

## Sound Elements in Poetry

Name:

1. In the following poem, identify all the sound elements that are at work. Then discuss the effects of these sound elements—i.e., how they add to our experience of the poem's tone, impact, and meaning.

### **Philip Larkin (1922-1985)**

#### **The Trees**

The trees are coming into leaf  
Like something almost being said;  
The recent buds relax and spread,  
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again                    5  
And we grow old? No, they die too,  
Their yearly trick of looking new  
Is written down in rings of grain.

Yet still the unresting castles thresh  
In fullgrown thickness every May.            10  
Last year is dead, they seem to say,  
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

2. Sonnets usually consist of 14 lines of rhymed iambic pentameter. In the following sonnet, where has William Wordsworth used *rhythmic substitution*, or *interrupted* the sonnet's Iambic rhythm? What effects do this rhythmic variation contribute to the poem's tone, impact, and meaning?

### **William Wordsworth (1770-1850)**

#### **The World Is Too Much with Us    (1807)**

The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;  
Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!  
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;            5  
The winds that will be howling at all hours,  
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers,  
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;  
It moves us not.—Great God! I'd rather be  
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;                    10  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

3. The following poem is about an experience—both the speaker’s *perception of* the experience and her *involvement in* the experience.

**What is the importance or impact of the experience on the speaker?**

How do formal elements of the poem—such as structure, diction, imagery, metaphor, tone, and sound devices—help to communicate the impact or importance of the experience?

- structure/organization, diction, imagery, metaphor
- tone
- how tone shifts and evolves throughout poem
- how author’s subtle manipulation of sound elements *contributes* to the tone and to the poem’s total effect

**Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)**

**A Bird Came Down the Walk**

A bird came down the Walk—  
He did not know I saw—  
He bit an Angeworm in halves  
And ate the fellow, raw,

And then he drank a Dew 5  
From a convenient grass—  
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall  
To let a beetle pass—

He glanced with rapid eyes 10  
That hurried all around—  
They looked like frightened beads, I thought—  
He stirred his Velvet Head

Like one in danger, Cautious,  
I offered him a crumb 15  
And he unrolled his feathers  
And rowed him softer home—

Than Oars divide the Ocean,  
Too silver for a seam—  
Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon  
Leap, plashless as they swim. 20

Line 20 - plashless = splashless