

## THE SOUNDS OF POETRY

### Study Guide

Poets use sound in a variety of ways to enhance their poems. Here are some examples of sound techniques poets use to create mood, tone and images. Use the guide when you are interpreting poetry or selecting poems for choral reading.

#### Rhyme Scheme:

Poets organize rhyming words in a variety of patterns called **rhyme schemes**. **End rhyme** is the rhyming of words at the ends of lines of poetry. **Internal rhyme** is the rhyming of words within one line of poetry. Here are some examples of end rhymes. Can you find examples of internal rhyme?

“Trees” by Joyce Kilmer (aabb)

*I think that I shall never see (a)*  
*A poem lovely as a tree. (a)*  
*A tree that may in summer wear (b)*  
*A nest of robins in her hair. (b)*

“The Highwayman” by Alfred Noyes (aabcb)

*The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees.*  
*The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas.*  
*The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor.*  
*And the highwayman came riding—*  
*Riding – riding—*  
*The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn-door.*

“Annabel Lee” by Edgar Allan Poe (ababcb)

*It was many and many a year ago,*  
*In the kingdom by the sea,*  
*That a maiden there lived, whom you may know*  
*By the name of Annabel Lee;*  
*And this maiden she lived with no other thought*  
*Than to love, and be loved by me.*

“The Cremation of Sam McGee” by Robert W. Service (abcdbefe)

*There are strange things done in the midnight sun*  
*By the men who toil for gold;*  
*The Arctic trails have their secret tales*  
*That would make your blood run cold;*  
*The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,*  
*But the queerest they ever did see*  
*Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarg*  
*I cremated Sam McGee*

**Repetition:** Repetition is the recurring use of a sound, a word, a phrase, or a line. Repetition can be used to appeal to our emotions, create mood, and to emphasize important ideas. Notice how Edgar Allan Poe uses repetition in “Annabel Lee” to create emotional effects:

*And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side  
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,  
In the sepulcher there by the sea,  
In her tomb by the sounding sea.*

In “Casey at the Bat” by Ernest Lawrence Thayer, word repetition is used effectively to create a mood:

*Oh, somewhere in this favored land the sun is shining bright,  
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light;  
And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout,  
But there is no joy in Mudville: Mighty Casey has struck out.*

**Alliteration:** Alliteration is the repetition of beginning consonant sounds. The tongue twister, “Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,” overuses alliteration. Alliteration is easy to use, but it is a challenge to use it well when writing poetry. Look for excellent examples in “The Highwayman” by Alfred Noyes.

**Assonance:** Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds. Notice how many “O” sounds occur in this poem by Nina Bogan:

*How strange it is  
To hover over words, like the smoke  
From the loggers’ fires, over the valley.*

**Consonance:** Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds anywhere within words, not just at the beginning. Count the “S” sounds as they appear in this verse of “The Walrus and the Carpenter” by Lewis Carroll:

*The moon was shining sulkily,  
Because she thought the sun  
Had got no business to be there  
After the day was done—  
“It’s very rude of him,” she said,  
“To come and spoil the fun!”*

**Onomatopoeia:** Onomatopoeia is the use of words that create the sounds they describe. Words like *buzz*, *hum*, *clank*, and *crash* represent a sound. Listen for the sound of horse hoofs repeated in “The Highwayman” by Alfred Noyes:

*Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot! Had they heard it? The horse hoofs ringing clear;  
Tlot-tlot, tlot-tlot, in the distance? Were they deaf that they did not hear?*