright's attitude toward what they're saying. Clues about tone abound in a dramatic text via stage directions that state directly how someone says something: *slowly*, *lazily*, *happily*, *aggressively*, and so on. When there are no stage directions, you can often deduce a character's tone from content and context. "I am absolutely not going," may sound angry or apologetic, for instance, depending on context.

Readers must pay attention to tone in a play to fully understand characters' attitudes. Reread the opening of *Beowulf*:

Question 1

What tone does the 1st Poet speak with? Explain your choice.

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The 1st Poet's use of frightened language and exclamations seems to convey a fearful and awed tone.

Question 2

How do the passage's physical elements—the slithering Grendel and his growls, hisses, and moans; the half-darkness; and then the blackout—help develop a certain mood?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: These sights and sounds, or aspects of spectacle, engage our senses so we feel some of what the character is feeling. They are contributing to a frightening mood.

Consider how the play continues when Hygelac enters and the lights come up.

Question 3

What shifts in this passage, the tone or mood? How does it do so?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The tone shifts, as the men's words have been full of fear, but now Beowulf enters and says bravely, "I shall stand against it, your highness."

Whenever you read a play, look for details the playwright uses to develop both tone and mood. Ask yourself:

- What emotion or feeling does a particular character seem to be conveying by their words and actions? How are they doing so?
- What does that feeling tell me about the character?
- What emotions are the events evoking in me, the reader? Why might they be doing so?
- What is the play's atmosphere, and what is contributing to that?

Check-In

Think about the development of mood and tone in *Beowulf* as you answer these questions.

Question 1

After Beowulf introduces himself to the Captain of Hrothgar's coastguard, the 1st Poet remarks, "The Captain was immediately impressed with Beowulf's quiet strength and confident demeanor." Does this line speak to tone or mood?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

The line speaks to tone, both in Beowulf's attitude and in the Captain's impression of him.

Question 2

Consider this passage where Hrothgar describes Grendel to Beowulf:

HROTHGAR (*Frowning*): But you have not seen this beast, this creature from Hell. You have not hidden in the shadows as this seed of Cain crushed innocent men's bones with its scaly claws and ripped apart their torsos with its razor teeth. You have not heard the cries of pain that fill the hall at midnight when the beast attacks. (*QUEEN WEALHTHEOW enters and stands behind BEOWULF.*)

WEALHTHEOW: Nor have you had to clean the blood of your own people that flowed here after the creature returned to its lair.

What does this passage contribute to mood, or atmosphere?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The King and Queen's imagery and their dismayed tone ("frowning") evoke a pretty terrifying and evil monster and the "cries of pain" he

provokes. Their words contribute to a mood of fear.

Question 3

Reread Beowulf's first encounter with Grendel.

BEOWULF (*Looking around cautiously*): Grendel! I feel your presence and know you are hiding in the shadows. I have come to put an end to you! Are you afraid? Are you such a coward that you will not show your face? (*Low growl is heard offstage.*)

1ST POET: Beowulf hears a noise outside the hall. (*GRENDEL continues to growl offstage.*)

2ND POET: Beowulf turns and makes himself ready for the monster's attack.

BEOWULF: Grendel! Child of Cain! Come here into the hall so I might see you! I am Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow. I am Beowulf, not afraid of you. I am Beowulf and I have come to put an end to you! (*GRENDEL enters, bent over with his claws in the air. He growls and hisses loudly.*)

GRENDEL: My appetite has not been satisfied. Come to me! There is nowhere to run, so come here and I shall feed upon you.

BEOWULF: I am Beowulf! I come from the light in order to kill that which lives in darkness. You hate the light! You hate all that is good! You must be broken!

What is Beowulf's dominant tone in this passage?

- a.** Growling
- b.** Proud
- c.** Good
- d.** Hissing

Show answer

Hide Answer:

- b.** Proud

Question 4

After his attack on Grendel, “Beowulf enters haughtily, holding Grendel’s arm. He stands center.” What aspect of tone or mood do these stage directions and the monster’s arm affect?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The spectacle of Beowulf holding up Grendel’s arm, “haughtily,” and in the center of the stage, underscores Beowulf’s intense pride in himself. They illustrate his attitude, or tone, toward his act.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Practice

Reread the end of the play from Beowulf's encounter with Grendel's mother, and then use the text to complete the activity.

Activity

Describe how the author develops the mood at the end of the play. How does tone contribute to mood here?

Show answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: With Beowulf's confrontation with Grendel's mother, the action picks up. They shout at each other, Beowulf announces his intentions, and then they battle. Suspense builds until Beowulf stabs her in her neck. The scene is both violent and furious, with Grendel's mother shouting her hatred of Beowulf and the rest of them twice. Her tone is clearly furious, as befits a mother whose son has been killed by the man who has now killed her too. The atmosphere is full of their mutual hatred for one another.

The mood shifts dramatically, however, when Beowulf reenters with Grendel's mother's head on a stick, "holding it proudly in the air." Fanfare follows and Beowulf's heroism is celebrated. The pride in the people's tone as they praise him shifts the mood to joy that mostly continues to the end of the play. One more shift briefly occurs, however, when Hrothgar cautions Beowulf to "Learn from your adventures here. For one day you will be old and slow and weak. . . . Be mindful of the frailty of life, for it is given to us for only a little while." Perhaps he is alluding to the limited power of pride, as we all die despite it. Beowulf's triumphs won't save him from old age and death.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I described the development of mood at the end of the play.
 2. _____ I explored how tone contributes to the mood at the end of the play.
 3. _____ I included specific details and examples from the play.
 4. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will analyze development of theme in a dramatic text.

Key Words

- **theme** – a major message or lesson contained in a literary work
-

Mood, Tone, Theme



Source' David Grigg. 123RF

When you have superpowers—the power to fly, for example—it seems easy enough to be a hero. But heroes usually distinguish themselves by taking extraordinary risks and exploiting their powers, super or otherwise, to do good for others.

Beowulf, the drama by Eddie McPherson that you will read today, is an adaptation of what is considered one of history's most timeless and universal stories; the professed hero is known for his defeat of monsters and dragons. The epic poem by the same name has been the direct source or inspiration for an abundance of other literature, plays, movies, and television. That's not surprising, given its focus on topics and ideas that captivate us all: heroism, good, evil, pride, courage. Battles between monsters and humans play regularly in our media, thanks in-part to an epic poem. An unknown author wrote the poem in the seventh century. It features a hero who out-brutalizes some of the fiercest monsters of all.

Did You Know?

The notion that courage is a virtue was formulated by Greek philosopher Aristotle, who believed that cowardly people fear indiscriminately, while courageous people fear only what is worth fearing. Courage in Aristotelian terms means knowing what should be feared and responding appropriately. The highest form of courage for Aristotle was the soldier who fights for the nation rather than for themselves. Those soldiers face that which is most to be feared, death, for utterly selfless reasons. Indeed, courage can only be virtuous when used as means to punish wrong or correct evil.

Take Notes as You Read

As you read the text, note in your Reading Log details relevant to what seems to be the playwright's ideas of what constitutes a hero, and consider how closely these ideals match your own interpretation of heroism.

Useful Vocabulary

bards: poets

Cain: biblical figure who is the oldest son of Adam and Eve and who murders his younger brother, Abel

demeanor: manner, conduct, behavior

frailty: fragility

lair: home or den, hideout

raze: destroy

refuge: sanctuary, shelter

smite: hit

viler: more evil, more dreadful

Mood, Tone, Theme

Development of Theme in Dramatic Texts

A theme is developed over the course of a play each time a particular topic or subject is the focus. The theme evolves as the playwright explores it and becomes more evident as the plot develops and characters interact with each other and their environments. By the end of a careful reading or viewing of the play, one should be able to summarize at least one if not multiple themes. For example, one topic explored in *Cinderella* is kindness, and one related theme the story illustrates over its course is that being kind is a courageous act.

Eddie McPherson's dramatization of *Beowulf* develops multiple themes common to Western literature. *Beowulf*'s themes, or ideas, address such subjects as heroism, good and evil, pride, and courage. Themes are the playwright's ideas developed through all the play's elements, including characters, their interactions, dialogue, stage directions, imagery, and plot.

To analyze the development of a theme, focus on a subject or topic that seems important; then, look for details the playwright includes that build a particular idea or ideas about the subject each time it comes up. As you watch the following video, observe how the students analyze the development of a theme in *Beowulf*.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Now, answer the questions.

Question 1

How do the students in the video analyze the development of themes?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: They look for repeated references to the play's key topics and then analyze those references.

Question 2

What is another method you could use to analyze the development of a particular theme?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: To look for developing themes, you can look for repeated words or phrases; the use and repetition of imagery (including props); conflicts between characters based on different perspectives on key topics; and plot developments that affect your understanding of the play's ideas.

Question 3

One could surmise that a theme conveyed in *Beowulf* is that evil is the continued desire to destroy what you can't have. What details in the play might help the playwright develop this theme?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: *Beowulf* contains multiple references to the monsters' destruction of the human body. Given that Grendel and his mother do not have human bodies, and as Grendel says, "I hate all men and any creature that walks or crawls," it is reasonable to conclude that they want to destroy what they themselves cannot possess.

Check-In

Use what you have learned about theme development to answer the questions *Beowulf*.

Question 1

Beowulf tells Hygelac, “I have decided I will go and destroy this beast for the good of every man there.” To what subject might these words best apply?

- a.** Beowulf’s villainy
- b.** Beowulf’s fear
- c.** Beowulf’s motivation
- d.** Beowulf’s patriotism

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

- c.** Beowulf’s motivation

Question 2

What else does Beowulf say that helps develop a theme related to his motivation? Find three examples from the text.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Beowulf repeatedly announces, “I am Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow,” which, he elaborates, makes him unafraid and on the side of right. He says to Grendel that he comes “from the light in order to kill that which lives in darkness,” and “you shall never again have the chance to take a man’s life from him.” These passages help develop one of Beowulf’s motivations, which is to do the specific good of preventing the monsters’ destruction of human life.

Question 3

What is a possible theme being developed about Beowulf's motivation?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Motivation to do good results in courage.

Need a little extra support?

Get Help Here

Question 4

Remember that a play can develop multiple related themes. What is another theme the play develops about Beowulf's motivation?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The desire to justify one's pride motivates one to act accordingly.

Practice

Reread *Beowulf* and keep in mind what you have learned about theme development to complete the activity.

Activity

Analyze the play's development of three themes in relation to a subject of your choosing. Summarize the themes you see at the beginning or end of your writing.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: One theme the play suggests is that evil is indifference to the humanity of others. Grendel and his mother are clearly evil in the play's terms. Their connections to Cain, whose sin was to kill his own brother, define evil as the murder of someone who should be loved. The details of the monsters' gruesome acts further define evil as the destruction of others to satisfy oneself; as Grendel notes quite simply, "My appetite has not been satisfied. . . . I shall feed upon you." The play also describes evil as desirous of others' suffering. Grendel clarifies what he wants: "I crave their blood and long to hear the wailing of their souls in agony." Hatred is evil, too, the play suggests. When Beowulf accuses Grendel of hating "all that is good," the monster replies, "You are right, Beowulf. I hate you. I hate all men and any creature that walks or crawls. . . . My hate runs too deep and makes me stronger than you." Grendel hates all humanity for their humanness. That Beowulf proves Grendel wrong about the strength of hatred suggests that love is stronger than hate. Grendel's mother's emergence briefly challenges that idea, as her hate results in more cruel deaths. But then Beowulf kills her too, and with her death, destroys the heritage of inhumanity passed down from Cain through Grendel. Beowulf's pride, which some religions consider the root of all evil, is here, a source of strength, confidence, and courage. That said, Hrothgar cautions Beowulf to "Never forget this journey taken to the land of the Danes. Learn from your adventures here. For one day you will be old and slow and weak. Beware. Be

mindful of the frailty of life, for it is given to us for only a little while.” This suggests the theme that pride is not the source of power Beowulf thinks, nor the evil some have suggested, but still a dangerous distraction from what matters in life.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

_____ I analyzed the development of three themes in the play.

_____ I stated my central ideas clearly.

_____ I used specific evidence from the text to support my idea.

_____ I used correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

23/24 Honors English 11 A - Poetry and Drama

Poetry and Drama Apply

Unit Reading Information

In this unit, you will read *Macbeth* unless otherwise directed by your teacher.

Select the links to access the text and reading log.

Macbeth

Reading Log: The Tragedy of Macbeth

Poetry and Drama: Apply

Objective

In this section, you will apply skills learned throughout the unit.

Show What You Know



Source: Fer Gregory. Shutterstock

In this unit, you focused on skills and strategies necessary to comprehend and analyze poetry and drama by implementing these learning goals:

- Explain how poetic structure affects the meaning and aesthetic impact of a poem.
- Describe the use of multiple poetic elements in a poem.
- Draw conclusions about a poem based in part on its structure and use of poetic elements.
- Analyze the effect of diction on the meaning of a poem.
- Analyze the effects of imagery and figurative language in a poem.
- Describe variations in play structure and the effect of the development of central ideas and themes.
- Explain how monologues and soliloquies, dramatic irony, and dramatic elements enhance dramatic texts.
- Analyze development of mood, tone, and theme in a dramatic text.

Now, you will have an opportunity to show what you have accomplished and apply your learning to the unit text, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. If you haven't already done so, take time now to finish reading the text.

Then, spend a few minutes discussing your reading with your Learning Coach, using these questions as a guide. Notice that the questions are open-ended—there are no “correct” answers—but they will help you to focus on the text as you get ready to apply the learning goals you have mastered in this unit:

- Rate your overall enjoyment of the text from 1 (did not like) to 5 (liked a lot). Tell your Learning Coach what you enjoyed and did not enjoy about the text. How did it rank among other Shakespearean plays you have read?
- Some question the value of reading Shakespeare and believe that his works are tedious to read and have no relevance today. Where do you stand on this

issue? Take a side and then argue your point to your Learning Coach. Use details from *Macbeth* and from your experience reading the play to support your opinion.

- Describe how the poetic elements Shakespeare used affected your understanding of the play. For example, how might you evaluate the role of the rhythm of the text in making the language more understandable and the ideas clearer?
- Discuss particular quotes you found most poignant and tell your Learning Coach why.

Finally, review your notes and get ready to answer the text-related questions that follow.

Poetry and Drama: Apply

Show What You Know

Now, reread Act V, Scene 5 of *Macbeth*. Then, assess your application of the learning goals from this unit by answering the questions that follow.

Macbeth

Did You Know?

You might wonder what the last stage direction, *Exeunt*, means. The answer is surprisingly simple: *exeunt* is a Latin word that translated literally means, “more than one exit.” In Shakespeare’s stage directions, the word *exit* indicates that one character leaves the stage, while *exeunt* indicates that a number of characters depart. In this scene, the word tells us that Macbeth leaves with the messenger—and possibly everyone else on the stage.

Question 1

Most Shakespeare plays follow a traditional five-arc dramatic structure of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Where in this structure do you think the scene you just read falls? What conclusion can you draw as a result of this structural placement?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Given that the scene occurs more than halfway through the last act, it is likely part of the play's resolution. The events have already reached a climax, and plans have been set into motion that almost certainly spell doom for Macbeth. Though he still believes the witches' prophecy will keep him safe, readers know that Malcolm is in fact a victim of it, and readers can conclude that he will soon meet his end.

Question 2

Consider what you learn about Macbeth in Act V, Scene 5. Then, explain the significance of this well-known line of dialogue from Scene 1 of the previous act: "Something wicked this way comes." Who does the line refer to? How does it enhance the events that occur in the scene you just read?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The line of dialogue in Act IV, Scene 1 is uttered by one of the witches, and it refers to Macbeth. The dialogue adds irony to Act V, Scene 5, as the witches conform to the traditional stereotype of wickedness, yet Macbeth is the one who is wicked, and wicked by the witches' making. In the excerpted scene, his wickedness is clear through his heartless words and his "slaughterous thoughts."

Question 3

In Act V, Scene 4, Malcolm orders his soldiers to disguise themselves as trees to conceal their advance toward Dunsinane. In light of this fact, explain

the dramatic irony in Act V, Scene 5 and tell how it enhances the plot.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: When Macbeth is told that Birnam Wood is moving toward Dunsinane, he believes it is actually moving, as if by evil magic, and that the witches' prophecy is coming true. Readers know it is only the soldiers holding branches in front of them. This use of dramatic irony adds suspense to the plot, as the audience doesn't yet know when and how Macbeth will eventually realize that events are not going to turn out as he expected.

Question 4

Reread lines 26–30 spoken by Macbeth:

1. Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
2. That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
3. And then is heard no more: it is a tale
4. Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
5. Signifying nothing.

Analyze Shakespeare's use of figurative language and imagery in these lines. What conclusions can readers draw from the use of these elements?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Macbeth uses several metaphors in these lines, comparing life to a walking shadow, an actor struggling to perform onstage, and a story told by an angry storyteller. Throughout, Shakespeare adds imagery—"poor" player, "struts and frets his hour," "heard no more," "full of sound and fury"—that adds a feeling of negativity. Readers can conclude that Macbeth is expressing the futility of our passions; he is saying that we expend all our energies on things that consume us for but a brief moment in the scheme of things and are insignificant in the end.

Question 5

Shakespeare uses two examples of rhythmic structure in *Macbeth*. One, iambic pentameter, can be heard in most lines of the play, including these that Macbeth speaks in Act V, Scene 5:

1. I have almost forgot the taste of fears;
2. The time has been, my senses would have cool'd

Another, trochaic tetrameter, is used by the witches, as in these lines from Act IV, Scene 1:

1. FIRST WITCH.
2. Thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd.
3. SECOND WITCH.
4. Thrice, and once the hedge-pig whin'd.
5. THIRD WITCH.
6. Harpier cries:—'Tis time, 'tis time.

How do the two rhythmic structures differ? How do they impact meaning and help Shakespeare control the mood of the text?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The lines in iambic pentameter have an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable in each syllable pair. The witches' lines in trochaic tetrameter have the opposite rhythm: a stressed syllable, followed by an unstressed syllable. The resulting rhythm sounds like a chant or drum beat and establishes a gloomy, eerie mood well-suited to the presence of evil magic. The more common use of iambic pentameter, on the other hand, conveys the day-to-day existence of "mortals" without the power of the witches.

Question 6

Select the interactive to answer the question.

Question 7

In your opinion, are Macbeth's words in lines 19–30 a monologue or a soliloquy? Explain your reasoning and tell how the lines add to the reader's understanding of the scene.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Although Macbeth is not alone when he says these lines, in my opinion they can be considered a soliloquy because he is clearly expressing his feelings about the passing of time and the futility and hopelessness of life. The soliloquy seems to hint at the possibility that, deep down, Macbeth knows that the end is near and that, despite what he believes about the witches' prophecy, things are not going to go well for him.

Self-Assess

Compare your answers to questions 1–7 with the sample answers. If you did well, move on to Try This. If you need more practice or review, use this chart to review the sections mentioned.

Missed Topics to Review

Question Missed	Section to Review
1	Dramatic Structure
2	Dramatic Elements
3	Dramatic Elements
4	Poetic Elements, Language in Poetry
5	Structure of Poetry
6	Poetic Elements, Mood, Tone, and Theme
7	Dramatic Elements

Poetry and Drama: Apply

Try This

Activity 1

Now that you have read the whole play, analyze the function of the soliloquies. In a paragraph or two, explain how Shakespeare's decision to include seven of them throughout the play helped to characterize Macbeth as a tragic hero. How might Macbeth have been less of a tragic hero had these soliloquies been omitted?

Activity 2

The Tragedy of Macbeth explores one of Shakespeare's favorite themes: the consequences of ambition. In an essay of 300 to 500 words, analyze the development of this theme throughout the play, explaining how Shakespeare used variations in structure to reveal this theme in all its complexity. Use specific quotations and evidence from the text to support your analysis and evaluate the impact of Shakespeare's choices on his main character's traits and actions. Organize your essay clearly and follow the rules of English grammar and punctuation.

Self-Assess

Use the rubric to decide whether your essay fulfills the standards of ideas/purpose; analysis; organization; comprehension; and grammar, conventions, and spelling.

Poetry and Drama Apply Rubric

Poetry and Drama Review

Unit Review

Today you will review all topics you've learned in this unit and complete a unit online practice. Review the unit introduction and the list of lessons in the course tree to engage with the topics from this unit. Make sure you feel confident about each topic before taking the assessment. If there are any topics that you forget or think you need to practice, go back and review those lessons now.

[View Learning Coach Guide](#)

Review

Read the information on the page with your student. Guide your student to review the major concepts in each unit by looking at the unit introduction and lessons.

Your student should identify the target concepts where additional practice may be needed before completing the unit's online practice.

Unit Reflect

Write a reflection about your learning in this unit. Your reflection should be at least five sentences in length. Use the following questions as a guide:

- What topics did you find most interesting in this unit?
- What skills or concepts were hard for you?
- What strategies or activities helped you to better understand a concept?
- What do you think you may need more practice with?
- What questions would you like to ask now that you have a better understanding of what you will find on the assessment?

[View Learning Coach Guide](#)

Reflect

Guide your student to reflect on how well they've mastered the content in the unit. Have your students use the questions provided as a guide for writing a reflection. Help your student to determine the next steps for review based on the responses given for the questions.

Study Tips

Once you have taken the unit online practice, use your results to determine if there are any topics that you need to go back and review. You may find the following approach useful while studying:

1. Review your results on lesson practice activities and assessments from throughout the unit.
2. As you review, make a list of the major concepts found in each lesson.
3. Write a summary of these concepts and place a star next to those you feel you have mastered.
4. Review the concepts that may need a bit more practice using strategies such as summarizing, making flash cards to test yourself, writing sentences with key vocabulary, working out problems or activities, or teaching a concept to a friend or family member. If other study methods work better for you, use those instead.
5. As you become more comfortable with each concept, place a star next to it and move on to the next until you are ready to complete the assessment.

[View Learning Coach Guide](#)

Study Tips

Read the study tips with your student and help identify what will be most helpful in reviewing the content from the unit. If needed, help your student brainstorm additional study tips that better fit their learning preference.

23/24 Honors English 11 A - Poetry and Drama

Poetry and Drama Unit Test