

Lesson 2

Parts of Speech

There are almost one million words in the English language and yet all of them belong to one of eight *parts of speech*: nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections. Dictionaries are useful in that they not only give a definition of a word, but also tell the part of speech. A noun is usually abbreviated *n.*; a verb, *v.*; a pronoun, *pron.*; and so on. Look below at the dictionary entry for the word *refuge*. Notice that its part of speech is shown next to the word.

DICTIONARY ENTRY

refuge *n.* [rĕ'-fyooj] **1** : a safe place for anyone who is in danger
2 : any place or thing that gives quiet, rest or relief [from L. *re-*, away, back + *fugere*, flee] *The family ran away from their country and sought ~ in the U.S.*

Noun and Pronouns

A *noun* is a word that names a person, place, or thing. Sometimes a noun does not name a thing that you can touch, taste, see, hear or smell. This kind of noun is called an *abstract noun*. Abstract nouns name ideas or feelings. All other nouns are called *concrete nouns*.

EXAMPLES OF CONCRETE NOUNS

cousin, priest, sky, hill, bone

EXAMPLES OF ABSTRACT NOUNS

love, craving, panic, trial, fun

Pronouns replace nouns. *He, she, it, we, you* and *they* are just a few examples. In the example below, the word *they* replaces *farmers*.

PRONOUNS REPLACE NOUNS

The *farmers* used buckets to drown the fire, and fortunately *they* were successful.

Verb

A *verb* is a word that refers to an action, or that links a subject with another word. If you can *do* it, it is an *action verb*. Words such as *sing, wash, pray, and lift* are all action verbs. You will learn about the *linking verbs* in a later section.

Exercise 2.1

Memorize the definition of *noun, verb* and *pronoun*.

Exercise 2.2

Look up each of the following words in a dictionary, and write down its part of speech. You may abbreviate.

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. _____ not | 6. _____ ouch |
| 2. _____ hasty | 7. _____ distress |
| 3. _____ destroy | 8. _____ himself |
| 4. _____ trespass | 9. _____ clock |
| 5. _____ because | 10. _____ of |

Exercise 2.3

Write 'N' if the underlined word is a noun, 'V' if it is a verb, and 'P' if it is a pronoun.

- ___ Sally told Margot that her dog Barkley was friendly, but sometimes bites.
- ___ Dogs, not cats, are man's best friend.
- ___ Ronald eats too fast.
- ___ The lightning and thunder scared us.
- ___ Jake shivered and put the blanket around his shoulders.
- ___ Thomas read the notice on the parking meter.
- ___ She ran to the distant fence.
- ___ The soldiers climbed the hill to see the enemy.
- ___ The sailors anchored the ship.
- ___ We shouted from the distance to get his attention.

Exercise 2.4

Underline the nouns once and the verbs twice.

EXAMPLE

Bruno's little sister smiled when her mother came into the room.

1. Anna had good manners.
2. Lewis and Will bought a new computer.
3. The mailman left a letter on the doorstep of our house.
4. Sally and Heather hiked, swam, and rode their bikes during the vacation.
5. Evi and Jacob saved their money for the ice cream.

6. Sam rode his new bicycle around the block.
7. We noticed a mouse in the corner of the room.
8. The fly came in through the open door, flew into my lemonade and drowned.
9. Mary recovered from her jealousy, anger and unhappiness.
10. Christian and Ethan dragged their broken bicycles across the street.

Lesson 2

The Language of Poetry

Another difference between prose and poetry is *language*. One easy way to see that difference is by looking closely at two accounts of an experience, one written in prose and the other written in poetry. Right below is a description of a country setting in March written by Dorothy Wordsworth. William lived with his sister in the Lake District, in a village called Grasmere—a very beautiful area full of trees, lakes, streams, hills and wildlife. The second description is the same account, only in poetry, written by her brother William Wordsworth (1770–1850). As you read the two accounts, notice particularly the difference in the two writers’ use of words.

A JOURNAL ACCOUNT BY DOROTHY WORDSWORTH

When I returned, I found William writing a poem descriptive of the sights and sounds we saw and heard. There was the gentle flowing of the stream, the glittering, lively lake, green fields without a living creature to be seen on them; behind us, a flat pasture with forty-two cattle feeding; to our left, the road leading to the hamlet. No smoke there, the sun shone on the bare roofs. The people were at work ploughing, harrowing, and sowing; . . . a dog barking now and then, cocks crowing, birds twittering, the snow in patches at the top of the highest hills, yellow palms, purple and green twigs on the birches, ashes with their glittering stems quite bare. The hawthorn a bright green, with black stems under the oak. The moss of the oak glossy. We went on. Passed two sisters at work (they first passed us), one with two pitchforks in her hand, the other had a spade. We had come to talk with them. They laughed long after we were gone, perhaps half in wantonness, half boldness.

WRITTEN IN MARCH BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

The Cock is crowing,
The stream is flowing,
The small birds twitter,
The lake doth glitter,
The green field sleeps in the sun;
The oldest and youngest
Are at work with the strongest;
The cattle are grazing,

Their heads never raising;
There are forty feeding like one!

Like an army defeated
The snow hath retreated,
And now doth fare ill
On the top of the bare hill;
The Ploughboy is whooping—anon—anon:
There's joy in the mountains;
There's life in the fountains;
Small clouds are sailing,
Blue sky prevailing;
The rain is over and gone!

The Language of Poetry Is More Compact

The first thing you might notice from a careful comparison between Dorothy's journal entry and her brother's poem is that the poem is more compact. Poets must be more selective than prose writers in their words—for many reasons. One is that a poet must say a lot more in a little space. Comparing Wordsworth's description of a country scene with his sister's, you will notice that "Written in March" tells us only that the stream is *flowing*; it does not describe it as a *gentle stream*, as does the prose description. Wordsworth uses less description because the picture that he tried to create had to fit a much smaller frame of space.

Poetry Uses Figurative Language

Another difference that you may have noticed is that Wordsworth's poetry uses several figures of speech, as in the statement, "The green field sleeps in the sun." When poets use figurative language, they do not mean exactly what they say. Obviously, a field cannot sleep. Perhaps what Wordsworth really meant when he wrote the poem was that the expanse of green field was as still as a sleeping dog under the warm, early spring sun. (Some animals like to bask in the warm sun and will often be found sleeping in it.) Whatever the case, Wordsworth is using the word *sleep* in a figurative way. On the other hand, when Dorothy Wordsworth says in her account that there were "green fields without a living creature to be seen on them," she is being *literal*; in other words, she means exactly what she says.

Words of Poetry Are Chosen for Their Rhythm

Another obvious difference between the two works is that William Wordsworth selected words to fit the rhythm of his poem. Dorothy mentions that there are forty-two cows grazing in the field, while her brother says that there are forty. Although she is being more precise in describing the scene before her, the rounded number *forty* fits the sense and rhythm of the poem much more than the word *forty-two*.

The Words of Poetry Suggest

One last difference between poetry and prose is that poetry is more suggestive. We will use “Seasons” by the English poet Christina Rossetti (1830–1894) as an example to illustrate this fact. Each stanza of Rossetti’s poem talks about one of the four seasons. The first is about spring; the second, summer; the third autumn; and the last, winter. The words of the first stanza suggest life, youth, beauty and joy. The leaves are *young*, the dewdrops *gleam*, and pretty birds are roosting in the branches of trees.

SPRING FROM SEASONS

In springtime when the leaves are young
Clear dewdrops gleam like jewels hung
On boughs the fair birds roost among.

In contrast, the words of the last stanza of “Seasons” paint a picture of a bleak, desolate landscape with no sparkle. The singing birds are gone and even the magnificent heavenly sun seems, at least from an earthly point of view, to have lost its shine.

WINTER FROM SEASONS

In winter when the birds are gone
The sun himself looks starved and wan
And starved the snow he shines upon.

Although the words of Christina Rossetti themselves do not say so *directly*, they speak of something more than the seasons themselves. Yes, the poem is a lovely picture of seasons, but it also suggests the cycle of human life. The words of the first stanza are suggestive of the excitement and vibrancy that are play a part of youth, but the words of the second stanza talk of the loneliness that often comes with old age—when life seems to have lost its “sparkle.”

Exercise 2.1

Write 'T' if the statement is true and 'F' if the statement is false.

1. ___ In his description of the countryside William Wordsworth was trying to be more accurate or precise than his sister in his poem "Written in March."
2. ___ In contrast to her brother's poem, Dorothy Wordsworth included no description in her journal entry.
3. ___ In general, poetry is more compact than prose.
4. ___ In his statement "The green field sleeps in the sun," William Wordsworth is using figurative language.
5. ___ Generally speaking, a poet is more careful about his word choice than a prose writer.
6. ___ William Wordsworth was an English poet who lived in the late 1700's and early 1800's.
7. ___ The poem "Seasons" is able to express deep things about youth and old age through a description of the seasons and the activity of birds.
8. ___ Christina Rossetti was an Italian poet who lived in the 1700's.
9. ___ Literal language expresses exactly what it says.
10. ___ When William Wordsworth says "There's joy in the mountains" he is being figurative.

Exercise 2.2

Answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. How is Dorothy Wordsworth's journal entry more *literal* than William Wordsworth's poem?
2. Find at least one figure of speech in William Wordsworth's poem (other than the use of the word *sleep*).
3. What are the two differences mentioned between the accounts of Dorothy Wordsworth and her brother?

Exercise 2.3

Write down the word in the blanks indicated by the description. The letters of the darker shaded boxes will spell out a mystery word. Write out the mystery word and be able to explain it.

1. “Easter ____” is a poem that was written by George Herbert.
2. William Carols Williams wrote a poem titled “____ Is Just to Say.”
3. George Herbert’s poem “The Altar” is shaped like an ____.
4. One example of prose is the modern ____.
5. An ____ indicates a new paragraph in prose.
6. “Regular” writing is called ____.
7. Who said that the length of a line is the length of what the poet may naturally say without taking a breath?
8. One example of prose is the ____.
9. ____ used unusual punctuation, which some say was effective in making the reader what he was trying to say in the poem.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.

Mystery Word