Poetry Key Terms

BALLAD

- **Meaning**: A narrative poem often made up of quatrains, originating in the mediaeval period.

- **Effect**: Ballads are plot-driven poems which show the reader the events of the poem, rather than telling them directly. The descriptive nature of ballads immerses the reader in the unfolding events of the poem.

Example:
*'La Belle Dame sans Merci' by John Keats is one of the most famous examples of a poetic **ballad.***

BLANK VERSE

- **Meaning**: Unrhymed metered lines, primarily written using iambic pentameter.

- **Effect**: Blank verse mirrors the general speech patterns of conversational English, so they are well-understood by the reader.

Example:
*All of Shakespeare's plays are written in **blank verse**, making use of iambic pentameter to best mimic spoken English.*

COUPLET

- **Meaning**: (also known as a rhyming couplet) Two consecutive rhyming lines. Couplets are used to end the pattern of a Shakespearean sonnet.

- **Effect**: When read aloud, couplets have a clear repetitive rhythm to them which can be used to emphasise a writer's point.

Example:
*'Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess' uses **couplets**, but they are broken up by frequent punctuation. The punctuation breaks up the rigid structure of the couplets, adding to the theme of arrogance throughout the poem.*

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

- **Meaning**: A poem in which the speaker addresses a listener. This may be the reader, though it is often a separate unnamed and unmentioned character.

- **Effect**: Dramatic monologues allow a writer to create a layered speaker with emotional depth created by the insight we get from hearing their innermost thoughts. This increases the reader's emotional investment and engagement.

Example:
*Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess' is one of the most famous examples of a **dramatic monologue**. It is written as one side of a conversation, and though we can't get the full story without the rest of the conversation, the structure allows readers to more easily get acquainted with the characters.*

ELGY

- **Meaning**: A poem which is written as a lament for the dead. They traditionally cover themes of mourning and reflection throughout.

- **Effect**: Elegies are used to express emotions rather than tell a story. They encourage the reader to view the speaker as vulnerable, building an emotional connection between the two.

Example:
John Milton's 'Lycidas' is one of the most famous examples of an elegy, throughout which the speaker mourns the loss of a young man named Lycidas.

END-STOPPED

- **Meaning**: A line ending with a full pause, often made clear through use of a full-stop or colon/semi-colon.

- **Effect**: End-stopped lines slow down the pace of the poem by creating a break, which gives a more rhythmic feel to a poem.

Example:
In 'Bayonet Charge' by Ted Hughes, the final stanza makes use of an end-stop; "Open silent, its eyes standing out. // He plunged past with his bayonet". The full-stop creates a temporary reflective pause, allowing readers to slow down and consider the imagery used.

EPIC

- **Meaning**: An extremely long, often book-length poem in verse form. They often tell the story of a heroic event, journey, group or person.

- **Effect**: Epic poems are written to relay heroic tales, and are intended to inspire the reader. The inspiration comes from the success of the hero in overcoming all obstacles to complete their goal.

Example:
Homer's 'The Odyssey' is one of the most famous epic poems. It gives us Homer's account of the Trojan war, detailing the heroic events of the war.

FREE VERSE

- **Meaning**: Unrhyming, non-metrical lines that closely mimics spoken English.

- **Effect**: Free verse gives a writer more freedom in their diction, allowing them to convey their message without structural restriction. It allows the reader to better understand their message, because it is written more clearly.

Example:
Langston Hughes's 'Mother to Son' is a famous example of a free verse poem. It depicts a mother speaking to her son about her life, using free verse to mirror the informal tone of the conversation.

IAMBIC PENTAMETER

- **Meaning**: A rhythm structure commonly used by Shakespeare which makes use of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable, 5 times in a line.

- **Effect**: The rhythm of iambic pentameter mimics the rhythm of a heartbeat, making it pleasing to the ear and relatively easy to remember, compared to other structures.

Example:
Percy Shelley's 'Ozymandias' is written in iambic pentameter; "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings".

METRE

Meaning: The basic rhythmic structure of a line within a poem.

- **Effect**: The effect of metre varies depending on which metre a poet chooses to make use of (ie. Iambic pentameter is used to mimic the rhythm of spoken English).

Example:
Robert Downing's 'My Last Duchess' is written using iambic pentameter; the metre makes the poem seem rhythmic and consistent, while the punctuation he uses has the opposite effect and breaks up the consistency.

ODE

- **Meaning**: A lyric poem used to express a writer's thoughts about a certain subject. They are written to express intense emotion.

- **Effect**: Odes allow writers to more clearly express their feelings, and the emotional nature of the poem allows readers to become more invested in the text as a result of the empathy for the writer.

Example:
John Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is one of the most famous odes. Keats was a romantic poet known for his emotive poems; the poetic form of an ode perfectly meets his requirements.

PETRARCHAN SONNET

Meaning: A sonnet made up of an octave and a sestet. The octave usually follows a ABBAABBA rhyme scheme, while the sestet usually follows a CDCDCD or CDECDE rhyme scheme.

- **Effect**: The octave at the beginning of a Petrarchan sonnet often presents a question or a problem, while the sestet at the end relieves the tension, creating a calming and satisfying conclusion for the reader.

Example:
Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'How do I love thee?' is a very famous example of a petrarchan sonnet, and it perfectly follows the expected form of a traditional petrarchan sonnet by asking a question in the octave, and answering it in the sestet.

POETIC FORM

- **Meaning**: Poetic form refers to the structural rules of a poem, encompassing the rhythm, metre, and rhyme scheme. This phrase can also be used to refer to the way a poem looks on a page.

- **Effect**: Poetic form adds layers of depth to a poem, reinforcing the themes and emotions a poet has instilled into the text. This increases the emotional engagement of the reader.

Example:
'Extract from The Prelude' by William Wordsworth is an epic poem, and the poetic form is used to make clear the importance of the events of the poem; epic poems are generally used to depict epic heroic events, so Wordsworth is equating his experience to a significant event like this.

RHYME SCHEME

- **Meaning**: The pattern of rhymes at the end of the lines of a poem. The rhyme scheme of a poem can vary stanza to stanza.

- **Effect**: Rhyme schemes give a poem a clear rhythm, making them easier for a reader to remember. Rhyme scheme can be used to emphasise more important aspects of a poem, or neatly round off the events of a poem.

Example:
In Wilfred Owen's 'Exposure', the first 4 lines of each stanza use a ABBA rhyme to represent the similarities in the soldiers' experiences.

SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET

- **Meaning**: A sonnet made up of three quatrains and a concluding rhyming couplet. They tend to follow a ABAB CDCD EFEF GG rhyme scheme.

- **Effect**: The alternate rhymes in each quatrain of a Shakespearean sonnet are used to create a clear contrast between different lines and sections of the poem, developing to a clear sense of progression in the poem. The rhyming couplets at the end of the form are used to neatly round off the poem, finishing up key themes from the poem.

Example:
Shakespeare wrote hundreds of sonnets, but 'Sonnet 18' is one of his most famous. It is famous for the way the sonnet form works with Shakespeare's eloquent language to convey intense emotion.

SONNET

- **Meaning**: A fixed verse poem consisting of 14 lines, typically with 10 syllables per line.

- **Effect**: Sonnets are typically used to delve into the difference between two characters, concepts, or emotions, and the sonnet form is used to explore the differences and tension between these two items.

Example:
Percy Shelley's 'Ozymandias' is written using sonnet form, but uses an unusual rhyme scheme to break up the expected rhythm of a sonnet to mirror the breaking down of the statue.

SPEAKER

- **Meaning**: The poetic equivalent to the narrator in prose. The speaker is not the same as the writer, as the writer will often write from the perspective of another person.

- **Effect**: The speaker in a poem is key to the way a poem is understood by the reader. The emotions of the speaker are intertwined in the text, giving the reader a more in-depth understanding of the emotions at play in a scene.

__Example:__
In Simon Armitage's 'Remains', the speaker is a soldier suffering with guilt following the killing of a looter while on patrol. By having the soldier himself narrate the poem, readers can understand more deeply the emotional trauma caused by the event.

STANZA

- **Meaning**: The poetic equivalent to a paragraph in prose; the chunks a poem is broken up into. Different stanza sizes have different names.
  - ○ Tercet – a stanza made up of 3 lines
  - ○ Quatrain – a stanza made up of 4 lines
  - ○ Quintain – a stanza made up of 5 lines
  - ○ Sestet – a stanza made up of 6 lines
  - ○ Septet – a stanza made up of 7 lines
  - ○ Octave – a stanza made up of 8 lines

- **Effect**: Stanzas can be used to change the physical form of a poem (ie. the way it looks on a page). They also help the writer to group their ideas together in a clear and concise way that keeps them separate but related for the reader.

__Example:__
In Ted Hughes's 'Bayonet Charge', the stanza sizes vary, with different numbers of line per stanza to mirror the changing speed of the soldier as he charges.

VOLTA

- **Meaning**: The turning point in a sonnet; where an argument changes or there's a shift in the thought process of the speaker.

- **Effect**: The volta engages the attention of the reader, by forcing them to examine the reasons behind the shift and encouraging deeper engagement.

__Example:__
In William Wordsworth's '1802', he uses a volta to turn the focus of the poem away from the English landscape.