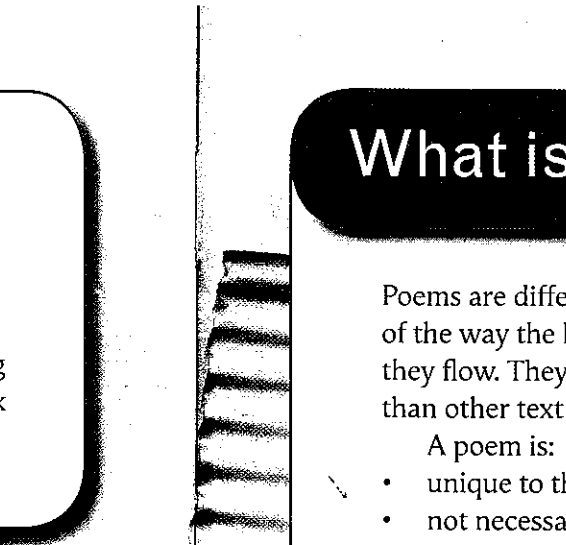


Poetry is a way of giving others a glance at what's in your head and heart. It is the oldest form of literature. Poetry and poets were prized in ancient times. The ancient Greeks used poetry to write powerful plays. The early Arabs fought over it, the Egyptians used it to worship the gods, while the rulers of India provided a lavish lifestyle for the best poets. In more recent times, famous writers such as Chaucer, Shakespeare and Goethe wrote all their work as poetry, exploring the most powerful beliefs and feelings of their time. Even today, knowing the work of our famous poets is still the mark of an educated person.

All the world's a stage  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages . . .

William Shakespeare, from *As You Like It*



Many poets use poetry as a medium to make a social comment. Poetry can question the world and its people and challenge the values and attitudes of our society and culture. Poets may have experienced injustices due to their age, race, class or gender, and may write poetry as a means of expressing their emotions and sharing their opinions or experiences with the reader.

Through poetic language, the reader is affected by the poem and its message and may become more aware of the world around them. Poetry, then, can be seen as a way to make changes in the world by educating people and encouraging them to make a difference.

## What is a poem?

Poems are different from other types of writing. They look different because of the way the lines are structured. They sound different because of the way they flow. They have more sound patterns, more imagery and more rhythm than other text types.

A poem is:

- unique to the person who wrote it
- not necessarily 'difficult' or 'challenging' but can explore deep and complex human experience
- a form of art and therefore represents something of the world in which it is created
- written within the particular culture, time period and from the personal experience of the writer. This shapes its style, its form and the beliefs expressed in it
- a way to have a strong impact, positive or negative, on the audience that reads it.

Poetry is different from other types of writing because we can say things in our own way without having to follow the rules for sentences and paragraphs. The only rule of poetry, according to the famous poet S.T. Coleridge, is that we use 'the best possible words in the best possible order'.

## Why write poetry?

We all have powerful feelings and opinions that we need to get out. Some people can do it through music or art, but all of us can do it through poetry. Words of sadness or happiness can be the beginning of a poem, no matter how short, simple or personal it might be.

There is no need to struggle with trying to achieve regular patterns of rhyme or rhythm. Many popular poets reject such patterns because these patterns can make their words sound forced or artificial.

A poem is like a letter – it's the message that counts, not the letter itself. It doesn't matter if every reader sees a different message. The strength of a poem is the impact it has on the poet or the audience.

Australian poet Judith Wright was once asked why she wrote poetry:

Another well-known writer, C. Day Lewis, said:

I do not sit at my desk to put into poetry something that is already clear in my mind. If it were clear in my mind I wouldn't have a need to write about it. We don't write in order to be understood; we write in order to understand.

Lewis was pointing out that poetry should not just be something clever to impress an audience. It should help us understand something about our own lives.

Often, when we write, we are listening to our inner voice, that special part of us that knows who we truly are. And no matter who we are, we sometimes feel inadequate or lonely.



## Mary's plea

Where am I  
You, my people  
Where am I standing.  
Take me back  
    and hold my hand  
I want to be with you.  
I want to smell  
    the smoke  
    of burnt grass.

Where are you  
    my people  
I am lost;  
I've lost everything; my culture  
    that should be my own.

Where am I  
The clouds  
    o'er shadow me  
    but my memories are there.  
But I am lost,  
    my people,  
Take me back  
And teach the things  
I want to learn.

Is it really you my people,  
The voices,  
the soft voices that I hear.

Daisy Utemorrah



- 1 Identify the lines in Daisy Utemorrah's poem that show that Mary feels lost and lonely.
- 2 Suggest to whom Mary is speaking when she says, 'You, my people'.
- 3 In this poem, Mary is lost and lonely because she feels her culture has been silenced. In pairs, discuss the reasons that are suggested by the poem for Mary's unhappiness. Write your answer in a paragraph. Choose one person from each pair to report to the class.