

# The Sounds of Poetry

What makes a poem different from other forms of writing? Do rhythm and rhyme come to mind? Not all poems use both these elements, but most poems have a music of their own. Listen for the music in the poems in this section. How does the arrangement of sounds help to create feeling and meaning?

## Find the Rhythm or Meter of a Poem

You react to rhythm every day - in the music you hear and the sports you play. In poetry, the **rhythm** is the beat of the lines caused by the syllables of the words on the line. The pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables is called the **meter**. Not every poem will have a meter, but every poem will have a rhythm. Some poems have a regular **pattern** of strong beats called a **foot**. A foot is a unit of meter. A metrical foot can have 2 or 3 syllables and usually has one or more stressed and one or more unstressed syllables in it. Here are some tips to figure out the rhythm pattern of a poem.

1. Read the poem to yourself to find the rhythm pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables.
2. Mark the **heavy or stressed** syllables this way: — (strong, up)
3. Mark the **lighter unstressed** syllables this way: ∪ (soft, down)
4. Now read it again and listen again to the beat of the lines where you have marked the stressed and unstressed syllables.
5. After marking the beats, look for the pattern. Usually the rhythm pattern repeats itself. Mark each foot with a /

Here is an example of a marked poem showing the meter and rhythm:

The sun / that brief / Decem/ber day  
Rose cheer/less ov/er hills / of / gray,  
And, dark/ly cir/cled, gave / at noon  
A sad/dér light / than wan/ing moon.

—John Greenleaf Whittier