



Poetry Lesson Plan: Sound & Sense

Grades: 9-12 > College Level

Objective and Instructions — The student will:

1. Write a poem based on the identification and utilization of words, relying on the use of prosody.
 - a. **"Prosody"** can be defined as the **rhythmical** organization that controls the construction and reading of a poem. Prosody can rely on line-breaks, rhyme, alliteration, rhythm, spacing, stanzas, line-length, internal or end rhyme and repetition.
2. Select and use words that will control how the poem is read; thus, making the poem more meaningful.
3. Become aware of the importance of specific word placement and the significance of word "sounds" when creating a poem.

Hint: Keep it simple. Suggest the poem topic be something familiar and one that involves movement or sound. Remind students that the words they use and how they are placed in the poem should control how the poem is read. (See Example #1 Below)

Sound & Sense

Write a poem which satisfies all of the following criteria:

Read and study below.

— **find the assignment *following* the definitions and examples.**

EXAMPLE 1:

Snake

Noiselessly
tasting the air
with its forked-tipped
tongue, a snake
smoothly
slithers
through grass

Read the poem, *Snake*.

- What sensations do you experience when reading the poem?
- Do specific words used in the poem help you "see" the snake?
- Which words?
- Why are these words important in making the poem successful?
- Are the words used by the poet controlling how a person reads the poem? How?
- Do you believe that "prosody" is important to the success of this poem?

EXAMPLE 2:

Young Sycamore

I must tell you
this young tree
whose round and firm trunk
between the wet

pavement and the gutter
(where water
is trickling) rises
bodily

into the air with
one undulant
thrust half its height--
and then

dividing and waning
sending out
young branches on
all sides--

hung with cocoons
it thins
till nothing is left of it
but two

eccentric knotted
twigs
bending forward
hornlike at the top.

-- *W.C. Williams*

Read the poem *Young Sycamore* two or three times.

Initially, you might think it's just a poem about a tree growing in a gutter, and nothing else. But, on closer inspection, **do you notice "prosody" at work?**

Read the poem again, but this time pay closer attention to the choice of words, their placement, as well as their "**sounds**" and how they provide a "rhythmical" **sense, feel, or movement** to the poem that, in this instance, mimics how the reader views the tree.

Stanzas 1 and 2: the poem begins by describing the tree from its base (its sturdy trunk) from the ground up; the words "round and firm" help provide that first image. Then, after a brief glimpse of water, the tree's source of life, trickling beside it, the reader is presented a view, a sensation of words (rises bodily) that allows us to move our gaze up the tree. This is prosody at work...the choice of words, line breaks and use of stanzas, already is beginning to subtly create rhythmic "sound" of organization.

Stanzas 3 and 4: the third stanza has the reader looking further up in the "air" while using the words "undulant thrust" to seemingly push the reader's gaze higher and higher into the tree -- Until, in stanza four, our attention begins to focus on the smaller, "dividing and waning" branches that make up the fuller upper body of the tree. Again, the selection and placement of words, line and stanza breaks not only control how the poem sounds but also what the reader is visualizing.

Stanzas 3 and 4: next, the reader's vision is guided to and beyond the seed pods, defined as "cocoons," hanging in the tree, before finally focusing on the very tiniest "twigs" that make up the tip-top of the tree. Read the last stanza again and listen for the sounds of letters in the words that help create the sense, the prosody created image, of small limbs and twigs.

The poem, through prosody, mimics the tree itself from bottom to top, start to finish – strong, heavy words at the beginning, quick, tight words at the end – controlling how poem is read and experienced.