

# Poetry Lesson Plan: Sound & Sense

**Grades:** 9-12 > College Level

**Objective** — The student will:

- write a poem based on the identification and utilization of words, relying on the use of prosody. (see definition below)
- select and use words that will control how the poem is read; thus, making the poem more meaningful.
- become aware of the importance of specific word placement and the significance of word "sounds" when creating a poem.

**Hint:** Keep it simple. Suggest the poem topic be something familiar and one that involves movement or sound. Remind students that the words they use and how they are placed in the poem should control how the poem is read. **See Example #1 Below...**

## Sound & Sense

**Write a poem which satisfies all of the following criteria:**

**Read and study below.**

**— find the assignment *following the definitions and examples.***

**"Prosody"** can be defined as the **rhythmical** organization that controls the construction and reading of a poem. Prosody can rely on line-breaks, rhyme, alliteration, rhythm, spacing, stanzas, line-length, internal or end rhyme and repetition.

### EXAMPLE 1:

#### Snake

Noiselessly  
tasting the air  
with its forked-tipped  
tongue, a snake  
smoothly  
slithers  
through grass

Read the poem *Snake*.

What sensations do you experience when reading the poem? Do specific words used in the poem help you "see" the snake? Which words? Why are these words important in making the poem successful? Are the words used by the poet controlling how a person reads the poem? How? Do you believe that "prosody" is important to the success of this poem?

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### EXAMPLE 2:

#### Young Sycamore

I must tell you  
this young tree  
whose round and firm trunk  
between the wet  
  
pavement and the gutter  
(where water

Read the poem *Young Sycamore* two or three times.

Initially, you might think it's just a poem about a tree growing in a gutter, and nothing else. But, on closer inspection, do you notice "prosody" at work?

Read the poem again, but this time pay closer attention to the choice of words, their placement, as well as their "sounds" and how they provide a "rhythmical" **sense, feel, or movement** to the poem that, in this instance, mimics how the reader views the tree.

is trickling) rises  
bodily

into the air with  
one undulant  
thrust half its height--  
and then

dividing and waning  
sending out  
young branches on  
all sides--

hung with cocoons  
it thins  
till nothing is left of it  
but two

eccentric knotted  
twigs  
bending forward  
hornlike at the top.

-- **W.C. Williams**

**Stanzas 1 and 2:** the poem begins by describing the tree from its base (its sturdy trunk) from the ground up; the words "round and firm" help provide that first image. Then, after a brief glimpse of water, the tree's source of life, trickling beside it, the reader is presented a view, a sensation of words (rises bodily) that allows us to move our gaze up the tree. This is prosody at work...the choice of words, line breaks and use of stanzas, already beginning to subtly create rhythmic "sound" of organization.

**Stanzas 3 and 4:** the third stanza has the reader looking further up in the "air" while using the words "undulant thrust" to seemingly push the reader's gaze higher and higher into the tree -- Until, in stanza four, our attention begins to focus on the smaller, "dividing and waning" branches that make up the fuller upper body of the tree. Again, the selection and placement of words, line and stanza breaks not only control how the poem sounds but also what the reader is visualizing.

**Stanzas 3 and 4:** next, the reader's vision is guided to and beyond the seed pods (defined as "cocoons") hanging in the tree, before finally focusing on the very tiniest "twigs" that make up the tip top of the tree. Read the last stanza again and listen for the sounds of letters in the words that help create the sense, the prosody created image, of small limbs and twigs.

The poem, through prosody, mimics the tree itself from bottom to top, start to finish--strong, heavy words at the beginning, quick, tight words at the end--controlling how poem is read and experienced.