



English is about communication. The most effective communication is communication that expresses its ideas simply. Better yet is communication that is easily remembered and readily passed on. Through your study of poetry you will come across, or already have come across, poems whose authors are anonymous. These poems, because they are easy to remember and often sung to popular tunes of the time, have been passed across the world and through generations.

Poetry was a particularly valuable tool for communication in times that predate literacy. This is because an illiterate person cannot revise words by reading them, instead they must remember the words that they have been told. Because poetry uses rhyme and regular rhythm this becomes a lot easier. Consider how difficult it would be to memorise this paragraph. If we were to turn it into a simple poem it would be much easier:

*Poetry was valuable when literacy was scarce,
Rhythm and Rhyme was oft' used to share
Ideas and expressions from one to the other
'Cause those who can't read have to remember.*

Think of all the childhood poems that you can remember. Often these teach you a lesson that you should never forget. Such an example is:

*Sticks and stones might break my bones
But names will never hurt me.*

Or less informative;

*I am rubber you are glue
Whatever you say bounces off me and sticks to you.*

Adults also remember important lessons through rhyme;

A stitch in time saves nine.

And through other techniques such as alliteration,

Don't make a mountain out of a molehill.

Over time, poetry has become much more than an easy way to remember ideas and songs. From these humble beginnings, poets from all ages and across all cultures have developed new ways in which to communicate their ideas concisely. A poem is often exactly this, a short, concise expression of complex and sometimes abstract ideas. Many people will tell

you that "a picture paints a thousand words". I will tell you that a poem paints a thousand pictures.

A poem has a number of advantages over other forms of communications that make it possible for them to communicate widely across cultures and broadly appeal to individuals - to paint a thousand pictures. These advantages include the ability to appeal to all five senses, the ability to make connections between words and thus ideas through language techniques, the ability to shape meaning through alterations in rhythm and meter and rhyme and the ability to change mood and tone to effect the appreciation of their subject. The choice of combinations of these factors will have a wide reception for readers, dependent on their personal context, their individual reaction to particular words, metaphors and rhythms.

In this day and age we are fortunate to have the resources to be able to examine a wide variety of poems with different styles, structures and purposes from all different parts of the world. There are poems that are aimed to amuse, to evoke happy emotions, sad emotions, emotions of love, political opinions. Poetry can also be informative.

We have poems that are written in strict structural formats, strict rhythms, strict rhymes and poems that use rhythm and rhyme 'freely'. We have 'epic' poetry thousands of lines long and shorter poetry such as haikus and limericks. We have poems from the distant past, poems from exotic countries and poems from our backyards written in our time.

Overwhelming? It needn't be. There are some simple rules that you can learn to be able to read, understand and enjoy poetry of all shapes and sizes. Inspiring, moving, uplifting? It can be. Just be sure to remember that when you analyse a poem and you are picking out language techniques and the features of the poem, you must **always** consider what **effect** any particular technique or feature has on the meaning, the **purpose** or **your** interpretation of the poem. English is about communication. When you are analysing another person's communication your fundamental question is:

How has this composer achieved their purpose?