

Poetic Forms and Literary Devices (Please Try These at Home!)

When reading *Thanku: Poems of Gratitude*, you might notice a diversity of poetic forms. No two poems in this collection follow the same structure, just as no two humans are exactly alike. This book was intentionally designed to showcase a range of well-known and lesser-known styles of poems, including some formats that were recently invented. Here's more about them:

A **didactic poem** usually includes a clear message or lesson that readers can take away from it. What do you think the message is in Joseph Bruchac's poem "Giving Thanks"?

Epistle is another word for a letter. Do you think the speaker in Naomi Shihab Nye's "Dear Sky" will send her letter via airmail?

Concrete poems (also called shape poems) use special arrangements or typeface to create visual effects that match the topic. What shape do you see in Kimberly Blaeser's poem "Flights"?

The Korean traditional poem known as **sijo** contains three lines of 14–16 syllables. Some sijo poems cover deep questions, knowledge, or abstract thoughts. What does your knowledge about dinosaurs and humans lead you to understand about the poem "Dinosaur" by 신선영 Sun Yung Shin?

Fibonacci poetry (nicknamed **Fib**) is a new form founded by children's author and poet Gregory K. Pincus. It is inspired by a mathematical sequence of the same name, where each line has a specific number of syllables. Ed DeCaria's poem "Constellation" includes seven lines with the following number of syllables in each: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13. Reading it is kind of like counting stars, only much easier.

Math poems incorporate numbers, equations, or math symbols with words to create meanings or express ideas. Would you prefer doing the homework included in Becky Shillington's "Appreciation Equations" or your regular schoolwork?

A **tanka** is a five-line, traditional Japanese poem containing lines of 5 or 7 syllables, with 31 syllables total. Tanka poems often give a complete picture of a mood or of a historical event. What long-ago invention fuels Padma Venkatraman's poem "Nothing to Be Grateful For"?

Poems for two voices sound like conversation or dialogue when read aloud because they are written for two people to perform. In Gwendolyn Hooks's poem "The Best Birthday Present: A Poem for Two Voices," can you see how the conversation goes back and forth on the page, with each speaker's words on one side?

The **septercet**, invented by Jane Yolen, is a poem that may or may not rhyme. Verses are in three lines (like the tercet), but each line has 7 syllables—from the Latin word *septem* (seven).

Hyperbole is an overexaggeration that can create emphasis or humor but is meant figuratively—not to be taken as true in the literal sense. In Janice Scully's poem, what object is being compared to a "First Responder" that rushes to help in a time of crisis?

A **quatrain** is a four-line stanza or poem, and the lines often alternate rhymes just as in Charles Waters's colorful poem "Roy G. Biv."

Found poetry means taking outside sources—magazines, newspapers, signs, or other written material—and making a new poem out of bits and pieces from them, much like a collage. Carole Lindstrom's poem "Drops of Gratitude" was created using words from the page of a book.

A **Tyburn** poem has six lines. The first four lines each have a single 2-syllable rhyming word. Line five has 9 syllables, and syllables 5 through 8 are the words from lines one and two. Line six likewise has 9 syllables, and syllables 5 through 8 are the words from lines three and four. Historically, these poems protested executions. Will you spare the bug in Sylvia Liu's "Thanks in Advance (For Not Squishing Me)"?

Onomatopoeia is forming words based on sound effects, and sometimes these are nonsense words that express emotions or actions. Carolyn Dee Flores's poem "Thank You, Sleep!" is filled with onomatopoeia, many of which appear in alphabetical order.

In an **echo poem**, the last word or syllable of a line is echoed underneath to form a rhyming line. When you read "Atta-Dude" by Sarvinder Naberhaus, one person reads a line, then the group calls out the echo!

An **allegory** is writing that contains fictional figures or symbols meant to represent real people or big ideas. In Lupe Ruiz-Flores's poem "No More Holes for Broken Soles," who might the worn-out shoes represent? How about the helpful cobbler?

A **tricube** includes three stanzas, each with three lines, and each line has 3 syllables. Can you count three beats in every line of “Each Scar” by Baptiste Paul?

A **chant** simply includes repeating lines or phrases and may be one of poetry’s oldest forms. Cynthia Leitich Smith’s poem “Stories for Dinner” uses a repeating chant, while the rest is written in **prose** (ordinary language) and **free verse** (nonstructured) couplets.

A **narrative** poem tells a story and often is written in the voice of the main character. Patti Richards’s poem “Alice Thanks the Looking Glass(es)” also makes **allusions** (quick mentions or references) to a well-known story and its characters. Don’t fall asleep, or you might miss them!

In an **acrostic**, the first (or last) letters of a line spell out a word or phrase. Sometimes, like in Chrystal D. Giles’s poem “Dimples,” the title is the same as what the letters spell.

The **décima mirror** is a traditional Cuban poetry form consisting of two redondillas (8-syllable quatrains) with a couplet (two-line) bridge, in the following rhyme pattern: *abba aa abba*. Can you feel the beats bounce during the playful walk of “I’m Thankful for My Puppy” by Margarita Engle?

American poet Bruce Newling invented the **McWhirtle**, which, according to Kenn Nesbitt, “is basically a double-dactyl without the requirements for a 6-syllable word or a higgledy-piggledy nonsense phrase.” In other words, it’s a difficult form made simple—like the complex ideas of responsibility and karma easily explained within the scenario of returning someone’s wallet.

An **ode** is a poem that praises or celebrates someone or something. Historically, many odes were meant to be sung. Can you hear a rhythm in JaNay Brown-Wood’s poem “Falling Leaves”?

A **mask** (also called persona) is a poem written from the point of view of an object or animal. Sometimes mask poems feel like riddles because the speaker’s identity isn’t stated. If you covered up the title “Diary of a Sweatshirt: The Best Day Ever” in Diana Murray’s poem, what clues would help someone guess who or what is speaking?

Most **sonnets** have fourteen lines, with 10 syllables per line and a set pattern of rhyme. Megan Hoyt’s poem “Thanksgiving at the Lake” follows the Shakespearean style of sonnet, where the last couplet (two lines) reveals an idea or conclusion.

A **ballad** is a poem or song that tells a story with short lines. Many ballads, like Jamie McGillen’s “The Perfect Rock,” have simple rhymes and a repeating rhythm that can be danced to or clapped out.

A **pantoum** is not an easy poem to write! This Malay verse form, which became popular in Britain and France in the 1800s, has a set pattern of how to repeat specific lines. In Renée M. LaTulippe’s poem “Autumn by the Sea,” the repeating lines mirror the movement of waves that continue to lap against the shore. Can you hear the pattern?

A **limerick** is a single verse with three long lines and two short lines, in the rhyme scheme of *aabba*. Said to be inspired by the Irish town of Limerick, these poems often make people smile or laugh. What made you smile while reading “Thankful for Thinking” by Vanessa Brantley-Newton?

An unrhymed **cinquain** (also known as a quintet) is a five-line poem, such as Traci Sorell’s “College Degree.”

A **palindrome** is a word, phrase, verse, sentence, or even poem that reads the same forward or backward. Edna Cabcabin Moran’s poem “A Graceful Journey” can be read from the first to the last line or the last to the first, but can you spot the other palindrome?

A **metaphor** is a figure of speech that describes a thing by calling it something else that it couldn’t possibly be in real life. In Charles Ghigna’s poem “Paint the Sunset,” the final line compares our lives with works of art. What will yours look like?

An **Etheree** is a ten-line unrhymed poem that begins with a 1-syllable line, and lines “grow” by 1 syllable in each line after. In Liz Garton Scanlon’s poem “All This,” the single, chilly word *snow* opens the poem, and it ends with a warm and cozy final image.

