

Language to use when talking about poetry

alliteration

The repetition of the same or similar sounds at the beginning of words

“What would the world be, once bereft/Of wet and wildness?” (Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Inversnaid”)

apostrophe

Words that are spoken to a person who is absent or imaginary, or to an object or abstract idea.

The poem God's World by Edna St. Vincent Millay begins with an apostrophe: “O World, I cannot hold thee close enough!/Thy winds, thy wide grey skies!/Thy mists that roll and rise!”

assonance

The repetition or a pattern of similar sounds, especially vowel sounds.

“Thou still unravished bride of quietness,/Thou foster child of silence and slow time” (“Ode to a Grecian Urn,” John Keats).

consonance

The repetition of similar consonant sounds, especially at the ends of words, as in *lost* and *past* or *confess* and *dismiss*.

couplet

In a poem, a pair of lines that are the same length and usually rhyme and form a complete thought. Shakespearean sonnets usually end in a couplet.

examples:

I saw a little hermit crab
His coloring was oh so drab

It's hard to see the butterfly
Because he flies across the sky

Hear the honking of the goose
I think he's angry at the moose

hyperbole

A figure of speech in which deliberate exaggeration is used for emphasis.

Many everyday expressions are examples of hyperbole: *tons of money*, *waiting for ages*, *a flood of tears*, etc.

litotes

A figure of speech in which a positive is stated by negating its opposite. Some examples of litotes: *no small victory*, *not a bad idea*, *not unhappy*. Litotes is the opposite of hyperbole.

metaphor

When two things are compared, usually by saying one thing is another.

Some examples of metaphors: *the world's a stage*, *he was a lion in battle*, *drowning in debt*, and *a sea of troubles*.

metonymy

A figure of speech in which one word is substituted for another word or concept with which it is closely associated.

For example, in the expression *The pen is mightier than the sword*, the word *pen* is used for “the written word,” and *sword* is used for “military power.”

meter

The arrangement of a line of poetry by the number of syllables and the rhythm of accented (or stressed) syllables.

personification

the attribution of human nature or character to animals, inanimate objects, or abstract notions, especially as a rhetorical figure.

Examples:

The stars danced playfully in the moonlit sky.

The run down house appeared depressed.

The first rays of morning tiptoed through the meadow.

She did not realize that opportunity was knocking at her door.

Time creeps up on you.

perspective

a particular attitude toward or way of regarding something; a point of view.

stanza

Two or more lines of poetry that together form one of the divisions of a poem. The stanzas of a poem are usually of the same length and follow the same pattern of meter and rhyme.

refrain

A line or group of lines that is repeated throughout a poem, usually after every stanza.

rhyme

The occurrence of the same or similar sounds at the end of two or more words. When the rhyme occurs in a final stressed syllable, it is said to be masculine: *cat/hat, desire/fire, observe/deserve*.

When the rhyme occurs in a final unstressed syllable, it is said to be feminine: *longing/yearning*.

simile

A figure of speech in which two things are compared using the word “like” or “as.”

An example of a simile using *like* occurs in Langston Hughes's poem “Harlem”: “What happens to a dream deferred?/ Does it dry up/ like a raisin in the sun?”

synecdoche

A figure of speech in which a part is used to designate the whole or the whole is used to designate a part.

For example, the phrase “all hands on deck” means “all men on deck,” not just their hands. The reverse situation, in which the whole is used for a part, occurs in the sentence “The U.S. beat Russia in the final game,” where the U.S. and Russia stand for “the U.S. team” and “the Russian team,” respectively.