Lesson 19
Elements of Poetry

Understanding about verse, rhythm, meter, and other features used in poems will help you write and talk about them.

Read  A poem has features you can both see and hear.

Each line in a poem is called a verse. Several verses grouped together form stanzas. These are structural elements you see.

Other elements in a poem are ones you hear. Meter sets up a pattern of strong and weak syllables in each verse. Rhythm is the regular pattern of sounds in the whole poem, like the beats in music. Rhyme repeats the same ending sounds in different words. Poets use these elements to express their ideas in new and surprising ways.

Read the poem below. Look and listen for structural elements.

Bigfoot’s Complaint
by John Hansen

Why do they have to call me that?
I’m more than just a pair of feet.
If humans took a closer look,
They’d see my eyes are rather sweet.

But I walk these woods and hide my face
My footprints left in mud and snow.
The rest of me they’ll never see
So I am called by what they know.
Think  Use what you’ve learned about structural elements to complete the chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>stanza</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>rhyme</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Talk  Share your chart with a partner.
- Did you list the same elements, descriptions, and examples?
- Which parts of the poem do you see?
- Which parts do you hear?

Academic Talk
Use these words to talk about the text.
- structural element
- verse
- stanza
- meter
- rhythm
- rhyme
Walking BIG WILLIE

by Clarisse Bartonelli

While I am working hard at school,
To master math and this and that,
At home Big Willie sleeps a lot
And dreams of chasing neighbors’ cats.

Big Willie shakes himself awake
When through the door I come at three.
A furry bullet knocks me down.
A leash is dropped upon my knee.

We’re on the street. No time to waste.

A million squirrels must be treed.
Some cats must be tormented next.
Will does this all at double speed.

Around the block and up the street,
He travels at the speed of sound,
And I, attached to him by leash,
Am led around and ’round and ’round.

I must confess I like the speed.
It’s fun to travel zip–zam–zoom.
But sometimes when I’m out with Will,
I wonder, who is walking whom?

Close Reader Habits

As you read, listen for a pattern of rhyming words. Then circle any word at the end of a verse that rhymes with a word at the end of a different verse. Next, draw lines to connect the pairs of rhyming words.
Explore How do the elements in “Walking Big Willie” contribute to the poem’s structure and meaning?

Think

1. The pattern of strong (stressed) and weak syllables in a verse is its meter. Each verse in this poem has eight syllables, and every other syllable is STRONG. Study the meter of verse 1. Then underline the strong syllables in verse 2.

   Verse 1 While I am WORKing HARD at SCHOOL,
   Verse 2 To master math and this and that,

2. Complete the chart below by adding information about the elements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pattern of rhymes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Repeats sounds that help shape the poem stanzas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Creates a pattern of strong and weak beats in a verse</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Creates a sense of sadness, excitement, or other feelings beyond the poet’s words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Talk

3. Describe the structural elements used in “Walking Big Willie.” How do they work together to create a feeling of exciting, speedy walks?

Write

4. **Short Response** Describe how the structural elements in “Walking Big Willie,” including meter, create certain effects, or feelings. Use the space on page 304 to write your answer.

**HINT** Reread the poem to figure out what elements of poetry the poet chose to use.
There lived a sage¹ in days of yore,
And he a handsome pigtail wore;
But wondered much and sorrowed more,
Because it hung behind him.

5   He mused upon this curious case,
And swore he’d change the pigtail’s place,
And have it hanging at his face,
Not dangling there behind him.

Says he, “The mystery I’ve found,—
10   I’ll turn me round”—he turned him round;
But still it hung behind him.

Then round and round, and out and in,
All day the puzzled sage did spin;
In vain—it mattered not a pin,
15   The pigtail hung behind him.

And right and left, and round about,
And up and down, and in and out,
He turned; but still the pigtail stout
Hung steadily behind him.

20   And though his efforts never slack,
And though he twist and twirl and tack,
Alas! still faithful to his back,
The pigtail hangs behind him.

¹ sage: a wise person

Close Reader Habits

How does the poet use rhythm in this poem for effect? As you reread the poem, underline the verse in each stanza that has a different beat than the others.
Think  Use what you learned from reading the poem to respond to the following questions.

1 Which statement best describes the last verse of each stanza?
   A It uses a different meter and does not rhyme with the last words of the other verses.
   B It uses the same meter and rhymes with words in the first verse of every stanza.
   C It uses the same meter, but only the last two verses in the stanza rhyme.
   D It uses a different meter, but the last verse rhymes with the other verses in the stanza.

2 What effect does the rhythm of each stanza have on a reader’s understanding of how the sage feels?
   A The change in the last line creates a feeling of excitement.
   B The change in the last line creates a feeling of disappointment.
   C The change in the last line creates a feeling of boredom and restlessness.
   D The change in the last line creates a feeling of nervousness and concern.

Talk

3 Explain how the poet’s use of structural elements adds to the meaning of the narrative poem. How do they combine to provide a clearer picture of the sage’s problem in “A Tragic Story”? Make a list of your ideas.

Write

4 Short Response  Describe how the poet’s use of structural elements adds to the meaning of “A Tragic Story.” Use at least two details from the passage to support your response. Use the space provided on page 305 to write your response.
4 Short Response  Describe how the structural elements in “Walking Big Willie,” including meter, create certain effects, or feelings.

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Don’t forget to check your writing.
Short Response  Describe how the poet’s use of structural elements adds to the meaning of “A Tragic Story.” Use at least two details from the passage to support your response.