Free Verse

**Free verse** is also known as “open form” verse. It is different from other forms of poetry because its rhythmic pattern is not organized into meter; also, it often has irregular line lengths, and usually does not rhyme. Within the broad category of free verse there are many different types, and it has evolved over the years.

The Fish by Elizabeth Bishop

I caught a tremendous fish   
and held him beside the boat   
half out of water, with my hook   
fast in a corner of its mouth.   
He didn’t fight. 5  
He hadn’t fought at all.   
He hung a grunting weight,   
battered and venerable   
and homely. Here and there   
his brown skin hung in strips 10  
like ancient wallpaper,   
and its pattern of darker brown   
was like wallpaper:   
shapes like full-blown roses   
stained and lost through age. 15  
He was speckled with barnacles,   
fine rosettes of lime,   
and infested   
with tiny white sea-lice,   
and underneath two or three 20  
rags of green weed hung down.   
While his gills were breathing in   
the terrible oxygen   
— the frightening gills,   
fresh and crisp with blood, 25  
that can cut so badly —   
I thought of the coarse white flesh   
packed in like feathers,   
the big bones and the little bones,   
the dramatic reds and blacks 30  
of his shiny entrails,   
and the pink swim-bladder   
like a big peony.   
I looked into his eyes   
which were far larger than mine 35  
but shallower, and yellowed,   
the irises backed and packed   
with tarnished tinfoil   
seen through the lenses   
of old scratched isinglass.[[1]](#footnote-1) 40  
They shifted a little, but not   
to return my stare.   
— It was more like the tipping   
of an object toward the light.   
I admired his sullen face, 45  
the mechanism of his jaw,   
and then I saw   
that from his lower lip   
— if you could call it a lip —   
grim, wet, and weaponlike, 50  
hung five old pieces of fish-line,   
or four and a wire leader   
with the swivel still attached,   
with all their five big hooks   
grown firmly in his mouth. 55  
A green line, frayed at the end   
where he broke it, two heavier lines,   
and a fine black thread   
still crimped from the strain and snap   
when it broke and he got away. 60  
Like medals with their ribbons   
frayed and wavering,   
a five-haired beard of wisdom   
trailing from his aching jaw.   
I stared and stared 65  
and victory filled up   
the little rented boat,   
from the pool of bilge   
where oil had spread a rainbow   
around the rusted engine 70  
to the bailer rusted orange,   
the sun-cracked thwarts,   
the oarlocks on their strings,   
the gunnels — until everything   
was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow! 75  
And I let the fish go.

venerable (adj) worthy of respect due to great age or impressive dignity

entrails (noun) intestines; guts

sullen (adj) showing irritation or bad mood by a gloomy silence or reserve

1. Describe what the fish caught in this poem looks like. Give at least 3 examples.

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2. Explain the speaker’s **tone**, or attitude (feelings) toward the fish? Give 3 specific lines from the poem that show/indicate this.

The tone/attitude toward the fish is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

The three different lines from the poem that show this are (1) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(2) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(3) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3. Find three **similes** used in this poem. Explain what two things are being compared in each one and what the simile is trying to express.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Definition: *A simile is a comparison between two different things using "like" or "as."* | | |
| First Simile | Second Simile | Third Simile |
| What is being compared: | What is being compared: | What is being compared: |
| What is the simile trying to express: | What is the simile trying to express: | What is the simile trying to express: |

4. Find two **metaphors** in this poem. Explain what two things are being compared in each one and what the metaphor is trying to express.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Definition: *A metaphor the comparison of two unlike things by saying one is the other.* | | |
| First Metaphor | Second Metaphor | Third Metaphor |
| What is being compared: | What is being compared: | What is being compared: |
| What is the simile trying to express: | What is the simile trying to express: | What is the simile trying to express: |

5. EXPLAIN what is **ironic** about the situation in this poem?

Remember, irony is about expectations, when the opposite of what is expected happens. There is usually a twist in some way, whether it is for the reader (you), a character, or sarcasm.

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6. Finally, did you like this poem? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Why or why not?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. **isinglass** (noun) thin, transparent sheets of mica used as windows or in lanterns [↑](#footnote-ref-1)