



Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Iambic Pentameter

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You probably already know that rhythm—or meter—is an important element of poetry. One of the most common rhythms used in poetry throughout the centuries is called iambic pentameter. Understanding this poetic rhythm will help you read and write poetry.

I. What is iambic pentameter?

Let's look at these two terms separately. An **iamb** is a combination of stressed and unstressed syllables. Say the words *between*, *mature*, and *instead*. These are iambs. In poetry, repeated rhythmic units are called "feet." An iamb is a kind of foot.

Pentameter means that the foot is repeated five times. It has the Greek root *penta-*, which means five. (Think of a pentagon; it has five sides.)

Now put the two terms together: **iambic pentameter** is a line of poetry with five iambs in it. It has this rhythm:
da DUM / da DUM / da DUM / da DUM / da DUM

Try clapping it out!

II. Who uses iambic pentameter?

Iambic pentameter is the most common meter in poetry. William Shakespeare is famous for using it in both his plays and his poems. Check out this line from *Macbeth*:

So foul and fair a day I have not seen.
Macbeth, Act I, Scene 3

Now read the first four lines of Sonnet XVIII. (By definition, a sonnet has 14 lines of iambic pentameter.)

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:

YOUR TURN

Clap out the rhythms of the sonnet. Then draw slashes in each line to show how they break into iambs. Finally, underline all the stressed syllables. We did the first line for you:

Shall I / compare / thee to / a sum / mer's day?

III. Craft Your Own Poem!

Writing in iambic pentameter requires thought and discipline to find just the right words. Create your own poem using iambic pentameter. If you don't get the right rhythm or number of syllables at first, think about how you can rephrase your thoughts or use different words to express yourself. Use the lines below to write your poem. Continue on the back if you wish.

_____ / / / /

_____ / / / /

_____ / / / /

_____ / / / /

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