



GCSE

English

Module Two:
Poetry & Prose

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Lesson 4**Poetic Form****Aims**

The aims of this lesson are to enable you to

- give accounts of real and imagined experience in poetic form
- show your understanding and appreciation of the ways in which poetry can communicate ideas and feelings
- study a well-known poem in some detail
- write your own narrative poetry

Context

In Module One we looked at different ways of reading and writing about actual and imagined experience. In Module Two, we continue this theme, looking at the ways in which experience can be used to write poetry and prose. By the end of this module, you should be well practised both in writing your own fictional and autobiographical pieces and in analysing the work of other writers.



Oxford Open Learning

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is a long poem by the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge and it was written and edited between 1789 and 1816. 'Rime' is an old-fashioned expression which in this context means poem or song. The poem tells the story of a sea voyage. Most of the story is told by an old sailor who meets a young man on his way to a wedding feast, and detains him in order to tell him his story. The sailor, or 'ancient mariner' tells how his ship was driven towards the South Pole by a storm. When the ship was surrounded by ice, an albatross came through the snow-fog and led the ship forward.

The albatross was thought of as a good omen by the ship's crew, and they treated the bird as a friend. However, the ancient mariner shot the albatross with his crossbow, and because of this act of cruelty, the ship has fallen under a curse. The ship is driven northwards, to the equator, and then becalmed. The whole crew is now facing the consequences of the shooting of the albatross.

This is the story so far. Now read the section of the poem which takes up the story at this point:

The Sun now rose upon the right
Out of the sea came he,
Still hid in mist, and on the left
Went down into the sea.

And the good south wind still blew behind,
But no sweet bird did follow,
Nor any day for food or play
Came to the mariners' hollo!

And I had done a hellish thing,
And it would work 'em woe:
For all averred, I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow.
Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
That made the breeze to blow!

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head:
The glorious Sun uprist:
They all averred, I had killed the bird
That brought the fog and mist.
'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
That bring the fog and mist.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst

Into that silent sea!

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion:
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, every where,
and all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot: O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue and white.

And some in dreams assuréd were
Of the spirit that plagued us so;
Nine fathom deep he had followed us
From the land of mist and snow.

And every tongue, through utter drought,
Was withered at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

Ah! well a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

Activity 1

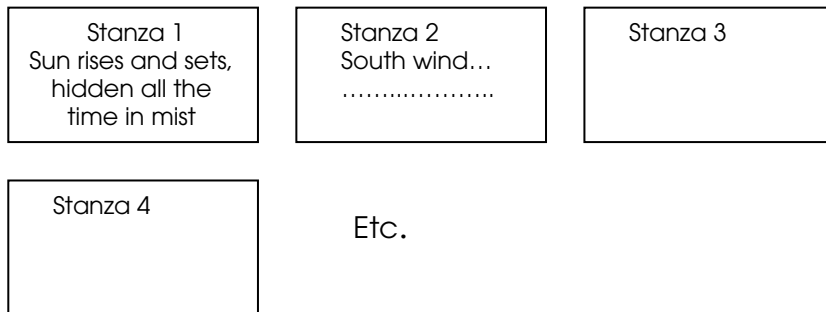
This activity tests your understanding of the events and ideas related by the poem.

Write down your answers to the following questions. You will need to refer to the poem and quote lines or words to support your answer. Always place your quotations in inverted commas, e.g.:

The mariner describes how the sun 'rose upon the right' (l. 1).

(l. 1) is an abbreviation for *line one*. When you quote from the poem, you should show whereabouts your quotation comes from by putting a line reference in brackets afterwards.

1. Describe how the weather changes from verse to verse. Not all the verses mention the weather, and you might find it helpful to plan your answer in diagram form to show this.




2. Describe what happens to the sailors and the ship from verse to verse. Again you might find it helpful to plan your answer before writing it out. You could draw a grid like the one below to help you make your notes.



3. You have described the changes in the weather and what happens to the ship and the sailors. Now look back over the poem and give an account of what the sailors themselves think is *causing* the various things that happen to them. To find out what the sailors think is causing the situation, look at lines 9-20, and lines 45-48. Do not forget to refer to the text to support what you say, *but* make sure you explain your answer in your own words.

1	2 Although the mariners call the bird, it does not come	3
4 The mariners think that it was right to kill the bird, as the weather is now better	5	6
7	8	9 etc.

	
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In Activity One you have been introduced to some useful ways of organising your notes. When you are reading a poem, a story or a play, it is always helpful to divide it up into sections. Often it is already divided up for you. You can then organise your notes in a way that is visually easy to refer to.

Making a grid like the one in question two gives you a poem-at-a-glance chart. Remember this method; you will find that it is a very good way of dealing with the longer and more complicated things that you read.

Suggested Answers to Activity One

You should have noted the following for question one; amongst other things:

Verse 1	2	4
Sun rises and sets, hidden all the time in mist.	South wind blows	Sun rises without mist; it is a clear day.
6	7	10
Sun becomes very hot.	The wind drops	Strange fires appear at night.

For question two, you should have noted that the ship sails on, blown by the 'good south wind' (l.5), in verses 1-5. Meanwhile the sailors try to decide how the weather might be affected by the shooting of the albatross in verses 3 and 4. In verse 7 we discover that the ship is becalmed. There is no wind ('breath', l.30) and the ship does not move. The sailors begin to suffer from thirst, as there is sea water all around them, but no rain to replenish the ship's water supplies. The sailors see strange creatures and fires at night (verses 9 and 10). The sailors have dreams about an evil spirit which is causing the drought and lack of wind.

By now all the sailors are suffering badly from lack of water to drink and they blame the mariner. He says that 'the Albatross about my neck was hung' (l.56). This may mean that the dead albatross was literally hung around his neck as a sign of his guilt or a punishment for shooting it, but it is more likely to have a figurative meaning, and to suggest that he felt as though the albatross was hanging round his neck, because everyone thought he was responsible for what had happened.

In answering question three, you should notice that in verse 3 the sailors think that the albatross had been a bird of good luck, and they are afraid that the breeze which is blowing the ship along will stop, now that the bird is dead. However, as you have noted, the breeze continues to blow, and the mist clears.

The sailors change their minds and they are now prepared to think that the albatross was a bird of bad luck, and responsible for the 'fog and mist' (l.20). They now think that the ancient mariner was right to kill the bird. When the ship is becalmed and the drought comes, the sailors think the boat is being 'plagued' (l.45) by an evil spirit which is following them. They again blame the ancient

mariner for what has happened, because of the killing of the albatross.

You may have noted that the sailors are:

1. Superstitious
2. Changeable in their views
3. Quick to find someone to blame, and
4. They all seem to think the same thing as each other.

Poetic Rhythm

When you read the extract from the poem, you will have noticed very soon that the poet uses certain voice patterns and **rhythms** in the verses. These patterns are the devices that make up the form of the poem, and the more patterning there is, the more formal the poem is. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is quite a formal poem, but as you will see, it does not always keep to its own patterns.

Here are some of the patterns we can observe:

1. Most verses have 4 lines.
2. Most have lines 2 + 4 rhyming, 1 + 3 unrhymed.
3. In most of the verses lines 1 + 3 have four stressed syllables, and lines 2 + 4 have three stressed syllables.

A syllable is a single unit of sound, and words when we speak them are made up of syllables, e.g.:

'blue' = one syllable

'running' = two syllables (runn - ing)
The first syllable is stressed: rúnning.

'catapult' = three syllables (cat - a - pult)
First syllable stressed: cátapult.

Poetry often has a pattern made up not from the number of words in each line but from the number of syllables that are stressed.

The children's rhyme 'Mary had a little lamb' has the same pattern of syllables in each line as *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

Here is a verse from each of them. See if you can hear the pattern of stressed syllables by reading each one aloud:

<p>Mary had a little lamb Its fleece was white as snow</p>
--

And everywhere that Mary went
 The lamb was sure to go.
 Water, water, everywhere,
 And all the boards did shrink;
 Water, water everywhere,
 Nor any drop to drink.

This is how a verse is written to show which syllables are to be stressed in reading, using accents over the stressed syllables:

Máry hád a líttle lámb
 Its fléece was whíte as snów
 And éverywhére that Máry wént
 The lámb was súde to gó.

Read this verse through aloud, making sure you stress the syllables marked. You will see that the pattern:

line 1: 4 syllables stressed
 line 2: 3 syllables stressed
 line 3: 4 syllables stressed
 line 4: 3 syllables stressed

is the same for *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. This is how verse 8 should be read:

Wáter, wáter, éverywhére,
 And áll the boárd's did shrínk;
 Wáter, wáter, éverywhére,
 Nor ány dróp to drínk.

Activity 2

Look back at your extract from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and read verses 5, 6 and 7 aloud, remembering the pattern of stresses:

line 1 4 stresses

line 2 3 stresses

line 3 4 stresses

line 4 3 stresses

Now write out verses 5, 6 and 7, and mark which syllables you think should be stressed with accents. Look back at the example of verse 8 to remind you.

When you have decided which syllables should be stressed, and written out the three verses, check the answer given at the end of this lesson. If the answer is different from your version, try reading them both aloud and try to decide which sounds better. Sometimes a line can be read in two different ways, but with the same number of stresses, for instance:

No bigger thán the Móon

or:

Nó bigger than the Móon

The first reading, 'No bigger thán the Móon' gives us a more even rhythm, but the second reading puts more emphasis on the size of the sun, 'Nó bigger than the Móon', and this second reading is preferable because it gives this dramatic emphasis to the size of the sun. It reminds us that the ancient mariner is telling us about strange events.





Rhyme and Other Poetic Devices

Apart from the stress pattern, there are other important patterns in this poem. You will remember that two of these are:

- Rhyming pattern
- Number of lines in each verse
(a verse is also called a stanza)

You will remember that we said that the pattern of lines per verse is 4 and that the rhyming pattern is:

line **2** rhymes with line **4**
line **1** does not rhyme with line **3**

<p>Activity 3</p>	<p>1. Go through the extract from <i>The Rime of the Ancient Mariner</i> and find all those stanzas which:</p> <p>(a) Have more than 4 lines</p> <p>(b) Do not fit the rhyme pattern (2+4 rhyme; 1+3 do not rhyme)</p> <p>Note down the stanza numbers for each question.</p>
	
	<p>2. In a few sentences, suggest why Coleridge decided to break the usual pattern for verses 3 and 4, and for verse 8.</p>
	

Suggested Answers to Activity Three

1. (a) 3; 4
(b) 3; 4; 8
2. Coleridge extended the number of lines to six in verses 3 and 4 to include the words of the sailors. Their words are added on to the basic verse rather like a chorus that repeats something important.

Verse 8 has lines 1 and 3 rhyming and lines 2 and 4 rhyming. Line 3 is a repetition of line 1. The alteration of the usual rhyme scheme makes this verse stand out from all the others, giving emphasis to what the verse says. Coleridge is emphasising the contrast between all the seawater around, and the lack of drinking water on the ship.

Other formal patterns in the poem, apart from rhyme, stress and number of lines in each stanza are:

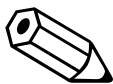
1. **Repetition of a whole line**, for example lines 1 and 3 in stanza 8
2. **Repetition of part of a line**;
3. **Internal rhyme**, where words within a line (not just line-endings) rhyme;
4. **Alliteration**, where a sequence of words in a line begin with the same letter.

Activity 4

Find examples of the formal patterns 2-4 listed above:

- (2) Repetition of part of a line
- (3) Internal rhyme
- (4) Alliteration

For each example you find, quote it, placing it in inverted commas and giving a line reference afterwards in brackets. Then explain in one or two sentences why you think the poet used this formal device.





Suggested Answers to Activity Four

Repetition of part of a line:

'Day after day, day after day' (stanza 7, l.29). The poet repeats this phrase within the line to suggest the monotonous repetition or succession of days, all the same as each other, while the ship is becalmed.

Another example of repetition within a line is, 'About, about' (stanza 10, l.41). The poet uses this repetition to suggest continual, rhythmic movement.

Internal rhyme:

'about/rout' (stanza 10, l.41). This internal rhyme suggests a rhythm, like the beat of a dance.

Two more examples are, 'blew/flew' and 'first/burst' (stanza 5, lines 21 and 23). Stanza 5 describes the boat moving fast in response to the wind, and these two internal rhymes link b-words and f-words to create a sense of smooth movement, speed and a pulsing rhythm.

Alliteration:

'breeze/blew' (stanza 5, l.21)

'foam/flew' (stanza 5, l.21)

'rose/right' (stanza 1, l.1)

'drop/drink' (stanza 8, l.36)

'reel/rout' (stanza 10, l.41)

All these alliterations emphasise a link between a noun and a verb. They all suggest that the two words go smoothly together in harmony with each other.

The next activity asks you to look carefully at the use of adjectives (describing words) within the poem.

In the poem, the experience of the Ancient Mariner and his friends changes sharply from pleasure to pain, and from good to bad.

Activity 5

Under the heading 'Positive' note down all the adjectives which connote* the good and the pleasurable, and under the heading 'Negative', note down all the adjectives you can find which connote the bad and the unpleasant.

When you have completed your two lists, check the two lists given below, and add any you have missed.

*to connote = to imply, suggest or signify



Suggested Answer to Activity Five

Positive: good right sweet fair glorious

Negative: slimy hot evil bloody hellish withered

The next activity asks you to use the knowledge you have gained about the structure and the patterns of the poem to write some verse of your own.

Activity 6

In the drought, all the sailors die except for the one who is telling the story, the Ancient Mariner. This part of the story is told in the section of the poem which comes after the one you have read. The story is still told in the first person ('I') by the Ancient Mariner.

Here is the information given by the mariner in three of the stanzas that tell this part of the story. The men have just died:

Stanza 1

I was all alone on the wide sea, and never a saint took pity on my soul in agony.

Stanza 2

The many beautiful men all lay dead. Only myself and a thousand slimy things were left alive.

Stanza 3

I looked upon the rotting sea and deck. I turned from the sea to the sight of the dead men.

Your task is to use the information to write three stanzas telling this part of the story. You may use the exact words you have been given, but sometimes you will need to add or omit words.

Before you start, and whilst you are working on this task, refer to the following checklist which reminds you of all the formal features you will need to make use of in order to write your own verses in the style of Coleridge's:

- Rhyme scheme
- Repetition of words
- Number of stressed syllables
- Repetition of phrases
- Number of lines in the stanza
- Alliteration
- Internal rhyme

You will need to write out your stanzas, then re-read and adjust them so that they are in keeping with the style of the original poem.

You will need to consider how to emphasise the mariner's solitude and the hugeness of the sea. Also you should consider using repetition to emphasise horror and the contrast between the dead men, and whatever is left alive. You should think about repeating any adjectives that emphasise the horror of the mariner's experience.

Try to divide each of your three stanzas into two couplets (pairs of lines), lines 1 and 2, and lines 3 and 4. Divide what you need to say in the stanza into two main messages and use a couplet to deal with each of these.

Here is an example:

'The death-fires danced around at night. The water burnt with colours of green, blue and white like a witch's oils.'

This can be turned into a stanza:

Internal rhyme

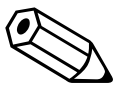
alliteration — 'About, about, in reel and rout
to emphasise — The death-fires danced at night;
dance rhythm — The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue and white.'

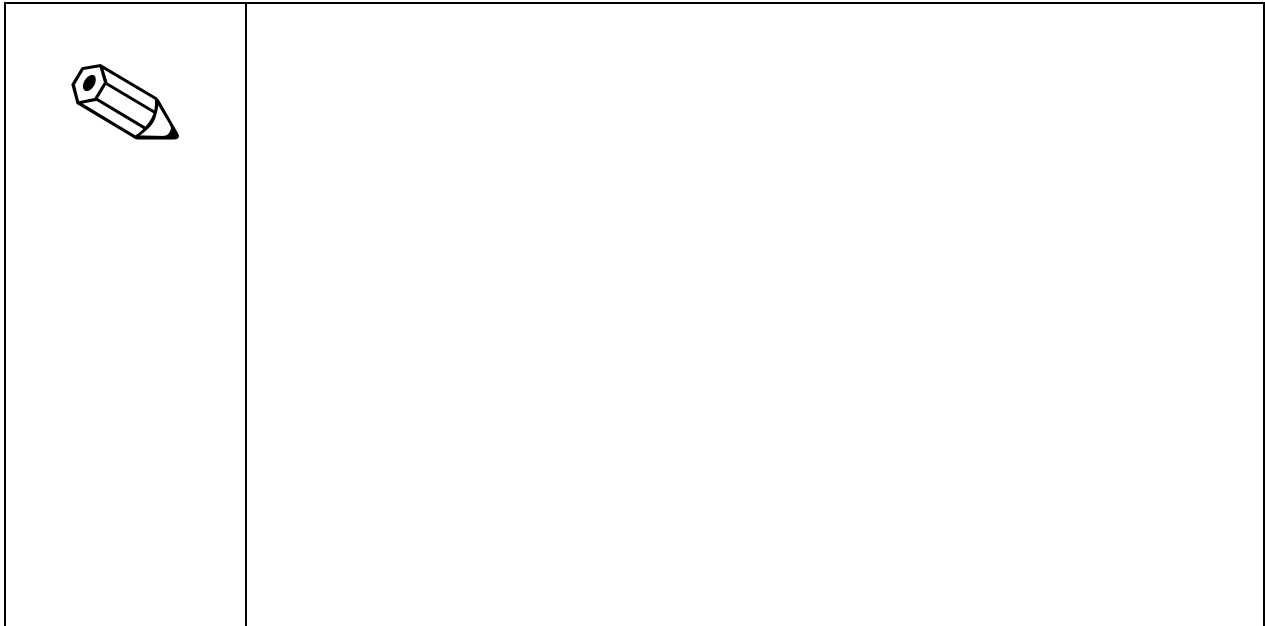
} *first part of statement*
} *second part of statement*

(stanza 10, 11. 41-44)

When you have completed your three stanzas, read them aloud to make sure you are satisfied with the rhythm.

Coleridge's version is given at the end of the lesson.





Other Poetic Forms

So far in the lesson we have concentrated on one particular verse form – the rhyming four-line stanza (the technical term for this is ‘quatrain’). This is not the only form that poetry can be written in – it comes in all shapes and sizes! Some different verse forms to the ones studied so far are listed below with examples (as well as in the glossary at the end of the course). You might find them particularly useful when analyzing the poetry from the pre-release booklet (see Module Four).

Free Verse

Free verse is verse which has neither regular rhyme, line length, nor rhythm (although it may have some of these things at certain points). It is sometimes divided into sections of varying length. Most free verse is modern – writers such as T.S. Eliot are famous for it! Here is an extract of free verse from Eliot’s poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (the poet is describing the fog on an autumn night):

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house and fell asleep.

You will notice that even though there is no obvious rhythm or rhyme scheme, the poet uses other devices to give form to his poetry. In many ways, this piece of verse is as 'crafted' and structured as the Coleridge extracts that you studied earlier in the lesson. Eliot uses repetition, alliteration and some well-placed rhyme words (leap / asleep) to draw this section of the poem together and unify it. You should also have noticed the extended personification of the fog as a cat.

Free verse often uses enjambment, which is when sentences or phrases 'run on' over the ends of lines.

The sentence starts here and
then jumps to the next line without a pause

The Eliot extract above, however, is 'end-stopped', which means that the end of lines fall where the natural pauses are (you can see that there is a comma at the end of every line).

The Ballad

Before most people could read and write, songs and poems were passed from one generation to another by word of mouth – the oral tradition. Many of these poems survived and have since been written down. Ballads are usually simple, yet effective narrative poems (they tell a story). The story narrated is usually a universal one (it often involves betrayal in love) and often has an unhappy ending. The verse form used is usually the quatrain and there is often some kind of repetition (of a verse, a phrase, or a chorus) which would help listeners to remember it.

A faithless shepherd courted me
He stole away my liberty:
When my poor heart was strange to men
He came and smiled and stole it then.

Anonymous

Sonnets

A sonnet is a fourteen-line poem with a patterned rhyme scheme. There are two main types of sonnet.

The Petrarchan (Italian) Sonnet is divided into two main sections, the octave (first eight lines) and the sestet (last six lines). The octave presents a problem or situation which is then resolved or commented on in the sestet. The most common rhyme scheme is A-B-B-A A-B-B-A C-D-E C-D-E, though there is flexibility in the sestet, such as C-D-C D-C-D. The terms 'octet' and 'sestet' (along with couplet and quatrain) can also be used in describing verses of that length in poems which are not sonnets.

The Shakespearean Sonnet, (perfected though not invented by Shakespeare), contains three quatrains and a couplet. The most common rhyme scheme is A-B-A-B C-D-C-D E-F-E-F G-G. In Shakespeare, the couplet often undercuts or contradicts the thought created in the rest of the poem.

Look at the example below and see if you can figure out the message of the poem, and what the couplet does to complement the message of the poem (hints: the word 'fair' is used to mean 'beauty'; 'untrimmed' can be taken to mean 'stripped of beauty'; 'owest' should be read as 'ownest'; 'lines' refers to the lines of the poem as well as wrinkles!):

Shall I compare thee...?

(Sonnet XVIII)

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And off is his gold complexion dimmed,
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest,
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee,

William Shakespeare

Summary

In this lesson you have completed a number of activities to show and develop your understanding of how the formal patterns and features of poetry can effectively describe personal experience and feelings; in this case extreme experiences and feelings produced by hardship and supernatural experiences. You have put your understanding into practice by writing using particular poetic forms, demonstrating your skills in handling a number of poetic conventions. Furthermore, you have learned about various poetic forms and their structures.

Suggested Answer to Activity Two

The fáir breeze bléw, the whíte foam fléw,
The Fúrrrow fólloved frée;
Wé were the fírst that ever búrst
Into that sílent séal!

All in a hót and cópper sky,
The blóody Sún, at nóon,
Ríght up abóve the mást did stánd,
Nó bígger than the Móon.

Dáy after dáy, dáy after dáy,
We stúck, nor bréath nor mótion;
As idle ás a páinted shíp
Upón a páinted ócean.

Suggested Answer to Activity Six

You can compare your version to the stanzas that Coleridge actually wrote:

Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.

The many men so beautiful!
And they all dead did lie;
And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.

I looked upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I looked upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay.

(Part IV, lines 232-243)