Poetry Texts
Structure and features of poetry texts

**Purpose**

Poetry captures the essence of an object, feeling or thought. Poetry for children should reflect the emotions of childhood, making students feel sensory experiences to an intensified degree and satisfying their natural response to rhythm.

**Forms of Poetry**

**Lyric poetry**

This is poetry that was originally sung to the lyre. The word lyric tends to be used in conventional literary studies to refer to any shorter poem that expresses the poet’s feelings and thoughts.

Most of the poetry written for students is lyrical. Lyrical poetry sings its way into the minds and memories of its readers. It is usually personal or descriptive poetry with no prescribed length or structure other than its melody.

**Concrete poetry**

Poets have been writing concrete poetry since the 17th century. In concrete poetry the shape and position of the letters and words reflect the meaning. This allows the poet to combine verbal and visual skills and experiment with language to heighten awareness of the meaning of individual words. Meaning must be the focus and then the shaping of the words will grow from the idea of the poem. In Elizabeth Honey’s ‘Honey Sandwich’ she captures the image of the small child making a sandwich trying to control the runny honey.

**Humorous verse**

Young students appear to prefer narrative rhyme and humorous verse over most other forms of poetry. This stirs their imagination and appeals to their sense of fun. The use of imaginative symbols and vivid imagery and metaphor mark the difference between real poetry and verse.

**Ballads**

Ballads satisfy a student’s innate love of story. Ballads are narrative poems that were sung during the 15th century in Europe and form an important part of the oral storytelling tradition. Ballads were simple, dramatic and entertaining stories that told succeeding generations of important events.

There are three types of ballads: traditional song ballads; popular or modern ballads; and poems or literary ballads that are not meant to be sung.

Traditional ballads were passed on orally. Words were often changed because ballad singers forgot some of the details of the version they first heard. At times the text was changed to suit the storyteller. Ballads therefore changed as they were told by one generation to another till eventually they were written down.

**Structure of Poetry Texts**

By its structure and use of rhyme, metre and figures of speech, poetry differs from other text types. Words are not casually connected but are linked in the mind of the creator. The plan of a poem has design and form. Well-written poetry should leave the reader pondering, questioning, considering and investigating.
A poet responds and is inspired by the stimuli around him. Poets help us to see familiar objects, people and experiences in different ways by engaging our senses of sight, sound, taste, touch and smell. Poets communicate thoughts and feelings, leading us to a better understanding of human nature and the world.

Students respond to stress patterns or speech rhythms that reinforce the sense of the word and the rhyme. The students soon understand that a change of rhythm is indicative of a new element in a poem.

The most common rhyme pattern is called end rhyme. This means that the end words of two consecutive lines, alternate lines or even lines further apart rhyme. Some poets may use an internal rhyme where two words rhyme within the same line.

Discussions of verse form with students can provide opportunities for language play. A student who is mathematically inclined may enjoy comparing a ballad, sensory poem or descriptive to see how they differ structurally. Students who experience considerable difficulties in writing prose can often express themselves quite fluently in verse. Poetry writing enables students to gain an appreciation of patterning and other poetic techniques as well as a practical insight into the function of language.

The structure of a ballad is similar to a narrative, with the addition of a refrain. The refrain acts as a commentary on events and holds the poem together. It generally appears after each verse.

**Language features of poetry texts**
- The rhyme, rhythm and layout of poetry differs from that of prose.
- Poetry can have end rhyme or internal rhyme.
- Images are used to portray feelings and emotions.
- The essence of an idea or thought can be captured.
- Experiences can be intensified.
- An everyday experience can be clarified in a way that the reader has never seen before.
- Rhythm is used to establish the mood of a poem, e.g. slow and sad, fast and happy, calm and reflective.

**Language features of ballads**
- Topics vary but many ballads tell of love, death, battle or the supernatural.
- Few details appear about the characters and setting as the focus is on the events or actions. These are told through the dialogue.
- Part of the ballad, or the entire ballad, is told in dialogue by a first person narrator (I) to the audience (you).
- The story is generally told in four-line stanzas of regular length. The rhyme is often abcb.
- The ballad’s mood is established by a regular rhythm that helps memorisation.
- The ballad is held together by the repeated refrain appearing after each stanza.
- The word order can be changed to suit the rhythm, e.g. ‘A soldier brave’.
- A semicolon is used instead of a full stop at the end of the second line of a four-line stanza.
- Often ballads end abruptly.

**Orientation**  **Refrain (optional)**
**Complication**  **Refrain (optional)**
**Series of events**  **Refrain (optional)**
**Resolution**  **Refrain (optional)**
Outcomes Checklist

At the end of the units on poetry texts, students will have worked towards achieving the following National Level 3 (NSW Stage 2) outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPEAKING AND LISTENING</th>
<th>BLM</th>
<th>DATE &amp; COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NA 3.1 NSW 2.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>62, 66, 68, 72, 79, 82, 89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicates and interacts for specific purposes with students in the classroom and in the school community using a small range of text types.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA 3.4 NSW 2.2</td>
<td>61, 66, 71, 76, 78, 82</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Interacts effectively and reflects on own skills and how others use communicating skills and listening strategies.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA 3.2 NSW 2.3</td>
<td>63, 67, 73, 74, 77, 88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognises that certain types of spoken texts are associated with particular audiences and purposes.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>READING AND VIEWING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 3.5 NSW 2.5</td>
<td>63, 67, 68, 73, 78, 83, 88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reads a wide range of written and visual texts and interprets and discusses relationships between ideas, information and events.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 3.6 NSW 2.7</td>
<td>67, 72, 76, 78, 79, 88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identifies simple symbolic meaning and stereotypes in texts and discusses how writers create worlds through language which achieves a wide range of purposes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 3.7 NSW 2.8</td>
<td>61, 87</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Identifies, discusses and uses the grammatical features and the structures of a range of text types to create meaning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>WRITING</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 3.12a NSW 2.9</td>
<td>80, 84, 87, 90</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Uses strategies to plan, review, proofread and publish own writing with awareness of audience and written language features.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 3.11 NSW 2.10 2.14</td>
<td>62, 80, 83, 84</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Able to produce a clear text using correct sentence structure, most grammatical features and punctuation conventions of the text type.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 3.12b NSW 2.11</td>
<td>69, 76, 77, 79, 80, 89</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Consistently makes informed attempts at spelling.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 3.10 NSW 2.13</td>
<td>77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognises and discusses how own texts are adjusted to relate to different readers, how they develop the subject matter for particular purposes and audiences.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 3.9</td>
<td>62, 69, 71, 74, 90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experiments with interrelating ideas and information when writing about familiar topics within a small range of text types.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW 2.12</td>
<td>78, 80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writes using consistent shape, size, slope and formation. Demonstrates basic desktop skills on the computer.</td>
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Background Lessons

If too much time is devoted to analysing a single poem, students frequently become bored and restless. The way to overcome this is to ask students to prepare for a performance. Children will read and reread poems in order to prepare, while the rhythms impress themselves and the meaning works on the mind and spirit. Performance leads to the discussion of the meaning of each line and how it will be said. With the addition of movement and sound effects, the students will present a worthwhile and enjoyable performance.

Session 1
Breaking the pattern

Cut up a poem into single lines and challenge pairs of students to try to work out the original poem. This will lead students to discuss the poem’s structure and its intended sequence. Students will focus on the rhythm, rhyme and layout and aspects of the language of the poem. They will become aware of the feeling driving the poem forward. A lyric poem is useful for this as its verses may appear to stand independently but there are normally clues in the text as to which verse should appear where in the overall format of the poem.

Session 2
Cloze technique

Students can work independently or in pairs on this task. To assist students and build their confidence when using a rhyming technique take a poem divided into verses that follows a regular rhyming pattern. Leave the first verse untouched and then follow a cloze technique, erasing end words on lines so that students can select appropriate words for meaning and rhythm.

Session 3
Writing poetry

For students who have not written much poetry, one focus per line is a useful starting point from which they can later deviate. As the students become more advanced they can think about a recurring motif, chains of images or sound effects creating a link.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Rain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Line 1</td>
<td>Who</td>
<td>Rain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line 2</td>
<td>What</td>
<td>Dripping strange outlines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line 3</td>
<td>Where</td>
<td>On the broken toy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line 4</td>
<td>When</td>
<td>On a quiet morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line 5</td>
<td>Why</td>
<td>To cleanse the air on this day</td>
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</table>

Session 4
Sensory poetry

Psychologists describe people’s earliest memories as sensory as we are able to recall the way things smell and taste. The following lessons provide students with experience in writing sensory poems.

In the first poem students describe a golden sunset. They are to add their thoughts to each of the lines.
A walk in the Australian bush
I see _________________________________
I hear________________________________
I feel_________________________________
I smell________________________________
I taste ________________________________

Encourage students to attempt to use their senses to describe other experiences they have, for example the sound of screeching brakes or a window pane shattering.

Before the second poem, cut up slices of apple, pieces of celery and sticks of carrot sufficient in number for each student to have one piece. Each student chooses a piece that will be the subject described in a sensory poem.

Ask students to attempt other words following the outline and format below.

Ask the students to follow this sequence:  
Example

Say the word for your slice or stick.
Apple

Write words you associate with it as you say it.
Rosy red

Write a describing word or adjective for it.
Delicious tasting

Describe how it looks.
Roundly reflecting light

Describe how it feels.
So smooth and firm

Ask the students to bite into the stick or piece.

Write a sound word.
Crunchy and fleshy

Describe how it feels in your mouth.
but firm with a taste

Describe the taste.
as sweet as honey

Describe how it feels as you swallow.
Small pieces dissolving

Describe the aftertaste.
Longing for another bite

What does the apple/celery stick or carrot remind you of?
Could this be the witch's apple from my fairy story?

Session 5
Descriptions

Students will soon develop confidence and want to attempt a number of poems when they write these simple but effective descriptions.

Students write four line poems which describe a scene. The three lines follow one another adding details to the description but the fourth line of each one has a twist or changes the context. (See BLM 55.)
Session 6
Wordles

Encourage students to have fun writing ‘wordles’. These are single words written in a visual way so that their meaning is clearly expressed, for example small, fat.

The next step could be writing descriptive words for an object and using these to create the shape of the object they are describing, for example a bed spring, a plant, a horse, a haunted house.

Session 7
Descriptive poetry

Students should work independently or with a writing buddy. They should decide on a character to be the focus of their writing. This character is completing a task at a specific time of the day. He or she could be waking and struggling out of bed; rushing to catch the bus to school; lying around on a hot afternoon; baking a cake; eating an ice-cream; learning to ride a bicycle.
Ask students to close their eyes so that they can picture the experience more fully then ask them independently to write down the words relating to the action. The emphasis is on spontaneous thoughts, opinions and a free flow of ideas. At this stage students can talk to their writing buddy or work independently drawing a picture of their thoughts. It is important that when students illustrate the poem, they try to visualise a humorous possibility that is part of the verbal description.

The poem could be written in the first or third person, but students need to concentrate on creating a picture in the reader’s mind of the action and feelings. Meaning must be the focus and then the shape of the poem should be created in the image of the action. Later students can work in inventive ways playing with words, phrases, sound patterns and images to clarify the meaning. Ask students to share these verbal and visual picture/concrete poems with other students.

A second type of descriptive poetry involves students writing descriptive colour poetry where a different colour appears in each line. Students should try to vary the places and images where they describe the colours.

Red is the colour of my toe rubbed so raw in my new shoes.
Yellow is the colour of flowing custard spreading over my bananas.

Session 8
Become an object!

Ask students to imagine that they are an inanimate object. They then write a poem as if they were that object, for example a can of beans or a fork used to eat dinner. What would they think about, feel and say? What dialogue would they write if they were a desk chair speaking to a computer or breakfast cereal speaking to a bar of soap? Ask students to suggest other ideas for inanimate objects.

Session 9
Wish poetry

Encourage students to write wish poems where they begin each line with 'I wish . . .’. They should continue the rhyming pattern that has been established and try ending the poem humorously or with a twist. (See BLM 56.)

Session 10
Ballad

Encourage students to attempt a class ballad. It is important at the pre-writing stage that as a class the tale is worked out from beginning to end. One of the benefits of the ballad form is that groups can take on the task of writing one or two verses of the overall tale. Students need to be reminded of the structure, features and language of the ballad. Suggest that it can be written in a simpler form of aabb as a starting point, for example:

Sweet Susie is her name
Robbery is her game;
I was in the town when she came out
They shut the doors when she was about.
Poems With a Twist

Write some poems with a twist. These are simple, four-line poems which describe a scene. The three lines follow one another and then a twist appears in the fourth line. Illustrate your poems.

- Colourful umbrellas
- Yellow raincoats
- Black gumboots
- No rain.
Wish Poems

Complete the wish poem. Then create an illustration that would add some humour to the poem.

I wish . . .

I wish I could climb that gnarled old tree
I wish it was not so difficult for me.

I wish I could sing all the hits on that chart
I wish I could hit the bull’s eye with my dart.

I wish __________________________________________
I wish __________________________________________

I wish __________________________________________
I wish __________________________________________

I wish __________________________________________
I wish __________________________________________

I wish __________________________________________
I wish __________________________________________
Ballad Scaffold

Orientation:

______________________________

______________________________

Repeated refrain:

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

Complication:

______________________________

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______________________________

(Repeated refrain)

Series of events:

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

(Repeated refrain)

Resolution:

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

(Repeated refrain)
Poetry Writing Interview

Name:

Class:

Date:

Self-assessment e.g. What type of poetry do you enjoy writing or reading? Is there any poetry that you would particularly like to write that you haven’t yet tried? Is there anything you don’t like writing about or find difficult about writing poetry? How do you rate yourself as a poet?

Range and preferences e.g. What do you like writing poetry about and for what type of audiences? What strategies do you use to make your poetry clear and interesting?

Skills e.g. How do you plan your poems? How do you edit your work? Are your ideas more important, or accurate spelling and correct sentence structure? How do you check spelling if you are unsure of a word?

Current projects e.g. What poems are you writing now? What would you like to write?
# Poetry Writing Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Task** e.g. Rhyming, sensory, humourous, descriptive poetry

**Context** e.g. Individual, pairs, group, teacher directed

## Analysis

**Content** e.g. Purpose, organisation of verses or format, awareness of audience

**Skills** e.g. Planning, drafting, editing, redrafting, spelling, punctuation, handwriting

**Language study** e.g. Selection of appropriate sensory and descriptive language

**Teaching needs** e.g. Attitude to task, teaching needed for further development