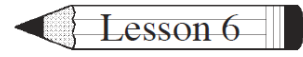


A Sample Lesson from The Gold Book

Ancient Poetry



When, upon the well-wrought chest,
Fiercely heat the howling wind,
And the oceans heaving breast
Filled with terror Danae's mind;

All in tears, her arm she throws
Over Perseus, as he lay
O, my babe, she said, what woes
On thy mother's bosom weigh!

Thou dost sleep with careless breast,
Slumbering in this dreary home,
Thou dost sweetly take thy rest,
In the darkness and the gloom.

(Simonides of Ceos (556-468 B.C.), Fragment 01)

1.

1. Poems written in ancient Greece that expressed deep feelings were often accompanied by the lyre or other stringed instrument. These **lyric poems** were short verses about an emotional experience. The poems did not have to rhyme but did rely on **meter**, either of the number of syllables or the stress placed on syllables, giving a musical quality to the verse. Today we call the words to a song *lyrics*.
2. Count the number of syllables in each line of the above poem. What do you notice? What quality does this bring to the poem?
3. The stressed syllables in poetry are known as its metrical pattern. The smallest of the metrical units is the *syllable*. In English, there are two kinds of syllables: accented or stressed, and unaccented or unstressed. After the syllable, the next largest metrical unit is the *foot*, which is a group of two

or more syllables. Meter is determined by the number of stresses per line.

The six common kinds of feet in English metrics have names derived from Greek:

1. **Iambic** foot consists of an unaccented syllable followed by an accented. It can be heard in such words as *hello* and *goodbye*.
 2. **Trochaic** foot consists of an accented syllable followed by an unaccented. These are trochaic words: *marry* and *pillow*.
 3. **Dactylic** foot consists of an accented syllable followed by two unaccented syllables. You can hear the dactylic beat in these words: *beautiful* and *Stephanie*.
 4. **Anapestic** foot consists of two unaccented syllables followed by an accented syllable. These words are anapestic: *tambourine* and *Marianne*.
 5. **Spondaic** foot consists of two accented syllables.
Ex: **aircraft**
 6. **Pyrrhic** foot consists of two unaccented syllables.
This foot is rarely used in English poetry.
4. The next largest metrical unit is the **line**. A line is the regular succession of feet, and, though it is not necessarily a sentence, it customarily begins with a capital letter. The number of feet in a line of verse determines the measure or meter. A line containing only one foot is called a *monometer*; one with two feet, a *dimeter* line; three feet, a *trimeter*; four feet, *tetrameter*; five feet, *pentameter*; six feet, *hexameter*; seven feet, *heptameter*; and eight feet, *octameter*.
5. What is the meter of the poem by Simonides at the beginning of this lesson?

6. Here is the next stanza of the poem:

In thy little mantle there,
Passing wave thou does not mind,
Dashing o'er thy clustering hair,
Nor the voices of the wind.

7. Does it follow the same metrical pattern?

2.

1. One of the most famous of the ancient Greek lyric poets, Pindar, born about 522 B.C. near Thebes, is credited with inventing the ode. In Greek, ode means "to sing or chant." Most of Pindar's odes were written to celebrate athletic victories and were sung by a chorus. Although we only have fragments of most early lyric poetry, most of Pindar's victory odes have been preserved.
2. Pindar's work is difficult to read, not only because of the language problem, but because of the complexity of his poems and perhaps the monotony of his subject. Olympian 1 glorifies Pelops, founder of the Olympic Games and tells of Hieron's victory in the horse race at the Olympia of 476 B.C.
3. Read the beginning of Olympian 1 by Pindar (translated by Sir Richard Francis Burton).

Best is Water of all, and gold as a flaming fire
In the night shines eminent amid lordly wealth,
But if of prizes in the games thou art fain, O my soul,
To tell, then, as for no bright star more quickening than the
sun
Must thou search in the void firmament by day,

So neither shall we find any games greater than the Olympic
Whereof to utter our voice: for hence cometh the glorious
hymn And enters into the minds of the skilled in song,
So that they celebrate the son of Kronos.
When to the rich and happy hearth of Hieron they are come,
For he wields the scepter of justice in Sicily of many flocks,
Culling the choice fruits of all kinds of excellence:
And with the flower of music is he made splendid,
Even such strains as we sing blithely at the table of a friend.

4. Summarize this part of the poem.
5. The main part of the poem tells the myth of Pelops and his famous chariot race which led to the Olympic games.
Research and read about this myth.
6. The poem concludes with these lines:

Now the good that comes of to-day is ever sovereign unto every man. My part it is to crown Hieron with an equestrian strain in Aeolian mood: and sure am I that no host among men that now are shall I ever glorify in sounding labyrinths of song more learned in the learning of honor and withal with more might to work thereto. A god hath guard over thy hopes, O Hieron, and takes care for them with a peculiar care: and if he fail thee not, I trust that I shall again proclaim in
song a sweeter glory yet, and find thereto in words a ready way, when to the fair-shining hill of Kronos I am come. Her strongest-winged dart my Muse hath yet in store.

Of many kinds is the greatness of men; but the highest is to be achieved by kings. Look not thou for more than this. May it be thine to walk loftily all thy life, and mine to be the friend of winners in the games, winning honor for my art among Hellenes everywhere.

7. Summarize this part of the poem.

8. Has the way we view sports changed from the way Pindar feels about the Olympics? Write a short paragraph stating your opinion.

3.

1. Horace (65-8 B.C.), a great ancient Roman lyric poet, began writing poetry to gain a place in Roman society after having lost his property in the civil war following the assassination of Julius Caesar. He is best known for his collection of poems called *Odes*. Up until his time, odes were written for ceremonies and other public gatherings. Horace's odes expressed more personal thoughts.
2. In Ode 1.11, "Carpe Diem," Horace advises his friend, Leuconoe:

Strive not (Leuconoe) to know what end The Gods above to me or you will send: Nor with Astrologers consult at all, That you may better know what can befall. Whether, you live more winters, or your last Be this, which Tyrrhen waves 'gainst rocks do cast; Be wise, drink free, and in so short a space, Do not protracted hopes of life embrace. While we are talking, envious Time does slide; This day's your own, the next may be deny'd.
(Translated by Thomas Hawkins, 1666)

3. *Carpe diem* is Latin meaning *seize the day*. Is this a good name for the poem?
4. Translating literary works from ancient languages is hard. Translating poetry presents even more difficulties because the translator is bound by the meter and/or rhyme scheme (will be discussed in Lesson 10, 4.f.) of the poem. Here is another translation of "Carpe Diem."

I pray you not, Leuconoe, to pore
With unpermitted eyes on what may be Appointed by the gods
for you and me, Nor on Chaldean figures any more.
'T were infinitely better to implore
The present only: — whether Jove decree More winters yet
to come, or whether he Make even this, whose hard, wave-
eaten shore Shatters the Tuscan seas to-day, the last —

Be wise withal, and rack your wine, nor fill Your bosom with large hopes; for while I sing, The envious close of time is narrowing; —

So seize the day, — or ever it be past, — And let the morrow come for what it will.

(Translated by Edward Arlington Robinson, 1897)

5. Compare the two. Which do you prefer? Why?
 6. Do you agree with the philosophy of *carpe diem*? Write a paragraph using examples from your life that supports or opposes this philosophy.
- 4.
1. While lyric poetry tends to be short and usually deals with the poet's personal experiences and feelings, poems that are longer and tell a story of heroes who accomplish extraordinary deeds are called *epics*. One of the earliest is *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to which you were introduced in Lesson Three.
 2. Elements usually found in epic literature include:
 1. A hero who exemplifies the ideal man of his culture. He usually is an offspring of a god or has superhuman qualities.
 2. An important task that must be accomplished by the hero.
 3. Gods who freely interact and intervene.
 4. A broad setting that moves not only geographically, but even into the underworld, the heavens, or other times.
 5. A language style that is formal.
 3. It has been said that if you want to know someone, look at who his heroes are. This is also true when you want to know more about a culture. Epic poetry can be found in most cultures. The ancient Greek poet Homer, often called the father of epic poetry, is credited with writing *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, two epic poems that tell the story of the end of the Trojan War and Odysseus's journey home. These two poems

are considered to be the beginning of Western literature.

4. The Greeks of Homer's time were polytheists. They believed in and worshipped many gods. In *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, Homer presents these gods with all their flaws and weaknesses. Born seven hundred years before Christ, Homer's writings would eventually help to expose the falsehood of believing in these flawed deities.
 5. Read the summary of the Trojan War found in *A World Literature Anthology*, 4.e. What caused the war? Who fought in the war? Where was it fought? How long did the war last? Who won the war?
5. a. The first of these two important epics is *The Iliad*. *The Iliad* tells of the last two years of the Trojan War. The main characters are Achilles, the son of a sea-nymph and a soldier, and Agamemnon, the King of Mycenae and brother of King Menelaus, the King of Sparta.

Review the summary of the Trojan War you read yesterday. What elements of epic poetry listed on 4.b. can you identify?

1. *The Iliad* is famous for Homer's use of simile. Remember that in a simile two different things are compared using the words *like* or *as*.

Ex: "As ravenous wolves come swooping down on lambs...so the Achaeans mauled the Trojans."

The use of simile makes the description much more vivid.

2. A **Homeric simile** or **epic simile** is a simile that compares an epic event with a commonplace happening that the reader would find familiar. Read the following from *The Iliad*, Book XI, and identify the similes:

And now as a band of reapers mow swathes of wheat or barley upon a rich man's land, and the sheaves fall thick before them, even so did the Trojans and Achaeans fall upon one another. They were in no mood for yielding but fought like wolves, and neither side got the better of the other. Discord was glad as she beheld them, for she was the only god that went among them. The others were not there, but stayed quietly each in his own home among the dells and valleys of Olympus. All of them blamed the son of Saturn for wanting to give

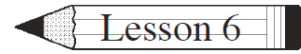
victory to the Trojans, but father Jove heeded them not. He held aloof from all, and sat apart in his all-glorious majesty, looking down upon the city of the Trojans, the ships of the Achaeans, the gleam of bronze, and alike upon the slayers and on the slain.

3. Read a brief summary of *The Odyssey* either from the library or online.

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Answers



1.

b. 7,7,7,7 The poem has a very steady, rhythmic quality.

e. trochaic tetrameter

Note: The main foot in these lines is trochaic (stressed/unstressed syllables). The final foot in each line is incomplete having only a stressed syllable. This incomplete foot at the end of each line is called catalexis, creating a catalectic foot. The meter is tetrameter because each line contains three complete feet and one incomplete foot making four feet.

g. Yes, it follows the same pattern. 2.

d. In nature, nothing is better than water because it gives life. Gold is the greatest treasure; it glows like fire. The Olympic sports are better than any other competition because the winner gains a crown shining like the sun. Everyone comes to sing of Hieron's glory, praising him with music and song.

g. It is now time to crown the winner. There is no one on earth more deserving that Hieron. I pray that the gods will watch over him and never abandon him. I again write a song of praise of your deeds. Remember, though, that being a king is the highest of honors. You should desire nothing more, so continue to be a good king. I will support you and serve you, as well as bring honor to Olympic winners, with my poetry.

3.

c. Yes. The poet urges his friend to enjoy the day and not place all his hopes on tomorrow because it may not come.

4.

e. The Trojan War began when Paris, the Prince of Troy, seduced and kidnapped Helen, Queen of Sparta. Helen's husband called on the other Greek Kings to join him to recapture Helen. The battle was fought at the City of Troy, which was in Turkey, and lasted almost ten years. The Greeks won the war.

5.

a. Most of the elements are present. Achilles exemplifies the ideal man of the culture. He is the son of a god and a mortal and has the superhuman quality of invincibility. His important task is to defeat the Trojans and return Helen to Greece. Gods and goddesses intervene and interact with the humans throughout the story.

c. 1) And now *AS a band of reapers mow swathes of wheat or barley* upon a rich man's land, and the sheaves fall thick before them, even so did the *Trojans and Achaeans* fall upon one another.

2) *They* were in no mood for yielding but fought *LIKE* wolves