

Lesson Plan: Alliteration, Consonance, and Assonance in Poetry

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Advanced high school

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Class time: This lesson can be used in one forty minute to hour period if the students already are familiar with these concepts and need a review. It can be spread over several periods if they are learning these poetic devices for the first time. There is an optional advanced group exercise at the end.

Goals of this lesson:

- Have the students learn the definitions of alliteration, consonance, and assonance and be able to recognize them
- Understand the effects these repeated elements have in poetry
- Optional exercise: Begin to write poetry using these poetic methods

I. Introduction to repetition devices in the context of a poem.

Have a student read aloud the poem “Under the Mangoes” by Jacqueline Bishop, on page 122 of Poetry International volume 17.

Ask the students if they heard any repeated sounds. They may have thought about the sense rather than the sound. Tell them to be ready to jot down any repeated sounds they hear, and have another student read the same poem aloud. If possible, hand out copies of the poem or project it on a screen. The students will find at least some of the repeats. Tell them you will return to this work after reviewing the definitions and working on some examples. A typical class will find the repeated consonants but may miss the repeated vowel sounds. FYI for teachers, some of the repeated items: Alliteration—initial b in balancing and basket in line 4, initial w in woman and white in line five, also w in wooden in line 5. There are other examples the students may find. Consonance—Mixing and re-mixing in line 11. Assonance—*Martinique, wanted* in first couplet.

II. Definitions of the poetry terms (paraphrased from material at the web site, www.types-of-poetry.org.uk/) and practice in recognizing them.

Alliteration is the repetition of the same or similar sounds at the beginning of words. Tongue twisters are based on alliteration. Example: She sells sea shells at the sea shore.

Ask the students: “Are the beginning sounds of the words in this tongue twister exactly the same?” Help them see that s—and sh—words are both used. Ask if they can think of any other starting letters that might sometimes sound like these words (for example you can help them by giving words starting with c

such as cistern). Ask if words starting with z or with ch could work? They can, but using too many of these almost-matched sounds would disrupt the sequence of s-sounds. Tell them that it counts as alliteration no matter whether the starting sound is repeated only once or if it is repeated many times. Also let them know it can be spread over more than one line in the poem.

Consonance is the repetition, close together, of the final consonants of accented syllables or important words. Examples: I had to *think* about the *blank* on the form at the *bank*. Ask the class, “How is this different from rhyming poetry?” Example from Robert Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”:

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village, though;...

Ask the students how consonance is different from rhyming. Help them to notice that both the final consonants and the vowels right before them are the same in a rhyme, but the vowels need not be the same in consonance. Also notice that the rhyming words are at the ends of lines, so they are farther apart than words in consonance.

Assonance is the repetition of a pattern of similar vowel sounds, typically with different consonants following the repeated vowel.

Example: The *plate* was *shapely* and well-*made*.

Example line from The Bells by Edgar Allen Poe:

From the *molten-golden notes*

Tell the students that in these poetic methods, only one repetition is enough to count. Ask the students to compare assonance with rhyme. In assonance, it’s an internal sound rather than a final sound as in rhyme; also, rhyme rarely rests on just the vowel sounds. Rhyme is typically a combination of vowel and consonant sounds at the end of the line that is matched to the end of another line. The students may understand this but not find it easy to put it into words.

Practice examples for the students to identify:

- A. Ghostly gables graced the haunted house.
- B. Susan was mad because the candy fell into the sand.
- C. “You slacker, get back to work.” “Don’t give me flack.”
- D. The moon rose as soon as Ballou began to croon.
- E. Singing teenagers clinging to the tires floated down the river.

III. Application of these terms to the poem from section I.

Return to the poem on p 122 of Poetry International volume 17, “Under the Mangoes” by Jacqueline Bishop. Ask the students to look for each of the three, alliteration, consonance, and assonance, in that poem. Once they have identified each device, ask them what they think these ways of using language has contributed to the feeling of this poem.

Have them guess what kind of place is being described (guavas are tropical fruit, etc). Then try again to have them connect these devices with the effect on the poem. If they are not sure the repetitions matter to its meaning, have them try changing a few of the words involved in the repeats to ones that lack the repetition and reading those lines aloud. The rhythm of the poem, which conveys some of its Caribbean beat, is enhanced by the repetition in this poem.

IV. Repetition devices in a different poem.

Have the students read “What It Hinges On” by Eleanor Wilner on page 298 of volume 17 of Poetry International in small groups. Have the students briefly discuss what they think the poem is about. Help them to go deeper and see that an earthquake or natural disaster can be similar to an upheaval in someone’s personal life. Then ask them to find as many cases of these repetitive elements in the poem as they can. Remind them that even one repetition counts.

FYI to the teacher: here are some examples of what they may identify:

Line 1, everything and spring (consonance)

Line 2, seems and be (assonance)

Line 4, some and stunning (alliteration)

Line 8, sail and cage (assonance)

Line 9: slams and shut (alliteration)

Line 10: so and smoke (assonance and alliteration)

Line 11: torn and confetti (assonance)

Line 12: letter and sentence (assonance)

Line 13: there and litter (consonance)

Line 14: outside and town (assonance)

Lines 15 and 16: great and plates (assonance)

Line 18: sleep and spun (alliteration)

Lines 20 and 21: bring, think and think (consonance)

Lines 22 and 23: fist and forgetting (alliteration)

There may be more.

When the students have worked about 5 minutes, get them together and have them take turns identifying one repetition element in the poem. If no one finished the poem, you can have the whole group look for the last few. Ask someone to change

one or two selected cases, read the lines aloud, and see if they are as effective as before.

V. **Optional advanced exercise.**

Ask the students to write down a list of ten words that would describe a natural disaster that they have experienced or seen on television.

Once they have a list, ask them to exchange lists with a different student, and to write down two or three words next to each word on the list that could be used in a repetition device like alliteration, consonance, or assonance. Discuss the examples below first, so the class will understand that they need to consider various possible parts of the word that could be repeated.

Examples:	Word	Possible sound repetition
	Rumble	roar trust double
	Shake	made broke slip

Ask the students, either individually or in the teams of two, to write a short poem in which they use as many of the ten words as possible, and use one of the sound repetition possibilities for each one. You may consider making this a homework assignment. You could post the poems or have the students read them aloud to each other.