

Hi, I'm Grace! This is Shakespeare in Schools, and I know what you might be thinking; Grace, that's not a Shakespeare shirt. Yes it is! Welcome to the third workshop. Today we're going to talk about verse.

In our last video we learned general differences between verse and prose, where verse is when a character is speaking in poetry, and prose is when a character is speaking in regular, everyday speech. You can also tell the difference between verse and prose by the way they are written on the page. For verse will always be off to the side, and capitals begin at every line. To put this all in verse I sure have tried. Sometimes veer rhymes, sometimes it does not. Whereas when you're reading prose, it just runs across the page. Capital letters begin sentences like normal. This is the kind of think you'll read in a text book or an online article. Most of the things you read are in prose, and you can tell because it goes from one end of the page to the other.

So what do we mean when we say: Shakespeare's Verse?
Because, if we're just talking about poetry, there's a whole lot of

different types of poetry, and poetry depends on the rhythm of the language. Did you know all languages have rhythm?

INTENSE BEATBOXING HAPPENING

Okay, not necessarily like that. I'm talking about if you write out the rhythm of a language the way a percussionist writes out music, you'd start to notice that different languages have different rhythms. And different languages therefore lend themselves to different forms of poetry. Check out this open in Japanese:

Speaks in Japanese

Ba-da dada da bada dadada dada daaaa-aa da da da

Five seven five. Hey, it's a Haiku!

Here's the beginning of a poem in Spanish:

Speaks in Spanish

Ba dada da da dada da Ba dada da da dada da Ba da dada da
dada Ba dada da da dada da

You can tell why this poem has been turned into many many songs.

Here's a poem in Arabic:

Speaks in Arabic

Yeah, I'm not even going to try to tap out that rhythm. But you can hear the repetition, right? That's all rhythm is, is repetition of sound. So, he was repeating some words, but he was also repeating some sounds within those words.

Ok, here's a poem in English:

How can I then return in happy plight that am debarred the
benefit of rest

When day's oppression is not eased by night then day by night
and night by day oppressed

Ba da ba da ba da ba da, ba da ba da ba da

That was a sonnet by William Shakespeare read by Jean Luc Picard...I mean Sir Patrick Stewart, and the rhythm that you're hearing is the rhythm that Shakespeare wrote in all the time. It is called Iambic Pentameter; don't pass out, we're going to break down what that means. And scholars think that iambic pentameter lends itself to the English language better than any other poetic form.

To listen to the rhythm of a language, you have to know how to count syllables, which is maybe something you did in elementary school. Can-You-Count-Syll-a-bles? But, syllables can be really

confusing because, and remember this, syllables have nothing to do with the way a word is spelled.

Take for example these words. Pretty easy, right? Book. Desk. Chair. They all have one syllable. But what about these words? Bunny. Apple. Today. You probably guessed it. They have two. So, our brains can be tricked into thinking that it's easy to tell where the syllables are. Check out these words. How many syllables do they have? Say leaf outloud. Leaf. Yup, just one. Does that mean the word leaves has two? Leaves. Eh. Leaves. Nope. Pretty sure leaves still only has one syllable. Unless you say leav-ez, which maybe you do if you speak Middle English.

So syllables have nothing to do with the way a word is spelled but everything to do with the way a word sounds, which can get confusing with words like Bro-co-li, or Brok-li, or Cho-co-late, or Chok-late. Int-ter-res-ting. Or is it In-tres-ting?

Don't worry about it. For right now if your English teacher is asking you, just look it up in a dictionary. But, if you're trying to write poetry, listen to the way that you say it.

Ok, so now that we know about syllables, we're going to start to talk about how to put those syllables into rhythm. In English, syllables are stressed or unstressed. Stressing and unstressing syllables is why some people go to the theater, and some people go to the thee-ater. As my favorite English teacher told me, "Well Grace, did you understand what I said? Then I said it right."

Ok, let's look at some words. Celery, Amusement, and Engineer. How many syllables does the word celery have? Go ahead. Say it out loud. Clap along if you want. Cel-ler-ry. Cel. Ler. Ry. Celery has three syllables. But where is the emphasis, or the stress? Do we say, CE-lery, cel-LER-ry, or celer-RYYYYY? We say CE-lery, right? So we put the emphasis on the first syllable. Stressed, unstressed, unstressed.

Ok, let's look at Amusement. First, how many syllables does it have? Amusement. A-muse-ment. Alright. Sounds like it has three, right? Do we say, A-musement, a-MUSE-ment, or a-muse-MENT? Well, if we're not French, we say a-MUSE-ment, right? So that stress is in the middle on the second syllable. Unstressed, stressed, unstressed.

Ok, I think you know where this is going. Engineer has three syllables. Do we say, EN-gineer, en-GIN-eer, or engin-EER? Yup. Unstressed, unstressed, stressed.

Shakespeare used these stressed and unstressed syllables to create a rhythm, and that rhythm is called: Iambic Pentameter.

To understand iambic pentameter all you really need is to understand syllables and stress which we've already gone over. So, an iamb is a unit of poetry. It is two syllables; the first one stressed, and the second one unstressed. Pentameter you already know, because the word penta is in it. How many sides does a pentagon have? Five. And meter just means per one of poetry. So, iambic pentameter means five iambs per line of poetry. So, without any words or meaning yet, just tapping out the rhythm, iambic pentameter sounds like: ba DA ba DA ba DA ba Da ba Da. That's it. Five iambs per one line of meter.

If you're a musician, you may have noticed that this looks a lot like a musical staff. Well done. We are talking about beats and rhythm rather than words and sentences. So, once iamb isn't necessarily a

word, and one line of meter isn't necessarily a sentence. Let's look at an example to show you what I mean.

If music be the food of love, play on.

This is the first line of Shakespeare's play Twelfth Night. What are the first two syllables of this line? If mu, right? We're not talking about words, we're talking about syllables. The second two syllables would be, sic be, the next, the food, of love, play on. Now this phrase is separated into measurements of two syllables. Is the first unit of two syllables an iamb?

Well, let's look at the word music. How many syllables does it have? Mu-sic. Two. Where is the emphasis? mu-SIC, or MU-sic? I listened to some mu-SIC today, or I listened to some MU-sic today. We say MU-sic, so the emphasis is on the first syllable. The word music by itself is not an iamb, because remember iambs go unstressed, stressed. But we can put it into a line of meter so that it helps the other iambs make sense.

Because the word music starts with a stressed syllable you can put it in front of the word if and create an iamb. Unstressed, stressed. If MU.

The second syllable in music is unstressed, remember? MU-sic, so we need another stressed syllable to make an iamb. If MU-sic BE. That works.

By now you've probably guessed it. The rest of this line of meter all has one syllable words. So let's just try it out.

If MU-sic BE the FOOD of LOVE play ON.

Look at that. Iambic pentameter; five iambs in one line of meter. This structure is really expressive and Shakespeare used it all the time.

But SOFT! What LIGHT through YON-der WIN-dow BREAKS!

That's a line from Romeo and Juliet.

Now IS the WIN-ter OF our DIS-con-TENT

That's from Richard III.

This structure lends itself so nicely to the English language, that sometimes we use it when we're not even thinking about it.

We HOLD these TRUTHS to BE self EV-i-DENT

I'd LIKE to GO and GET an ICE cream CONE

English just kind of plods along like this anyway, so shoving into iambic pentameter takes some finesse and some time, but eventually it becomes second nature. I promise it's not rocket surgery.

Hey Yorick, are you writing your next play in iambic pentameter?

Writing in iambic pentameter is about making words fit into a rhythm. One line of meter doesn't necessarily have to be one sentence. A sentence ends wherever your sentence ends; wherever your thought stops. One line of meter always has to be five iambs. Let's look at a speech.

For GOD'S sake LET us SIT up-ON the GROUND
and TELL sad STOR-ies OF the DEATH of KINGS
How SOME have BEEN de-POSED, some SLAIN in WAR
Some HAUN-ted BY the GHOSTS they HAVE de-POSED
Some POI-soned BY their WIVES, some SLEEP-ing KILLED
All MUR-dered.

More within The Hollow Crown, etc, etc...

Let's watch somebody act that better, hm?

For god's sake let us sit upon the ground
and tell sad stories of the death of kings

How some have been deposed, some slain in war
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed
Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed.
All murdered.

See, I told you Richard II stays in meter the whole play! If you are in the discussion section I will be having you write your own lines of iambic pentameter in modern English. Don't worry, it's a lot easier than it sounds. Thanks so much! See you next time.