

# SAMPLE OF GLOSSING

It's easy to "spot" poetry by its Shape. Defining Poetry It's different "looking than prose or drama, but that's different than a definition."

Defining poetry is perhaps the most difficult thing about poetry. It is easier to say what poetry does than to describe what it is. We know that poetry can make us chuckle or laugh aloud, startle us with insight, or surprise us with its clarity. Some poems express feelings that we did not even know we had until we read them, presenting the familiar in a way that surprises. Then we say, "Yes, that's just the way it is!" Poetry deals with the essence of life and experience. "Poems have a unique sense of contained energy, made as they are from words used in the most precise and evocative form," say anthologists Michael and Peter Benton. "Poems have their effects upon us as much by sounds, rhythms, associations, shapes, and forms as by lexical definition" (2008, pp. 136-137). Although good prose and poetry share many of the same stylistic devices, poetry is marked by the "saturation" of its language.

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Poets themselves are often the best source for a definition of poetry. Robert Frost (1939) notes that "a poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom." Poetry, says poet Gregory Corso (1983, p. 11), is "the opposite of hypocrisy." Poet Ron Koertge agrees with Emily Dickinson that writers of poetry need to "tell all the Truth, but tell it slant" (2006, p. 539). Poetry combines rich meaning with sounds of language arranged in an interesting form. Poet J. Patrick Lewis calls it "ear candy." Poets select words and arrange them carefully to call attention to experiences in a fresh, new way. Samuel Taylor Coleridge distinguished between prose, "words in their best order," and poetry, "the best words in the best order." Poetry has an economy of form that prose rarely contains. Eve Merriam once remarked that poetry is like a can of frozen juice, becoming prose only when diluted.

Many poets write poems about poetry. Bobbie Goldstein's *Inner Chimes: Poems on Poetry* (P-I-A) contains several poems about poetry. In "Inside a Poem," from *It Doesn't Always Have to Rhyme* (P-I), Eve Merriam captures the essence of poetry and reveals some of its characteristics. She says poetry has a beat that repeats, words that chime, an inner chime, and images not imagined before. Eleanor Farjeon gives a more elusive definition in *Poems for Children* (P-I) when she says that it is "Not the rose, but the scent of the rose." Poet Kristine O'Connell George writes about herself as a writer in "The Blue Between" in Paul B. Janeczko's *Seeing the Blue Between: Advice and Inspiration for Young Poets* (A).

I see the blue between—  
The blue woman tugging  
her stubborn cloud across the sky.  
The blue giraffe stretching  
to nibble a cloud floating by.  
A pod of dancing dolphins,  
cloud oceans, cargo ships,  
a boy twirling his cloud  
around a thin blue fingertip.

In those smooth wide places,  
I see a different scene.  
In those cloudless spaces,  
I see the blue between.

KRISTINE O'CONNELL GEORGE

Poets and critics also often distinguish between poetry and verse. Noted poet and anthologist Myra Cohn Livingston argued that there was a clear difference; generally, the variation in emotional intensity distinguishes verse and poetry, with verse being much less intense than poetry. Anthologist Liz Rosenberg puts it succinctly: "Shel Silverstein . . . worked in a tradition of light verse. . . [but] has moments of poetry in his light verse, just as Shakespeare deliberately plants ditties in the midst of his great poetic plays. But by and large verse and poetry are two separate creatures, like the difference between *standup comedy* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" (2005, p. 375). Verse, then, is amusing but not intense, whereas poetry is intense, an intricate combination of the sounds, meanings, and arrangement of words to call attention to something in a fresh, compelling manner. In this chapter we explore both poetry and verse for young readers.

## A Brief History of Poetry for Young Readers

Verse written especially for children appears in folklore, with Mother Goose verses some of the earliest poetic forms to delight the ears and tickle the tongues of children. Whereas doggerel, sentimental lines, riddles, and traditional rhymes were plentiful, poetry written especially for children began to appear only in the nineteenth century.

Some truly great works, though written for adults, preceded the flowering of poetry written for children. For example, the English poet William Blake (1757-1827) captured the spirit of childhood in verse. The poems in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789) portray the human mind with a childlike quality. Blake's poems show the child as refreshingly curious and responding intuitively to unfathomable beauty.

### THE BLUE BETWEEN

Everyone watches clouds,  
naming creatures they've seen.  
I see sky differently,

not mentioned at beginning

I love that poetry forces us to make every word count.

line - but Sara Holbrook's "If I were a stronger" would be a stronger choice, I think. Why isn't she mentioned here? Maybe b/c she is more contemporary.

I like this wording.

I'm feeling a bit offended. Who is she to say Shel's work does not qualify as "poetry." I'm curious if further reading will calm me down about the issue.