

Plan for *Let's Have Some Poetry—in English!*

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Summary

This is a plan for an introduction to English poetry (meaning poetry written in English, that is, English & American poetry).

The first part is the summary of the book-to-be: In short, Aimed for and Objective.

The second part explains how I began planning to write this book.

The third part lists items to be treated with examples in some cases:

Characteristics of English poetry, sound effects, poetry forms, types of poems, technical terms, poems in the movies, relationships between poetry and arts, relationships between poetry and music, some hints to enjoy English poetry

The fourth part shows two examples of the explanations of the listed items

Onomatopoeia, limerick

[Although the book is to be written in Japanese, the plan is in English so that it can get suggestions and ideas from native speakers of English.]

In short: creating a book that not only introduces English poetry (meaning poetry written in English, that is, English & American poetry) to students but helps them enjoy it, as well.

Aimed for: the Japanese people (hence written in Japanese)

high school students (possibly junior high school students who are interested in English) to adults.

Objective: Poetry is the essence of each language, and English poetry is the very embodiment of the beauty of the English language. I'd like to show this through the examples of masterpieces which are not so difficult for beginners to understand, explaining the items which follow after "How I began planning to write this book" step by step.

How I began planning to write this book

As explained in the first chapter of my book, *In Search of Emily: Journeys from Japan to Amherst*, I came to realize the beauty of English language through my very first encounter with English poetry, with its rhythm and rhyme. As a junior high school student, I tried to find a book of introduction to English poetry in Japanese; I found some, but they were not satisfactory. At that point my search began. Sadly, however, after 45 years of searching, all I have found are five such books. I did find about

20 textbooks for college students, but what I want is a book which a 12-year-old “I” can read and enjoy, yet is readable for adults, as well. In the meantime I have collected piles of English poetry books for children and teachers’ guides on how to introduce poetry to children in the States. This I have done during my one year in 1986-7 through the grant of the Ministry of Education of the Japanese Government, another one year stay in 1993-4 through the ACLS (American Council for Learned Societies) scholarship, a half year stay in 2000 through Fulbright scholarship and some summer visits. It is amazing how each year I find five or ten new books with different wonderful ideas of how to present poetry to young people. I have learned a great deal from them and have applied some of these ideas when I teach English poetry to my university students in Japan. Yet I continue to think of that 12-year-old “I” who is looking for the ideal book. Since it still has not been written, I feel I must do it. My dream book will include many illustrations, plus a CD.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ENGLISH POETRY

Rhythm & rhyme: Japanese poetry has no rhyme, but syllable-counting is the point, so much has to be explained. For example, the importance of accents, iambic, etc.

However, the beginning should not be too intimidating, and should be treated carefully and delicately. I still have not found a clear image of this part. “Twinkle, twinkle, little star” could be an example, since the melody and the Japanese version of the song is known to most of all children. Some Mother Goose tongue twister poems may be good also.

SOUND EFFECTS

#alliteration #onomatopoeia

POETIC FORMS

#visual poems/ concrete poems

Just like a mouse tail in *Alice in Wonderland*

Ex. Wing-shaped like -----

a poem printed in a shape of a fallen leaf

#villanelle [Ex. Robinson: The House on the Hill]

#couplet #limerick #sonnet #haiku #narrative poems #ballad #ode #elegy #epitaph #epigram

TYPES OF POEMS

#blank verse [Ex. Shakespeare (of course!): Parting is such sweet sorrow/ that I shall say good night till it

be morrow (this is a good example for rhyme and alliteration, too)]

#pastiche [Ex. “Richard Cory,” written by Edwin Arlington Robinson, depicts a town celebrity who kills himself out of loneliness. In reply to this poem, Simon & Garfunkel composed a lyric from the viewpoint of the townspeople.]

#riddle poem [Ex. Dickinson: a train poem (I like to see it lap the miles···)]

#definition poem

TECHNICAL TERMS

(They should be arranged more systematically when all the items are done.)

#refrain [Ex. Frost: Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening

last two lines: Miles to go before I sleep

Miles to go before I sleep]

#metaphor & simile [Ex. Sandburg: Fog (as a kitten). Burns: My love is like a red, red rose]

#title [Ex. Most of Dickinson poems have no title. Ex. Marianne Moore: Poetry (this is the title) I, too, dislike it ···]

#stanza #run-on line #exaggeration #understatement #personification #synesthesia (sense mixing)

#imagery #paradox & oxymoron #irony #satire #allergory

POEMS IN THE MOVIES

#movies where a poem/ poems is/ are introduced

[Ex. “Dead Poets Society”: Captain! Oh, my captain! (Whitman)

“Million Dollar Baby”: Innisfree (Yeats)

#movies where a teacher explains what a poem is

[Ex. “Renaissance Man”: oxymoron, metaphor, simile, rhythm etc.]

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN POETRY AND ARTS

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN POETRY AND MUSIC

Poetry, you see, is closely related to music, and so it is quite natural that many poems are set to music.

Some examples are provided.

SOME HINTS TO ENJOY ENGLISH POETRY

#reading poems aloud just for yourself or to share the reading with some voices

#memorizing poems and reciting for yourself or in front of audience

#Magnet Poetry is another interesting way to enjoy poetry—you start to write poetry using magnetic

pieces!

Two examples of the explanations of the listed items

ONOMATOPEIA

It is the use of words which sound like the noise they refer to. Here are some examples in English. Can you guess whose noises they are: Bow-wow, Mew, Cock-a-doodle-do (and some others)? They are: a dog, a cat, a rooster. In Japanese, we express respectively as :Wan-wan, Nya, Kokekkokko. Do they make different noises in different countries? NO; simply we hear differently according to sound system of each language. Not only animals but also other things make noises. The door closed with a “Bang.” This has been turned into a verb as “The door banged.” Many verbs were born in this way. In the Japanese language, we have a lot of “onomatopoeia” not only for noises and sounds, but also for movements, for example, different ways of walking as walking briskly, quickly, slowly, tiredly etc. Poets have very sensitive ears and they use “onomatopoeia” very often. Here is an example, the first part of a poem titled “The Bell” by Edgar Allen Poe (his life is to be introduced in a column or a biography section). Let’s see how many onomatopoeia you can find here. Along with other phonetic devices like alliterations and rhymes, when you read this poem aloud, you can hear the bells jingling.

Hear the sledges with the bells—
Silver bells!
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
In the icy air of night!
While the stars, that oversprinkle
All the heavens, seem to twinkle
With a crystalline delight,
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the tintinabulation that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells—
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

(After this, the poem is presented for the second time with different colors for each phonetic device.)

LIMERICK

It was born in the town of Limerick, Ireland. It consists of five lines whose first line usually goes as “There (once) was a … .” The rhyme scheme is: aabba. Edward Lear wrote lots of them, one of which goes as the following:

There was an Old Lady whose folly
Induced her to sit in a holly;
Whereupon, by a thorn
Her dress being torn,
She quickly became melancholy.

What does the poem mean? It’s silly, ridiculous. It does not make sense. Hence, we call this “nonsense.” However, what is important is, that’s not all. Although this is an exaggeration, don’t we see people of this kind around us? They are not only silly or ridiculous, but humorous. Some pathos sometimes. That enriches our lives. So “nonsense” should be redefined as “it looks absurd at first but contains some truth in it.” Have you checked the rhyme works exactly as the limerick rule? Then you can fill in the following blanks to make a limerick.

There once was a girl
Who by accident broke her ();
She slipped on the ()
Not once, but twice
Take no pity on her, I ().

Since Lear worked so hard to make his limerick rhyme, the Japanese translation has its own rhyme, though usually Japanese poetry does not rhyme. In this way, even in translation, it has some taste of humor. Would you like to try a translation with the limerick rhyme with another limerick by Lear?