

# Analyzing the Structure of a Poem

**CCSS**

**RL.7.5:** . . . Analyze how a . . . poem's form or structure (e.g., . . . sonnet) contributes to its meaning.

Theme: *A Family Scrapbook*

Poetry is writing that uses words, sound, and structure in special ways to express meaning. Sometimes, poets arrange their thoughts in **stanzas**, or groups of lines. Stanzas may have a particular pattern of rhyming words. Sometimes poets write in **free verse**. In free verse, the arrangement of lines is irregular, and there may be no **rhyme scheme**, or pattern of rhyme, at all. Poets may also repeat certain sounds, words, or patterns to call attention to them, or create a rhythm.

**Read the poem excerpt below, which describes the tasks a mother must do each day. Notice the rhyme scheme, which is based on the last sound of each line. When two lines have the same rhyming sound, they are assigned the same letter. Also, look for the groups of verbs at the end of each line, and circle them.**

**from "Song of the Old Mother"**

*by William Butler Yeats*

**Rhyme Scheme**

I rise in the dawn, and I kneel and blow	A
Till the seed of the fire flicker and glow;	A
And then I must scrub and bake and sweep	B
Till stars are beginning to blink and peep . . .	B

**Read the chart to learn how the structural elements in this poem contribute to its meaning.**

Structural Element	What It Adds to the Poem
Rhyme scheme	The AABB rhyme scheme helps tie together the parts of each idea— starting the fire, and cleaning all day.
Repeated pattern	Ending each line with a group of verbs suggests the day-in and day-out nature of the woman's work.
<b>Poem's Meaning:</b> The work of a mother is ongoing and difficult.	

Listen closely the next time you read or hear a poem read aloud. Ask yourself these questions to better understand the poem's meaning: how is the poem organized? Does it rhyme, or is it free verse? Does the poet use repetition? If so, what effect does it create? Understanding poetry can be difficult, but asking questions like these can make it easier.



Read the poem below, which is about a child woken in the night by a hooting owl.

Genre: Lyric Poem

## A Barred Owl *by Richard Wilbur*

The warping night air having brought the boom  
Of an owl's voice into her darkened room,  
We tell the wakened child that all she heard  
Was an odd question from a forest bird,  
5 Asking of us, if rightly listened to,  
"Who cooks for you?" and then "Who cooks for you?"  
Words, which can make our terrors bravely clear  
Can also thus domesticate a fear,  
And send a small child back to sleep at night  
10 Not listening for the sound of stealthy flight  
Or dreaming of some small thing in a claw  
Borne up to some dark branch and eaten raw.

**Explore how to answer this question:** "How does the structure of the poem contribute to its meaning?"

"A Barred Owl" is a lyric poem, or a poem that expresses the speaker's feelings. In this poem, parents want to comfort their frightened child, even though they realize the owl may not be as innocent as they tell her it is.

**In the poem above, number the stanzas and think about the meaning in each one. Mark the rhyme scheme and underline any instances of repetition. Then, complete the following chart.**

Structural Element	What It Adds to the Poem
Stanzas	
Rhyme scheme	The AABB rhyme scheme is similar to a lullaby used to help a child fall asleep.
Repetition	
<b>Poem's Meaning:</b>	

**With a partner, take turns discussing how you interpreted the poem's meaning. Citing evidence from the text, explain how the different structural elements helped you come to that conclusion.**



## Close Reading

This is a sonnet, a lyric poem with 14 lines. Think about how the phrase “count the ways” in the first line relates to phrases in other lines. **Underline** the phrase that is repeated throughout the poem.

## Hint

Look closely at the repeated phrases that you underlined. How do they connect to the poem’s title?

Read the poem, then use the Close Reading and Hint to help you answer the question.

Genre: Sonnet

### How Do I Love Thee? *by Elizabeth Barrett Browning*

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.  
5 I love thee to the level of everyday’s  
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;  
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.  
I love thee with a passion put to use  
10 In my old griefs, and with my childhood’s faith.  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints,—I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.

Reread the poem. Then explain how the poet has used repetition to express the speaker’s feelings.

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## Show Your Thinking

Citing evidence from the poem, explain how the poem’s structure helps you understand the speaker’s feelings.

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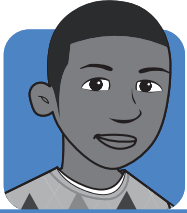
With a partner, list and discuss the ways in which the speaker answers the question “How Do I Love Thee?”





Read the poem. Use the Study Buddy and Close Reading to guide your reading.

Genre: Ode



An ode is a type of lyric poem that celebrates something. I will keep this in mind as I read to see what the poem celebrates.

## Close Reading

The speaker mentions mistakes in some photos. **Underline** instances of all the things that are wrong with the photos.

The speaker starts by flipping through a book of photos. Does he keep doing so to the end? What changes, and how do the lines and stanzas help show that change?

# Ode to Family Photographs

by Gary Soto

This is the pond and these are my feet,  
This is the rooster, and this is more of my feet.

*Mama was never good at pictures.*

This is the statue of a famous general who lost an arm,  
5 And this is me with my head cut off.

This is a trash can chained to a gate,  
This is my father with his eyes half-closed.

This is a photograph of my sister  
And a giraffe looking over her shoulder.

10 This is our car's front bumper.  
This is a bird with a pretzel in its beak.  
This is my brother Pedro standing on one leg on a rock,  
With a smear of chocolate on his face.

Mama sneezed when she looked  
15 Behind the camera: the snapshots are blurry,  
The angles dizzy as a spin on a merry-go-round.

But we had fun when Mama picked up the camera.  
How can I tell?  
Each of us laughed hard.

20 Can you see? I have candy in my mouth.



## Hints

Eliminate answer choices that misinterpret the poet's use of structure.

How is this ode a celebration?

Think about how the speaker's actions and feelings are communicated not just through his words but also through the repetition of phrases and the lengths of stanzas.

Use the Hints on this page to help you answer the questions.

- 1 How does the structure the poet uses help add meaning to the text?
  - A The use of the rooster imagery suggests the speaker lives on a farm.
  - B The free-form lines mirror the speaker's fun and lighthearted tone.
  - C The italicized sentence shows the speaker's anger at the mother.
  - D The rhyme scheme mirrors the turning of pages in a photo album.
- 2 How do the speaker's feelings become clearer in the last stanza of this poem?
  - A The speaker wishes his mother had been a better photographer.
  - B The speaker regrets how he described the photographs.
  - C The speaker reveals that he likes his mother's photography.
  - D The speaker is upset that the photographs had mistakes.
- 3 This poem explores a relationship between photographs and memories. Write a paragraph that describes how the structure of the poem helps to explore this relationship. Use at least three details from the text to support your response.

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Read the poem. Then answer the questions that follow.

## A Boy and His Dad

*by Edgar Guest*

- A boy and his dad on a fishing-trip—  
There is a glorious fellowship!  
Father and son and the open sky  
And the white clouds lazily drifting by,  
5 And the laughing stream as it runs along  
With the clicking reel like a martial song,  
And the father teaching the youngster gay  
How to land a fish in the sportsman's way.
- I fancy I hear them talking there  
10 In an open boat, and the speech is fair.  
And the boy is learning the ways of men  
From the finest man in his youthful ken.  
Kings, to the youngster, cannot compare  
With the gentle father who's with him there.  
15 And the greatest mind of the human race  
Not for one minute could take his place.
- Which is happier, man or boy?  
The soul of the father is steeped in joy,  
For he's finding out, to his heart's delight,  
20 That his son is fit for the future fight.  
He is learning the glorious depths of him,  
And the thoughts he thinks and his every whim;  
And he shall discover, when night comes on,  
How close he has grown to his little son.
- 25 A boy and his dad on a fishing-trip—  
Builders of life's companionship!  
Oh, I envy them, as I see them there  
Under the sky in the open air,  
For out of the old, old long-ago  
30 Come the summer days that I used to know,  
When I learned life's truths from my father's lips  
As I shared the joy of his fishing-trips.



Answer the questions. Mark your answers to questions 1–3 on the Answer Form to the right.

**Answer Form**

1 Ⓐ Ⓑ Ⓒ Ⓓ

2 Ⓐ Ⓑ Ⓒ Ⓓ

3 Ⓐ Ⓑ Ⓒ Ⓓ

**Number  
Correct****3**

**1** Which statement **best** describes the structure of the poem?

- A** The poem has three stanzas, and each stanza uses repetition.
- B** The poem has four stanzas, and each stanza uses a rhyme scheme.
- C** The poem has four stanzas that use repetition in alternating stanzas.
- D** The poem has five stanzas that use rhyme and repetition.

**2** How does the question at the beginning of the third stanza help to develop the central idea of the poem?

- A** The speaker realizes that the father and son's time together is more important than fishing.
- B** The speaker understands that the son will soon be ready to face the challenges of life.
- C** The speaker envies the relationship the father and son reveal during the fishing trips.
- D** The speaker imagines what the father and son are learning about fishing.

**3** How do the speaker's feelings become clear in the last stanza of this poem?

- A** The speaker wants all fathers and sons to go on fishing trips.
- B** The speaker hopes that sons will learn lessons about life from their fathers.
- C** The speaker wants to go on fishing trips with his grandfather.
- D** The speaker fondly remembers his own experiences as a young boy.

[illegible]

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