**Rhythm and Metre**

Rhythm is the regular patterns of emphasis in poetry. When we speak words aloud we naturally give more weight to certain syllables. We lean into them, saying them slightly louder, more slowly, or more forcefully.

Dangerous

Catastrophe

It’s a shame he didn’t clean his bedroom.

When lines in poetry are arranged so that ‘stressed’ (emphasised) and ‘unstressed’ (non-emphasised) syllables line up and form a pattern, this is called the **metre**. It gives it a beat or rhythm to a poem.

Will there real-ly be a mor-ning

Is there such a thing as day?

Could I see it from the moun-tains

If I were as tall as they?

Even if two lines have the same number of syllables, they won’t have the same ‘beat’ if the emphasis falls in a different place. The couplet below has a metre because the emphasised syllables line up:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Will** | there | **real-** | ly | **be** | a | **mor-** | ning | (8 syllables) |
| **Is** | there | **such** | A | **thing** | as | **day?** |  | (7 syllables) |

Compare that to this next example. Although the second line still has seven syllables, the emphasis doesn’t line up. So there’s no pattern, no ‘metre’.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Will** | there | **real-** | ly | **be** | a | **mor-** | ning | (8 syllables) |
| Are | **u-** | ni- | corns | **fic-** | tion- | al? |  | (7 syllables) |

**How to Find the Stressed Syllables:**

Read each line aloud a few times. See if you can hear the ‘beat’ or pattern where the emphasis falls. In words with more than one syllable, make sure you only underline the stressed SYLLABLE, not the whole word (e.g. connection not connection). Practice on these lines (the first one has been done as an example)

1. And today that great Yertle, that marvellous he
2. Lo, thus I triumph like a king
3. Double, double, toil and trouble
4. Amazing grace how sweet the sound
5. Kissed the girls and made them cry
6. These growing feathers plucked from Caesar’s wings
7. And the sound of a voice that is still
8. Tell me not in mournful numbers.
9. Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green.
10. My life closed twice before its close.
11. Love again, sing again, next again, young again
12. It is better to fight for the good than to rave at the ill.
13. Lord what fools these mortals be