



The GED Language Arts, Reading Test

Poetry



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GED

Video Partner



Passing the GED Reading Test

A poem is never finished, only abandoned.
Paul Valery (1871-1945)

Video 14 Focus: how to read poetry and understand it, even if you're not a poet

You Will Learn From Video 14:

- How to identify the structure of poetry.
- How to recognize the importance of word choice.
- To distinguish literal from figurative language.
- To listen to rhyme and rhythm.



Words You Need to Know:

While viewing the video, put the following vocabulary words in the blanks: **figurative language, Favorite Poem Project, rhyme, rhythm, Robert Pinsky.** Answers are on page 13.

1. _____ is a U. S. Poet Laureate.
2. _____ asks people to say a favorite poem out loud.
3. When the end-sounds of words are the same, the words _____. Examples are: *red, said; name, game.*
4. The _____, or recurring beat, can be felt by reading the poem out loud.
5. _____ is used often in poems to make comparisons.



Points to Remember:

- The more poetry you read, the better you'll be at understanding it.
- When you can, read poetry out loud to enjoy the rhyme and rhythm.
- Your life experiences will determine what poems mean to you personally.
- Learn "to hear" poetry in your mind, so you can "hear" it while taking the GED test.

On the GED Reading Test, you will read and analyze one poem. There will be approximately 4-6 questions to answer.

THE PURPOSE QUESTION: WHAT IT IS, WHERE IT IS FOUND, AND WHY YOU SHOULD ALWAYS READ IT

At the beginning of every reading is a question. The purpose of the question is to give a reason for reading the material. Use this question to focus your reading. You are not required to answer this question. It is given only to help you concentrate on the ideas presented in the excerpt. Here is a typical purpose question:

HOW DID DEATH VALLEY GET ITS NAME?

Now as you read the following paragraph, focus on the above question.

In Death Valley in the United States country. This valley, located in California sea level. It is not uncommon for record of 134 degrees for the nation was given by a group of gold seekers in 1849.



is the lowest and hottest spot in the near the Nevada border, is 282 feet below temperatures to reach 125 degrees. A recorded in 1931. Its grim name was

Learning about the structure of poetry: The form of poetry is different than in prose. In prose, the author writes in sentences and paragraphs, while in poetry, the author writes in lines and stanzas. Some of the lines are complete sentences, some are not. The stanzas usually have the same number of lines, but not always. It is always important to read the title of the poem and, of course, the focus question before answering the GED questions.

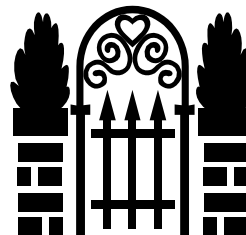
Let's compare the poem written by Confucius about a young man waiting to meet his girlfriend with an interpretation of that poem written in prose.

Written as **poetry**, it looks like this:

WHAT PROBLEM DOES THE YOUNG MAN HAVE?

Trysting Time

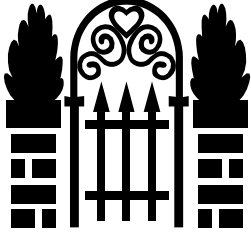
A pretty girl at time o' gloaming
Hath whispered me to go and meet her
Without the city gate.
I love her, but she tarries coming.
Shall I return, or stay and greet her?
I burn, and wait.



L. Cranmer-Byng, *A Lute of Jade: Being Selections From the Classical Poets of China*

Notice several things about the format. First, each line of the poem starts with a capital letter, no matter if it is the beginning of a sentence or not. When reading this poem out loud, do not stop until you get to the first period. Then continue reading until the next period. Some of the lines are indented, some are not. This is for visual interest and to show special emphasis. This is only the first stanza, or division, of the poem. The next stanza would come after the writer had skipped a few spaces.

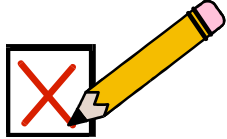
An interpretation written as **prose** looks like this:



A pretty girl has whispered to her boyfriend to meet her outside the gates of the city at twilight. He loves her, but she is late to meet him. He wonders what to do. He decides to wait.

Notice the sentences are written one following the other. The first word is indented, or moved in from the margin, to show this is the beginning of a paragraph. Capital letters are only used at the beginning of each new sentence. This writing has only one paragraph. To show a new paragraph, the writer would indent the first word of the next new sentence.

Read the following sentences and decide if they describe the characteristics of poetry or prose. If it depicts poetry, write *PO*. If it depicts prose, write *PR*. If it depicts both poetry and prose, write *BOTH*. Answers are on page 13.



1. _____ The sentences are written in stanza form.
2. _____ Each line of the writing begins with a capital letter, even if it is not a sentence.
3. _____ The writer indents the first word of a paragraph.
4. _____ The reader keeps reading until coming to a period, not stopping or pausing just because he/she is at the end of a line.

Learning to recognize the importance of word choice: A poet appeals to all of your senses through his/her choice of words. Mental pictures are created by words that appeal to the senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

Read the following poem by Steven Vincent Benet. Notice the words he chooses and how they help your senses create a mental image of the meal.

WHAT DOES BENET THINK ABOUT THE FOOD IN THE QUICK LUNCH ROOM?

Dinner in a Quick Lunch Room

Soups should be heralded with a mellow horn,
Blowing clear notes of gold against the stars;
Strange entrees with a jangle of glass bars
Fantastically alive with subtle scorn;

Fish, by a plopping, gurgling rush of waters,
Clear, vibrant waters, beautifully austere;

Roast, with a thunder of drums to stun the ear,
A screaming fife, a voice from ancient slaughters.

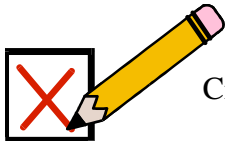
Over the salad let the woodwinds moan;
Then the green silence of many watercresses;

Dessert, a balalaika, strummed alone;



Coffee, a slow, low singing no passion stresses;
Such are my thoughts as—clang! crash! bang!—I brood
And gorge the sticky mess these fools call food.

Steven Vincent Benet, *Young Adventure: A Book of Poems*



Circle the correct answer. Answers are on page 13.

1. To which of the reader's senses does the poet most appeal?
 - A. sight
 - B. sound
 - C. smell
2. Each course of food is compared to
 - A. one another.
 - B. noise.
 - C. musical instruments or sounds of nature.

3. What kind of musical instrument is the balalaika (in stanza 2)?
 - A. wind
 - B. brass
 - C. string

4. How does the poet feel about the quality of the food served him?
 - A. amused
 - B. hungry
 - C. disgusted

5. If the poet were to describe the fruit course, what might he compare it to?
 - A. a whistling farmer in the orchard
 - B. apples and bananas
 - C. the sugary tones of the saxophone announcing the peak of summer



Learning how to distinguish figurative language from literal language: The poet likes to write in a creative manner. Figurative language, or using language that goes beyond its literal meaning, is one technique used. Figurative language makes comparisons. You, the reader, must sometimes read this more than once to interpret the meaning.

Poets enjoy comparing things that literally have no connection. For example, on the video, the poem, “The Last Recording Session of Papa Joe”, instead of saying one of the musicians was young, the poet instead used the comparison of age to time by saying “his mornings are still coming.” This type of comparison is known as a metaphor.

When the poet uses the words, *like* or *as*, to make a figurative comparison, it is known as a simile. In the same poem, the words, “your arms wide as the sea” is a simile since the word *as* was used to make the comparison.

Practice interpreting figurative language in the following poem.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BLACK FOX?

The Ballad of the Black Fox Skin

There was Claw-fingered Kitty and Windy Ike living the life of shame,
 When unto them in the Long, Long Night came the man-who-had-no-name;
 Bearing his prize of a black fox pelt, out of the Wild he came.

His cheeks were blanched as the flume-head foam
 when the brown spring freshets flow;
 Deep in their dark, sin-calcined pits were his sombre eyes aglow;
 They knew him far for the fitful man who spat forth blood on the snow.

"Did ever you see such a skin?" quoth he;
"there's nought in the world so fine--
Such fullness of fur as black as the night,
such lustre, such size, such shine;
It's life to a one-lunged man like me; it's London,
it's women, it's wine.



"The Moose-hides called it the devil-fox, and swore that no man could kill;
That he who hunted it, soon or late, must surely suffer some ill;
But I laughed at them and their old squaw-tales.
Ha! Ha! I'm laughing still.

"For look ye, the skin--it's as smooth as sin,
and black as the core of the Pit.
By gun or by trap, whatever the hap, I swore I would capture it;
By star and by star afield and afar, I hunted and would not quit.

"For the devil-fox, it was swift and sly, and it seemed to flee at me;
I would wake in fright by the camp-fire light, hearing its evil glee;
Into my dream its eyes would gleam, and its shadow would I see.



"It sniffed and ran from the ptarmigan I had poisoned to excess;
Unharm'd it sped from my wrathful lead ('twas as if I shot by
guess);
Yet it came by night in the stark moonlight to mock at my
weariness.

"I tracked it up where the mountains hunch like the vertebrae of the world;
I tracked it down to the death-still pits where the avalanche is hurled;
From the glooms to the sacerdotal snows,
where the carded clouds are curled.

"From the vastitudes where the world protrudes
through clouds like seas up-shoaled,
I held its track till it led me back to the land I had left of old--
The land I had looted many moons. I was weary and sick and cold.

"I was sick, soul-sick, of the futile chase, and there and then I swore
The foul fiend fox might scathless go, for I would hunt no more;
Then I rubbed mine eyes in a vast surprise--it stood by my cabin door.

"A rifle raised in the wraith-like gloom, and a vengeful shot that sped;
A howl that would thrill a cream-faced corpse--
and the demon fox lay dead. . . .
Yet there was never a sign of wound, and never a drop he bled.

"So that was the end of the great black fox,
and here is the prize I've won;
And now for a drink to cheer me up--I've mused since the early sun;
We'll drink a toast to the sorry ghost of the fox whose race is run."

Robert Service, *The Ballads of a Cheechako*



Circle the correct answer. Answers are on page 13.

1. To what does the poet compare the cheeks of the man-who-had-no-name? (See stanza 2).
 - A. to the foam on the top of the water trough
 - B. to the foam on the top of a beer
 - C. to the foam on the cooking pot
2. What color are the cheeks of the man-who-had-no-name?
 - A. pink
 - B. white
 - C. red
3. In stanza 8, what is the "vertebrae of the world"?
 - A. the backbone of the fox
 - B. the highest mountain top
 - C. the mountain range
4. Who is the narrator of the poem?
 - A. the man who spit blood on the snow
 - B. third person narrator
 - C. Windy Ike
5. In stanza 10, the animal hunted is described as "the fowl friend fox". Each word starts with the letter *f*. Thus, it has a rhythmic pattern. This type of patterning is called *alliteration*. Choose the description of another animal that does not follow the alliteration pattern.
 - A. white wily wolf
 - B. angry agnostic alligator
 - C. haughty male hawk

Interactive activity: Let's try to write in a poetic fashion. With a classmate, do the following activity. Match the common objects on the right with the abstract ideas on the left. Compare your answers and decide which comparisons seem the most creative. Who has poetic style? Who enjoys writing in a creative fashion? Who is more comfortable with factual statements? If you are working without a partner, read the comparisons you have written out loud to see how they sound. Sample answers are on page 14.



Love, sadness, life, joy, memory, pencil, hamburger, car, wind, pizza

1. Love is like the wind because it blows on and off.
2. Sadness is like the/a _____.
3. Life is like the/a _____.
4. Joy is like the/a _____.
5. A memory is like the/a _____.

Learning to listen to rhyme and rhythm: A poet appeals to your auditory sense through rhyme, or the repetition of sounds, and rhythm, the sound and beat of each line. Rhyming words make it easier to remember the poem and also emphasize what the poet wants you to understand.

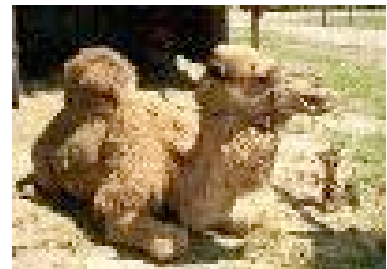
In “The Ballad of the Black Fox Skin,” the poem you just read, the rhyming words in the first stanza are: *shame*, *name*, and *came*. In this case, the rhyming words are at the end of the lines. But notice in the sixth stanza, the rhyming words, *fright* and *light*, are within the same line. *Me*, *glee*, and *see* also are rhyming at the end of each line in that stanza. The poet uses all variations of rhyming words to appeal to your ear. That is why poetry should be read aloud. Practice reading the following poem very softly to yourself. Listen to the rhythm and rhyming words.

HOW DO THE CAMELS FEEL ABOUT WORKING?

COMMISSARIAT CAMELS

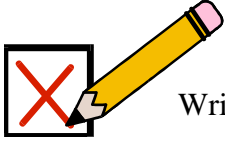
“We haven’t a camelty tune of our own
To help us trollop along,
But every neck is a hair trombone
(Rtt-ta-ta-ta! Is a hair trombone!)

And this our marching-son
Can’t! Don’t! Shan’t Won’t
Pass it along the line!
Somebody’s pack has slid from his back,
Wish it were only mine!



Somebody's load has tipped off in the road—
Cheer for a halt and a row!
Urrr! Yarrh! Grr! Arrh!
Somebody's catching it now!

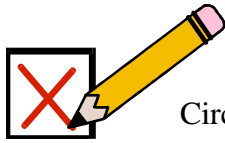
Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book*



Write the correct answer. Answers are on page 14.

1. In stanza 1, what are the rhyming words? _____ and _____
2. The rhythm of the poem can best be described as
 - A. running.
 - B. marching.
 - C. flying.
3. Who is speaking in this poem?
 - A. one camel
 - B. an outside narrator
 - C. the man leading the caravan
4. The attitude of the camels toward carrying the packs is
 - A. positive.
 - B. negative.
 - C. indifferent.
5. If the camels were to add another word to their marching song, which one wouldn't it be?
 - A. Shouldn't!
 - B. Never!
 - C. Able!

Learning about symbolism: A symbol is an image that represents an abstract idea, a person, a generalization, or an experience. It is used by many poets. For example, in the poem, “Commissariat Camels,” the camels’ marching song is a symbol for life with all its ups and downs. The tracking and eventual killing of the black fox in “The Ballad of the Black Fox Skin” symbolizes man’s conquering of Nature.



Circle the correct answer. Answer is on page 14.

1. What does the comparison of foods to various musical instruments and to the quality of food served the customer in “Quick Lunch Room” symbolize?
 - A. a menu in an expensive restaurant
 - B. the good life and all its ramifications
 - C. a rich meal meant for special occasions

EXERCISE

Using the skills you have developed about analyzing poetry, answer the following questions.

WHO IS THE SOLDIER THINKING ABOUT?

The Soldier

I climbed the barren mountain,
And my gaze swept far and wide
For the red-lit eaves of my father's home,
And I fancied that he sighed:
 My son has gone for a soldier,
 For a soldier night and day;
 But my son is wise, and may yet return,
 When the drums have died away.

I climbed the grass-clad mountain,
And my gaze swept far and wide
For the rosy lights of a little room,
Where I thought my mother sighed:
 My boy has gone for a soldier,
 He sleeps not day and night;

But my boy is wise, and may yet return,
 Though the dead lie far from sight.

I climbed the topmost summit,
And my gaze swept far and wide
For the garden roof where my brother stood,

And I fancied that he sighed:
 My brother serves as a soldier
 With his comrades night and day;

But my brother is wise, and may yet return,
Though the dead lie far away.

L. Cranmer-Byng, *A Lute of Jade: Being Selections From the Classical Poets of China*





Circle the correct answers.
Answers are on page 14.

1. Which people envision the boy as a soldier?
 - 1) his father
 - 2) his mother
 - 3) his brother
 - 4) his father, mother, and brother
 - 5) the poet

2. What is the tone of the poem?
 - 1) happy
 - 2) curious
 - 3) anxious, but optimistic
 - 4) anxious, but pessimistic
 - 5) sad

3. In which stanza does the mountain described seem similar to a mountain in a desert with nothing growing on it?
 - 1) stanza 1
 - 2) stanza 2
 - 3) stanza 3
 - 4) all of the above
 - 5) none of the above

4. The repeated lines, “I climbed the _____ mountain/summit, and my gaze swept far and wide,” is an example of the poet’s use of
 - 1) rhyme.
 - 2) rhythm.
 - 3) comparison.
 - 4) narration.
 - 5) symbolism.

5. The description of the mountains the soldier climbed is a symbol showing
 - 1) the love he had for his family.
 - 2) his dislike of being a soldier.
 - 3) his yearning to return home safely.
 - 4) the ruggedness needed to be a soldier.
 - 5) the challenges of being a soldier with each mountain have its unique difficulties.

Page 2: Words You Need to Know

1. Robert Pinsky
2. Favorite Poem Project
3. rhyme
4. rhythm
5. figurative language

Page 4: Structure of Poetry

1. Po
2. Po
3. Pr
4. Both

Page 5-6: Importance of Word Choice

1. **B Analysis** Even though the subject appeals to one’s sense of taste, the sense of sound plays more strongly with the comparison of food to musical instruments and their sounds.
2. **C Analysis (comparison)**
3. **C Comprehension (context)** If the instrument is “strummed,” then it must be a string instrument.
4. **C Comprehension (inference)** “Sticky mess” denotes a negative reaction.
5. **C Application** The “whistling farmer” is not a form of nature, and “apples and bananas” are fruit themselves and can’t be used as comparisons.

Page 8: Figurative and Literal Language

1. **A Analysis (comparison)** A flume is used in mining and is the same as a water trough.
2. **B Comprehension (context)** If something is blanched it has no color or is white.
3. **C Analysis (figurative language)** “Vertebrae” denotes a chain, and thus a range of mountains, rather than a single mountain.
4. **B Analysis (point of view)** Even though the hunter tells his story, an outside person is the narrator and begins the poem in stanza one and two.
5. **C Synthesis** Alliteration as described requires that all words begin with the same sound, thus, “haughty male hawk,” does not meet this description.

Page 9: Interactive Activity (These are sample answers.)

Sadness is like a pencil with broken lead and no eraser. You can't write anything.

Life is like a hamburger. It comes in all varieties; some with pickles, tomatoes and cheese; some very plain with nothing on it; some with so much on it, you can't get it into your mouth.

Joy is riding in a red convertible with the top down on a beautiful summer day.

A memory is like a pizza with everything on it. You can't walk by it without having another piece.

Page 10: Rhyme and Rhythm

1. own and trombone
2. **B Comprehension (supporting details)** Details such as “tune,” “trollop along,” and “marching-song” denote a marching pace.
3. **A Analysis (point of view)** The speaker in this poem is the camel speaking for the whole caravan. It starts with the word “We”.
4. **B Comprehension (inference)** Words such as: “Can't, Don't, Shan't, and Won't” express the negative feelings.
5. **C Synthesis (tone)** the tone of the march “Able” is not negative, thus, the correct answer.

Page 11: Symbolism

1. **B Analysis**

Page 12: EXERCISES

1. **(4) Comprehension (supporting details)**
2. **(3) Synthesis (tone)** The repeated phrase, “wise and may yet return,” denotes a hopeful scenario.
3. **(1) Comprehension (context)** “Barren” means desert-like.
4. **(2) Synthesis** The repetition of the words sets up the rhythm of the poem..
5. **(5) Analysis (Symbolism)**