

The Grammar
of
Poetry
(*TEACHER'S EDITION*)

IMITATION IN WRITING

by Matt Whiting

Imitation in Writing

The Grammar of Poetry - Teacher's Edition

Background:

We are commanded in Scripture to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ. We are also commanded to imitate those brothers and sisters who, through faith and patience, have inherited the promises. To imitate something or someone means:

- To do or try to do after the manner of; to follow the example of; to copy in action.
- To make or produce a copy or presentation of; to copy, reproduce.
- To be, become, or make oneself like; to assume the aspect of semblance of; to simulate.

This God-sanctioned method of learning is an essential tool for educating young people. For example, how is it that we teach a child to perform simple physical skills such as throwing and catching? “Hold your hands **like this**. Step forward as you throw **like this**. Look at **this ‘a’**. Trace **this letter**. Now, you try to make an ‘a’ **like this one**.” Imitation. How is it that we teach art? At Logos School students learn how to paint by imitating master painters of the past. “**This** is a good painting. Let’s see if you can **reproduce it**.” Imitation. How is it that music is taught, or reading, or math? Very often the best instruction in any of these areas necessarily includes imitation. Why, when it comes to teaching young people writing, do we educators regularly neglect this effective tool?

Educators in seventeenth century England knew the value of imitation as a tool through which they could teach style, particularly in the area of writing. The primary method of imitation in these English grammar schools was called **Double Translation**. In a double translation the teacher would translate a Latin work into English. The student was to copy this English translation over, paying close attention to every word and its significance. Then the student was to write down the English and Latin together, one above the other, making each language answer to the other. Afterwards the student translated the original Latin to English on his own. This was the first part of the translation. The second part took place ten days afterward when the student was given his final English translation and required to turn it back into good Latin.

Benjamin Franklin wrote of a similar exercise that he employed to educate himself a century later. When he was a young man, he came across a particular piece of writing that he delighted in, *The Spectator*. *The Spectator* is a series of 555 popular essays published in 1711 and 1712. These essays were intended to improve manners and morals, raise the cultural level for the middle-class reader, and popularize serious ideas in science and philosophy. They were written well, the style was excellent, and Franklin wanted to imitate it. Here is Franklin’s method of “double translation” regarding *The Spectator*:

With the view (imitate this great work) I took some of the papers, and making short hints of the sentiments in each sentence, laid them by a few days, and when, without looking at the book, tried to complete these papers again, by expressing each hinted sentiment at length, and as fully as it had been expressed before, in any suitable words that should occur to me. Then I compared my Spectator with the original, discovered some of my faults, and corrected them.

But he realized that he needed a greater stock of words in order to add variety and clarity of thought to his writing.

Therefore I took some of the tales in the Spectator, and turned them into verse; and, after a time, when I had pretty well forgotten the prose, turned them back again. I also sometimes jumbled my collection of hints into confusion, and after some weeks endeavored to reduce them into the best order, before I began to form the sentences and complete the subject. This was to teach me method in the arrangement of thoughts. By comparing my work with the original, I discovered many faults and corrected them; but I sometimes had the pleasure to fancy that, in particulars of small consequence, I had been fortunate enough to improve the method or the language, and this encouraged me to think that I might in time become to be a tolerable English writer, of which I was extremely ambitious.

Now the question is; “How can we employ a similar methodology?”

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INSTRUCTIONS

1. The Schedule: *There are thirty lessons in this text. I have found it profitable to cover three lessons per week (M, W, F), each lesson lasting approximately 30 minutes.*

2. The Lesson: *It is helpful for the teacher to read through the new information at the top of each lesson with the class in order to clarify and check for understanding; although, a sharp student could progress through much of this text individually with a minimum of help.*

3. The Practice: *After reading and discussing the new material, the teacher should direct the class to consider the example for that lesson. The class will then work through each practice activity together to insure that the students have a thorough understanding of the concept.*

4. The Review: *After the first few lessons there will be review questions for the student to complete on his own. This helps to keep the important information familiar, and it provides additional practice of previously covered concepts.*

5. The Imitation: *It is important that each imitation exercise be properly scanned by the student prior to his imitating it (lessons 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26 and 29). Therefore, scan the poem together as a class to insure that each student is imitating the correct meter. I do not require my students to reproduce the exact rhyme scheme.*

6. The Exam: *A final exam is included in this text. It is imperative that the students keep their poetry sheets in order to refer to them throughout the review exercises and so that they will be prepared to study effectively for the cumulative final exam. A poetry folder is a great idea.*

7. Commencement: *The completion of this text should not mark the graduation of your students from poetry. Once your students have completed this book and understand the “grammar of poetry” they are then ready to take the training wheels off and begin writing their own. This is one reason for studying poetry toward the beginning of the year!*

8. Ideas for Additional Poems: *After your students have completed this text and they are ready to tackle writing poetry on their own, here are a few ideas to keep them churning out witty, wise, and well-formed verse:*

A. Prose-Poetry-Prose: Give the students an Aesop’s Fable, Fairy Tale or Greek Myth and have them take down a few notes to help them remember the content. (See other Imitation In Writing books for more detail.) After turning in the prose text of the story, have the students compose a poetic version of the same. Later, this poem can be translated back into prose. This is a wonderful way to get students started on superb poetry and prose, especially if they have a difficult time generating ideas of their own.

B. Historical Poetry: Have the students write a poem about some aspect of what you are studying in history. The more history they know, the easier it will be to craft it into verse.

C. Poetic Book Report: After reading a literature book, have the students compose a poem based on the book. It could summarize the book, describe one character or give a description of a favorite scene.

D. Cartoon Poetry: One of our favorite poetry themes is cartoon poetry. Pass out a different Far Side cartoon to each student or have each bring in his own to write poetry about, and you will have a highly motivating and entertaining assignment to grade!

E. Epiphany Graph: Another good idea to get your students writing poetry is to simply have them turn to their epiphany graphs and select a good topic that they are familiar with. Most students can go on and on about some high point, low point or turning point in their lives.

9. Parting Comments: *Some students (and teachers) are very tidy-minded and want everything, including scansion, to work out in a mathematically precise fashion, every time, for every line of verse. Poetry will give them fits unless they begin to learn to appreciate the variation, intricacy, and mystery of pictures and music as they communicate truth honestly, goodness well, and beauty in its cleanest figure.*

Make sure that your students can accurately “hear” the music of a poem before they begin throwing breves and stresses around. Those who are gifted musically or who have musical training will have a distinct advantage when it comes time to scan, while others need to take their time and learn to “listen” as the poem sings.

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What is Poetry?

Poetry has been defined in many different ways. For our purposes, we will define poetry as pictures and music. A good poet paints pictures with his words. Much of this painting takes place in figurative language. Specific figures of speech are known as tropes; these are the pictures of poetry. If tropes are the pictures of poetry then what is the music? The music of poetry contains two parts, meter and rhyme. Meter and rhyme work together in order to produce the musical sound that most poems contain. There will be more about that later; for now it is important that you remember the definition of poetry – pictures and music.

Epiphany Graph

In order to write a good poem, you will need to have a meaningful topic to write about. Below is an epiphany graph designed to help you organize your topics. The word epiphany means to “show” or “reveal.” By completing the graph, you will be listing items that show or reveal something significant about you.

Directions: In the columns below write down **High Points** – the best things that have ever happened to you (success, honor, happiness, etc.), **Low Points** – the worst things that have ever happened to you (injuries, failures, embarrassing moments, etc.), **Turning Points** – events that have changed you in some way (a lesson you learned, an idea that finally “clicked,” etc.), **Special People** (relatives, friends, heros, historical characters, etc.), **Special Places** (home, vacation spot, etc.), and **Special Possessions** (books, games, toys, weapons, etc.). Write as many ideas as you can in each section.

TOPIC IDEAS FOR POETRY		
HIGH POINT	LOW POINT	TURNING POINT
SPECIAL PEOPLE	SPECIAL PLACES	SPECIAL POSESSIONS

Thankfulness in Poetry

In order for you to become a good poet, you will need to become an avid reader of poetry. Reading lots of great poetry will not be much fun unless you enjoy it; this brings up a very important point. Whenever you begin to study something for the first time, you have a choice to make. Are you going to like this subject and relish it or will it be sour to your tastes and drive you away? You will find in your study of poetry, as in other subjects, that if you determine to set your affections upon it from the beginning that you will have a delightful time learning to read and write poetry along the way. In order to do this, be thankful for the chance to learn about poetry. When it is time to study poetry during the course of your week, think of it as a time in which you *get* to learn poetry instead of a time when you *have* to. Poetry will not always be easy, but the more thankful and tenacious you are when you study it, the more you will learn and enjoy as you study it. In short, teach yourself to love poetry.

Reading Poetry

In this lesson you will learn how to read, memorize, and recite poetry that you are interested in. The first thing you should do when you attempt a poem is to read the title. This might seem too obvious to need pointing out, but consider for a moment the importance of the title. Oftentimes in poetry the title contains information that must be understood in order for the reader to comprehend what the poem is about. The title might contain the setting of the poem, the time in which the poem takes place, or the name of a person the poem is describing. After reading the title, make a guess at what the poem is going to be about. Next read the poem quietly to yourself. As you read it, try to figure out how the poem should sound. Do not stop at the end of each line; pay attention to the punctuation as you read. Poetry is very similar to music in that it has a distinct rhythm or beat that you need to detect. Finally, read the poem aloud, this time paying very close attention to what the poem means. Let's review the three steps to go through when reading a poem for the first time:

1. Read the **title** and guess what the poem is about.
2. Read the poem quietly to detect the **rhythm**.
3. Read the poem aloud to determine the **meaning**.

As you think about the meaning of a poem, you will find that it will naturally fall into one of the following categories:

1. Narrative Poetry: poems that tell stories.
2. Nature Poetry: poems about creation.
3. Love Poetry: poems that sing of friendship or romantic love.
4. Descriptive Poetry: poems that explain or describe something.
5. Historical Poetry: poems about countries, peoples, wars, etc.
6. Religious Poetry: poems about God or man's relationship with him.
7. Humorous Poetry: poems to make you laugh.

Of course, some poems that you read will be a combination of the types listed above. Many historical poems tell a story resulting in what is called a historical narrative. If the story is a funny one, it could be described as a humorous historical narrative. The important thing to do is to figure out which type(s) of poetry you are reading so that you are better prepared to understand what it is trying to say.

Practice

A. Read the following poems. (Remember to go through all three steps: title, rhythm, meaning.) Label what type of poetry it is (narrative, nature, etc.).

Nature Poetry / Religious Poetry

(type of poetry)

FRAGMENT

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower – but *if* I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.
– Alfred Tennyson

Historical Poetry

(type of poetry)

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!
– Katherine Lee Bates

Descriptive Poetry

(type of poetry)

THE OWL AND THE FOX

There was an old Fox
That lived under the rocks
At the foot of the huge oak tree;
And of all of the foxes
That ever did live
There was none so bad as he.
His step was soft,
With his padded feet,
But his claws were sharp beneath;
And sharp were his eyes,
And sharp were his ears,
And sharp were his terrible teeth.

And the dreariest place
You ever did see,
Was this old Fox's den;
It was strewn with the down
Of the tender Chick,

And the quills of the mother hen,
Where he dragged them in
This dismal den
And piled their bones together,
And killed them dead,
And sucked their blood,
And ate their flesh,
And picked their bones,
And warmed his bed with the feathers...
– Unknown

Love Poetry

(type of poetry)

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 often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd:
But thy eternal Summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.
– William Shakespeare

Religious Poetry

(type of poetry)

TRINITY SUNDAY

Lord, who hast form'd me out of the mud,
And hast redeem'd me through thy blood,
And sanctifi'd me to do good;

Purge all my sins done heretofore:
For I confess my heavy sore,
And I will strive to sin no more.

Enrich my heart, mouth, hands in me,
With faith, with hope, with charity;
That I may run, rise, rest with thee.
– George Herbert

SIMILE

The first trope, or picture, that we will discuss is the simile. A **simile** is a comparison of two dissimilar things using the words *like*, *as*, or *than*. This is called an explicit comparison because it is so obvious that one thing is being compared to another; the words *like*, *as*, or *than* give the comparison away. An important point to remember is that the two items being compared must be very dissimilar in order for it to be a simile. If I were to say, “That hog eats like an animal,” it would not be a simile because a hog is an animal. Whereas, if I said, “That man eats like a hog,” the two things being compared are dissimilar enough to produce an effective picture in our minds, and therein lies the power of a simile.

Practice and Review

A. Circle the two dissimilar things being compared and underline *like*, *as*, or *than* in the following similes.

Example: The poorly mannered (schoolboy) ate like a (pig).

1. Her (hair) drooped round her pallid cheek, like (seaweed) on a clam.

2. On the abandoned and lifeless rocky island, a single (lighthouse) guarded the coastline like a loyal, solitary (sentry).

3. The (staff) of his spear was like a weaver's (beam).

4. She had (cheeks) like (roses).

5. A fatal (habit) settles upon one like a (vampire) and sucks his blood.

6. A merry (heart) doeth good like a (medicine); but a broken spirit drieth the bones. Prov. 17:22

7. The (wrath) of a king is as (messengers) of death: but a wise man will pacify it. Prov. 16:14

B. Write three of your own similes.

C. This is a poem of similes. Fill in each blank so that the rhyming pattern is not broken.

As wet as a fish-as dry as a bone;

As live as a bird-as dead as a stone;

As plump as a partridge-as poor as a rat

As strong as a horse-as weak as a cat;

As hard as a flint-as soft as a mole;

As white as a dove-as black as a coal;

As plain as a staff-as rough as a bear;

As light as a drum-as free as the air;

As heavy as lead-as light as a feather;

As steady as time-uncertain as weather;

As hot as an oven-as cold as a frog;

As gay as a lark-as sick as a dog;

As savage as tigers-as mild as a dove;

As stiff as a poker-as limp as a glove;

As blind as a bat-as deaf as a post;

As cool as a cucumber-as warm as toast;

As flat as a flounder-as round as a ball;

As blunt as a hammer-as sharp as an awl;

As brittle as glass-as tough as gristle;

As neat as a pin-as clean as a whistle;

As red as a rose-as square as a box;

As bold as a thief-as sly as a fox.

D. Label each one of the following sentences as *Simile* or *Other*.

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1. The rain looks like pearls upon a string | <u>simile</u> |
| 2. My love is like a red, red rose. | <u>simile</u> |
| 3. That lion eats like an animal. | <u>other</u> |
| 4. Mother smiled as she walked in the room. | <u>other</u> |
| 5. The lips of the adulteress drip honey. | <u>other</u> |
| 6. Her speech is as smooth as oil. | <u>simile</u> |
| 7. Your father's commandment is a lamp. | <u>other</u> |
| 8. Your words are sharp as a two-edged sword. | <u>simile</u> |
| 9. He looks like he is hungry. | <u>other</u> |
| 10. Children are like poppies spread about. | <u>simile</u> |

E. Define the following words in complete sentences.

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 1. poetry | <u>Poetry is pictures and music.</u> |
| 2. trope | <u>A trope is a figure of speech.</u> |
| 3. epiphany | <u>An epiphany is a showing or revealing.</u> |
| 4. simile | <u>A simile is a comparison of the dissimilar things using the words like, as, or than.</u> |

RIDDLE RENDEZVOUS

From time to time there will be one or two riddles at the bottom of your poetry worksheet. Some are *posers* and others are *chestnuts*, but all are just for fun and should be attempted after the worksheet has been completed! Solutions can be found on our web site: www.logosschool.com (go to the link for Curriculum Materials and find this book)

#1 Runs over fields and woods all day
Under the bed at night sits not alone,
With long tongue hanging out,
A-waiting for a bone.

#2 The beginning of eternity
The end of time and space
The beginning of every end,
And the end of every place.

RHYME

A **rhyme** is a pair of words which end with the same sounds but begin with different ones. Rhyme is not necessary in poetry; in fact, some of the best poetry is written in what is called **blank verse**, poetry that does not rhyme. However, rhyme does help to cement lines together and to add beauty and meaning to a poem. There are two different types of rhyme that we will initially concern ourselves with. The first is **full rhyme**; it is seen when a pair of words end with exact-sounding vowels and consonants (e.g. spring-wing, cat-hat). The second, **slant rhyme**, is defined as a pair of words which end with approximate-sounding vowels or consonants (e.g. death-earth, lectures-directors). Full rhyme produces a clean and clear effect while slant rhyme causes a feeling of tension or uneasiness. Skillful poets use full and slant rhyme to compliment what they are trying to communicate in their poems.

Rhyme Scheme

A rhymed-poem will have a certain rhyme scheme that each stanza follows. (A **stanza** is simply a paragraph of poetry.) A **rhyme scheme** is a combination of letters which represent the rhyming pattern of a poem. These letters are called variables. In order to determine the rhyme scheme of a poem, label the last word of each line with a letter. Lines whose last words rhyme will receive the same letter. It does not matter which letters you use as long as the rhyming words receive the same ones.

Practice and Review

A. Determine the rhyme schemes of the following stanzas. Label the last word of each line with a letter of the alphabet. Lines whose last words share the same sound also share the same letter. When you are done, write the rhyme scheme out horizontally on the line above the poem.

Example:

ABABCCCC

Sweetest Saviour, if my *soul* A
 Were but worth the *having*, B
 Quickly should I then *control* A
 Any thought of *waiving*. B
 But when all my care and *pains* C
 Cannot give the name of *gains* C
 To thy wretch so full of *stains*, C
 What delight or hope *remains*? C

AA

Who read a chapter when they rise, A
 Shall ne’re be troubled with ill eyes. A

Triplet: a stanza with three lines.

AAA

Winds still work: it is their plot, A
 Be the season cold, or hot: A
 Hast thou sighs, or hast thou not? A

Quatrain: a stanza with four lines.

ABCB

As Robin Hood in the forest strayed, A
 All under the greenwood tree, B
 He was aware of a brave young man, C
 As fine as fine might be. B

But that thou art my wisdom, Lord, A
 And both mine eyes are thine, B
 My mind would be extremely stirr’d C
 For missing my design. B

B. Similes are easy to identify because they contain one of the following three words: like , as , or than .
Choose three topics from your epiphany graph and write a simile about each one.

Example: *My father is as strong as a bear.*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

C. Define the following words in complete sentences.

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 1. simile | <i>A simile is a comparison of two dissimilar things using the words like, as, or than.</i> |
| 2. rhyme | <i>A rhyme is a pair of words which end with the same sounds but begin with different ones.</i> |
| 3. full rhyme | <i>A full rhyme is a pair of words which end with exact-sounding vowels and consonants.</i> |
| 4. slant rhyme | <i>A slant rhyme is a pair of words which end with approximate - sounding vowels and consonants.</i> |
| 5. stanza | <i>A stanza is a paragraph of poetry.</i> |

RIDDLE RENDEZVOUS

#3 Without a bridle or a saddle,
Across a ridge I ride and straddle;
And every one, by help of me,

Though almost blind, is made to see
Then tell me pretty dame,
And witty master, what's my name?