

# Poetry

A poem is a literary composition in verse, which often expresses deep feelings in an imaginative way. A famous poet once wrote that poetry consists of, 'the best words in the best order'. Writing that is not in poetic form is called prose.

There are many different types of poems, such as:

**Rhymed poetry:** the last words of the lines rhyme. The rhyming words can be at the end of every line or every second line.

**Free verse:** Free verse poetry that lacks a consistent rhyme, metrical pattern, or musical form.

**Haiku:** a 3–line poem. The Japanese invented the haiku poem.

**Example of a Haiku:**

## *Frigatebird*

The frigatebird soars

Dark and alone

Master of the skies

Compose a haiku of your own, which contains very effective imagery. It can describe a person, a creature, or a place. It should be concise but descriptive.

**Cinquain:** a 5–line poem.

Line 1: One word (a noun, the subject of the poem)

Line 2: Two words (adjectives that describe the subject in line 1)

Line 3: Three words (-ing action verbs–participles–that relate to the subject in line 1)

Line 4: Four words (a phrase or sentence that relates feelings about the subject in line 1)

Line 5: One word (a synonym for the subject in line 1 or a word that sums it up)

**Examples of Cinquain poems:**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Dog</i></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Loyal, Brave</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Loving, Playing, Guarding</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Best friend of man</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pet</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Cats</i></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Curious, playful,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Creeping, pouncing, sleeping,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Always fun to cuddle</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Feline</p>
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**Choose a topic and write your own Cinquain poem.**

**Ballad:** a poem which tells a story. It is a form of narrative verse that can be either poetic or musical. It is a melodious form of storytelling. Example of a ballad: *'The Gypsy Rover'*;  
Composer: Leo Maguire (1950's), Ireland

Example of a **Ballad:**

The gypsy rover came over the hill  
Down through the valley so shady  
He whistled and he sang till the green woods rang  
And he won the heart of a lady

He came at last to a mansion fine  
Down by the river Clady  
And there was music and there was wine  
For the Gypsy and his lady

"He is no Gypsy, my Father", she said  
"But Lord of the free lands all over  
And I will stay till my dying day  
With my whistling Gypsy Rover"

**Limerick:** A limerick is a five-line poem that consists of a single stanza, an AABBA rhyme scheme, and whose subject is a short, tale or description, often funny or silly.

**Example of a Limerick poem** by Robert Louis Stevenson (who also wrote Treasure Island)

There was an old man of the Cape  
Who made himself garments of crepe.  
When asked, 'Do they tear?'  
He replied, 'Here and there;  
But they're perfectly splendid for shape.'

**Another example:**

There was an Old Man with a beard,  
Who said, 'It is just as I feared!  
Two Owls and a Hen,  
Four Larks and a Wren,  
Have all built their nests in my beard!

## Rhyming poems

Here is a poem by Laura Ranger. Read it and consider the points that follow:

### *My Dog*

My dog Ali  
is as gold  
as a dollar coin.  
He is as old  
as a dinosaur.  
He's half deaf.  
All of his knees  
are worn out.  
He smells like  
rotten cheese.

When we take Ali for a walk,  
he rolls in mud puddles  
and snorts like a horse.  
He scavenges for food,  
and finds fish and chips  
with tomato sauce.  
He eats the paper too  
of course.

### Similes

The poem above makes particularly effective use of similes to build up a picture of the dog. A simile compares one thing with another, always using the words 'like', or 'as', to create a vivid image in the reader's mind. Examples:

The water was **as clear as glass**.

The drunk man blundered about **like a bull in a china shop**.

The lines in *My Dog* are arranged into two separate groups. Groups of lines in a poem are called stanzas. Read the poem again, then answer the following questions:

1. Why did Laura divide her poem My Dog into two stanzas? i.e. What is the main difference between what happens in the first stanza and the second?
2. List the pairs of words that rhyme.
3. Find and write out three similes from the poem, My Dog.

**For you to do:**

Write a poem of your own, about the same length as My Dog, describing a pet that you have known. Use some interesting and original similes in your poem, divide it into two stanzas and give it a suitable title.

**Prose and Poetry: Rupert Brooke**

Rupert Brooke (1887–1915) was a famous English poet who made a trip through the Pacific Islands in 1913. At the age of 26 he visited Hawaii, Sāmoa, Fiji, New Zealand and Tahiti before returning to England. He died very young, aged only 28, in World War I.

Rupert Brooke loved the South Pacific Islands and their people. Rupert Brooke described his **time in Sāmoa** in these words of *prose*:

You lie on a mat in a cool Sāmoan hut,  
And look out on the white sand under the high palms,  
And a gentle sea, and the black line of the reef a mile out,  
And moonlight over everything. . .  
And then among it all are the loveliest people in the world,  
Moving and dancing like gods and goddesses,  
Very quietly and mysteriously, and utterly content.  
It is sheer beauty, so pure that it's difficult to breathe it in.

While in Tahiti, Rupert Brooke fell in love with a girl he called **Mamua**. He wrote a poem called Tiare Tahiti. The following lines are from this *poem*:

Crown the hair and come away!  
Hear the calling of the moon,  
And the whispering scents that stray  
About the idle warm lagoon.  
Hasten, hand in human hand,  
Down the dark, the flowered way,

Along the whiteness of the sand,  
And in the water's soft caress,  
Wash the mind of foolishness,  
Mamua, until the day.

Write down three differences between the prose and poetry extracts by Rupert Brooke. Look at the way the words are arranged, the types of words used, whether there is rhyme and the person each piece of writing is intended for.

## Language Techniques

Poets use many language techniques to make their writing more effective. Some of these techniques are listed below. Study them, then answer the question that follows:

**Alliteration:** The repetition of the same letter or sound at the beginning, middle or end of several words in succession, e.g. Sing a song of sixpence.

**Imagery:** The use of language to produce vivid 'pictures' in the minds of readers, e.g. The wind licks its wounds in a dry creek bed. It snuffles in the shadows and mutters threats at the stones.

**Metaphor:** A figure of speech that calls a thing something else, to help describe it in the reader's mind, e.g. The government *bulldozed* the bill through parliament.

**Personification:** Giving a non-human object human characteristics, e.g. The moon's round face smiled down on them kindly.

**Rhyme:** Similarity of sound between words at the end of lines of poetry, e.g.

I once knew a girl with a heart like an icicle  
Who used to go riding around on a bicycle.

Find one example of alliteration, imagery, personification and rhyme from Rupert Brooke's lines from *Tiare Tahiti*. Write your answers in full sentences.

## Poem set in the Pacific Islands

**Ruth Gilbert**, a New Zealand poet, wrote a series of poems after visiting Sāmoa.

### *The Market*

Sack-laden trucks, crammed buses, hungry dogs, and heat;

Baskets, bright umbrellas, children, sandaled feet,  
and eager vendors squatting, cross-legged, their watchful eyes  
Half hidden behind mounds of morning merchandise:  
Taro, bread-fruit, green bananas, and gourmet ones they call  
Lady-fingers, golden, plump, sugar-sweet and small.  
Cocoa, like black putty, that willing house-boys brew  
Foolhardy guests, or, gleeful, buy in sticky lumps and chew.  
All colour, chaos, movement, until the noon sun stares  
On empty streets and weary forms stretched, sleeping, by their wares.

**Synonyms:** A synonym is a word similar in meaning to another word. For example, synonyms for the word 'sleepy' would be: drowsy, tired, weary and worn-out. Use your dictionary to help you find synonyms for the following words, and then list them in your exercise book.

eager

gleeful

plump

**Adjectives:** What is the important difference between 'The Market' at the beginning and at the end of the poem? Use adjectives of your own to describe what the market is like at the beginning and end of the poem (three words for each).

### **Write a poem of your own**

Write a poem of your own, on any subject which appeals to you. Make it as interesting and well written as you can. As you write, make sure you follow the guidelines below.

- Your poem should be at least 10 lines long.
- It may or may not have rhyming lines.
- It should be arranged in more than one stanza.
- It should include at least three of the following figures of speech: alliteration, imagery, a metaphor, a simile, personification, adjectives.

**Reference:** Year 10 English Curriculum, Samoa

# Poetry in the Bible

<https://overviewbible.com/poetry/>

## Types:

### 1. The same thought repeated

It's common for biblical poets to craft two or more lines that share the same thought. Sometimes the second line restates the first, such as David's cry for help at the beginning of the Psalms:

LORD, how many are my foes!

How many rise up against me!

(Ps 3:1)

And sometimes the second line builds upon or intensifies the first. A good example of this is how the main speaker in the book of Ecclesiastes describes the repetitive cycle of the universe, particularly how not only is the ocean ever full, but that the rivers never empty:

All streams flow into the sea,

yet the sea is never full.

To the place the streams come from,

there they return again.

(Ec 1:7)

### 2. Contrast and comparison

Sometimes poets choose to put opposing thoughts side by side to show make their point. These thoughts don't necessarily voice opposing ideas—usually they're describing two sides of the same principle.

The prologue to the book of Proverbs gives us a classic example of one thought being expressed by contrasting two opposing outcomes:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,

but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

(Pr 1:7)

These contrasts can occur on a larger scale than a single verse. For example, the beginning of Psalms presents the reader with two sides of the same coin. Blessings await those who delight in the Torah:

Blessed is the one

who does not walk in step with the wicked

or stand in the way that sinners take

or sit in the company of mockers,  
but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and who meditates on his law day and night.  
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither—  
whatever they do prospers.

(Ps 1:1–3)

Those who follow God’s laws are compared to a healthy, thriving, fruit-giving tree. But those who oppose God’s ways get the opposite treatment—the psalmist compares them to the worthless part of a plant that’s left to blow away in the wind:

### **Where are the books of poetry in the Bible?**

Christians put five of these books of poetry in the middle of the Old Testament: right after the books of “history” (Joshua–Esther) and before the books of “prophecy” (Isaiah–Malachi).

However, this is not how these books were arranged during the time of Jesus, Peter, and Paul.

The ancient Jews put the books of our Old Testament (which they called the Scriptures) into three general groups:

The Law, which tells the story of how Israel and their God came together

The Prophets, which tells the story of how Israel rejected God and was exiled from their land, often through long, poetic discourses.

And the Writings, a collection of documents that helped the Jews remain loyal to their God despite being scattered across foreign empires.

There was no “poetry” section—because poetry is everywhere in the Old Testament. In fact, the poetry-heavy books in the Prophets and Writings account for more content in the Bible than the entire New Testament.

### **Books of wisdom in the Bible (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes)**

These three books help followers of God think about how the world works, how it should work, and how to deal with the difference between the two. The most celebrated act of wisdom in the Bible is God’s creation of heaven and earth: the God of Israel brings a complex, beautiful world out of cosmic chaos. These books invite the reader to participate in God’s wisdom by bringing justice, mercy, and insight to the world around us.



## **Job**

Job begins in tragedy. It's a famous Bible story about an innocent man who loses everything. Job makes his case to God, demanding an explanation for the hardship he's experiencing. God responds by showing Job just how big and complex the world is—and the kind of wisdom it takes to create and sustain such a world. Job (like the reader) concedes that God's wisdom operates at a scale that sometimes we humans just can't see.

## **Proverbs**

Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings from the ancient near east, many of which are associated with the wise King Solomon. This book invites the reader to gain more and more wisdom, bringing more of our decisions and actions in alignment with God's good order for the universe.

## **Ecclesiastes**

Ecclesiastes explores the unpredictability of life: we have an idea of how the world should work, but it rarely goes that way. And no matter how wise you are, or how hard you work, or how pious your faith, you don't have any guarantees. The book encourages readers to be loyal to God and enjoy the simple things in life—because you really don't know what's going to happen tomorrow.

## **Psalms, Song of Songs, Lamentations** (Books of song in the Bible)

The other three books in this section are collections of poems, several of which were probably accompanied by music. Some of these songs are written as prayers to be sung to God, some are written to be sung to other people. There are at least 185 songs in the Bible—and most of them are found in these books.

## **Psalms**

The book of Psalms is a five-volume collection of poems that the Jews used to worship and understand God. It begins with two promises: blessings for those who delight in the Torah (which also has five parts), and a future Messianic King who will restore Jerusalem and rule the nations in peace and justice. The book calls readers to praise the Lord, and trust in his justice, mercy, and love.

## **Song of Solomon**

The Song of Songs, which is associated with Solomon, is a romance poem that paints a picture of paradise found in human love. This little book portrays love as an intense and powerful thing, dangerous and beautiful.

## **Lamentations**

The little book of Lamentations is a collection of five dirges, each of which mourns the fall of Jerusalem. It expresses anguish and sadness, but also hope that God will keep his promises, even when humans don't prove to be so dependable.