

# Poetry Terms and Examples

**alliteration:** is the repetition of sound in poetry or prose. The repetition can occur at the beginning, middle or end of the words. There are two types of alliteration: consonance, which is the repetition of consonant sounds ( and the definition we will be using for alliteration) and assonance, which is the repetition of vowel sounds. We will separate the two types for this unit.

example: She sells seashells by the seahore.

## The Gnome, The Gnat, And The Gnu

By Shel Silverstein

(Repetition of the n sound in the poem.)

I saw an ol' gnome  
Take a gnock at a gnat  
Who was gnibbling the gnose of his gnu.  
I said, "Gnasty gnome,  
Gnow, stop doing that.  
That gnat ain't done gnothing to you."

He gnodded his gnarled ol' head and said,  
"Til gnow I gnever gnew  
That gnocking a gnat  
In the gnoodle like that  
Was gnot a gnice thing to do."

**assonance:** is the repetition of vowel sounds.

example: It is true that you look so blue.

## Lone Dog

By Irene Rutherford McLeod

(Repetition of ē, ou, a, u, sounds, etc.)

I'm a lean dog, a keen dog, a wild dog, and lone;  
I'm a rough dog, a tough dog, hunting on my own;  
I'm a bad dog, a mad dog, teasing silly sheep;  
I love to sit and bay the moon, to keep fat souls from sleep.

I'll never be a lap dog, licking dirty feet,  
A sleek dog, a meek dog, cringing for my meat,  
Not for me the fireside, the well filled plate,  
But shut door, and sharp stone, and cuff and kick and hate.

Not for me the other dogs, running by my side,  
Some have run a short while, but none of them would bide,  
Oh, mine is still the lone trail, the hard trail, the best,  
Wide wind, and wild stars, and hunger of the quest!

**allusion:** is a reference to a statement, a person, a place or an event from literature, history, religion, myth, politics, sports, science or pop culture.

example: O Henry title for his short story "The Gift of the Magi" is an allusion to the wise men from the East called the Magi, who presented the Christ child with the first Christmas gifts.

example: TLC's "Sumthin' Wicked This Way Comes" is an allusion to Ray Bradbury's novel *Something Wicked This Way Comes*.

**ballad:** is a song that tells a story. There are two kinds: folk ballad, which is composed by unknown singer and passed on from generation to generation through oral tradition and literary ballad, which is composed by a known individual and is written down. It is an imitation of the old folk ballad. A ballad usually tells a sensational story of tragedy or adventure, using simple language with a great deal of repetition and is thus easy to memorize.

### **Bad, Bad Leroy Brown**

By Jim Croce

Well the South side of Chicago  
Is the baddest part of town  
And if you go down there  
You better just beware  
Of a man named Leroy Brown

Now Leroy, more than trouble  
You see he stands about six foot-four  
All the downtown ladies call him "Treetop Lover"  
All the men just call him "Sir"

And he's bad, bad, Leroy Brown  
The baddest man in the whole damned town  
Badder than old King Kong  
And meaner than a junkyard dog

Now Leroy, he's a gambler  
And he like his fancy clothes  
And he like to wave his diamond rings  
In front of everybody's nose  
He got a custom Continental  
He got an El Dorado too

He got a thirty-two gun in his pocket full of fun  
He got a razor in his shoe

And he's bad, bad, Leroy Brown  
The baddest man in the whole damned town  
Badder than old King Kong  
And meaner than a junkyard dog

Now Friday 'bout a week ago  
Leroy, shootin' dice  
And at the edge of the bar  
Sat a girl named Doris  
And ooh that girl looked nice  
Well he cast his eyes upon her  
And the trouble soon began  
Then Leroy Brown, he learned a lesson  
'Bout a' messin' with the wife of a jealous man

And he's bad, bad, Leroy Brown  
The baddest man in the whole damned town  
Badder than old King Kong  
And meaner than a junkyard dog

Well, the two men took to fighting  
And when they pulled them off the floor  
Leroy looked like a jigsaw puzzle  
With a couple of pieces gone

And he's bad, bad, Leroy Brown  
The baddest man in the whole damned town  
Badder than old King Kong  
And meaner than a junkyard dog

Yeah, he's badder than old King Kong  
And meaner than a junkyard dog

**blank verse:** is poetry written in unrhymed iambic pentameter. Blank means the poetry is not rhymed. Iambic pentameter means that each line contains five iambs or metrical feet that consist of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (˘ ´). William Shakespeare frequently used it as in *Romeo and Juliet*.

example: Büt sóft! Whät líght thröugh yónděr wíndöw bréaks?

**couplet:** is two lines of rhymed poetry. The rhyme usually occurs at the end of each line.

## Some Opposites

By Richard Wilbur

(each two lines of rhymes)

What is the opposite of riot?  
It's *lots of people keeping quiet*.  
The opposite of doughnut? Wait  
A minute while I meditate.  
This isn't easy. Ah, I've found it!  
*A cookie with a hole around it*.

What is the opposite of two?  
*A lonely me, a lonely you*.

The opposite of a cloud could be  
*A white reflection in the sea,*  
*Or a huge blueness in the air,*  
Caused by a cloud's not being there.

The opposite of opposite?  
That's much too difficult. I quit.

**free verse:** is poetry that does not have a regular meter or rhyme scheme. It attempts to capture the natural rhythms of ordinary speech. The wonderful, wonderful thing about free verse, is that it has very few distinct rules or boundaries. It is similar to blank verse in that it does not rhyme, but unlike blank verse, it is not written in iambic pentameter.

## O Captain! My Captain

By Walt Whitman

I. O captain! my captain! our fearful trip is done;  
The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won;  
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
While follow eyes the stead keel, the vessel grim and daring.

But O heart! heart! heart!  
O the bleeding drops of red!  
Where on the deck my captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

II. O captain! my captain! rise up and hear the bells;  
Rise up! for you the flag is flung, for you the bugle trills;  
For you bouquets and ribboned wreaths, for you the shores a-crowding;  
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning.

O captain! dear father!  
This arm beneath your head;  
It is some dream that on the deck  
You've fallen cold and dead.

III. My captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;  
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will.  
The ship is anchored safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;  
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won!

Exult, O shores! and ring, O bells!  
But I, with silent tread,  
Walk the spot my captain lies  
Fallen cold and dead.

**imagery:** is language that appeals to the senses. The language in the poem is appealing to the senses of sight, sound, touch, taste and/or smell.

## Harlem

By Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore-  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over-  
like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load

*Or does it explode?*

**irony:** may occur in two forms. In the verbal form it is the use of words to mean the opposite of what they say. There is also dramatic irony or irony of situation. This is when there is contradiction between the outward and inward circumstances.

verbal irony example: If the weather during the past weeks has been dominated by rain and today it is raining once again and someone says, "Well, it is another perfect day," these words are used ironically.

dramatic irony example: would be if a violent serial killer was called "the gentle man." His nickname is the opposite of his actions.

**metaphor:** is a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two unlike things, in which one thing becomes another thing without the use of the words *like, as, than* or *resembles*. Metaphors can be directly stated, implied-suggested rather than directly stated- or extended- developed over several lines or an entire poem.

### **The Little Boy and the Old Man**

By Shel Silverstein

(implied metaphor)

Said the little boy, "Sometimes I drop my spoon."

Said the little old man, "I do that too."

The little boy whispered, "I wet my pants."

"I do that too," laughed the little old man.

Said the little boy, "I often cry."

The old man nodded, "So do I."

"But worst of all, said the boy, "it seems

Grown-ups don't pay attention to me."

And he felt the warmth of a wrinkled old hand.

"I know what you mean," said the little old man.

**onomatopoeia:** is the use of a word whose sound imitates or suggests its meaning.

example: crack, bang, crash, pop

**personification:** is a metaphor in which a nonhuman thing or quality is talked about as if it were human.

### **Little Pig's Treat**

By Shel Silverstein

(nonhuman pig as human)

Said the pig to his pop,

"There's the candy shop.

Oh, please let's go inside.

And I promise I won't

Make a kid of myself

If you give me a *people-back* ride."

**simile:** a comparison between two unlike things using the words *resembles, than, like* or *as*.

### Scale

By Shel Silverstein

If I could only see the scale,  
I'm sure that it would state  
That I've lost ounces...maybe pounds  
Or even *tons* of weight.  
"You'd better eat some pancakes-  
You're skinny as a rail."  
I'm sure that's what the scale would say...  
If I could see the scale.

**sonnet:** is a fourteen line *lyric poem*-poem that does not tell a story but expresses the writer's emotions or thoughts- that is usually written in iambic pentameter and has one of several rhyme schemes. There are two primary types. The *Italian* or *Petrarchan* sonnet consists of an *octet*, eight lines, of poetry that pose a question-and a *sestet*-six lines of poetry that respond to the question. The second type of sonnet is the *Shakespearean* sonnet, which consists of three *quatrains* or four lines of poetry and closes with a *couplet*.

### American Sonnet 10

By Wanda Coleman

our mothers wrung hell and hardtack from row  
and boll. fenced others'  
gardens with bones of lovers. embarking  
from Africa in chains  
reluctant pilgrims stolen by Jehovah's light  
planted here the bitter  
seed of blight and here eternal torches mark  
the shame of Moloch's mansions  
built in slavery's name. our hungered eyes  
do see/refuse the dark  
illuminate the blood-soaked steps of each  
historic gain. a yearning  
yearning to avenge the raping of the womb  
from which we spring

**theme:** is the central idea of a work of literature. Think about what the poet is discussing, explaining, describing. What is the subject, in general? Is it love, evil, loyalty, etc.

### Far Away

by Nickelback

This time, This place  
Misused, Mistakes  
Too long, Too late  
Who was I to make you wait  
Just one chance  
Just one breath  
Just in case there's just one left  
'Cause you know,  
you know, you know

[CHORUS]

That I love you  
I have loved you all along  
And I miss you  
Been far away for far too long  
I keep dreaming you'll be with me  
and you'll never go  
Stop breathing if  
I don't see you anymore

On my knees, I'll ask  
Last chance for one last dance  
'Cause with you, I'd withstand  
All of hell to hold your hand

I'd give it all  
I'd give for us  
Give anything but I won't give up  
'Cause you know,  
you know, you know

[CHORUS]

So far away  
Been far away for far too long  
So far away  
Been far away for far too long  
But you know, you know, you know

I wanted  
I wanted you to stay  
'Cause I needed  
I need to hear you say  
That I love you  
I have loved you all along  
And I forgive you  
For being away for far too long  
So keep breathing  
'Cause I'm not leaving  
Hold on to me and, never let me go