

Poetic Techniques



*The following techniques are commonly found in poetry (and some in prose). When reading a poem, it is often helpful to have this list to hand and to annotate it with the techniques as you find them. Once you have ascertained the devices being used, you should consider **why** they have been used and their **intended effect** upon the reader.*

- Alliteration: a series of words beginning with the same letter.
- Anthropomorphism: giving an animal human qualities.
- Assonance: a series of words with the same vowel sound.
- Caesura: a full stop, colon or semi-colon in the middle of a line.
- Consonance: a series of words with the same consonant sound, not necessarily at the beginning of a word.
- Enjambment: continuing poetry without punctuation at the end of the line.
- Imagery: a continued symbol or motif used throughout the poem.
- Metaphor: saying that something *is* something else.

- Onomatopoeia: a word which sounds like the thing it is describing (or onomatopoeic, which is *reminiscent* of the thing it is describing)
- Personification: giving an inanimate object human qualities.
- Repetition: the repeated use of a word or phrase.
- Sibilance: a repeated “s” sound
- Simile: saying that something is *like* or *as* something else.
- Synaesthesia: invoking other senses (i.e. taste, smell) in the poem.

Here is an example of a poem which has been annotated:

I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud



BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

I wandered lonely as a cloud¹
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host², of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancin³g in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way⁴,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance⁵.

The waves beside them danced⁶; ⁷but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee⁸:

¹ Simile

² Imagery

³ Personification

⁴ Simile

⁵ Personification

⁶ Personification

⁷ Caesura

⁸ Personification

A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company⁹:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show ¹⁰to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude¹¹;
And then my heart with pleasure fills¹²,
And dances with the daffodils¹³.

Now let's think about the **effect** of some of these devices:

1. "*Lonely as a cloud*" is a **simile**. Why is a cloud lonely? What images does Wordsworth convey when he used this simile?
2. "*A crowd, a host, of golden daffodils*" is **personification**. What effect does personification have here? Why might Wordsworth have used it? What about the word "*host*"? When we hear the word "*host*", we often think of "Heavenly Host" – so what does this mean? Why has Wordsworth chosen to invoke the notion of Heaven?
3. "*Fluttering and dancing in the breeze*" is another example of **personification**. With this device, what image comes to mind? Can you picture the daffodils more clearly?
4. "*Continuous as the stars that shine*" is another example of a **simile**. Think about stars in the sky: why would Wordsworth have chosen to liken the daffodils to such an image? What is he trying to convey?
5. "*Tossing their heads in sprightly dance*" is, once again, **personification**. Why has Wordsworth used this here? What sorts of creatures "toss their heads"? Horses, certainly – and, perhaps, girls. Why has he chosen to suggest this?

⁹ Personification

¹⁰ Metaphor

¹¹ Imagery

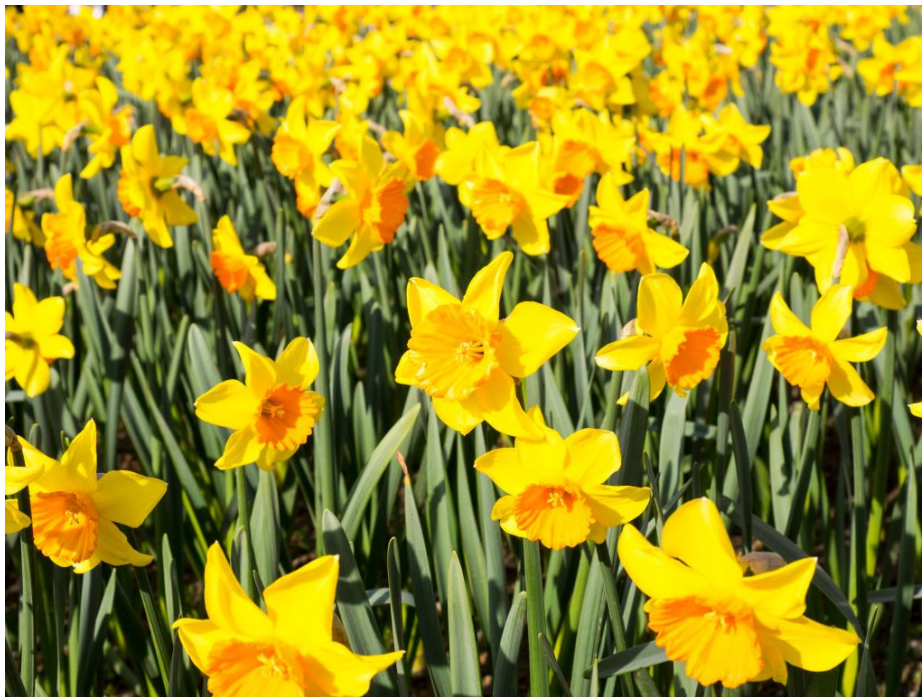
¹² Metaphor

¹³ Alliteration and metaphor

6. Perhaps the answer is in the final stanza? Wordsworth writes:

*“For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.”*

7. When faced with “*the bliss of solitude*” (which means that he is happily alone), he sees these daffodils in his “*inward eye*”.
8. Why might he have personified them and made them human, in order to think about them when he is alone?
9. Think back to the opening line: “*I wandered lonely as a cloud*” – is there a connection? Is there an idea which links the opening of the poem to its close? Who is lonely, yet happy in their solitude? What is the overall message of this poem?
10. Look again at the annotations: there are many other devices – what purposes do you think they serve?
- 11.



Now over to you.

Read through this poem and annotate all of the poetic devices you can find.

When you have finished, answer the following questions in full sentences:

1. Which devices are being used? **Identify** them.
2. Where are you able to see the devices? Give a **quotation**.
3. What **effect** do they have on the reader? Why has the poet used them?
4. What is the **overall message** of the poem?

Leisure

W. H. DAVIES

WHAT is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare?—

No time to stand beneath the boughs,
And stare as long as sheep and cows:

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass:

No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night:

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance:

No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began?

A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.