

Marilyn  
Dumont  
**A Really  
Good  
Brown  
Girl**

TEACHER GUIDE

BRICK BOOKS CLASSICS 4 BRICK BOOKS

Brick Books has produced this Teacher Guide as an aid in discussing and studying the titles from its Brick Books Classics poetry series in secondary and post-secondary classrooms.

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# INTRODUCTION TO POETRY

## WHAT MAKES POETRY, POETRY?

Begin with some of your assumptions and preconceptions about poetry by answering the following questions as true or false. If you believe the statement to be false, you may indicate why with a brief explanation to the right of the statement. The final question invites you, in your own notebook, to write whatever else you believe to be true (or false) about poetry. Quiz someone close to you with your own suppositions.

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1. T/F **Poetry has a beat.**

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2. T/F **Poetry rhymes.**

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3. T/F **Poetry does not run margin to margin, as prose does, but has line breaks.**

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4. T/F **Poetry deals with imagery (allegory, symbol, metaphor, simile, etc.).**

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5. T/F **Poetry is difficult.**

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6. T/F **Poetry has stanzas.**

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7. T/F **Poetry has verses.**

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8. T/F **There is no difference between a stanza and a verse.**

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9. T/F **Songs that have words are poetry.**

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10. T/F **Poems, unlike short fiction, don't tell a story.**

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11. T/F **Free verse has no rules.**

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12. T/F **Blank verse has no rules.**

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13. T/F **All poems have a regular metre or cadence.**

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14. T/F **Poems have one valid interpretation.**

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15. T/F **All poets are extremely well-educated.**

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16. T/F **Rap is poetry.**

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17. T/F **Poetry is/isn't...**

## HOW DO POETS TALK ABOUT POETRY?

Read some of the quotations below to discover what published poets say about their own craft. In the box below their statements, create your own statement about poetry.

“Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity.”

—**William Wordsworth**

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“Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”

—**Percy Bysshe Shelley**

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“Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.”

—**T. S. Eliot**

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“Poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive, and widely effective mode of saying things, and hence its importance.”

—**Matthew Arnold**

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“The poet is the priest of the invisible.”

—**Wallace Stevens**

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“If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?”

—**Emily Dickinson**

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“Poems come out of wonder, not out of knowing.”

—**Lucille Clifton**

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“Poetry isn’t a profession; it’s a way of life. It’s an empty basket; you put your life into it and make something out of that.”

—**Mary Oliver**

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“When an angel carries away my soul / all shrouded in fog, folded in flames / I have no body, no tears to weep / just a bag in my heart, full of poems.”

—**Elena Svarts**

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I think that poetry is ...



# TEACHER GUIDE TO A REALLY GOOD BROWN GIRL: BRICK BOOKS CLASSICS 4

by MARILYN DUMONT

For each of the selections, before you respond to the questions, keep in mind the following important considerations for each piece:

- a) Imagine the identity of the speaker.
- b) Imagine an audience for the address.
- c) What imagery (sensory detail, metaphors, similes, symbols, etc.) does the poet use?
- d) What technical elements are in play (structure, rhythm or its lack, rhyme or its lack)?
- e) What allusions does the poet make to ideas/people/places (historical figures, works of art, scientific terms, etc.) that have a life outside the poem?
- f) Are there elements of the poet's biography (family life, profession, relationships, etc.) that inform the work? If so, how do they inform the poetry?

## **INTRODUCTION: *And They Waited to Judge*, by Lee Maracle (page 13)**

- ▶ In what regard does Lee Maracle hold this particular volume of poetry by Marilyn Dumont?
- ▶ What, in particular, did Dumont articulate for Maracle that she had formerly considered normal?
- ▶ Why is shame a prominent theme in the childhood of both of these women?
- ▶ In what way does Dumont reverse, even scorn, the judgment and censure associated with white people's assessment of the Métis?
- ▶ How is the culture of poetry among the Salish people different than in settler culture? Give a few examples and illustrate your points.

- ▶ How does Dumont “shrink” colonialism?
- ▶ Why was Dumont’s book too late to prevent Maracle from becoming a “blue ribbon mom”?
- ▶ Do a little research. What are some of the reasons that Maracle’s family would have had a lifespan generally of only sixty years? What effect does this information have on you?
- ▶ What does Maracle mean when she asserts there’s a “lotta Raven” in Dumont’s poetry?

## **SQUAW POEMS**

### **The White Judges (page 25)**

- ▶ Marilyn Dumont is Métis. What does that mean?
- ▶ Account for the shift in form between stanzas 1 and 2.
- ▶ Who are the white judges and by whose authority do they judge? Does Dumont recognize this authority?
- ▶ Is tripe a dish limited to Native American cultures? What other ethnicities consume tripe? How is it regarded in each case, contextually?
- ▶ Why were clothing donations dropped anonymously at the speaker’s door? By whom? How did this act make the speaker feel?
- ▶ Why would the speaker’s mother be “praying, coaxing and thanking” the animals that her husband and children hunted? Do other cultures do this? Elaborate.
- ▶ What languages do the Métis speak besides English and Cree? How many languages do you speak?

### **Memoirs of a Really Good Brown Girl (page 28)**

- ▶ Comment on the speaker’s attitude and tone regarding:
  - a) becoming invisible
  - b) becoming a follower
  - c) being a good visual learner.
- ▶ What does the speaker mean by “the changing of the guard”? Why does this event occur?
- ▶ The speaker says that her classmates resemble porcelain dolls. Can you think of an unmentioned quality of porcelain dolls that also applies to her classmates?
- ▶ What does the speaker’s description of the duality of her life at school tell you about Indigenous and settler relations in the sixties and seventies? Have things changed? Elaborate.
- ▶ Why does the speaker choose the words “hounded of dirt and sin” to describe what she felt as her brother’s fiancée prepared her for being a flower girl?
- ▶ By the time the speaker reaches university, is she still invisible? How do you know?

**The Halfbreed Parade (page 32)**

- ▶ What word would you use to describe the speaker's tone in this piece: sardonic? Derisive? Self-deprecating? Other?
- ▶ Which of the author's word choices help to establish this tone?
- ▶ Why would the speaker describe the coffee made by Grandpa Dan as **heavy**?

**The Red & White (page 33)**

- ▶ Who is Mary? Use textual evidence and research to support your claims.
- ▶ What are all the permutations of "Red & White"?
- ▶ Despite the fact that each stanza's first word is **god**, the word is not capitalized. Why do you think this is?
- ▶ What does the speaker mean by the last stanza?

**Squaw Poems (page 34)**

- ▶ What do you notice about the Cree words in this piece? How do you think they might affect non-speakers of Cree?
- ▶ How does each account of the word **squaw** vary from first stanza to last?
- ▶ In "newo," what relationship does this pair of analogies reveal?
- ▶ Why does the speaker choose to attempt to embody the Indian princess archetype?
- ▶ What relationship does the last analogy delineate?

**Helen Betty Osborne (page 36)**

- ▶ Research each of the names mentioned in this piece and list pertinent details on each.
- ▶ How is each stanza linked to the next?
- ▶ What themes are implied in this piece?

**Blue Ribbon Children (page 38)**

- ▶ What is a blue ribbon winner?
- ▶ According to what culture is such a prize awarded?
- ▶ Referring back to *Helen Betty Osborne*, which Indigenous virtues were left behind for this version of womanhood?
- ▶ Who is the "he" in the second last line?
- ▶ How many of the facts of intersectionality are at work in this poem? (You may consider race, education, sexuality, ability, age, gender, ethnicity, culture, language, and/or class.) Support your response with quotations from the text.

**old fool and a five-year moon (page 39)**

- ▶ Whom is the speaker addressing?
- ▶ What is a “five-year moon”? What does it symbolize? In what culture?
- ▶ Speculate on the adverbs **then** and **now** as they are used in this piece. What time shift do they indicate?
- ▶ Does the person speaking admire or pity the person to whom she speaks? Or do you sense a different emotion? Elaborate.

**let the ponies out (page 41)**

- ▶ How has the poet used sound to convey the emotions of the speaker?
- ▶ What do you suppose is the speaker’s vision of an afterlife? Use examples from the poem that support your views.
- ▶ Who or what is **Chigayow**? Where did you find the information for your response?
- ▶ Add one more line to this poem, beginning with the words *in the* and using the sense of taste. Strive for unity with the lines previous to the one you are creating.

**the pay wickets (page 42)**

- ▶ What is a **Quinella** bet? Using this poem as evidence, how often did “papa” make such a bet? Does the speaker seem to be worried about her father’s gambling? How do you know?
- ▶ How does the speaker give dignity to the figure of “papa”?
- ▶ Discuss the pay wickets as a metaphor.

**WHAT MORE THAN DANCE****what more than dance (page 45)**

- ▶ What sonic effect is created by the repetition of “what more than” in this poem? How does it relate to its theme?
- ▶ Which of the images used holds up dance as a positive metaphor and for what?
- ▶ Which of the images used holds up dance as a negative metaphor and for what?
- ▶ What is the difference between a **rhumba** and a **jig**? How is each significant to the theme of the poem?
- ▶ How is dance a symbolic act? How does it mirror the struggle between self and other?
- ▶ Comment on the phrase **still life**. How does its use in the art of painting relate to the art of dance?

**beyond recognition (page 47)**

- ▶ What does the phrase **beyond recognition** mean in most contexts? Is its meaning similar in this context?
- ▶ List some possibilities for what event or events in the speaker's life could have made the year "chilling."
- ▶ Why would the poet address the addressee's age as "one year past thirteen," rather than using the number fourteen?
- ▶ List some possible reason(s) for the addressee's smile.
- ▶ Make some guesses as to the person to whom the speaker is speaking. Support your response with quotations from the poem.

**as if I were their sun (page 48)**

- ▶ Why does the poet use a word associated with food to describe a flower colour?
- ▶ How does the speaker respond to the gift of flowers? Why?
- ▶ How does the metaphor of the sun work in this poem?

**horsefly blue (page 49)**

- ▶ What does the speaker's intimacy with various types of light tell you about her? Is the intimacy authentic? How does that qualify your response about the light?
- ▶ What polarities are highlighted by the structure and typography of the poem?
- ▶ If you had the choice to spend an afternoon with one of these characters in the poem, which one would you choose? Why?

**spineless (page 51)**

- ▶ Where in the world does this poem take place? How do you know?
- ▶ Who or what is the "you" in the poem? What caused him/her/them to be "shrunken"? Defend your answer.
- ▶ How is the frame image used differently here than in "what more than dance"?
- ▶ Why do you suppose the poem is divided in half by the line "all you've heard are lies"?
- ▶ What is ironic about the speaker's description of herself in the final stanza?

**blue sky pokes (page 52)**

- ▶ What is the relationship between the speaker and the addressee? How do you know?
- ▶ Draw this scene or one of the faces in it.
- ▶ Who perceives the self more accurately: the self or the observer? Why do you think so?

**when you walk through my door (page 53)**

- ▶ “[W]hen death and birth join hands” can be interpreted many ways. How do you interpret this idea? What or who is dying? What or who is being born?
- ▶ What repeated words point toward the theme of this poem?
- ▶ How do the title of the poem and its last line help underscore the theme?

**wild berries (page 54)**

- ▶ What words or phrases reveal the speaker’s attitude toward the person addressed? What is that attitude?
- ▶ Which of the three similes used is the most sensual in your opinion? Why?
- ▶ Does the poet allow any clues as to the addressee’s response to these confessions? If so, what are they?

**a hard bed to lie in (page 55)**

- ▶ What does the expression *You’ve made your bed; now lie in it* mean?
- ▶ What interpretations for the word *lie* take this expression from trite aphorism to a double entendre?
- ▶ How are the images of hunting and marriage intertwined?
- ▶ How do the images of the jacklight and the beacon show the speaker’s confusion about entertaining the possibility of an affair with a married man?
- ▶ How does the ambiguous syntax of the final stanza make the poem really interesting?

**talking on stone (page 57)**

- ▶ Why do you think the speaker needs to be pulled “to the place / of talking”?
- ▶ Why must the place of talking be “on stone, on rock”?
- ▶ What colours are “dust, ash, ochre, blood” and why are these colours important in many Indigenous cultures?

**recovery (page 58)**

- ▶ What is respiratory philosophy? How does it relate to this poem?
- ▶ How does the structure of the poem mimic its sense?
- ▶ In what way is a recovery an entry into birth?

**spring breathing (page 59)**

- ▶ Whom does the speaker address?
- ▶ Whom do the grandfathers represent?
- ▶ How does this poem reverberate with the one before it?

**breakfast of the spirit (page 60)**

- ▶ What does the word **breakfast** mean etymologically?
- ▶ What fast, metaphorically, was the speaker enduring?
- ▶ How is the return of voice like eating “preserves / after you’ve slept so long”?
- ▶ What kind of awakening do you suppose the speaker has experienced? What makes you think so?

**a bowl of smooth brown wood (page 61)**

- ▶ Despite the margin-to-margin format of these lines, how do you know that they are not prose?
- ▶ What elements of Senecan prose style does this piece use? What effect do they have on the reader?
- ▶ What musical elements combine to give this piece a chant-like quality?
- ▶ What is the speaker’s attitude toward her sexuality?
- ▶ Find a picture of a sculpture that would suit this poem well (beside it or on an opposing page). Explain your choice.

**you only know after (page 62)**

- ▶ Make a brief list of things you do daily without much conscious consideration. What kind of event might change the way that you experience these things?
- ▶ How might the speaker re-experience her world after the decision to reclaim her heritage?

**my mother’s arms (page 63)**

- ▶ How does this piece resemble a prayer? How is it different?
- ▶ How does this piece resemble a love-song? How is it different?

**guilt is an erosion (page 64)**

- ▶ From your personal experience, or by interviewing Métis women (with their permission to share their contributions), explore sources of shame that are:
  - a) common to all female experience
  - b) specific to Métis female experience
  - c) common to all people regardless of gender, sexuality, or any other demographic determinant.
- ▶ With the responses from the question above before you, write your own poem using the title “guilt is…” but changing the metaphor.
- ▶ What is ironic about the “perfect palm size” stone?

**not just a platform for my dance (page 65)**

- ▶ What is the speaker's relationship to the land?
- ▶ Using the word **platform** in the political sense, what is represented by the speaker's song or dance?
- ▶ Rewrite this poem changing only the nouns, attempting to retain a cohesive theme centred around an issue about which you feel strongly.

**one day in May (page 66)**

- ▶ Who is the audience and who is the speaker in this poem?
- ▶ Examine the metaphor of the dark glasses. With what might the reader identify them?
- ▶ What is the significance of the "bedsheet" being "braided"?
- ▶ What does the last line mean to you?

**WHITE NOISE**

- ▶ What is **white noise**? How is it used as a tool of manipulation both positively and negatively? In which of those two senses do you predict that the poet will move in this section of her poetry?

**half human / half devil (halfbreed) muse (page 69)**

- ▶ In what way does the rhythm of this piece echo its meaning?
- ▶ What is the difference between **giving up** and **giving over**? How does the poem's structure reinforce these ideas?
- ▶ How does the speaker invert the images of entrapment and escape?

**Letter to Sir John A. Macdonald (page 70)**

- ▶ Briefly research the proper names in this piece including:
  - a) Sir John A. Macdonald
  - b) Meech Lake
  - c) Riel
  - d) Bill Wilson
  - e) F. R. Scott
  - f) Laurentian Shield.
- ▶ How is Louis Riel connected to Marilyn Dumont?
- ▶ What does the speaker mean by "we were railroaded"? Consider the phrase both literally and figuratively.
- ▶ How did Riel die? Why?
- ▶ Why is the name Jody Wilson-Raybould relevant to this piece?



**Still Unsaved Soul (page 72)**

- ▶ To whom is the speaker speaking?
- ▶ What is a **saved soul** according to Christian doctrine?
- ▶ What is a **giveaway ceremony** according to Indigenous cultures? How is that term used ironically in this piece?
- ▶ What does that last stanza reveal about the speaker's relationship to the Catholic Church?
- ▶ What emotions might each stanza evoke in the reader?
- ▶ How might a person react to this poem who was neither Christian nor the spiritual persuasion of the speaker?

**The Devil's Language (page 73)**

- ▶ What associations do you make with the title before reading the poem?
- ▶ What is "the Great White Way" and how does its reference relate to this poem?
- ▶ Who is Eliot and why would Dumont need (or want) to reconsider him?
- ▶ Why would Dumont write in English rather than Cree? How does this put her in awkward territory both as a person and as a poet?
- ▶ Is literacy superior to orality? Defend your response (and watch your assumptions).
- ▶ What might be the characteristics of orality versus literacy? Make a table to compare the two ways of communicating / thinking / remembering.
- ▶ How is violating "God the Father and standard English" "talking back" for this Cree speaker?
- ▶ Why do you think the author divided this poem into three sections? What point does each section illustrate?

**For Bruce, the Night We Sat Studying Cree (page 75)**

- ▶ Why does the poet personify the book that the speaker removes from the shelf?
- ▶ What, based on the interactions between the speaker and Bruce/the book, can you tell about the study partner?
- ▶ Is returning the book "into its empty space on the shelf" an implicit decision on the part of the speaker? How so?

**Circle the Wagons (page 76)**

- ▶ What does the expression **circle the wagons** mean? Why is its use here ironic?
- ▶ What is cultural appropriation? When is it most controversial in practice?
- ▶ What do **Doc Martens**, **cappuccinos**, and **foreign films** have in common? Why does the speaker feel "caught in / all the trappings"?

- ▶ What is the etymology of the word **canonize**? What are the inherent difficulties in deciding who or what is worthy of inclusion in a canon?

### Leather and Naughahyde (page 77)

- ▶ Determine by context alone what a **treaty guy** and the **mooniyaw** are.
- ▶ Find out the differences between **leather** and **Naughahyde** and explain how they relate to discussion of race among Indigenous peoples.
- ▶ How is the above metaphor bitterly ironic?

### It Crosses My Mind (page 78)

- ▶ Would you characterize this piece as stream of consciousness? Why or why not?
- ▶ How is this passage a good example of Senecan rhetorical style?
- ▶ How many binary choices does the speaker delineate for the reader/listener? List them.
- ▶ What is the speaker's attitude toward polarized modes of thinking?
- ▶ Choose two words that you find interesting in this piece and mind-map them until you find a connection between them.
- ▶ Make a pictorial representation of a **vertical mosaic** (see John Porter, sociologist, for reference purposes).
- ▶ How does the expression **to cross one's mind** from both the title and the last line have a double meaning?

### the sound of one hand drumming (page 79)

- ▶ Why does this poem fit well into this section titled "White Noise"?
- ▶ Which images point to spiritual crisis in this poem? Whose crisis is it? Who is the "you"?
- ▶ What is the speaker's attitude toward academia? How do you know?
- ▶ How could Dumont's style be characterized as verbal crochet?

### MADE OF WATER

- ▶ What percentage of the human body is water?
- ▶ What do you predict the themes of this section might be?

### Liquid Prairie (page 83)

- ▶ What shift from Alberta prairie does the word **liquid** in the title suggest? If the speaker misses the North Saskatchewan River, where do you suppose she is now?
- ▶ How does Dumont characterize:
  - a) the spruce
  - b) the sky

- c) the earth
- d) the ocean?

Which element do you think the speaker identifies with most and why?

- ▶ In what sense is the ocean itself a “liquid prairie”?

#### **the geese are not welcome (page 84)**

- ▶ If the speaker is not in the prairies, where is she? What possibilities can you deduce from the clues given?
- ▶ What effect does the litany of negation create?
- ▶ Why are the phrases ***give me a piece of its mind*** and ***wear out their welcome*** italicized?
- ▶ In what way would geese “haunt” the speaker’s “winter clock” and why would they not be welcome?

#### **Installation Piece (page 86)**

- ▶ What is installation art? What is the literal meaning of ***installation***? How are the two meanings interrelated in this piece?
- ▶ How does the speaker describe the persona that she has created and whom she is addressing?
- ▶ What does a ***Saratoga trunk*** look like and what was its original intended use in its heyday?
- ▶ How do the ***carry-ons, overnights, Pullmans,*** and ***Gladstones*** contrast with a ***Saratoga trunk***? What does this contrast symbolize?

#### **Fireflies (page 87)**

- ▶ Why is the speaker headed west?
- ▶ What does the speaker mean by “the weight of my own choices”?
- ▶ Why is the word ***summon*** used to describe what Cree does to the speaker? What does this word connote?
- ▶ How are mosquitoes and fireflies contrasted as symbols in this piece?
- ▶ What experience have the grandmothers had that the speaker has not? Characterize their treatment of the speaker based on this response.

#### **âcimonwina (page 89)**

- ▶ What details in this piece reveal the intimacy in the relationship between the speaker and her grandmother?
- ▶ Which details show the influence of white noise on Indigenous culture? Which seem specifically Indigenous?

- ▶ Do some research on the words **rat toot**. What do you discover is their relevance to Cree language?
- ▶ Write your own poem called “Everyday Stories” and attempt to capture a relative of yours in the same intimate, detailed, nuanced way.

### **Instructions to My Mother (page 90)**

- ▶ Based on the instructions that the speaker gives to her mother, how would you characterize their relationship?
- ▶ Each of these five instructions reveals a gap or missing element that the speaker feels mars her relationship with her mother. Give one word or phrase for each of these needs.
- ▶ Are these instructions ones that most daughters might give their mothers? If so, why might these complaints be such common ones? If not, what different instructions might be given by another daughter to her mother to address gaps in their relationship?
- ▶ Write a similar poem but change “Mother” in the title to some other relative or significant person in your life.

### **Who Knew the Moons Would Remember (page 92)**

- ▶ How does the image of the moon act as a catalyst for the speaker? What symbolic representations might it have?
- ▶ What imagery does the speaker associate with the transition from child to adult? What kind of transition is it, then?
- ▶ Speculate on the age that the speaker mentions: what kind of trauma might a three-year-old witness or experience that would later leave her a “body-scarred, hard-skinned, grey-haired baby”?
- ▶ The persona created by the speaker, at the end of the poem, feels unable to connect with her mother in the intimate way that a baby connects with its mother. What do you suppose is the reason other than just achieving adulthood?

### **He Taught Me (page 94)**

- ▶ As the speaker looks back over her relationship with the person addressed, how are the images both positive and negative?
- ▶ What extended metaphor of arrested development predominates in stanzas 2 and 3? How does it work?
- ▶ How had the person who is being addressed underestimated the speaker?
- ▶ How do you interpret the phrase “forester of my own flesh”?

**yellow sun days of leaving (page 96)**

- ▶ How does the speaker's father's death affect her?
- ▶ How is this piece song-like?
- ▶ How does the way that the poem is placed on the page amplify its meaning?

**The Sky is Promising (page 97)**

- ▶ Since Marilyn Dumont's father's name is Joseph Ambrose Dumont, make some guesses as to who Danny is and why he is gone?
- ▶ This poem is interesting to compare to Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill." Do an analysis of comparison and contrast between these two poems.

**we are made of water (page 100)**

- ▶ Whose pain has the speaker carried? List several possibilities.
- ▶ Water, here, as a metaphor for pain, is something that the speaker is willing to revisit "every so often." Discuss the nature of that relationship and why the speaker would willingly do that.
- ▶ Why is part of this poem's title appropriate to the themes of these last eleven poems? How does this last poem reinforce the themes of all the others in this section?

**Author's Afterword (page 103)**

Write an essay on one of the following topics in relation to Marilyn Dumont's *A Very Good Brown Girl*:

- ▶ Ideological repression, self-hatred, fear, and anger
- ▶ Naming the external forces that degrade self-worth
- ▶ Marginalization and isolation of Indigenous women
- ▶ Voicings and personae as vehicles of expression
- ▶ Cultural oppression.

**Biographical Note**

- ▶ How is Lee Maracle uniquely qualified to introduce this volume?

**What other questions would you like to discuss that were not asked above?**



# GLOSSARY OF POETIC TERMS

For a more comprehensive list of literary terms related to poetry, consider the online Oxford or Abrams glossaries.

## **Alliteration**

Repeated consonant sounds in close proximity.  
ex: *Bugsy borrows bouncing baby buggies.*

## **Allusion**

A reference to a person, place, or event outside the text.  
ex: *“There is no need to become Woody Allen.” Gwyneth Paltrow, Sliding Doors.*

## **Analogy**

A comparison between unlike things to show an underlying similarity.  
ex: *“And the night is clear and empty / as a lake of acid rain.” Bruce Cockburn, Don’t Feel Your Touch.*

## **Anecdote**

A funny little story.  
ex: *Any story that begins “When I was your age ...”*

## **Antagonist**

The obstacle to the protagonist (the character with whom the reader sympathizes).  
ex: *The shark in Jaws.*

## **Archetype**

A type of character universally recognized across many cultures.  
ex: *“Follow the dreamer, the fool and the sage / back to the days of the Innocent Age.” Dan Fogelberg, The Innocent Age.*

**Argument**

Any writing which attempts to convince or sway the reader.

ex: *Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own, which outlines the needs of the female writer.*

**Ballad**

A lengthy poem, often in song form, having many stanzas and a refrain.

ex: *Gordon Lightfoot's The Canadian Railroad Trilogy.*

**Character**

A person or animal in a story.

- *Static Character*: like a piece of furniture, just there.
- *Dynamic Character*: changes or develops as the story unfolds.
- *Flat*: like cardboard, having only two dimensions, not well-developed.
- *Round*: an interesting and complex character whom the reader gets to know well.

**Characterization**

4 ways to develop characters:

- By what they say.
- By what they do.
- By what others in the text say.
- By what the speaker/narrator/author says.

**Chronological Order**

Events arranged in the time order in which they occurred.

ex: *Lists of Canadian Prime Ministers from first to last.*

**Cliché**

An overused expression that has lost its effectiveness over time.

ex: *"Avoid clichés like the plague."*

**Conflict**

Forces in opposition.

- *External*: another character, society, nature (*Person vs. Person, Person vs. Society, Person vs. Nature*).
- *Internal*: within a character; a choice or decision (*Person vs. Self*).



**Description**

Writing meant to conjure up a person, place, thing, event, or experience for the reader using adjectives or imagery. Pays close attention to sensory details.

**Dialect**

Way of speaking characteristic of a geography or a people.

ex: *"I's the b'y that builds the boat."* Newfoundland folk song.

**Dialogue**

Conversation between or among characters.

ex: *"Dude, where's my car?" "Where's your car, dude?"*

**Diction**

Choice of wording.

ex: *"Jen and I were accustomed to our father's last-will-and-testament diction, and were at times free to interrupt Atticus for a translation when it was beyond our understanding."* Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

**Drama**

Writing meant to be performed on stage.

ex: *Any play by Shakespeare.*

**Essay**

Nonfiction writing that is arguable, provable, worth proving, with a limited scope.

- *Subjective*: from the essayist's point of view.
- *Objective*: an attempt to remove bias from the subject.
- *Argument/Persuasive*: the focus is swaying or convincing the reader.

**Exposition**

Writing that informs.

ex: *An article about how to improve your golf swing.*

Part of the plot of a narrative in which characters and setting are established. (see also **PLOT**)

ex: *Once upon a time, there were three little pigs and the time came for them to leave home and seek their fortunes.*

**Euphemism**

The exchange of an offensive or embarrassing term for a more polite one.

ex: *"XYZ!" for Examine your zipper; your fly is down!*

**Fable**

A story with a widely applicable life story. It often conveys a moral.

ex: *The Tortoise and The Hare tells the story of how slow and steady tends to win the race more often than speed.*

**Fiction**

Stories created from the imagination.

ex: *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial.*

**Figure of Speech**

An idiomatic expression which, when taken literally, does not make sense.

ex: *"Hit the road, Jack!" is not an instruction for someone named Jack to go outside and slap the road.*

**Flashback**

Insertion of an event prior to the actions currently happening.

ex: *The film Forrest Gump begins with Forrest waiting for a bus. As he waits, he goes backward in time to tell stories of his life that happened before that moment.*

**Foreshadowing**

Hints that suggest future events.

ex: *In Jurassic Park, Dr. Grant, during a moment of turbulence in a helicopter, hastily ties two female ends of a seat belt together. Her action foreshadows the female dinosaurs who will later reproduce regardless of the lack of male dinosaurs.*

**Free Verse**

Poetry with rhythm but without a regular metre or rhyme scheme.

ex: *"For all this sea-hoard of deciduous things, / Strange woods half sodden, and new brighter stuff: / In the slow float of differing light and deep, / No! there is nothing! In the whole and all, / Nothing that's quite your own. / Yet this is you." Ezra Pound, "Portrait D'Une Femme."*

**Historical Fiction**

A created story set in a real historical time period.

ex: *Braveheart or Shakespeare in Love.*

**Humour**

Something funny or amusing.

ex: *Anything published by the Onion.*

**Hyperbole**

An exaggeration.

ex: *We've heard this story a million times!*

**Idiom**

An expression not meant to be taken literally.

ex: *Don't get your knickers in a twist.*

**Imagery**

Descriptive words and phrases that appeal to the senses (sight, taste, smell, hearing, touch); often uses figurative language.

ex: *"I wandered lonely as a cloud." William Wordsworth.*

**Inference**

A deduction about the text based on evidence.

ex: *Someone slams a door and you infer that the person must be upset or angry.*

**Irony**

A contrast between expectation and reality.

- *Verbal*: the gap between what appears to be true and what is actually true in spoken word.
- *Situational*: an expected outcome differs greatly from the actual outcome.
- *Dramatic*: the audience knows something which the character(s) on stage or in the work do not.

**Legend**

A story passed down culturally with historical roots but without authentication.

ex: *Sasquatch, The Loch Ness Monster.*

**Limerick**

A five-line poem with an AABBA rhyme scheme meant to be funny.

ex: *There once was a lady from York / who had an aversion to pork. / When piglets were born / with face all forlorn, / she hid both her knife and her fork.*

**Literal Language**

Language that has no interpretation other than the intended meaning.

ex: *“Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.”* Bitzer’s definition of a horse, given to his literally-minded teacher, Mr. Gradgrind.

**Lyric Poem**

A poem that expresses feelings, originally accompanied by a lyre.

ex: Catullus’s *“Odi et Amo”* (*I hate and I love*) is an excellent example.

**Metamorphosis**

A complete shift in physical form.

ex: *The overnight change of Gregor Samsa in Kafka’s Metamorphosis from human to insect. A caterpillar becomes a butterfly.*

**Metaphor**

An identification of two unlike things to suggest a commonality.

ex: *Simon and Garfunkel’s “I Am a Rock.”*

**Mood**

The emotions evoked in the reader by an author’s words.

ex: *The often-used opening “It was a dark and stormy night” is clearly an establisher of mood.*

**Motif**

Any object or idea repeating itself throughout a literary work.

ex: *The scars in J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter repeatedly point to both destiny and love.*

**Myth**

A story that typically explains the creation of the world and/or why it is the way it is. Generally involves gods or supernatural forces.

ex: *Sisyphus, Hercules, Romulus and Remus.*

**Narrative**

Writing that tells a story.

ex: *“Boy meets girl. Boy loses girl. Boy sucks thumb.”* Dennis Lee.

**Narrative Poem**

A poem that tells a story.

ex: *"The Highwayman"* by Alfred Noyes.

**Narrator**

The person telling the story.

ex: *The entire story of The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald is told through the character Nick Carraway.

**Onomatopoeia**

Words that imitate or resemble the sounds they describe.

ex: *Bang, plop, fizzle, hiss, ding. "The moan of doves in immemorial elms, / And murmuring of innumerable bees."* Tennyson, *"Come down, O Maid."*

**Oxymoron**

A juxtaposed contradictory term.

ex: *Just war, adult child, loose tights, paid volunteer. "I like a smuggler. He is the only honest thief."* Charles Lamb.

**Personification**

The attribution of human feelings, thoughts, behaviours, or attitudes to the non-human.

ex: *Justice is blind.*

**Playwright**

The author of a play.

ex: *Norm Foster.*

**Plot**

The series of events that make up a story.

- *Exposition (Introduction)*: introduces conflict, characters, and setting.
- *Initial Incident*: the first action that happens in the story.
- *Rising Action*: the events which increase the conflict and the suspense.
- *Climax*: the most emotional moment in the story.
- *Crisis*: the turning point of the story. (Sometimes crisis and climax occur at the same time.)
- *Falling Action*: events which decrease the conflict and the suspense.
- *Resolution/Denouement*: conflicts are resolved, and mysteries are unravelled.

**Point of View**

The eyes or lens through which a story is told:

- *First Person*: we only know, see, and feel what the narrator knows, sees, and feels.
- *Second Person*: the narrator addresses “you”—who might be another character in the work, or the reader, or even the narrator him/herself. Often “I” as the teller of the story is implied.
- *Third Person Limited*: the reader is told the story through the eyes of only one character.
- *Third Person Omniscient*: the reader learns everything about all the characters through an all-seeing, god-like narrator.

**Protagonist**

The character with whom our sympathy most lies. The conflict revolves around the protagonist. The protagonist is opposed by the antagonist.

ex: *Christ or Satan in Milton’s Paradise Lost (depending on your point of view).*

**Proverb**

A pithy saying that states an obvious truth.

ex: *Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.*

**Pun**

A word with multiple, often humorous interpretations.

ex: *When you work in a calendar factory, it’s hard to take a day off.*

**Rhyme Scheme**

A coding of the rhymes in a poem with letters from the alphabet, beginning with ‘A.’ Each differing rhyme is labelled with the next letter and so on.

ex: *ABAB, AABB, ABBA, ABCB, etc.*

**Setting**

Where and when the story takes place.

ex: *Star Wars opening credits: “It is a period of civil war. Rebel spaceships, striking from a hidden base, have won their first victory against the evil Galactic Empire. During the battle, Rebel forces managed to steal secret plans to the Empire’s ultimate weapon, the Death Star, an armoured space station with enough power to destroy an entire planet.”*

**Simile**

A comparison between two unlike things using the words **like** or **as**.

ex: *“Loneliness in a woman is like hunger in a dog.” Margaret Atwood, Alias Grace.*

**Stanza**

A group of lines in a poem that form a unit, sometimes with a regular metric and rhyme pattern; similar to paragraphs in prose.

ex: *“True wit is nature to advantage dress’d; / What oft was thought, but ne’er so well express’d.” Alexander Pope, “An Essay on Criticism.”*

**Stereotype**

Assigning qualities to an individual based on membership in a group.

ex: *All Canadians are nice and constantly apologize.*

**Suspense**

Withholding information from the reader to create anxiety or anticipation for what may come next.

ex: *The situation in Stephanie Meyer’s Twilight is a constant state of suspense: we know that Bella is in danger of being killed or turned into a vampire at some point by SOMEBODY but we don’t know who and we don’t know when.*

**Symbol**

Something with a universality about its meaning shared by many cultures.

ex: *Colours can have meaning almost universally understood: red can signify passion, anger, and love.*

**Syntax**

The accepted order in which words are commonly placed in a given language.

ex: *“Much to learn you still have.” Yoda, Star Wars, Episode II: Attack of the Clones. His syntax, rather than subject-verb-object, is object-subject-verb. To English speakers, the syntax sounds alien.*

**Tall Tale**

An exaggerated, implausible story told as though it should be believed.

ex: *Paul Bunyan or Johnny Appleseed.*

**Text Structure**

How a piece of writing is constructed, in terms of how each part is placed.

*ex: In Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, the chapters alternate between day and night to create a rhythm that accentuates the emphasis on female cycles and rhythms.*

**Theme**

A theme is a recurrent idea that is threaded throughout a work of literature. In larger works there may be several themes.

*ex: In The Princess Bride, the themes are explicitly stated: "Are you kidding? Fencing. Fighting. Torture. Revenge. Giants. Monsters. Chases. Escapes. True love. Miracles." William Goldman, The Princess Bride script.*

**Tone**

The point of view is the lens through which the narrator sees the events, people, and places in the text; the tone is the attitude the narrator holds about those experiences.

*ex: An approach to a subject can be formal, informal, humorous, satirical, jaunty, serious, emotional, objective. There are as many tones as there are emotions. If you can identify what the narrator is feeling about what is happening, you can usually identify the tone. For example, "Those who reside in vitreous domiciles should refrain from hurling geological objects." Essentially, it's the same thing as "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." However, the tone is much more formal and the diction more precise and scientific.*

**Tragedy**

A tragedy happens when, at the crisis, the fortunes of the protagonist take a negative turn and do not recover.

*ex: Great tragedies often involve irony: Romeo dies thinking Juliet is dead; she revives, finds Romeo dead, and kills herself. Lear, seeking signs of love and devotion from his daughter, divides his kingdom too early and loses her. Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman cannot make a success of anything in his life except his death, which leaves his wife "free and clear" with the insurance money but without the only thing that was ever important to her: Willy.*

**Understatement**

The opposite of hyperbole.

*ex: "Houston, we have a problem." Jim Lovell's summation of the situation in response to an exploded oxygen tank, 200 000 miles away from Earth on the Apollo 13 space mission.*