

Creative Activity: Write Your Own Iambic Poem



This activity can be used at any point in the curriculum or as a fun homework assignment. This activity works best when used in tandem with the “Speaking Shakespeare: Scansion and Meter” activity.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Apply scansion knowledge to an original work
- Synthesize emotion into rhythmic language
- Compose an original work of poetry

MATERIALS

- Iambic Pentameter Handout (page 2)

INSTRUCTIONS

Step One: Ask students to think about the moments leading up to an exciting and/or terrifying event, like playing a game against a rival team, taking a test or speaking in front of a crowd. Have students consider the following questions as a brainstorm to help them recreate the moment through all five senses:

- What were your surroundings like?
- Who was with you?
- What was going through your head?
- What did the setting smell like?
- What did it sound like?

Step Two: Students then use their sensory brainstorm to create their own iambic pentameter poem: 5–10 lines of text in iambic pentameter about the exciting or terrifying event. Students can choose to use rhymes or not. Refer to the Iambic Pentameter handout if needed.

Step Three (Optional): Students share their poems with the class and describe how they used iambic pentameter to communicate emotions or amplify the setting.

Iambic Pentameter



CREATIVE ACTIVITY: WRITE YOUR OWN IAMBIC POEM

William Shakespeare wrote most of his plays in iambic pentameter, a specific poetic verse format that consists of 10 syllables per line. Each line contains five “feet,” with each foot comprising two syllables. The rhythm pattern typically follows an unstressed-stressed format, which can be represented as:

da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM

This rhythmic structure resembles a heartbeat, adding emotional depth to the text.

SCANSION EXAMPLES

To help illustrate scansion, here are examples of both perfect meter and broken meter:

Original Text (Perfect Meter):

*If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.*

Original Text (Broken Meter):

*To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles.*

Scanned Text (Perfect Meter):

U / U / U / U / U /
If mu · sic be · the food · of love, · play on;
U / U / U / U / U /
Give me · excess · of it, · that, sur · feiting.
U / U / U / U / U /
The app · etite · may sick · en, and · so die.

Scanned Text (Broken Meter):

U / U / U / U / U / U /
To be · or not · to be · that is · the que · stion:
/ U U / U / U / U / U /
Whether · 'tis nob · ler in · the mind · to su · ffer
U / U / U / U / U / U /
The slings · and arr · ows of · outrage · ous for · tune,
U / U / U / U / U / U /
Or to · take arms · against · a sea · of troub · les.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- **Iambic Pentameter:** A line of verse consisting of five iambs (unstressed-stressed syllable pairs).
- **Scansion:** The process of marking the stresses in a line of poetry to analyze its rhythm.
- **Emotional Insight:** The rhythmic pattern can provide clues to characters' emotions and the overall tone of the text.



IMAGE: COURTESY OF AUDIO SHAKESPEARE PRONUNCIATION APP