

Task for *The ABC Book of Australian Poetry*

Workset sheet 5: Free verse

Close study: 'The Rock Pool' by Peter Skryznecki

As a post-war European urban migrant Peter Skryznecki has a different perspective to Lawson and other earlier poets on what it means to be Australian and live in this country. He is one of over 6.5 million people who have migrated to the country since World War Two. As such, his poems reflect on his context and the experiences of a modern multicultural Australia. His poem 'The Rock Pool' does not directly address those experiences, but represents a break away from poetry about the outback and rural life. In the poem he captures the wonder of a child exploring rock pools along the shoreline. Whilst the beach has long been a feature of the Australian psyche, he portrays the unique point of view of a child and their fascinating connection to this place.

1. **Read** 'The Rock Pool'.

2. **Identify** the form of the poem from your prior knowledge: is it a bush ballad, a lyric poem, or written in free verse? How can you tell?

3. **Focus on techniques:** read the table below.

Imagery:

*Full of colours of the sea
washes in –
blues, greens, browns, reds:
yellow that leaps in reflection*

Visual imagery: Here the poet uses colours to describe the features of the rock pool. In the final description he gives the colour yellow an action, 'leaps in reflection', which not only paints a picture in our minds but brings the scene to life with the movement of the sea.

*by the swirling tide
and crashing waves*

Auditory imagery: These lines help us to imagine the sounds at the rock pool. Not only is the reader introduced to the sights, but the fuller atmosphere of the setting, through the sounds of the beach as well. The **onomatopoeic** word 'crashing' also carries a **connotation** of danger or destruction, which gives us the sense that it is a delicate moment of wonder and one that may only exist for a short time.

Personification:

*Seagrass weaves
in slow, soft dances -
reaches up to your face*

The **sibilance** in the 's' sounds mimics the rhythms and swaying of the waves and the seagrass in the rock pool. The **personified** seagrass which 'soft dances', gives the rock pool a personal connection with the child and a deeper human connection to the place.

Extended metaphor:

*The rock pool
is a magic circle
full of treasures
from a sea king's cave*

One of the key devices in this poem is the **extended metaphor** of the 'magic circle' or the 'treasure cave.' The metaphor of the magic circle runs over a few lines here, conveying the idea of a mystical place that has lots of precious objects.

Questions:

- What are the treasures that Skryznecki is referring to?
- Can you identify other poetic devices like alliteration, enjambment and repetition?
- Why would the poet choose to use repetition when describing the rock pool? (Think about the scene and the actions of the ocean.)
- How does Skryznecki capture a different perspective on Australian life in this poem?

Close Study of ‘Uluru’ by Eva Johnson

Read Eva Johnson’s ‘Uluru’. Read a short [biography](#) of her or refer to the earlier group work.

Note how the poem is written in free verse:

‘Uluru’ by Eva Johnson	Structural features
<p>Isolated rock, that stands in silence caress the earth, while waters of tears carry ancient stories</p>	<p>There is no set rhyme scheme. But, there is a strong sense of rhythm carried through the line length and also the use of techniques like alliteration, sibilance and assonance.</p> <p>Enjambment is used throughout the poem as the sentences and clauses run across the poetic lines, pushing the reader to read on. This technique also creates a sense of rhythm and flow for the poem. The poem’s rhythm is much like that of the spoken word.</p>

Questions:

- How is Johnson’s poem different from the others you have studied?
- Why do you think her perspective on the Australian Outback is so different from Paterson or Hannay Foott?
- What is her message in the poem here? What do you think her purpose was when composing the lines?
- Who do you think the ‘keepers’ of Uluru are in the last line?
- Why do you think Johnson has used Uluru as a symbol for the struggles of Indigenous people? You might want to look up a history of [Uluru](#) and the issues surrounding the site over the years.

Comparison of ‘The Law About Singing Out’ by Gela Nga-Mirraitja and ‘In the Forest’ by Thomas Shapcott

Read from ‘The Law About Singing Out’ by Gela Nga-Mirraitja.

- How is Nga-Mirraitja’s connection to the land different to those that have been studied in other poems?
- Whose voice does she represent?
- How is personification used to strongly convey her connection with the land? Find examples to prove your answer.

Read Thomas Shapcott’s ‘In the Forest’.

- What do you think the poem is about?

Draw a line down the middle of half your page. Choose four lines of the poem that you think stand out the most and write them individually in the left-hand column. In the other column, write down a list of questions that help you to explore the meaning of each line in more detail. The table below can act as a guide to what to do.

Line	Students consider:
<i>Wait for the axe to sound in the forest.</i>	Who is holding the axe? Which forest is the subject of the poem? Who is waiting for the axe?
<i>The possums clutch their young; they flee.</i>	What are the possums fleeing? Does this mean they are leaving their home? Where will they go?
<i>Now, says the axe, and the tree is fallen</i>	Why has the poet chosen to allow the axe to speak? What will happen to the tree? How many trees will fall?

- Identify the enjambment in the lines.
- How does the onomatopoeia in the lines ‘That! Slap of an axe. Slap!’ and ‘Crack again crack of a slow man’s weapon’ add to the feeling of the forest?
- What other sounds can be heard in the poem? We refer to this as auditory imagery because these are creating sounds for the reader to hear, which deepen the atmosphere in the poem.
- How do Johnson and Shapcott give a voice to the Australian bush that is different to the earlier poems?

Students may find a deeper analysis in these poetry blogs by [Michelle](#) and by [Bianca](#).

[\(ACELA1547\)](#), [\(ACELT1619\)](#), [\(ACELT1621\)](#), [\(ACELT1806\)](#) [\(ACELT1627\)](#),
[\(ACELT1807\)](#), [\(ACELT1623\)](#), [\(ACELT1630\)](#), [\(ACELY1719\)](#), [\(ACELY1721\)](#) [\(ACELY1733\)](#)