



Oide

Tacú leis an bhFoghlaim
Ghairmiúil i measc Ceannairí
Scoile agus Múinteoirí

Supporting the Professional
Learning of School Leaders
and Teachers

Engaging with Poetry





Contents:

There are many different ways to engage with poetry. The following pages explore a selection of possible strategies for teaching poetry in the classroom.

Introduction:

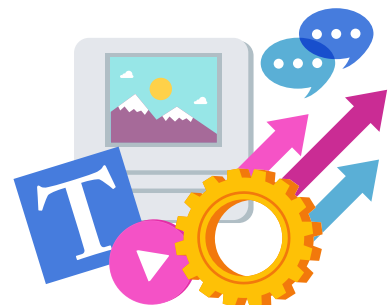
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What is Poetry?

"The best words in the
best order"

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

"Poetry springs from a level below
meaning; it is a molecular thing, a
pattern of sound and image"

Nuala Ni Dhomhnail

"You can find poetry in your
everyday life, your memory, in
what people say on the bus, in the
news, or just what's in your
heart."

Carol Ann Duffy

"Poetry is when an emotion
has found its thought and
the thought has found
words".

Robert Frost

"Genuine poetry can
communicate before it's
understood"

T.S. Eliot



What is your understanding of poetry? Could you sum it up in one sentence? Share your sentence with a peer.



Exploring Poetic Techniques:

The following exercise invites students to think about the effect **some** poetic techniques can have on a text and in their own writing.

Use the text box at the **bottom of the page** to fill in the column on the right. The first one is completed for you as an example.

Effect poetic technique has on a text	Poetic Technique
This is a powerful technique which engages the reader visually. It encourages the reader to connect with the poem.	Imagery
Poets may use this technique to create rhythm in a poem. It can make the lines of the poem seem more fluid in their delivery.	
Poets use this technique to place an emphasis on a certain word/point in the poem. This can have a persuasive affect on the reader. You will also notice how this can add to the rhythm of a text.	
This technique is used to engage us cerebrally, connecting two images. It makes us think about an object in a way that we may not have thought of previously.	
This technique is used for sound. It repeats the same letter or sound at the beginning of connected words. This adds to the aural and oral quality of a piece.	
This technique is used to create sound and bring a moment/image to life.	

A selection of poetic techniques

Imagery	Alliteration	Repetition
Onomatopoeia	Enjambment	Simile



Start here

1. Examine the **title**,
form and **shape** of
the poem.

2. Read the poem
aloud to hear the
tone and **rhythm**.

3. Identify the
speaker/narrator. Is
there a setting?

4. Analyse the
theme(s)
conveyed by the
poet.

5. Identify sound effects
such as **rhyme**,
assonance, **alliteration**
and **onomatopoeia**.

6. Identify any poetic
techniques such as **imagery**,
similes and **metaphors**.









Possible steps to support analysing poetry

8. Develop your
personal response
to the poem.

7. Think about the **word**
choice, **syntax** and **use**
of **language**.



A Dialogic Approach to Poetry

Step	Possible Questions to be Explored
 1. Title	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the title reveal about the poem? • Can you relate the title to the world around you?
 2. Read poem aloud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you notice when you read it aloud or hear it aloud? • What effect does the use of commas and full stops have? • Did you pause on certain words?
 3. Speaker, tone and voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the speaker of the poem? • Who is the speaker speaking to? • Is the speaker the poet or a character the poet has created?
 4. Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your opinion, what is the poem about? What is the writer's view on this subject? • Summarise the main idea of the poem or paraphrase it in a few sentences. • Do you think the themes and messages implicitly or explicitly stated in the poem? Explain your reasoning.
 5. Sound Effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sound devices can you identify? • Is there a rhyming pattern/rhyming scheme in the poem? • Are there any examples of internal rhymes? • What effect does sound have on the poem?
 6. Poetic Techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What poetic techniques does the poet use? (metaphor, simile, alliteration etc.) • Does the poet use imagery in the poem? What senses are appealed to? • What effects do the techniques create? How do they help establish the theme of the poem?
 7. Word choice, syntax and use of language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any lines or words that stand out in the poem? • What effects does the choice of language create? • Is there a specific language style (e.g. colloquial, formal etc.)?
 8. Personal Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the poem mean to you? • Can you relate it to the world around you? • Does it evoke a memory in you? • Do you like the poem? Give reasons why or why not.



Three Alternate Strategies to Approaching Poetry






Strategy 1: Imagery and Sketch Notes in Poetry

Sketch Notes encourages students to engage with imagery in any poem. It is an accessible approach to analysing any text at any level.

The following strategy may be useful:

- **First**, read the poem aloud. Ask students to sketch images/icons/symbols of what they **hear**. Students can do this on a separate page or around the poem itself.
- **Next**, invite students to look at the poem. They might add further to their sketches. When complete, encourage students to **reflect** on what they have just drawn. Are there recurring images? Do the images 'draw out' the key message(s) of the poem?
- **Finally**, ask students to share their sketch ideas with the class and **discuss** their thinking behind each sketch.

The poem and accompanying sketches on the following page are an example of how students may go about this activity.

Note the repetition of the  symbol which shows the student's understanding of a recurring theme of love. This might offer a window into further discussion for students who may struggle to express themselves orally.

Students will create a key for their sketches and justify in writing their choices. This will aid further discussion and extended writing activities. It might also support comparison with future prescribed and non-prescribed material at all levels.

Further Supports:



This strategy could be further assisted through digital technology. In this case you may find websites such as *The Noun Project* or *Flaticon* useful resources. They allow you to access simple icons which can be repurposed for free. Please refer to further supports on p.21 for further links on the topic.








Example: Imagery and Sketch Notes in Poetry





Below is an example of how a poem could be broken down through the use of sketch notes. It is an accessible approach to analysing any text at any level and further supports the development of their personal voice.

Students might also benefit from creating a key for their sketches to detail their rationale for choosing certain icons and the effect that they have.



 The Sun Has Burst The Sky
by Jenny Joseph 

The sun has burst the sky
Because I love you 
And the river its banks.

The sea laps the great rocks 
Because I love you 
And takes no heed of the moon dragging it away
And saying coldly 'Constancy is not for you'.
The blackbird fills the air 
Because I love you 
With spring and lawns and shadows falling on lawns.

The people walk in the street and laugh 
I love you 
And far down the river ships sound their hooters
Crazy with joy because I love you. 


Student's notes:

Note the basic repetition of the  symbol which highlights the recurring theme of love throughout this poem. The  is also prominent in the title and opening line. This demonstrates a positive and uplifting tone. These symbols along with some of the others I've drawn above indicate that there is a lot of natural imagery in this poem.



Activity: Imagery and Sketch Notes in Poetry

Now is your opportunity to analyse a poem or piece of text using sketch notes.

Below you will find the poem **'On the First Leaves of Autumn'** by Nikita Gill.

Begin your analysis applying relevant icons and/or symbols to various parts of the poem. Perhaps this could be done in pairs, where one student reads the poem and the other sketches. Afterwards, switch roles before comparing your results. Once finished, provide a justification for the icons and symbols you picked.

'On the First Leaves of Autumn'

Nikita Gill

Between hot chocolate and pumpkin spice,
mellow warmth and misty mornings,

the gold of your mother shines
alongside your father's glowing smile.

Your grandmother bakes buttery cookies,
while your grandfather rakes the amber orange garden.

In a season where everything leaves,
you learn the fine art of loving and letting go.

Notes:



Below is a space for you to insert your own studied material and begin analysing using the Sketch Notes technique from page 9 and 10.



Strategy 2: Grammar Goggles and Poetry

All texts introduced in the classroom, whether prescribed or non-prescribed, present opportunities for grammatical analysis. Poetry, it's fair to say, is often looked at predominantly through the lens of **meaning, poetic devices or specific word choice**, but let's look at one from a grammatical point of view. Look at the poem 'The Orange' by Wendy Cope below and some of the grammar elements that have been identified.

The Orange by Wendy Cope

Setting the scene early on

At lunchtime I bought a huge orange—
The size of it made us all laugh.

Descriptive adjectives

Relative clauses provide more information about another noun

Active verbs to move the story along

I peeled it and shared it with Robert and Dave—
They got quarters and I had a half

Full rhyme adds to the upbeat rhythm

And that orange, it made me so happy,
As ordinary things often do

Simile used to make the ordinary extraordinary

Just lately. The shopping. A walk in the park. **Five full STOPs** add variety to the sentence length

This is peace and contentment. It's new.

The rest of the day was quite easy.

I did all the jobs on my list
And enjoyed them and had some time over.

Subject varies throughout, from the poet, to the orange, to her list of activities

Nouns and adjectives are used to give a sense of time passing gently

Conjunctions add variety to the writing throughout

I love you. I'm glad I exist.

Click to listen to **a reading of the poem** by actress, Emma Watson,
courtesy of The Poetry Corner



Activity: Put on your Grammar Goggles!

Now is your opportunity to analyse the following poem, **'Nettles'** by Vernon Scannel. This time with a sole focus on grammar and sentence structure.

'Nettles' **Vernon Scannel**

My son aged three fell in the nettle bed.
'Bed' seemed a curious name for those green spears,
That regiment of spite behind the shed:
It was no place for rest. With sobs and tears
The boy came seeking comfort and I saw
White blisters beaded on his tender skin.
We soothed him till his pain was not so raw.
At last he offered us a watery grin,
And then I took my billhook, honed the blade
And went outside and slashed in fury with it
Till not a nettle in that fierce parade
Stood upright any more. And then I lit
A funeral pyre to burn the fallen dead,
But in two weeks the busy sun and rain
Had called up tall recruits behind the shed:
My son would often feel sharp wounds again.



Extended Activity: Put on your Grammar Goggles!

Below is a space for you to insert your own studied material and begin dissecting it, paying particular attention to punctuation, sentence structure and types of words/phrases used (nouns, adverbs, clauses, conjunctions etc.).

Title of Poem:



Strategy 3: Poetry Through Colour

Once again, this approach to analysis can be used with prescribed or non-prescribed texts. But will work well with poetry in particular as it is generally written with aesthetically pleasing vocabulary and word choice.

Introduction:

To begin, students can be asked to discuss any preconceptions they may have with colour: What does green/blue/yellow/red etc. mean to them in terms of emotion, location, and/or personal connections.

<i>blue</i> TRUST SMART CALM FAITH NATURAL STABLE POWER	<i>red</i> LOVE IMMEDIACY ENERGY SALE PASSION ANGER HUNGER	<i>black</i> BOLD RICH POWER MYSTERY ELEGANCE EVIL STRENGTH	<i>green</i> SOOTHING ECO-FREINDLY NATURAL ENVY JEALOUSY BALANCE RESTFUL
<i>yellow</i> CHEER ATTENTION CHILDISH FRESH WARMTH ENERGY OPTIMISM	<i>orange</i> HEALTH ATTRACTION STAND OUT THIRST WEALTH YOUTHFUL HAPPINESS	<i>pink</i> TENDERNESS SENSITIVE CARING EMOTIONAL SYMPATHETIC LOVE SEXUALITY	<i>purple</i> ROYAL MYSTERIOUS ARROGANT LUXURY CHILDISH CREATIVE SADNESS

Image courtesy of The Paper Mill.
(Please note this list is not exhaustive)

Task: Having discussed colour associations and explored some examples, students can attempt their own analysis by following these steps:



01

Write the title of your chosen text at the top of your page and choose **at least 5 colours** to represent this text.



02

Explain your colour selections in writing, including at least 3 pieces of textual evidence or quotations.



Example: Poetry Through Colour

We have chosen the poem 'Dulce et Decorum est' by Wilfred Owens as a sample.

'Dulce et Decorum est'

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.—
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.





Example: Poetry Through Colour

Below is a student sample of a colour analysis of the poem 'Dulce et Decorum est' by Wilfred Owens.

Chosen colours:



'Dulce et Decorum est' starts with reference to the soldiers in tough conditions on the battlefield. I felt **brown** was appropriate as it represents the physical conditions and the mood at war.

Green seems like an obvious choice to represent the initial gas attack under a green sea. The colour **grey** highlights the confusion and panic as it sets in, with men *fumbling to fit clumsy helmets*.

The final stanza starts with reference to his **white eyes** *writhing in his face*. I thought this was an appropriate choice of colour as it also represents purity and innocence, this man did not deserve to die. The language of the stanza is represented by a **blood red** as it is filled with anger, rage and frustration (*obscene, bitter, vile*).

The final line mocks *the old lie* in the form of the title. This title once gave hope to the soldiers, hence my choice of **yellow** to finish out my summary.



Activity: Poetry Through Colour

Now is your opportunity to analyse a poem or piece of text through colour.

Below is the text of the poem '**Lion King**' written by Joseph Woods.

Lion King

You've been watching the weather
in your grandad's face
as he sleeps armchaired
in the sitting room
and how the newspaper flopped
to his feet like a seagull
big with wings of newsprint.
Watching the weather in his face
is more interesting than The Lion King
and when he wakes from his snooze
he always looks like a spaceman
landed on some strange planet
but still manages a smile
when you ask him. Grandad
were you old before you were old?

Analysis:

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Further Supports:

WordSift

[Click to access this interactive dictionary.](#)



[Click to access the Poetry Ireland Website.](#)



[Click to access a playlist of poetry readings compiled by UCD Library.](#)



[Click to access a PDF version of *The Sketchnote Handbook* by Mike Rhode.](#)



[Click to access a video clip on Sketch Notes courtesy of Ted Talks](#)

The Noun Project
Free Icon and Symbols



[Click to access this website which may be useful when using Sketch Notes in the classroom.](#)



[Click to access this website which may be useful when using Sketch Notes in the classroom.](#)