

Lesson Name : 39

Lesson Title : Any Human to Another and Patterns

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Read the poems [“Any Human to Another”](#) by Countee Cullen and [“Patterns”](#) by Amy Lowell.

Use your digital notebook to keep notes on new vocabulary and definitions that you may need to reference later.

Lyric Poems

Today, we are going to continue our discussion of poetry by examining two **lyric poems**. Like many song lyrics, **lyric poems** are narrated in the first person and focus on the speaker’s emotions. The “speaker” isn’t necessarily the poet himself or herself; the “speaker” can be a fictional narrator.

First, let’s look at “Any Human to Another” by Countee Cullen. Cullen, who is associated with the Harlem Renaissance, published several collection of poems by African-American poets, titled “Caroling Dusk.” He caused controversy when he wrote, in that collection’s foreword, that African-American poets should focus less on racial topics. This **lyric poem** is not really about a racial topic, but it could be interpreted that way.

“Any Human to Another” is loosely structured: The **end rhymes** Cullen uses do not follow any pattern, and his stanzas and lines are of different lengths. Cullen does, however, make use of literary techniques such as **figurative language**, a form of language in which the stated meaning of the words is different than the implied meaning. Note the **similes** (language that uses *like*, *as*, or *even though* to compare seemingly unlike things) and **metaphors** (comparisons that do not use the words like or as), such as the simile:

“My sorrow must be laid / On your head *like a crown*.”

Okay, let’s be honest. What you’re really wondering is: What does this poem mean? You’re right that the poem’s language is heavily **figurative**. Essentially, the **figurative** meaning of this poem is that we must all share one another’s sorrows, and that we cannot isolate ourselves from other people and their troubles.

Your grief and mine
Must intertwine
Like sea and river,
Be fused and mingle,
Diverse yet single,
Forever and forever.

Now, let's take a look at "Patterns" by Amy Lowell. The **literal meaning** of this poem is simpler to figure out: A woman has just received a letter informing her that her fiancé is dead, and now she walks in a garden, wearing a stifling dress and mourning her loss.

What do you think is the **figurative meaning** of this poem? Take another look at the last line: "What are patterns for?" The speaker is questioning the rigid social conventions by which she must live. On the one hand, these conventions have limited her personal expression. On the other hand, these conventions are now supporting her in a time of struggle.

Notice the **paradox** (a statement that appears contradictory but is actually true) of how the stiff structure of the speaker's dress is both restraining her activity and holding her upright. Also, notice how the social convention of offering refreshments to the messenger both restrains her grief and helps her to maintain her composure. There are many other examples that the entire poem seems like an answer to that final, powerful question about the purpose of patterns.

Literary Techniques and Sound Devices

When we discussed the poem "Patterns" earlier in this lesson, we focused mostly on its **literal** and **figurative meanings**. Now let's review some of the **literary techniques** and **sound devices**.

Literary techniques:

Figurative language – a form of language in which the stated meaning of the words is different than the implied meaning, including similes, metaphors and personification

Paradox – a statement that appears contradictory but is actually true

Imagery – language that appeals to the senses of hearing, sight, touch, or smell to imagine something

Sound devices:

Alliteration – the repetition of initial consonant sounds (Sally sells sea shells ...)

Assonance – the repetition of near vowel sounds (The sad cat lapped gladly at the pan.)

Onomatopoeia – words that sound like what they mean (i.e., hiss, whoosh, bang).

End rhyme – the repetition of the end syllable sound at the ends of the lines of poetry (Whose woods these are I think I know. / His house is in the village though.)

Internal rhyme – the repetition of the same syllable sound within a line of poetry (Without much trouble he found a double.)

Repetition of a word, phrase, clause or any other expression

Rhythm or Meter – a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in poetry



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Vocabulary

When you read poetry, it's important to understand that a single word can have several meanings. Reading the poem several times, each time considering a different meaning of the word, can add richness to your reading experience.

Here, for example, are nine words from "Any Human to Another" and "Patterns." Note the multiple meanings of some of the words. Do you think the writer intended one particular meaning or more than one?

1. **blade** – noun – the cutting part of a tool
2. **crown** – noun – a reward of mark or honor; a royal headdress
3. **ills** – noun – misfortunes or causes of distress; physical ailments; sicknesses
4. **unique** – adj. – being the only one; sole; being without a like or equal; unusual
5. **wreath** – noun – something intertwined or arranged in a circular shape; a band of intertwined flowers or leaves worn as a mark of honor or victory
6. **squills** – noun – plants from the lily family with small clusters of violet-blue or blue-striped flowers
7. **brocade** – noun – a fabric woven with an elaborate design, especially one having a raised overall pattern
8. **whale-bone** – noun – strips of bone or ivory from a whale used as stays in corsets or dresses
9. **swoon** – verb – faint