Teacher Notes
Tuning In – What is a Poem?

Have you ever thought about what makes a poem... a poem? Maybe you have... but you probably haven’t! The next five slides contain short texts. Read each text, then discuss as a class whether or not you consider the text to be a poem.
Is the following text a poem? Why or why not?

Today at the shops I need to buy:  
Apples, bananas, ice cream and pie,  
Carrots and milk, berries and meat,  
Bread, spaghetti and also a treat.
The wonders of the universe astound me,
The never-ending blackness of space.
Oh how I wish I could travel into the unknown,
And uncover the lost secrets of time.
Snakes

Snakes slither along slippery surfaces using the sidewinding method. The snakes spear its head forward and the rest of the body follows. Some snakes can ascend sandy slopes without slipping while sidewinding.
The Forgotten One

Is the following text a poem? Why or why not?

Anger bubbles viciously inside me, like a cauldron of boiling water.
My head is a ball of raging fire, burning and throbbing with pain.
My heart is a shattered mirror, broken in a million pieces.
How could my parents forget my birthday?
Snowflakes

Graceful, intricate
Floating, dancing, falling
Perfect in their uniqueness
Flawless
What is Poetry?

• Poetry is a very broad genre of writing. Because of this, it is quite tricky to come up with one definition of what poetry actually is.

• Basically, poetry is a form of imaginative writing. People write poetry to express thoughts and feelings about something in a creative way.

• The purpose of poetry is to engage and excite the imagination of the reader, or to stir a particular emotional response within them.

• Poems can be long or short, funny or sad, structured or unstructured. Because of this, poets have a lot of freedom to express their thoughts and feelings in a very individual way.
Poetry Defined

The purpose of poetry is to engage and excite the imagination of the reader, or stir an emotional response within them.

Keeping this definition in mind, revisit the five texts from the tuning in activity.

Have you changed your mind about whether or not the text is a poem?
Elements of Poetry

• The elements of poetry are the tools that poets use when writing poems. Some poems may contain all of these elements, whereas other poems may contain only some of them.

• Some of the elements of poetry include:
  - structure
  - rhythm
  - rhyme
  - sound devices
  - figurative language.
Elements of Poetry – Structure

• The structure of a poem refers to the way in which the lines or verses of the poem have been arranged.
• In some poems, the lines or verses follow a regular pattern. This is often referred to as ‘fixed verse’.
• In other poems, the lines or verses don’t follow a regular pattern. This is often referred to as ‘free verse’.
Poetry Structure – Fixed Verse

Here is an example of a fixed verse poem about bats. Can you explain why this is an example of fixed verse?

In the deep dark night, the bats will fly,
Past the trees and the clouds on high.
In the deep dark night, the moon will glow,
Reflecting its light on the earth below.
Poetry Structure – Free Verse

Here is an example of a free verse poem about bats. Can you explain why this is an example of free verse?

At night, the bats fly
Wings extended, the wind soars beneath
Their shadows dancing on the moon
Hunting silently in darkness.
Poetry Structure – Form

• Many fixed verse poems are written in a particular form. This means they may have a set number of lines, a regular rhythm or a distinct rhyming pattern.

• When writing a poem in a fixed form, you must follow the pre-established rules for that particular type of poetry.

• More information on the various different forms of poetry can be found in the *Forms of Poetry PowerPoint*. 

  Acrostic
  Haiku
  Cinquain
  Limerick
  Ballad

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Elements of Poetry – Rhythm

• Most poems are supposed to be read aloud. Because of this, many poems have a regular rhythm.

• In music, another word for rhythm is ‘beat’. In poetry, another word for rhythm is ‘metre’.

• When writing a poem, poets carefully choose words that create a regular rhythm when the poem is read aloud.

• Words create rhythm by the way they are pronounced. Some syllables are pronounced more strongly than others, or ‘stressed’. This creates a beat-like rhythm within the poem.
Rhythm in Poetry – Example

Read the poem below aloud. The syllables in red are stressed. Can you hear the rhythm? Try clapping it with your hands.

Twinkle, twinkle, little star.
How I wonder what you are.
Up above the world so high.
Like a diamond in the sky.
Rhyme is the repetition of similar sounds. Usually, the last word of a line will rhyme with the last word of another line (this is called ‘end rhyme’).

The rhyming pattern of a poem describes which end words rhyme with each other. Lower case letters are used to represent each new sound in the rhyming pattern.

Although rhyme is an element of poetry, not all poems have a rhyming pattern.

I’m a poet and I didn’t know it!
Rhyme in Poetry – Example

Read the poem below aloud. Can you hear the rhyme pattern?
The rhyme pattern of this poem is aabb.

Every night, at half past three,
A friendly alien visits me.
He stays until the break of day,
Then jumps in his ship and flies away!
Elements of Poetry – Sound Devices

• One of the tools poets use to express their thoughts and feelings about a topic is sound devices.

• Some of the more common sound devices used in poetry include:
  - repetition (using a word or phrase several times)
  - alliteration (repeating a beginning sound)
  - assonance (repeating a vowel sound)
  - consonance (repeating a middle or end sound)
  - onomatopoeia (words that imitate a sound).
Sound Devices in Poetry – Example

Can you find alliteration, assonance, consonance and onomatopoeia in this poem?
Some examples have been included for you.

Graceful as a dancer,
Twirling through the sky.
Turning, tumbling, twisting,
Gently floating by.

Silent as a church mouse,
Gliding on the breeze.
Falling, floating, flying,
Drifting through the trees.

Falling like a parachute,
To sleep upon the eaves.
Waiting, watching, whispering,
The ever-falling leaves.

Dancing off the rooftops,
To rest upon the ground.
Rustling, crunching, crackling,
A joyous autumn sound.
Elements of Poetry – Figurative Language

• Another tools poets use to express their thoughts and feelings about a topic is figurative language.

• By comparing one thing to another, figurative language allows the poet to create images for the reader using words.

• Some figurative language commonly used in poetry includes:
  - similes (make comparisons using the words ‘like’ or ‘as’)
  - metaphors (make comparisons by saying one thing ‘is’ another)
  - personification (give human qualities to non-human objects).
Figurative Language in Poetry – Example

Can you find some similes and metaphors in this poem?
Some examples have been included for you.

Majestic and proud,
He elegantly stalks through the jungle.
Fur as orange as the blazing sun,
Striped like a prison cell.

Silent and alone,
He dutifully guards his territory.
His eyes are tiny balls of gold,
Piercing through darkness.

Muscular and powerful,
He effortlessly captures his prey.
His teeth are daggers,
A strong warning to others.

Strong and lean,
He spreads himself on a silent rock.
Sleep embracing him like a blanket,
His hunger quenched.
Summary

• Poetry allows people to express their thoughts and feelings about something in a creative way.
• Poets use elements of poetry such as structure, rhythm, rhyme, sound devices and figurative language to make their poems engaging and interesting.
• Poems can be written about just about anything. That is the beauty of poetry!