

Appendix A

What We Talk About When We Talk About Poetry: A Lexicon

alliteration – the repetition of beginning sounds, usually consonants, in neighboring words

allegory – a story with a second meaning hidden inside its literal one

allusion – within a poem, a reference to a literary work or an event, person, or place outside of the poem

anaphora – repetition in which the same word or phrase is repeated, often at the beginning of lines

anastrophe – a deliberate inversion of the normal order of words

annotation – a reader's comments written on a poem

anthology – a book of poems by different poets

assonance – the repetition of vowel sounds in neighboring words

cadence – a rhythmic pattern that's based on the natural repetitions and emphases in speech

caesura (si-ZHOOR-uh) – a slight but definite pause *inside* a line of a poem created by the rhythm of the language or a punctuation mark, e.g., a period, dash, or colon in the middle of a line

cliché – an expression that has been used so often it has lost its freshness or meaning, e.g., a rainbow of colors, as busy as a bee, a blanket of snow; note: the adjective form is *clichéd*

close form – poetry written to an established pattern, e.g., a sonnet, limerick, villanelle, pantoum, tritina, sestina, or rondel

collection – a book of poems by one poet

concrete – a real, tangible detail or example of something; opposite of *abstract* or *general*

couplet – a pair of lines, usually written in the same form

connotation – the emotions and associations that a word suggests beyond its literal meaning

denotation – the literal or dictionary meaning of a word

diction – a poet's word choices

elegy – a poem of mourning or praise for the dead

end-stopped line – when meaning *and* grammar pause at the end of a line; a line-break at a normal pause in speech, usually at a punctuation mark; the opposite of an *enjambéd line* or *enjambment*

enjambéd line – when the meaning and grammar of a line continue from one line to the next with no pause; also called a *run-on line*

epigraph – a quotation placed at the beginning of a poem to make the theme more resonant

figurative language – comparisons between unrelated things or ideas: metaphor, simile, personification, and hyperbole are all types of figurative language, which reveals the familiar in new, surprising ways; the opposite of *literal language*

free verse – poetry that doesn't have a set rhythm, line length, or rhyme scheme; instead, it relies on the natural rhythms of speech; today the most widely practiced kind of poetry in the English language

form – the structure of a poem; how it is built

hyperbole – when a poet exaggerates on purpose for effect

image/imagery – a sensory response evoked in the mind of a reader by the diction in a poem; not just visual but any sensory impression—sound, touch, taste, odor—inspired by language

irony – when a poet says one thing but means something else

line – a group of words in a row; the unit of a poem

line break – the most important point in a line of poetry: the pause or breath at the end of a line

literal language – the straightforward meanings of words; the opposite of *figurative language*

lyric poetry – short poems (fewer than 60 lines) about personal experiences or feelings; most verse written today is lyric poetry

metaphor – a comparison in which the poet writes about one thing as if it is something else: A = B, with the qualities of B transferred to A

open form – see *free verse*

oxymoron – a figure of speech that combines two words that contradict each other, e.g., bittersweet

personification – a comparison that gives human qualities to an object, animal, idea, or phenomenon

poet laureate – a title given to an outstanding U.S. poet by the Library of Congress, usually for one or two years

prose poem – a piece of writing that has poetic features—rhythm, imagery, compression—but doesn't rhyme, conform to a set rhythm, or break into lines

rhyme scheme – the pattern of rhyming in a poem; to describe the pattern, each line is assigned a letter, and lines that rhyme are given the same letter, e.g., abab

sensory diction – language in a poem that evokes one of the five senses

simile – a kind of metaphor that uses *like* or *as* to compare two things: A is like B

speaker/persona – the voice that speaks the words of a poem, not necessarily the same person as the poet

stanza – a line or group of lines in a poem separated from other lines by extra white space; a division in a poem that occurs at a natural pause or at a point where the poet wants to speed up or slow down the poem, shift its tone, change the setting, or introduce a new idea or character

symbol – a thing or action that represents something else in addition to itself

tercet – a unit of three lines, usually written in the same form

theme – an idea about life that emerges from a poem

tone – the attitude of the speaker or poet toward the subject of the poem or its reader

tricolon – a rhythm, pattern, or emphasis used three times; a.k.a. “the power of three”

turn – a point in a poem when the meaning moves in a new, significant direction, or its theme emerges