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## **Sound Learning Feature for April 2004**

From *The Writer's Almanac* ([www.writersalmanac.org](http://www.writersalmanac.org))

In April 1996, the Academy of American Poets began National Poetry Month, which brings together writers, publishers, booksellers, libraries, and schools around the country to promote poetry in American culture. Thousands of businesses and literary organizations support National Poetry Month by hosting readings, festivals, workshops, and other events.

*The Writer's Almanac* is a good resource for introducing poetry into our daily lives. It can be heard each day on public radio stations throughout the country. Each program features a poem, read by Garrison Keillor, and historical notes about literary figures.

The poems and readings in this month's feature are of particular interest to teachers and students of English/language arts and creative writing.

In the following pages, find instructional ideas and study guides intended to aid in the teaching of:

- Listening comprehension.
- Reading comprehension.
- Critical thinking.
- Research and writing challenges.
- Key terms and topics.



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## Reading Comprehension Questions

Read the poems "The Fish" by Elizabeth Bishop and "From Blossoms" by Li-Young Lee, and answer the following questions.

"The Fish" by Elizabeth Bishop (*The Writer's Almanac*, Thursday, July 10, 2003)  
[http://www.writersalmanac.org/docs/03\\_07\\_07.htm#thursday](http://www.writersalmanac.org/docs/03_07_07.htm#thursday)

"From Blossoms" by Li-Young Lee (*The Writer's Almanac*, Wednesday, June 20, 2001)  
[http://www.writersalmanac.org/docs/01\\_06\\_18.htm#Wednesday](http://www.writersalmanac.org/docs/01_06_18.htm#Wednesday)

- 1) What images do you have in your mind when you read the poems?
- 2) How did the poets use words to create these images?
- 3) What images are similes?
- 4) What images are metaphors?
- 5) What images use personification?
- 6) What symbols are used?
- 7) What do you think the poems are about? What do you think the poets are saying in their poems?
- 8) How do the images help you understand the poems?
- 9) Which images help you understand the poems more easily? Why?
- 10) Which images challenge or confuse you in the poems? Why?





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## Listening Comprehension Questions

Listen to the poems "Sonnet 109" by William Shakespeare and "The Loon" by Mary Oliver, and answer the following questions.

"Sonnet 109" by William Shakespeare (*The Writer's Almanac*, Tuesday, June 10, 2003)

[http://www.writersalmanac.org/docs/03\\_06\\_09.htm#Tuesday](http://www.writersalmanac.org/docs/03_06_09.htm#Tuesday)

"The Loon" by Mary Oliver (*The Writer's Almanac*, Sunday, August 11, 2002)

[http://www.writersalmanac.org/docs/02\\_08\\_05.htm#Sunday](http://www.writersalmanac.org/docs/02_08_05.htm#Sunday)

- 1) What images do you have in your mind when you hear the poems?
- 2) How did the poets use words to create these images?
- 3) Make a two-column chart. For every general image in each of the poems, write the specific words used in the poems. What are your examples of specific images?
- 4) What senses were described in the poems? List the specific examples from the poems.
- 5) Which images were literal images?
- 6) What do you think the poems are about? What do you think the poet is trying to say in the poems?
- 7) How do the images help you understand the meaning of the poems?



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## Critical Thinking Questions

Read or listen to the poem "Condolence" by Dorothy Parker and answer the following questions.

"Condolence" by Dorothy Parker (*The Writer's Almanac*, Wednesday, August 22, 2001)  
[http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/docs/01\\_08\\_20.htm#wednesday](http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/docs/01_08_20.htm#wednesday)

- 1) Why do you think the speaker of this poem is "speaking" to the dead?
- 2) How does the irony of the title relate to the poem? Why?
- 3) What are the differences and/or similarities between the author's tone in each of the two stanzas?
- 4) What theme or themes do you think run through this poem? Why? What helps you understand the themes?
- 5) How do the contrasting images of "tears" and "laughter" work to convey the meaning of the poem?



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## Research Challenges

- 1) Research one of the poets, or a poet of your choice. How does the life of the poet influence the poetry?
- 2) Research two poets from the same era. What similarities and differences do they have in their lives, including their work?
- 3) Choose one object or idea, such as "onion." Write the word at the top of your page. Write a poem using specific, literal images that describe all the senses without using the subject of your poem, nor its color, shape, or state of matter.
- 4) Think of an image from your life that is important to you. Write down all the images and ideas that come to you when you think about it. Choose some of the figurative tropes and create the images from what you have written. That is, create a simile, metaphor, personification, and/or symbol with your own images. Then write a poem from your ideas.
- 5) Make a list of words—use a dictionary or other resource—that you like, both concrete and abstract. Choose three words in which you know the denotative meanings and list your connotations for each word. Create a poem using words from your list, your three words that have connotations as well as denotations, and consider the emotion(s) you are trying to convey with your words (especially with the adjectives, verbs, and colors).



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## Research Challenges

(continued)

6) You are going to create a visual poem out of pictures. Before you begin, have an idea in your mind regarding what your poem will/should say to readers. Create an order or pattern that speaks to your message. Consider what you want to say and how it may be expressed through visual images. Write an accompanying piece that brings your picture alive in words. Trade your picture with someone else. Examine their creation fully. Then write a poem inspired by their picture. When you are both finished, share both pieces with your partner and look for similarities and differences in the imagery that was conveyed through the pictures in your poem and your partner's poem.

7) Choose one of the poems already discussed, or a new poem to model your own poem on. Read it carefully and take into consideration the meter, rhyme scheme, number of stanzas, number of lines in each stanza, title, and overall structure of the piece. Think about the images used in the poem and ones that you would like to use. Describe them or create tropes, such as similes, with your images. Then write a poem incorporating your description and/or images in a style that is similar to the poem you have chosen. Be sure to make the poem your own. That is, it may not be exactly like the one you chose to model—you are starting in the same place, but ending up in a totally different one—but it may be similar in spirit.



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## Key Terms

The following vocabulary words may come up in discussions of poems found on the *Writer's Almanac* site.

<http://www.writersalmanac.org>

### Poetic Terms

- Abstract
- Alliteration
- Allusion
- Assonance
- Atmosphere
- Audience
- Ballad
- Blank Verse
- Concrete
- Connotation
- Consonance
- Couplet
- Denotation
- Didactic
- Epic
- Epithet
- Figurative
- Free Verse
- Hyperbole
- Image
- Irony
  - Verbal irony
  - Situational irony
  - Dramatic irony
- Limerick
- Literal

- Lyric
- Metaphor
- Meter
- Motif
- Myth
- Narrative Poem
- Ode
- Oxymoron
- Paradox
- Parody
- Personification
- Rhyme Scheme
- Rhythm
  - Iambic
  - Trimeter
  - Pentameter
  - Trochaic
  - Tetramter
- Satire
- Simile
- Sonnet
- Speaker
- Stanza
- Symbol
- Theme
- Tone

### Other Literary Terms

- Characterization
- Climax
- Conflict
- Foreshadowing
- Point of view
- First person points of view:
  - Interior monologue
  - Dramatic monologue
  - Subjective narration
  - Detached autobiography
  - Memoir
- Third person points of view:
  - Limited
  - Omniscient
  - Neutral or "dramatic"



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## Answer Key

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### Reading Comprehension:

#### 1) "The Fish"

*Fish, boats, rainbows, a struggle, gasping for breath, sea animals, the fish as a wise, old man, pain, eyes, fishing line as a beard, respect of the animal's journey*

*"From Blossoms"*

*Peaches, trees, summer, dusty, hot and dry, family, care-free, unabandoned living*

#### 2) "The Fish"

*"infested with tiny white sea lice," "flesh packed like feathers," "a five-haired beard of wisdom," "was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow," "He hung a grunting weight, battered and venerable and homely"*

*"From Blossoms"*

*"brown paper bag of peaches," "bend in the road," "signs painted peaches," "laden boughs," "sweet fellowship in the bins," "nectar at the roadside," "succulent peaches," "dusty skin," "dust of summer," "dust we eat," "carry within us an orchard," "the shade," "bite into the round jubilation of peach," "death were nowhere"*

#### 3) "The Fish"

*"like ancient wallpaper," "like full-blown roses," "white flesh packed in like feathers," "pink swimbladder like a big peony," "like medals with their ribbons frayed and wavering"*

*"From Blossoms"*

*none*

#### 4) "The Fish"

*"victory filled up the rented boat," "the beard of wisdom"*

*"From Blossoms"*

*"sweet fellowship in the bins," "to eat not only the skin, but the shade"*



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## Answer Key

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### 5) "The Fish"

*"he hung a grunting weight," "sullen face," "lower lip," "aching jaw," "oil had spread a rainbow around the rusted engine," "the oarlocks on their strings"*

### "From Blossoms"

*"sweet fellowship in the bins," "the round jubilation of peach," "eating shade," "eating days"*

### 6) "The Fish"

- *The rainbow as a symbol of life and good things which is why she let the fish go*
- *The "beard of wisdom" made out of the five previous fishing lines symbolizes the age and wisdom of the fish and its past battles with humans*

### "From Blossoms"

- *Dust is the symbol of the summer, the heat, the dryness, and the weather.*
- *The blossoms are the possibilities that exist and are waiting to be discovered.*
- *The peaches are joy, happiness, and memories.*
- *The skin becomes more than just the superficiality of that time of year and asks you to peel it back and dive into the joy, the memories, and the happiness of what summer is to you.*

### 7) "The Fish"

- *You think you want something (the fish) and then realize, upon closer inspection, that it is not as insignificant as you may have once believed. Discovering the purpose or history of something you desire makes you question your intentions for obtaining it.*
- *Everything and everyone has a story to tell and its place in the web of life and we need to recognize this as two stories collide and continue on their own paths.*



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### "From Blossoms"

- *You need to savor the moments and memories of life and summer.*
- *Dive into and dig into everything you experience with fervor and passion.*
- *Live in that moment and remember it forever.*

8) *They offer you a story and pictures that are very familiar, that you can relate to and ask you to question your own actions and desires.*

### 9) "The Fish"

- *The personification of the fish as human.*
- *The similes that compare the fish to something familiar, knowable.*

### "From Blossoms"

*It is more in the descriptive word choices ("devour", "succulent", "jubilation", and "joy") that help you understand that desire to hold on to the memories of summer.*

### 10) "The Fish"

*The symbols do not have any concrete relationship.*

### "From Blossoms"

*The oxymorons of "sweet impossible blossom" and the symbols of "wing to wing" do not give a specific, concrete image to help you understand what he is saying.*

## Listening Comprehension:

### 1) "Sonnet 109"

*A heart, a home of love, movement or traveling—the traveler, a stain, blood, absence, a living soul*

### "The Loon"

*Waking up in the dark, books on a shelf, water, reading a book, the sounds in the dark, the loon*



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## Answer Key

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### 2) "Sonnet 109"

*"false of heart," "home of love," "bring water for my stain," "kinds of blood," "wide universe," "as from my soul, which in thy breast doth lie," "I return again"*

### "The Loon"

*"rapture of being alive," "neat and colorful rows," "waves of the words," "temple of thought," "voice of the loon," "heavy head uplifted," "fading moon," "pink flesh swelling in the East," "pool of lamplight"*

### 3)

"Sonnet 109"	
1) heart 2) home of love 3) traveler 4) wide universe 5) stain 6) absence 7) blood 8) living soul	1) "false of heart" 2) "home of love" 3) "I return again" 4) "wide universe" 5) "bring water for my stain" or "preposterously be stained" 6) "I from myself depart" or "I return again" 7) "all kinds of blood" 8) "as from my soul, which in thy breast doth lie"
"The Loon"	
1) waking up in dark 2) books on a shelf 3) water 4) reading 5) sounds 6) loon	1) "rapture of being alive strikes me from my sleep" 2) "books are lined up in their neat and colorful rows" 3) "I hear outside the, over the actual waves" 4) "for a long while, do I read on" or "wandered in over the waves of words to the temple of thought" 5) "he calls out to the fading moon" 6) "the perfect voice," "the heavy head," or "perfect voice of the loon"



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### 4) "Sonnet 109"

*Visual: "all kinds of blood," "preposterously stained," "water for my stain," "wide universe"*

#### *"The Loon"*

- *Sounds: "small perfect voice," "I hear, outside, over the actual waves"*
- *Visual: "books all lined up in their neat and colorful rows," "I rise from my bed," "heavy head uplifted," "fading moon, to the pink flush," and "pool of lamplight," "do I read on"*

### 5) "Sonnet 109"

*The stain, the blood, the wide universe, traveler*

#### *"The Loon"*

*Comfortable bed, books lined up in rows, hearing the voice of the loon, calling out to the fading moon, heavy head uplifted, pool of lamplight, inside the house it is dark, "I do not close the book"*

### 6) "Sonnet 109"

- *Even though "I" am not there, "I" still love you.*
- *It is a declaration of love to "Rose."*
- *Could possibly be an apology for not being around*

#### *"The Loon"*

- *An ode to a beautiful creature*
- *She loves her life (of books) and the sound of the loon is reminiscent of being alive in the world (particularly this world of darkness).*
- *It is not only about being intellectually alive, but also physically alive.*
- *A realization that even though we may not be awake or functioning, there is always someone or something present and living in the world*
- *There is beauty in darkness and in not seeing you may see more.*
- *A wake up call that life exists outside of your own head and thoughts*



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7) *They offer you a story and pictures that are very familiar, that you can relate to, and that ask you to question your own actions and desires.*

### Critical Thinking:

1)

- *She is looking for comfort.*
- *She is upset.*
- *She wants to make herself feel better.*
- *They are the only ones who may listen.*
- *They are the only ones who may understand her grief.*
- *She wants to share the irony of her experience with them.*
- *She wants to mock those who mourn.*

2)

- *She does not appear to need condolences.*
- *Usually you give condolence to someone else and she is giving it to herself.*
- *Death is stereotypically a sad occasion and she ends with laughter and mockery.*
- *The ghosts of the dead are doing more to console her than the "living" beings offering their condolences.*

3)

- *The first stanza is more somber, and the second has a brighter, happier tone.*
- *The first ends with tears and the second ends with laughter.*
- *The tone/voice of the first is more exposition based while the second offers a source of reflection.*
- *She only begins using the word "I" in the second stanza.*
- *She uses personification in both stanzas to convey what they have done for her.*
- *In both stanzas the events are things that have happened to her and not what she has done.*
- *In both stanzas is unclear who is "listening" or to whom she is speaking.*



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4)

- *That those people offering condolences appear to be more selfish than selfless because, according to the speaker, they "rejoiced that I was comforted" and "left to tell of all the help they gave"*
- *Death appears not to be a horrible event. The shift in tone from stanza one to two (tears to laughter) demonstrates this point.*
- *The need for comfort after a tragedy is a strong theme. The poem offers the possible solution that you know what you need more than others.*
- *The other side—you never really die—and no one can disprove your thoughts on what you believe happens when someone dies.*

5)

- *You expect tears when someone close to you dies, but you do not even expect to hear about laughter.*
- *If you notice it is those offering condolences that cry and the dead that laugh at their tears.*
- *They perceived her "smile" as bravery as opposed to the ironic mockery that was stemming her thoughts.*
- *They are crying about the happiness that will occur when these two meet again and not the actual loss of this person's life.*
- *The laughter exists as both the dead laughing at the living and her own laughter at being comforted by her thoughts of the reactions of the dead.*

### Key Terms:

**Abstract** — *Considered apart from a concrete, exact idea; theoretical*

**Alliteration** — *Repeated consonant sounds at the beginning of words*

**Allusion** — *A reference to a literary or historical figure or event. It may allude to myth, religion, or any other aspect of ancient or modern culture.*



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**Assonance** — *Recurrence of vowel sounds in the presence of changing consonant sounds*

**Atmosphere** — *The prevailing mood of a literary work; usually created through choice of setting, imagery, details, and description*

**Audience** — *Person(s) the speaker of a poem addresses; not always just the reader; other, more-immediate listener may be present*

**Ballad** — *Tells a story in short verses*

**Blank Verse** — *Unrhymed verse form in iambic pentameter (5 iambic feet per line; see "Rhythm" below)*

**Characterization** — *The methods the author uses to create a character in a literary work:*

- 1) *The character's actions and choices;*
- 2) *What the character says (dialogue);*
- 3) *What the character thinks and feels (interior monologue);*
- 4) *How other characters react to him or her;*
- 5) *Direct description or explanation by the narrator.*

**Climax** — *The high point in the action; the point where the central conflict is resolved and the outcome determined or made clear*

**Conflict** — *The struggle of opposing forces. Conflicts are either external (person vs. person, person vs. environment or nature, person vs. society) or internal (conflicting emotions or ideas or desires within a person).*

**Concrete** — *An idea that you can relate to; direct experience*

**Connotation** — *An idea added to its actual meaning*

**Consonance** — *Repetition of consonant sounds in the presence of different vowel sounds*



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**Couplet** — *Two lines of poetry that go together and are usually rhymed*

**Denotation** — *The exact meaning without adding ideas it may contain*

**Didactic** — *Used for teaching a lesson or someone too willing to correct others speech*

**Epic** — *Long narrative poem (originally handed down in oral tradition, later a literary form) dealing with great heroes and adventures, involving supernatural forces and written in a lofty, dignified style. (e.g., Iliad and Odyssey by Homer, Beowulf)*

**Epithet** — *A word or phrase that describes a person or thing*

**Figurative** — *Giving meaning that is different from the exact meaning but forms a sharp picture in the mind; compares to something else; surprising*

**Foreshadowing** — *The technique of giving the reader, listener, or viewer of the story, novel or play hints of what is to come in that work*

**Free Verse** — *Poetry with irregular rhythmic beat instead of the usual metrical patterns*

**Hyperbole** — *Great exaggeration used for expressive or comic effect*

**Image** — *A picture of any sense impression*

## Irony

**Verbal irony:** *Contrast between what is said and what is meant*

**Irony of situation:** *An outcome or event contrary to what is expected (with a surprising or unusual twist)*

**Dramatic irony:** *The reader or viewer is aware of something about which the character involved knows nothing*

**Limerick** — *A funny poem of five lines with a certain rhyme and rhythm*



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**Literal** — *Exactly depicts or replicates an object or experience*

**Lyric** — *Short poem expressing an emotion or thought*

**Metaphor** — *A figure of speech that compares two unlike things without using "like" or "as" (example: "curtain of night")*

**Meter** — *The rhythm, arrangement of accented syllables in each line*

**Motif** — *A thematic element (e.g., idea, object, melody) that recurs in a literary, artistic, or musical work, or that runs through several such works*

**Myth** — *Stories made up, usually handed down across generations, that didn't really happen*

**Narrative Poem** — *One that tells a story*

**Ode** — *A serious poem in a noble and dignified style usually honoring a person or event*

**Oxymoron** — *Juxtaposing contrasting words*

**Paradox** — *A seemingly self-contradictory truth that grows out of two contradictory ideas: "The more we learn the less we know."*

**Parody** — *A composition that ridicules a serious literary work by flippantly imitating its style or subject matter*

**Personification** — *Figure of speech that animates lifeless things (e.g., "the music sobbed")*

**Point of view** — *The position or person from which or whom events are viewed*

**First person points of view:**

a. **Interior monologue:** *Protagonist talks to him- or herself.*



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*b. **Dramatic monologue:** Only the protagonist speaks, though other characters' speech may be implied.*

*c. **Subjective narration:** Protagonist tells the story not long after it has happened; may still be emotionally involved and lacking in objectivity. (See "unreliable narrator" below")*

*d. **Detached autobiography:** Protagonist tells the story long enough after the event that his or her outlook may now be different and his view more objective.*

*e. **Memoir:** Narrator is an observer; usually a minor character in the story.*

### *Third person points of view:*

*a. **Limited:** Single or dual-character point of view*

*b. **Omniscient:** Can enter the thoughts, report the feelings of all characters*

*c. **Neutral or "dramatic":** Stands back and like motion picture camera, records the action without entering consciousness of any character*

**Rhyme Scheme** — *The pattern of end-rhyme in a poem*

**Rhythm** — *The repetition of regular patterns of accented and unaccented syllables (Also called "meter")*

***Iambic:** Unstressed - stressed*

***Trimeter:** Three meters*

***Pentameter:** Five meters*

***Trochaic:** Stress - unstressed*

***Tetramter:** Four meters*

**Satire** — *A technique that ridicules people and their institutions in an effort to expose their weaknesses and evils. Often the purpose is to bring about change. Devices of satire: exaggeration and parody.*

**Simile** — *Comparison of unlike things which uses the words "like" or "as"*



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## **Answer Key**

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**Sonnet** — *An intricately structured poem of 14 lines, written in iambic pentameter, and using a particular rhyme scheme [A Shakespearean sonnet consists of three quatrains (abab cdcd) and ends with a rhymed couplet (gg).]*

**Speaker** — *Voice or first-person narrator in a poem*

**Stanza** — *A group of lines that forms one of the sections in a poem*

**Symbol** — *Something concrete that stands for something abstract (e.g., a rose represents love)*

**Theme** — *Underlying idea of a work; a universal statement or opinion about the subject matter of the work*

**Tone** — *Attitude of the narrator or speaker toward the subject (e.g., ironic, bitter, amused, sympathetic, detached ...)*



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