

Sound, Shape, Sense: The Work of Our Words (Shutta Crum, 2021)

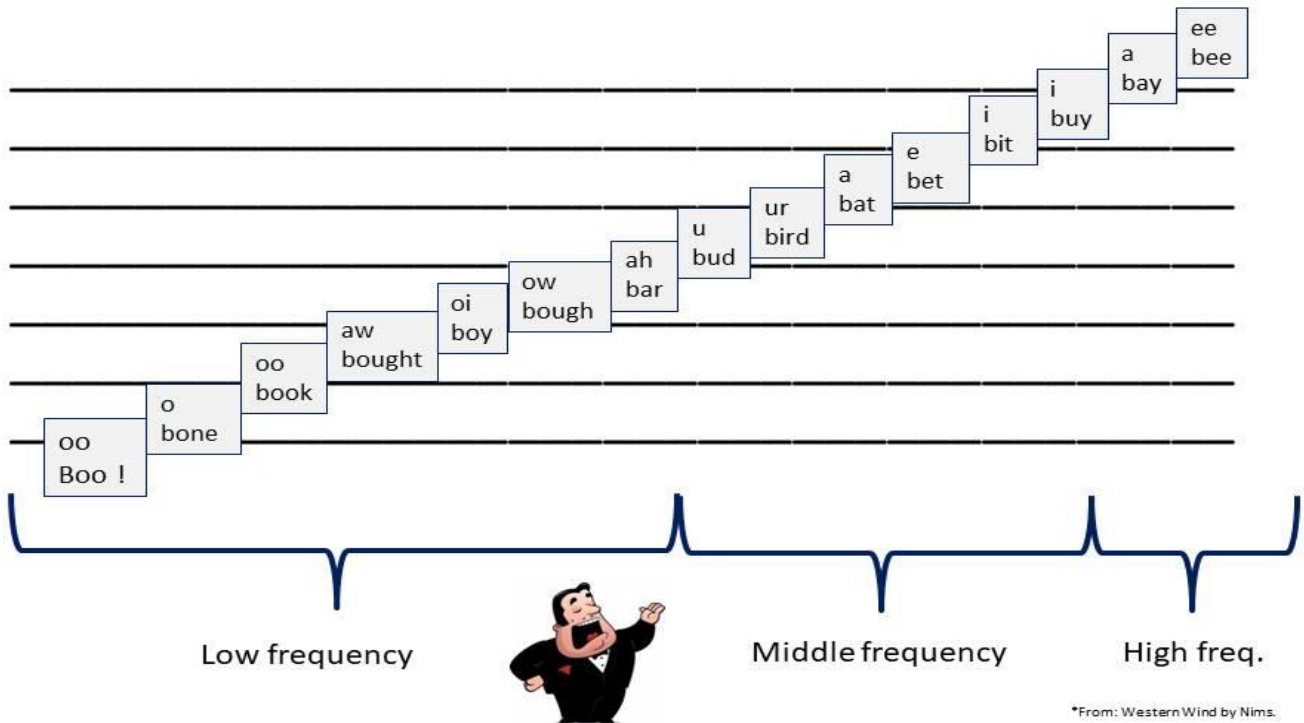
Creating Moodscapes with Sound:



Aspects of word choice:

- emotional
- cultural
- historical
- physical

Frequency Scale of English Vowel Sounds*



Common metric feet – (and a short poem of mine):

IAMB: (1 soft -1 hard beat) u /

ANAPEST: (2 soft – 1 hard) u u /

TROCHEE: (1 hard – 1 soft) / u

DACTYL: (1 hard – 2 soft) / u u

u / u / u / u / }
 You sleep, one foot outside the heat
 u u / u u / u u / } *sound rises*
 of our bed. While the snow, in the clear
 / u / u
 morning lingers
 / u u / u u } *sound falls*
 jealously . . . dreamfully.

Poetic technique: **Alliteration (including assonance & consonance)**

Definition: The repetition of sounds within words. Most often defined as repeated initial sound and letters. Sub-types include assonance and consonance. *Assonance*: repeated vowel sounds. *Consonance*: repeated consonant sounds.

Examples:

Poems: Robert Frost, “*Stopping Woods on a Snowy Evening.*”
Edgar Allan Poe, “*The Raven.*”

Pict. Books: **Eek! Creak! Snicker, Sneak** by Rhonda Gowler Greene.
Shrek! by William Steig.
Many alphabet books.

Fiction & Opening of **The Crossing** by Cormac McCarthy.
Non-Fiction: **A Natural History of the Senses** by Diane Ackerman.

Writing starter: Make an alphabet of sounds in a writing journal. Designate a whole page, or more, for each letter of the alphabet and jot down the impression each letter gives you when you say the letter aloud, and then words associated with that impression. Ex.: “b” (baheeeeeeeee...) makes me think of starting quickly and then racing off into the distance, like at a racetrack. So the alliterative words that thought brings to mind for me are, *brake, bench, blare, brace, brands, bang*, etc. Keep the lists going and find words there for poems or a short piece.

Poetic technique: **Onomatopoeia**

Definition: Words that imitate the sound of what they mean like *splat, sizzle, buzz* and *puff*.

Examples:

Poems: Lillian Moore, “*Wind Song.*”
Eve Merriam, “*Weather.*”
Edgar Allan Poe, “*The Bells.*”

Pict. Books: **Click, Clack, Peep!** by Doreen Cronin.
Raccoon Tune by Nancy Shaw.
Bear Snores On by Karma Wilson.

Fiction & Works by Ernest Hemmingway.
Non-fiction Works by Loren Eiseley.

Writing starter: Choose a holiday. Take your time and list every sound you associate with it—even if you don’t have a word yet for that sound. For ex.: write “the sound of the oven closing” for a Thanksgiving list. Keep the list, post it on the refrigerator and let your family add to it—we all hear and remember sounds differently. Once you’ve got a long list, work with the sound words for a poem/story idea. Start an onomatopoeia dictionary—keep fun words kept in an alphabetical list. (I use a blank old phone directory.)

Poetic technique: **Meter**

Definition: The measure of a line of verse composing a measurable rhythm of stressed and unstressed syllables.

Examples:

Poems: Edgar Allan Poe, "*The Raven*."
Clement More, "*The Night Before Christmas*."
Robert Frost, "*Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*."
Poems by Jack Prelutsky and Shel Silverstein.

Pict. Books: **Bear Snores On** by Karma Wilson.
Sheep in a Jeep by Nancy Shaw.
Mammoths on the Move by Lisa Wheeler.

Writing starter: Select a poem with a strong meter and vary it by deleting words and phrases, or adding words and phrases to create a new pattern. Analyze. How would "*Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*" sound with just three feet per line instead of four? (He will not see me stop/to watch his woods fill up/...)

Poetic technique: **Caesura & Enjambment**

Definition: Caesura: A pause in a line of text caused by a space, comma, dash, ellipsis, or other punctuation/technique. Can also be a stop in the illustrations or text to indicate time passing, or other action. (See **I Want My Hat Back** by Klassen for pauses in illustration.) Seen often before a final fillip or in books where the page turns with a guessing game/surprise. Enjambment: the opposite of caesura in which lines are ran together or spaced so the piece is read as though all one line. Speeds things up.

Examples:

Poems: Emily Dickinson, "*I Heard a Fly Buzz—When I Died*."
Tamara Kitt, "*So Long As there's Weather*"
e. e. cummings, Various poems.

Pict. Books: **Company's Coming** by Arthur Yorinks. (See last four pages.)
I Want My Hat Back by Jon Klassen. (See illustrations without text.)
Pierre: a cautionary tale... by Maurice Sendak.

Novel: **Everything on a Waffle** by Polly Horvath.
Criss Cross by Lynne Rae Perkins.

Writing starter: Find a point of amassed emotion, a transitional point, or a place where you feel a decision is made within a poem/story. Insert a caesura—a comma, dash, space, etc. Does this facilitate understanding, create a different meaning, or relocate the emphasis? Try enjambling writing you find with caesuras. What is the effect? Has the tone of the piece changed?

Poetic technique: Metaphor & Simile

Definition: Figures of speech that compare one thing to another and expand our understanding of a subject. *Metaphor* is stronger in that one thing directly assumes the characteristics of another. In everyday speech: “the mouth of a river.” *Similes* use a connecting comparative word such as “like” or “as,” so it is a bit removed from the immediacy of the image. Simile is more conversational, metaphor more formal.

Related technique: *Synesthesia*: using one sense to portray another as in, “bitter smile.”

Examples:

Poems: Elisabeth Coatsworth, “*Rain Poem.*”
May Swenson, “*A City Garden in April.*” (See “Daffodils” section.)
Billy Collins, “*Winter Syntax.*”

Pict. Books: **The Other Side** by Jacqueline Woodson.
My Heart is Like a Zoo by Michael Hall.
Quick as a Cricket by Audrey Wood.

Fiction & Non-fiction **Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy** by Douglas Adams.
The Reenactments by Nick Flynn.

Writing starter: Find similes you like and rewrite them as metaphors. Which do you prefer? Extend your metaphors. Settle on two things to compare, and answer these questions in regard to the comparison: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? (For ex.: sunset=blood. When? As I leave the city. How? Spilled from a gash in the sky. Where? Over the road that leads from the city to the desert.) You may not be able to answer all the questions. Keep notes and write a piece using metaphor and simile.

Poetic technique: Personification

Definition: To give human qualities to inanimate objects, abstractions, movements, events, etc. As used in everyday speech, “the economy demands,” or “instinct tells us...”

Examples:

Poems: Carl Sandburg, “*Paper I*” and “*Paper II.*”
Billy Collins, “*The Lesson.*”

Pict. Books: **Chicka Chicka Boom Boom** by Bill Martin.
Who Took My Hairy Toe? by Shutta Crum. (the trees)
Red Sings from Treetops: A Year in Colors by Joyce Sidman.

Fiction **The Book Thief** by Markus Zusak.
War Horse by Michael Morpurgo.

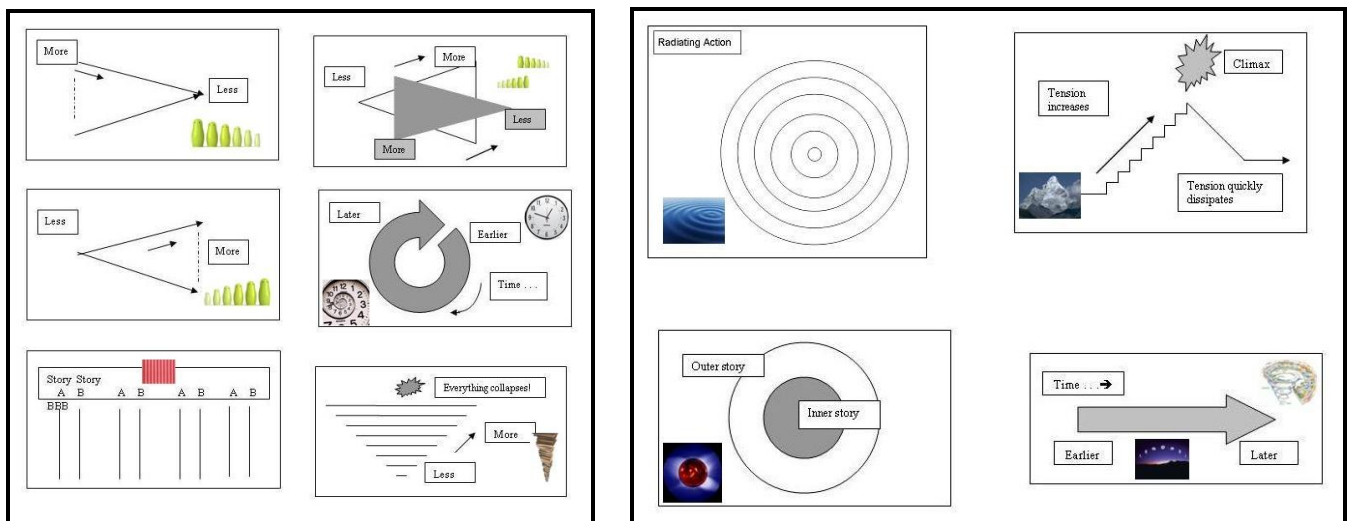
Writing starter: Give something inanimate a human background. List friends it might have, phrases it might say, attitude toward its job/function, and memories or desires. Then play with your lists to make a poem or write a short piece.

Recommended Reading

Alison, Jane. **Meander, Spiral, Explode.** Catapult Books, 2019.
Baer, William. **Writing Metrical Poetry.** Writer's Digest Books, 2006.
Cron, Lisa. **Story Genius.** Ten Speed Press, 2016.
Drury, John. **The Poetry Dictionary.** Story Press, 1995.
Forsyth, Mark. **The Elements of Eloquence: How to Turn the Perfect English Phrase.** Icon Books, 2013.
Griswold, Jerry. **Feeling Like a Kid.** John Hopkins University Press, 2006.
Jauss, David. **Alone with All That Could Happen.** Writer's Digest, 2008.
King, Stephen. **On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft.** Pocket Books, 2000.
Kooser, Ted. **The Poetry Home Repair Manual.** University of Nebraska Press, 2005.
Maass, Donald. **The Emotional Craft of Fiction.** Writer' Digest, 2016.
Prose, Francine. **Reading Like a Writer.** Harper Perennial, 2007.
Rogers, Cindy. **Word Magic.** Institute of Children's Literature, 2004.
Yolen, Jane. **Take Joy: A Writer's Guide to Loving the Craft.** Writer's Digest Books, 2006.

ARTICLES AT SHUTTA'S SITE FOR WRITERS: www.shutta.com/resources

- Getting Out of Slushville
- Tucking Your Reader In: Writing a Great Picture Book Lead
- Poetry 101 (A refresher course.): Poetry Techniques Revisited
- Novel Revision Checklist
- Come and Play! Invite the Reader to Play, and Create an Outstanding Picture Book
- Teaching Literary Techniques with Picture Books
- Simple Plot Structures You Should Know



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