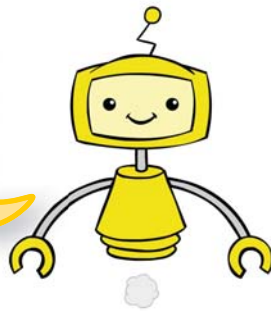


# Poetry to my ears

'I love a sunburnt country,  
A land of sweeping plains, ...'

I can see it now; those words create a vivid image in my mind. I can feel the vastness and the grandeur of the Australian landscape, and the feelings that the wild weather evokes. Oh, Dorothea Mackellar, thank you for such a beautiful poem! Let's find out some more about what makes a great poem!



**LINKS TO:**

Stage 2, Module 3  
Learning Object 2: How I express myself

**PRIOR LEARNING:**

**Stage 2**

Module 2 Work Sheet 7: *Zak and the mystery of the message*  
Module 5 Work Sheet 5: *Reading between the lines*



## What is a poem?

1

Poetry is one of the many ways we express ourselves in language. Every country has its own poetry tradition, with famous poets and poems, stories and forms, passed down for generations.

Much of our early literature was in the form of oral narrative poems like Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, or the famous anonymous poem *Beowulf*. These long poems told stories about great heroes and battles, and were written to be recited aloud to groups of people, usually as part of the entertainment at a feast or party.

Poems are usually patterned in some way, using poetic devices such as rhythm, rhyme and repetition. Most poems also use figurative language and imagery.

### Open and closed forms

There are two major types of poetry: open and closed forms. Closed forms of poetry have strict rules about how the poems are patterned, whereas open forms (or free verse), don't have any rules! The poet Robert Frost famously said that writing free verse was like playing tennis with the net down. Sometimes, free verse poets create their own rules about what a poem should sound like or look like.

### Concrete poetry

One of the free verse forms that can be a lot of fun to try is concrete poetry, in which the poem looks like the thing it is about. Here is a concrete poem from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. It is a mouse's tale, which looks like a mouse's ... tail!

"FURY said to  
a mouse, That  
he met in the  
house, 'Let  
us both go  
to law: I  
will prose-  
cute *you*.—  
Come, I'll  
take no de-  
nial: We  
must have  
the trial;  
For really  
this morn-  
ing I've  
nothing  
to do.'  
Said the  
mouse to  
the cur,  
'Such a  
trial, dear  
sir, With  
no jury  
or judge,  
would  
be wast-  
ing our  
breath.'  
'I'll be  
judge.  
I'll be  
jury,'  
said  
cun-  
ning  
old  
Fury:  
'I'll  
try  
the  
whole  
cause,  
and  
con-  
demn  
you to  
death."

*The Mouse's Tale by Lewis Carroll*

In Indonesia, the poet Sutardji Calzoum Bachri is well-known for his concrete poetry. One titled 'Belajar Membaca' (Learning to Read) is in the shape of a leg and a foot and is about an injured leg or foot. The poem is also a real tongue twister.

## 2

# Poetic patterns

Closed form poetry uses many strategies to create patterns. In English language poetry, these patterns are usually created by using repetition or rhyme, and by using quantitative meter.

## Metric lines

There are three types of quantitative meter in English poetry.

**Accentual meter:** where you count the number of accented syllables in each line, regardless of how many unaccented syllables there are. Rap and nursery rhymes are written in accentual meter.

➔ For example:  
(the accented syllables are in bold)

If **wishes** were **horses**  
**Beggars** would **ride**;  
If **turnips** were **watches**  
I'd wear **one** by my **side**.

**Syllabic meter:** where you count the number of syllables in each line and ignore any accents. Syllabic meter is quite rare in English language poetry, but you may be familiar with 'borrowed' syllabic forms like *haiku*.

➔ For example:  
year after year (four syllables)  
on the monkey's face (five syllables)  
a monkey's mask (four syllables)  
(poem by Matsuo Basho)

**Accentual-syllabic meter:** where you count both the number of syllables and the number of accents in each line. Most closed poetic forms in English use accentual-syllabic meter, such as the

Shakespearean sonnet, which has five accents in each line, and ten syllables.

➔ For example:  
(accented syllables in bold)

Shall **I** compare thee to a **summer's day**?  
Thou **art** more **lovely and** more **temperate**:  
Rough **winds** do **shake** the **darling buds** of **May**,  
And **summer's lease** hath **all too short** a **date**:  
(Opening of William Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 18'.)

## Rhyme and repetition

The other common poetic devices that are used in both closed and open forms of poetry are rhyme and repetition.

Rhyme is when we use two or more words that either sound or look the same. Rhymes can be very close, or they can be quite 'loose', and they can be either aural or visual. A loose rhyme is often called a pararhyme.

➔ For example:  
Close rhyme *bat, cat*  
Pararhyme *cat, cot*  
Visual rhyme *orange, strange*

Poets also often use repetition to create patterns in their poems. Poets might repeat words, phrases, lines or whole stanzas. A common form of repetition, which is also used in songwriting, is the repetition of a complete stanza, which is called a chorus.

## 3

# As happy as a cloud

The use of figurative language and imagery is very common in poetry.

## Figurative language

The two most common forms of figurative language used in poetry are metaphors and similes. Metaphors and similes compare two things. In a metaphor, the comparison is made by saying one thing **is** the other, whereas in a simile the comparison is made by saying one thing is **like** the other.

➔ For example:  
**Metaphor** The world is my oyster  
**Simile** I wandered lonely as a cloud

## Images

Poetry also often uses strong images to convey meaning, or to create pictures in the mind. Some of the most vivid imagery in poetry also relates to sounds, tastes, touch and smell. Effective imagery in poetry is concrete and specific, rather than vague or imprecise.

## Australian poetry

Early Australian poetry drew heavily on the traditions of European, and particularly British, poetry. Some of our most famous early poets wrote ballads.

### Ballads

Ballads are a form of narrative poetry — that is, poetry that tells a story — and are typically written in accentual syllabic meter, with a strong rhyming pattern. Ballads usually have a chorus, which is repeated periodically throughout the poem.

Two of the most famous early Australian poets were Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson, both of whom wrote bush ballads. Bush ballads were originally set to music, and the strong musicality of many ballads is easy to hear when they are read aloud.

Ballads were a traditional form of poetry in England, Scotland and Ireland, where many

early settlers and convicts came from. Australian bush ballads adapted the form of the ballad to tell stories about life in Australia. Most of these stories focus on life in the bush, droving, horse-riding, shearing sheep or wandering the land. The stories often focus on an Aussie battler, and incorporate both high drama and comedy.

Some of the most famous bush ballads continue to be sung, memorised, taught and otherwise celebrated in Australia. Bush poetry competitions are still held in many country towns, where poets stand and recite their original works, or well-known favourites. Contemporary musicians such as John Williamson and Graeme Connors also continue to write bush ballads about Australian life.

Some of the ballads you may know include:

- *The Wild Colonial Boy*
- *The Man from Snowy River* by Banjo Paterson
- *The Shearers* by Henry Lawson
- *The Sentimental Bloke* by C J Dennis
- *Mallee Boy* by John Williamson

## Indonesian poetry

The ethnic and linguistic diversity of Indonesia means that there is not really a clearly identifiable national tradition of poetry before the 20th century.

However, during the Dutch Colonial period and well into the 1920s, Indonesians adopted many European forms, particularly the sonnet, and wrote poems in Dutch as well as Indonesian. It was argued by many poets of the time that the sonnet was very similar to the *pantun* with its focus on the theme of love.

Nevertheless, there is a clear distinction between the old poets (*Pujangga Lama*) and the poets and poetry of the 20th and 21st centuries. The term 'Indonesian literature' generally refers to works written in Bahasa Indonesia. It was not until the 1920s that poetry started to be written in Bahasa Indonesia.

### Pre-1920s

Prior to the 1920s, there were several traditional forms or types of poetry, all with strong Malay influence, including:

<i>Syair</i>	traditional narrative poetry
<i>Pantun</i>	quatrains made up of two seemingly disconnected couplets
<i>Gurindam</i>	brief aphorisms

The *pantun* was one of the most popular forms. It is a highly symbolic form of poetry, and often, in order to understand the poem, you need to be familiar with the traditional meanings of the images it contains. Some common images, for example, are the flower (the girl), the bee (her lover), and the water hyacinth (love that floats on the surface, without taking root). A *pantun* always has an even number of lines: 2, 4, 6 or 8. The first half of a four-line *pantun* has two lines, each of which has an image. The two images are intended to be startlingly different; the second half states the (connecting) theme of the poem.

➔ For example:  
*Bintang tujuh sinar berseri*  
*Bulan purnama datang menerpa*  
*Ajaran guru hendaklah dicari*  
*Mana yang dapat janganlah lupa*  
 (Anonymous)

Three main themes have dominated Indonesian poetry: nature poetry, mysticism (or religious poetry), and the personal lyric (or emotional poetry).

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## After 1920

In the early 20th century, poets like Mohammad Yamin, who wrote sonnets and used quatrains, were described as belonging to the *Pujangga Baru* group of poets. In their effort to break free from the old traditions, these writers instead looked to the traditions of the Dutch poets of the 1880s.

Another well-known poet of the 20th century was Rendra. He drew on a variety of poetic forms, from lyric, epic and dramatic poems to protest poetry. His special legacy was a body of unique narrative poems.

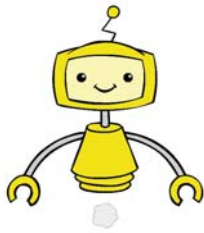
Contemporary Indonesian poets include Sapardi Djoko Damono and Goenawan Mohamad, who are still very active as writers.

# 6

## Exercises

To interpret the poems in these exercises you can use the reading and comprehension skills you have learnt in Module 2, Work Sheet 7, *Zak and the mystery of the message*. You will also be able to use your reading for inference skills, as set out in Module 5, Work Sheet 5, *Reading between the lines*.

### Exercise 1



C'mon Peter, it's time to introduce me to a new poem. I see that you have some Indonesian poems there. Let's read the first one. I hope I like this one as much as Dorothea Mackellar's *My Country*.

Read the poem carefully and then answer the following questions in English.

#### Naik Delman

Pada hari Minggu kuturut ayah ke kota  
Naik delman istimewa kududuk di muka  
Kududuk samping Pak Kusir yang sedang bekerja  
Mengendali kuda supaya baik jalannya  
Tuk tik tak tik tuk tik tak tik tuk tik tak tik tuk  
Tuk tik tak tik tuk tik tak  
Suara s'patu kuda

(Anonymous)

1.1 What sorts of aural or visual patterns are used in this nursery rhyme, such as rhyme, rhythm or repetition? Use quotations from the poem to support your answer.

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**1.2** What sorts of imagery are used in this nursery rhyme? What sense do the images appeal to, sight, sound, touch smell or taste? Use quotations from the poem to support your answer.

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**1.3** Who do you think is the intended audience for this nursery rhyme? Give reasons for your answer.

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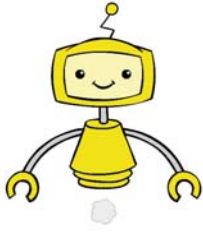
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## Exercise 2



Ah, that nursery rhyme was fun. What's next? Ooh, I think I know what this poem may be about. Let's read this poem together.

Read the poem carefully and then answer the following questions in English.

### Kekecewaan Petani

Kau menanam padi susah payah  
Walau harus berjemur di sawah  
Tapi kau tidak takut kalah  
Dengan tikus-tikus sawah  
Walau hasil panen harus dijual murah  
Tapi tekadmu tidak akan goyah  
Sungguh besar jasamu petani  
Kau memanen padi dengan ani-ani  
Kau pergi ke sawah setiap hari  
Walau kau harus pergi pagi-pagi  
Jika kau panen kau juga berbagi  
Terima kasih atas jasa petani

(Anonymous)

- 2.1 What types of aural or visual patterns are used in this poem, such as rhyme, rhythm or repetition? Use quotations from the poem to support your answer.

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- 2.2 What sorts of imagery are used in this poem? What sense do the images appeal to sight, sound, touch, smell or taste? Use quotations from the poem to support your answer.

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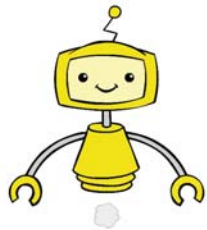
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I think I know everything I need to know about poetry now. Just a couple more things to do before I take out my computer and have a good go at writing some poetry of my own.

### Exercise 3

Read the two poems in Exercises 1 and 2 again and answer the following questions in English.

- 3.1 What differences and similarities are there in the patterning devices used in the two poems? Use quotations from the poems to support your answer.

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**3.2** What differences and similarities are there in the imagery and figurative language used in the two poems? Use quotations from the poems to support your answer.

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**3.3** What strategies did you use when you came across unfamiliar words? Describe the process you used to discover the meanings of at least two words.

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**3.4** Which poem did you find easiest to read and understand? Give reasons for your answer. You may use quotations from the poem if you wish.

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**3.5 Which of these poems did you like the most? Give reasons for your answer.**

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