



Dennis
Lee
Riffs

with a new introduction
by Paul Vermeersch

TEACHER GUIDE

BRICK BOOKS CLASSICS 3 BRICK BOOKS

Brick Books has produced this Teacher Guide as an aid in discussing and studying the titles from its Brick Books Classics poetry series in secondary and post-secondary classrooms.

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INTRODUCTION TO POETRY

WHAT MAKES POETRY, POETRY?

Begin with some of your assumptions and preconceptions about poetry by answering the following questions as true or false. If you believe the statement to be false, you may indicate why with a brief explanation to the right of the statement. The final question invites you, in your own notebook, to write whatever else you believe to be true (or false) about poetry. Quiz someone close to you with your own suppositions.

1. T/F **Poetry has a beat.**

2. T/F **Poetry rhymes.**

3. T/F **Poetry does not run margin to margin, as prose does, but has line breaks.**

4. T/F **Poetry deals with imagery (allegory, symbol, metaphor, simile, etc.).**

5. T/F **Poetry is difficult.**

6. T/F **Poetry has stanzas.**

7. T/F **Poetry has verses.**

8. T/F **There is no difference between a stanza and a verse.**

9. T/F **Songs that have words are poetry.**

10. T/F **Poems, unlike short fiction, don't tell a story.**

11. T/F **Free verse has no rules.**

12. T/F **Blank verse has no rules.**

13. T/F **All poems have a regular metre or cadence.**

14. T/F **Poems have one valid interpretation.**

15. T/F **All poets are extremely well-educated.**

16. T/F **Rap is poetry.**

17. T/F **Poetry is/isn't...**

HOW DO POETS TALK ABOUT POETRY?

Read some of the quotations below to discover what published poets say about their own craft. In the box below their statements, create your own statement about poetry.

“Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity.”

—**William Wordsworth**

“Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”

—**Percy Bysshe Shelley**

“Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.”

—**T. S. Eliot**

“Poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive, and widely effective mode of saying things, and hence its importance.”

—**Matthew Arnold**

“The poet is the priest of the invisible.”

—**Wallace Stevens**

“If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?”

—**Emily Dickinson**

“Poems come out of wonder, not out of knowing.”

—**Lucille Clifton**

“Poetry isn’t a profession; it’s a way of life. It’s an empty basket; you put your life into it and make something out of that.”

—**Mary Oliver**

“When an angel carries away my soul / all shrouded in fog, folded in flames / I have no body, no tears to weep / just a bag in my heart, full of poems.”

—**Elena Svarts**

I think that poetry is ...

TEACHER GUIDE TO RIFFS: BRICK BOOKS CLASSICS 3, by DENNIS LEE

For each of the selections, before you respond to the questions, keep in mind the following important considerations for each piece:

- a) Imagine the identity of the speaker.
- b) Imagine an audience for the address.
- c) What imagery (sensory detail, metaphors, similes, symbols, etc.) does the poet use?
- d) What technical elements are in play (structure, rhythm or its lack, rhyme or its lack)?
- e) What allusions does the poet make to ideas/people/places (for example, historical figures, works of art, scientific terms, etc.) that have a life outside the poem?
- f) Are there elements of the poet's biography (family life, profession, relationships) that inform the work? If so, how do they inform the poetry?

Introduction: *That Funny Ping* by Paul Vermeersch

- ▶ Give a short summary, according to Paul Vermeersch, of some of Lee's volumes of poetry: *Civil Elegies*, *Riffs*, *The Gods*, and *Testament*. Which one sounds the most interesting to you? Why?

1

- ▶ Skim through the structure of the entire book, beginning with this riff. How many pieces are there? Is this number significant in any way? If not, how do you explain it?

2

- ▶ To what do assonance and alliteration draw our attention in this riff?

3

- ▶ What effect do the repeated consonants have on the sound? How do they help the sense of the piece?

4

- ▶ What do these details reveal about the lifestyle of the speaker up to the point where he met the person he's "wild for"?

5

- ▶ Predict why this couple have been separated from one another.
- ▶ What words or phrases make the speaker's experience sound scripted. What does this forecast for the relationship?

6

- ▶ How has the speaker's voice modulated in this riff?

7

- ▶ How does the speaker turn the cliché of **one true love** upside down?

8

- ▶ How does the speaker interpret the beloved's expression of "ho hum"? What does that tell you about the speaker?

9

- ▶ What does the sense of "yes" in which the beloved "moved around in" tell you about the beloved?

10

- ▶ Analyse the line endings in lines 6, 9, and 12. Does each enjambment work the same way? What do you notice?

11

- ▶ How does the speaker give a sacred and primordial quality to the affair between him and his beloved?

12

- ▶ When the speaker wishes to know what his beloved is dreaming, what do you suppose are some of his motivations?

13

- ▶ Comment on the use of the images “hopscotch,” “quicksilver,” and “born-again.” How do these disparate images hang together?

14

- ▶ Identify each of the four metaphors in the first three lines of this riff. Do their associations reveal any commonalities?
- ▶ If the phrases “at play in the garden of words” and “permitted to live in our skins” appear somewhat contradictory, in what way might the contradiction validate the emotional authenticity of the riff?

15

- ▶ Identify at least three paradoxical metaphors or similes in this riff. Explain their effectiveness.

16

- ▶ Sing the lines of this riff into a recording device. Aim for a jazz feel. Play it back to yourself. What is your reaction? What are your classmates' reactions?

17

- ▶ Show how reversals in turns of phrase help reinvent clichés.

18

- ▶ How does the way that the words are placed on the page serve this riff?

19

- ▶ How has the speaker's voice altered in this riff? How does it compare to other voicings thus far in this collection?

20

- ▶ Draw the person speaking these lines.

21

- ▶ How many musical metaphors are in riff 21? How do they work together?

22

- ▶ Examine the contrast between the speaker's voice and his subject. What kind of tension does it create?

23

- ▶ What activity does the speaker describe in the words "to coin new nerve ends, fashion an / icon habitation, name of / be-when-my-reason-for- / being-is-snatched-away"? What evidence supports your claim?

24

- ▶ What effect does the mixture of formal and informal images have on the speaker's voice?
- ▶ What does the bow-tie symbolize?

25

- ▶ How is this riff structured?
- ▶ How does each section shift in terms of tone?

26 & 27

- ▶ The speaker claims he was not happy, that he "lied." What is he instead and why?
- ▶ The word **delicado** is Spanish. What is its meaning and what is it describing in stanza 3?
- ▶ Where does the word **areté** come from and what does it mean?
- ▶ Account for the shift from tercets to couplets from the end of riff 26 to the beginning of riff 27? What change in the meaning is reflected by the change in structure?
- ▶ What does the final ellipsis in riff 27 lead the reader to contemplate?

28 & 29

- ▶ How do these two poems underscore the physical eroticism of Lee's *Riffs*?

30

- ▶ How do you know that the lover character in *Riffs* has bolted from the relationship, perhaps more than once?
- ▶ What does the last image in the last line indicate about the character of their relationship?

31 & 32

- ▶ How does Lee use echoes of nursery rhymes and allusions to the Bible with humorous affect in these two poems?
- ▶ How do the contrasts in riff 32 indicate the sudden shift in the lover character's attitude toward the speaker?

33

- ▶ How is the image of snuff problematic in this riff? Why is it funny?

34 & 35

- ▶ How does the speaker convey his sense of loss and diminishment in these two riffs?
- ▶ Draw a cartoon comic strip of one frame titled "Return of the Wandering Spats."

36

- ▶ What is the origin of the Latin word **tremendum**? Where has it been used? How does Lee's allusion to it comment on the subject matter?
- ▶ What kind of dissonance does it create to use this term against some of Lee's other diction?
- ▶ What other Latin word is used to describe the lover character? How does its placement above the words "you jerk" contradict its deference? Why is the contradiction workable?

37

- ▶ What is the speaker's attitude towards himself? Which word choices convey this attitude most effectively?

38

- ▶ What is a **homburg**? Why is **merrie** spelled as it is? Why use the term **Dit-Dat-Dot**? Where does the word **reprise** come from? What effect is created by using so many disparate linguistic references in the same piece?

39

- ▶ Look up the words **conjure**, **pronto**, **chutzpah**, **panache**, and **frabjous**. Use this single piece as a benchmark to describe Lee's poetic style.

40

- ▶ Explain the colon in line 4.

41

- ▶ Contrast the tone and subject matter of riff 40 with riff 41. What effect is caused by their juxtaposition?

42

- ▶ What is the world of pre-logos?
- ▶ What is the speaker's motive for taking his lover there?

43

- ▶ There is no antecedent for the pronoun **them** in the first line of this piece. Yet if you read it in its entirety, the reference becomes clear. Who or what are the "them"?
- ▶ Why can the speaker not "hold them together"?
- ▶ In the light of the responses to the first two questions, how does the last line, impossibly, make perfect sense?

44

- ▶ With the mention of one word, Lee manages to "hold together" what he claimed he could not hold together in the last poem. What is that word?

45

- ▶ The "holding" mentioned in this piece hearkens back to riff 43. How? And what are the different reverberations for each use?

46

- ▶ Find another piece in this volume that has the same tone and voice as this one and compare the methods by which Lee achieves the tension between colloquial twang and literary command of language.

47

- ▶ Why is the word **suite** particularly apt in this piece?

48

- ▶ By what method does the speaker convey the depth of his emotion for his beloved while at the same time revealing his anger with her?

49

- ▶ What are the indicators that the speaker's attitude has changed from anger to another emotion? What is that emotion?

50

- ▶ What do the phrases **words and tomorrow** and **aere perennius** suggest about the lover character?

51

- ▶ What metaphor is used to describe/identify the speaker's emotions? Could this same metaphor be a metaphor for the poetic process? How?

52

- ▶ How does the poem's sound reflect the speaker's mood?

53

- ▶ Describe the nature of the speaker's connection to the beloved.

54

- ▶ How would you describe "sheer valhalla overdrive"?
- ▶ What does this expression indicate about the character of the speaker?

55

- ▶ In what way does this piece sound a bit like the ancient poets Catullus and Sappho?

56

- ▶ In what ways is this piece more poem-like and less riff-like?

57

- ▶ What is the difference in tone between the italics and the regular text?

58

- ▶ Outline the speaker's dilemma as posed in this riff.
- ▶ Where else in Lee's work in *Riffs* do you find a dichotomy between what is real and the attempt to articulate it?

59

- ▶ Analyse the structure of this piece. Why couplets? Why end with a single word on a single line?
- ▶ Where in this piece do you hear echoes of riff 39?

60

- ▶ What does the loss of “the beat” symbolize?
- ▶ What do the last three lines tell you about how the speaker characterizes his relationship with the lover character?

61

- ▶ How does Lee use assonance to achieve the tone he desires?

62

- ▶ What do you think the speaker means by going “drunk into / jive-time”?

63

- ▶ Choose one of the following expressions and analyse its use:
 - a) “Look maw—no mind”
 - b) “stick to the stony face of / nothing”
 - c) “chomp on the root of *is*”.

64

- ▶ Why use the word **speechlessest** instead of **most speechless**?

65

- ▶ What are the “planks” that the speaker has walked since his lover left?

66

- ▶ What metaphor does the speaker use for his behaviour while waiting to hear from his lover?

67

- ▶ Why are the words **chaucer** and **water** joined by the word **and**?
- ▶ Why is the word **chaucer** not capitalized?

68

- ▶ What does the word **ping** symbolize as used by Lee?
- ▶ Which expressions and images point to the paradoxical relationship that the speaker has with his beloved?

69

- ▶ When the speaker's hope departs, how does the tone change along with the syntax?
- ▶ What extended metaphor does the speaker use to identify the nature of his lover's treatment of him?

70

- ▶ Choose one riff previous to this one in praise of the beloved and compare it to this post-rejection rant. Look for similarities as well as differences.
- ▶ Identify the style of this particular riff.

71

- ▶ What tone does the speaker use to mitigate his pain? Give some examples.

72

- ▶ How has the lover character's treatment of the speaker eroded? Give examples.

73

- ▶ What is a **juggernaut**? Does the term apply to the speaker or the beloved?

74

- ▶ What image is implied but never directly stated in this riff?

75

- ▶ Which words or expressions in this riff have been modified from their original meaning or context? Why?

76

- ▶ How does Lee use traditionally romantic imagery in this riff? Give examples.

77

- ▶ What is the purpose of the repetition in this riff?

78

- ▶ Who or what is the speaker's god? Support your response with direct quotations from the text.

79

- ▶ How does the image of the behemoth relate to the rest of this riff?

80

- ▶ Compare the use of the word **pang** in this riff to its use in the first riff in the volume. How is it similar? How is it different?

81

- ▶ Comment on the effect of the juxtapositions in line 6 of this riff. How do the images inform each other?

82

- ▶ Comment on the typography of this riff. Why are the words and lines arranged in this way?

83

- ▶ The speaker characterizes his past preoccupation with his beloved in three words in line 8. Restate his opinion of his former feelings in this paraphrase.

84

- ▶ Use one word to describe the speaker's feelings for his beloved based on this riff. Defend your choice.

85

- ▶ How many ways can you interpret the expression **mouth to mouth** in line 8 in the context in which it is used?

86

- ▶ What do the words **deciduate** and **a capella** mean?
- ▶ How are these three lines related to each other?
- ▶ Which other poets come to mind as you read this riff? Why?

87

- ▶ Examine the syntax of this riff. What does it reveal about the speaker?

88

- ▶ What in the nature of dolphins makes them an apt metaphor for this piece?

Afterword and Essay questions:

- ▶ Choose one of the following themes and comment on its relevance to Dennis Lee's *Riffs*:
 - a) structure
 - b) voicings
 - c) vernacular and slang
 - d) improvisation
 - e) influences on Dennis Lee.
- ▶ Read Dennis Lee's essay on polyphony (in *Body Music*, his collection of essays) and apply his analysis to his own work in *Riffs*.
- ▶ What moves this collection through a linear progression, despite its apparent haphazard path?
- ▶ Do you agree that poetry is the art of "opening up a space for the wind to blow through"? Why or why not?

What other questions would you like to discuss that were not asked above?

GLOSSARY OF POETIC TERMS

For a more comprehensive list of literary terms related to poetry, consider the online Oxford or Abrams glossaries.

Alliteration

Repeated consonant sounds in close proximity.
ex: *Bugsy borrows bouncing baby buggies.*

Allusion

A reference to a person, place, or event outside the text.
ex: *"There is no need to become Woody Allen."* Gwyneth Paltrow, *Sliding Doors*.

Analogy

A comparison between unlike things to show an underlying similarity.
ex: *"And the night is clear and empty / as a lake of acid rain."* Bruce Cockburn, *Don't Feel Your Touch*.

Anecdote

A funny little story.
ex: *Any story that begins "When I was your age..."*

Antagonist

The obstacle to the protagonist (the character with whom the reader sympathizes).
ex: *The shark in Jaws.*

Archetype

A type of character universally recognized across many cultures.
ex: *"Follow the dreamer, the fool and the sage / back to the days of the Innocent Age."* Dan Fogelberg, *The Innocent Age*.

Argument

Any writing which attempts to convince or sway the reader.

ex: *Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own, which outlines the needs of the female writer.*

Ballad

A lengthy poem, often in song form, having many stanzas and a refrain.

ex: *Gordon Lightfoot's The Canadian Railroad Trilogy.*

Character

A person or animal in a story.

- *Static Character*: like a piece of furniture, just there.
- *Dynamic Character*: changes or develops as the story unfolds.
- *Flat*: like cardboard, having only two dimensions, not well-developed.
- *Round*: an interesting and complex character whom the reader gets to know well.

Characterization

4 ways to develop characters:

- By what they say.
- By what they do.
- By what others in the text say.
- By what the speaker/narrator/author says.

Chronological Order

Events arranged in the time order in which they occurred.

ex: *Lists of Canadian Prime Ministers from first to last.*

Cliché

An overused expression that has lost its effectiveness over time.

ex: *"Avoid clichés like the plague."*

Conflict

Forces in opposition.

- *External*: another character, society, nature (*Person vs. Person, Person vs. Society, Person vs. Nature*).
- *Internal*: within a character; a choice or decision (*Person vs. Self*).

Description

Writing meant to conjure up a person, place, thing, event, or experience for the reader using adjectives or imagery. Pays close attention to sensory details.

Dialect

Way of speaking characteristic of a geography or a people.

ex: *"I's the b'y that builds the boat."* Newfoundland folk song.

Dialogue

Conversation between or among characters.

ex: *"Dude, where's my car?" "Where's your car, dude?"*

Diction

Choice of wording.

ex: *"Jen and I were accustomed to our father's last-will-and-testament diction, and were at times free to interrupt Atticus for a translation when it was beyond our understanding."* Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Drama

Writing meant to be performed on stage.

ex: *Any play by Shakespeare.*

Essay

Nonfiction writing that is arguable, provable, worth proving, with a limited scope.

- *Subjective*: from the essayist's point of view.
- *Objective*: an attempt to remove bias from the subject.
- *Argument/Persuasive*: the focus is swaying or convincing the reader.

Exposition

Writing that informs.

ex: *An article about how to improve your golf swing.*

Part of the plot of a narrative in which characters and setting are established. (see also **PLOT**)

ex: *Once upon a time, there were three little pigs and the time came for them to leave home and seek their fortunes.*

Euphemism

The exchange of an offensive or embarrassing term for a more polite one.

ex: *"XYZ!" for Examine your zipper; your fly is down!*

Fable

A story with a widely applicable life story. It often conveys a moral.

ex: *The Tortoise and The Hare tells the story of how slow and steady tends to win the race more often than speed.*

Fiction

Stories created from the imagination.

ex: *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial.*

Figure of Speech

An idiomatic expression which, when taken literally, does not make sense.

ex: *"Hit the road, Jack!" is not an instruction for someone named Jack to go outside and slap the road.*

Flashback

Insertion of an event prior to the actions currently happening.

ex: *The film Forrest Gump begins with Forrest waiting for a bus. As he waits, he goes backward in time to tell stories of his life that happened before that moment.*

Foreshadowing

Hints that suggest future events.

ex: *In Jurassic Park, Dr. Grant, during a moment of turbulence in a helicopter, hastily ties two female ends of a seat belt together. Her action foreshadows the female dinosaurs who will later reproduce regardless of the lack of male dinosaurs.*

Free Verse

Poetry with rhythm but without a regular metre or rhyme scheme.

ex: *"For all this sea-hoard of deciduous things, / Strange woods half sodden, and new brighter stuff: / In the slow float of differing light and deep, / No! there is nothing! In the whole and all, / Nothing that's quite your own. / Yet this is you." Ezra Pound, "Portrait D'Une Femme."*

Historical Fiction

A created story set in a real historical time period.

ex: *Braveheart or Shakespeare in Love.*

Humour

Something funny or amusing.

ex: Anything published by the Onion.

Hyperbole

An exaggeration.

ex: We've heard this story a million times!

Idiom

An expression not meant to be taken literally.

ex: Don't get your knickers in a twist.

Imagery

Descriptive words and phrases that appeal to the senses (sight, taste, smell, hearing, touch); often uses figurative language.

ex: "I wandered lonely as a cloud." William Wordsworth.

Inference

A deduction about the text based on evidence.

ex: Someone slams a door and you infer that the person must be upset or angry.

Irony

A contrast between expectation and reality.

- *Verbal*: the gap between what appears to be true and what is actually true in spoken word.
- *Situational*: an expected outcome differs greatly from the actual outcome.
- *Dramatic*: the audience knows something which the character(s) on stage or in the work do not.

Legend

A story passed down culturally with historical roots but without authentication.

ex: Sasquatch, The Loch Ness Monster.

Limerick

A five-line poem with an AABBA rhyme scheme meant to be funny.

ex: There once was a lady from York / who had an aversion to pork. / When piglets were born / with face all forlorn, / she hid both her knife and her fork.

Literal Language

Language that has no interpretation other than the intended meaning.

ex: *“Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.”* Bitzer’s definition of a horse, given to his literally-minded teacher, Mr. Gradgrind.

Lyric Poem

A poem that expresses feelings, originally accompanied by a lyre.

ex: Catullus’s *“Odi et Amo”* (*I hate and I love*) is an excellent example.

Metamorphosis

A complete shift in physical form.

ex: *The overnight change of Gregor Samsa in Kafka’s Metamorphosis from human to insect. A caterpillar becomes a butterfly.*

Metaphor

An identification of two unlike things to suggest a commonality.

ex: *Simon and Garfunkel’s “I Am a Rock.”*

Mood

The emotions evoked in the reader by an author’s words.

ex: *The often-used opening “It was a dark and stormy night” is clearly an establisher of mood.*

Motif

Any object or idea repeating itself throughout a literary work.

ex: *The scars in J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter repeatedly point to both destiny and love.*

Myth

A story that typically explains the creation of the world and/or why it is the way it is. Generally involves gods or supernatural forces.

ex: *Sisyphus, Hercules, Romulus and Remus.*

Narrative

Writing that tells a story.

ex: *“Boy meets girl. Boy loses girl. Boy sucks thumb.”* Dennis Lee.

Narrative Poem

A poem that tells a story.

ex: *"The Highwayman"* by Alfred Noyes.

Narrator

The person telling the story.

ex: *The entire story of The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald is told through the character Nick Carraway.*

Onomatopoeia

Words that imitate or resemble the sounds they describe.

ex: *Bang, plop, fizzle, hiss, ding. "The moan of doves in immemorial elms, / And murmuring of innumerable bees." Tennyson, "Come down, O Maid."*

Oxymoron

A juxtaposed contradictory term.

ex: *Just war, adult child, loose tights, paid volunteer. "I like a smuggler. He is the only honest thief." Charles Lamb.*

Personification

The attribution of human feelings, thoughts, behaviours, or attitudes to the non-human.

ex: *Justice is blind.*

Playwright

The author of a play.

ex: *Norm Foster.*

Plot

The series of events that make up a story.

- *Exposition (Introduction):* introduces conflict, characters, and setting.
- *Initial Incident:* the first action that happens in the story.
- *Rising Action:* the events which increase the conflict and the suspense.
- *Climax:* the most emotional moment in the story.
- *Crisis:* the turning point of the story. (Sometimes crisis and climax occur at the same time.)
- *Falling Action:* events which decrease the conflict and the suspense.
- *Resolution/Denouement:* conflicts are resolved, and mysteries are unravelled.

Point of View

The eyes or lens through which a story is told:

- *First Person*: we only know, see, and feel what the narrator knows, sees, and feels.
- *Second Person*: the narrator addresses “you”—who might be another character in the work, or the reader, or even the narrator him/herself. Often “I” as the teller of the story is implied.
- *Third Person Limited*: the reader is told the story through the eyes of only one character.
- *Third Person Omniscient*: the reader learns everything about all the characters through an all-seeing, god-like narrator.

Protagonist

The character with whom our sympathy most lies. The conflict revolves around the protagonist. The protagonist is opposed by the antagonist.

ex: *Christ or Satan in Milton’s Paradise Lost (depending on your point of view).*

Proverb

A pithy saying that states an obvious truth.

ex: *Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.*

Pun

A word with multiple, often humorous interpretations.

ex: *When you work in a calendar factory, it’s hard to take a day off.*

Rhyme Scheme

A coding of the rhymes in a poem with letters from the alphabet, beginning with ‘A.’ Each differing rhyme is labelled with the next letter and so on.

ex: *ABAB, AABB, ABBA, ABCB, etc.*

Setting

Where and when the story takes place.

ex: *Star Wars opening credits: “It is a period of civil war. Rebel spaceships, striking from a hidden base, have won their first victory against the evil Galactic Empire. During the battle, Rebel forces managed to steal secret plans to the Empire’s ultimate weapon, the Death Star, an armoured space station with enough power to destroy an entire planet.”*

Simile

A comparison between two unlike things using the words *like* or *as*.

ex: *"Loneliness in a woman is like hunger in a dog."* Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace*.

Stanza

A group of lines in a poem that form a unit, sometimes with a regular metric and rhyme pattern; similar to paragraphs in prose.

ex: *"True wit is nature to advantage dress'd; / What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd."* Alexander Pope, *"An Essay on Criticism."*

Stereotype

Assigning qualities to an individual based on membership in a group.

ex: *All Canadians are nice and constantly apologize.*

Suspense

Withholding information from the reader to create anxiety or anticipation for what may come next.

ex: *The situation in Stephanie Meyer's Twilight is a constant state of suspense: we know that Bella is in danger of being killed or turned into a vampire at some point by SOMEBODY but we don't know who and we don't know when.*

Symbol

Something with a universality about its meaning shared by many cultures.

ex: *Colours can have meaning almost universally understood: red can signify passion, anger, and love.*

Syntax

The accepted order in which words are commonly placed in a given language.

ex: *"Much to learn you still have."* Yoda, *Star Wars, Episode II: Attack of the Clones*. *His syntax, rather than subject-verb-object, is object-subject-verb. To English speakers, the syntax sounds alien.*

Tall Tale

An exaggerated, implausible story told as though it should be believed.

ex: *Paul Bunyan or Johnny Appleseed.*

Text Structure

How a piece of writing is constructed, in terms of how each part is placed.

ex: In Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, the chapters alternate between day and night to create a rhythm that accentuates the emphasis on female cycles and rhythms.

Theme

A theme is a recurrent idea that is threaded throughout a work of literature. In larger works there may be several themes.

ex: In The Princess Bride, the themes are explicitly stated: "Are you kidding? Fencing. Fighting. Torture. Revenge. Giants. Monsters. Chases. Escapes. True love. Miracles." William Goldman, The Princess Bride script.

Tone

The point of view is the lens through which the narrator sees the events, people, and places in the text; the tone is the attitude the narrator holds about those experiences.

ex: An approach to a subject can be formal, informal, humorous, satirical, jaunty, serious, emotional, objective. There are as many tones as there are emotions. If you can identify what the narrator is feeling about what is happening, you can usually identify the tone. For example, "Those who reside in vitreous domiciles should refrain from hurling geological objects." Essentially, it's the same thing as "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." However, the tone is much more formal and the diction more precise and scientific.

Tragedy

A tragedy happens when, at the crisis, the fortunes of the protagonist take a negative turn and do not recover.

ex: Great tragedies often involve irony: Romeo dies thinking Juliet is dead; she revives, finds Romeo dead, and kills herself. Lear, seeking signs of love and devotion from his daughter, divides his kingdom too early and loses her. Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman cannot make a success of anything in his life except his death, which leaves his wife "free and clear" with the insurance money but without the only thing that was ever important to her: Willy.

Understatement

The opposite of hyperbole.

ex: "Houston, we have a problem." Jim Lovell's summation of the situation in response to an exploded oxygen tank, 200 000 miles away from Earth on the Apollo 13 space mission..