

GETTING INTO POETRY by Barb Miller

Poetry Workshop 2: Rhyming Experiences

Plot

Rhyming poetry was used as an aid to memory. Whether the story was sung or recited, the rhyming lines helped troubadours, storytellers and actors to remember those lines. Their other aid to memory was the cadence of the lines, also called the meter, the number of accents in the line.

A basic rhyme pattern is the couplet, two lines that end with a rhyme. But you can choose any rhyme scheme you want for your quatrain.

A quatrain is a four-line stanza with at least one rhyme. We will use letters of the alphabet to mark rhyme repeats and slashes to mark the accents.

A/ll in a ho/t and co/pper sk/y,	<i>a</i>
The blo/ody Su/n, at no/on,	<i>b</i>
Right u/p abo/ve the ma/st did sta/nd	<i>c</i>
No bi/gger tha/n the Mo/on.	<i>b</i>

From "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Alternative or additional suggested readings: "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost, "There is No Frigate Like a Book" by Emily Dickinson, "The Land of Counterpane" by Robert Louis Stevenson.

What is the rhyme scheme of the stanza from Coleridge?

Many rhyming poems are written in iambic pentameter. That means there are 5 feet to a line. (A foot consists of one accented and one unaccented syllable.)

Tetrameter would have four beats or accents to a line and trimeter three beats to the line. Going the other direction, hexameter would be 6 beats to the line and heptameter 7 beats to the line.

The meter of this stanza from Coleridge is tetrameter for lines *a* and *c* and trimeter for the two rhyming lines *b*.

Write down three experiences you might like to write a quatrain about, one of them from a vacation period. If you worked during a vacation time, you can use that job as an experience.

To get started, here are two stanzas of a vacation poem. Does it or doesn't it sound like a good experience?

Sample: My Favorite Vacation

When I was fourteen I took a canoe trip. *a*
We paddled all day, then pitched a tent. *b*
It was dirty and smelly and covered with blood. *c*
And in one spot was a terrible rip. *a*

I soon found out what had caused all this. *d*
Hordes of mosquitoes as big as crows. *e*
They attacked every inch of skin we exposed *e*
Bad as it was, some things I still miss. *d*

What is the rhyme scheme of the first stanza? Of the second stanza?

What is the meter of the first stanza? Of the second stanza?

Now add a quatrain that might explain why the narrator had a good time.

If you would rather, you can write a quatrain about one of your vacation experiences.

You can vary the rhyme scheme from stanza to stanza, but it a good idea to stick with one pattern of meter.

Read your quatrain aloud to see if the meter is consistent.

Did you have trouble thinking of rhymes? You can make use of a rhyming dictionary.

But here is a fun idea to make rhymes. Make up your own words. Example:

Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

From "The Jabberwok" by Lewis Carroll

We don't know what many of these words mean, but in context we can get a visual image from the poem. Chose something from your vacation experience and construct a word from two others.

Examples: Good + dog = godog, fell + swoop = fwoop, nasty + cough = naugh

Another way to construct words is to turn them around. Examples: hedgehog = gohegdeh, cow = woc, horse = esroh.

Try a couplet or longer poem using at least one constructed word to create a rhyme. Example:

Wollypog Swamp

In the early darkling,	<i>a</i>
the pond sounded frogling,	<i>a</i>
Sending peeps of putrid pleasure,	<i>b</i>
From the wollypog weir,	<i>c</i>
Where glubbling and snorking,	<i>a</i>
Ribbiting and chortling,	<i>a</i>
Made a wollypog concert,	<i>d</i>
A feast for the ear.	<i>c</i>

- by B. Miller, 2003

An alternative reading would be “The Panther” by Ogden Nash.

“... if called by a panther,
Don't anther.”

or “The Three Foxes” by A. A. Milne

“Once upon a time there were three foxes
Who didn't wear stockings, and they didn't wear sockses ...”

Besides constructed rhyme words, what other device does the Wollypog poem use to accentuate sounds?

Alliteration means similar consonant sounds, such as in “peeps of putrid pleasure.”

Onomatopoeia - to mimic the real sound, “Baaa” for a sheep, “ribbit” for frogs

Assonance - similar vowel sounds, like the o's in “wollypog.”

A popular short form of rhymed poetry that is a lot of fun is the limerick.

Sample:

There was an old sailor on the dock	<i>a</i>
Who dropped his chew in the slock,	<i>a</i>
He climbed into the mud,	<i>b</i>
To fetch back his cud,	<i>b</i>
But lost both his shoe and his sock.	<i>a</i>

- B Miller, 2006

Choose a subject, and write a first line. Think of a second line that rhymes. You now have a couplet. Think of a third and fourth line that rhyme: another couplet.

Find a fifth line to rhyme with the first two and you have a limerick. The last line often ends with the same word as the first line.

There are many more elaborate rhyme schemes. Sonnets have 14 lines and various rhyme schemes. For example:

Shakespearean sonnets: *abab cdcd efef gg*

Spenserian sonnets: *abab bcbc cdcd ee*

But don't let complex rhyme schemes scare you. Simple rhymes can be just as satisfying. Think of rhyme and meter in poetry as a game. It is also a way to be concise and learn to weigh words. Can you see how both the rhyme and the meter would be an aid to memory for anyone who could not write the poem down, for example, an actor who had to speak from memory?