

# Learner Resource 4 Using graphology, prosodics, semantics and syntax to read a poem

Look at the shape of the poem below.

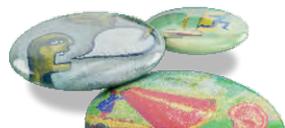
Little Lamb who made thee	six syllables
Dost thou know who made thee	six syllables – interrogative sentence
Gave thee life & bid thee feed	seven syllables
By the stream & o'er the mead;	seven syllables
Gave thee clothing of delight,	seven syllables
Softest clothing woolly bright;	seven syllables
Gave thee such a tender voice,	seven syllables
Making all the vales rejoice!	seven syllables
Little Lamb who made thee	six syllables
Dost thou know who made thee	six syllables – interrogative sentence
Little Lamb I'll tell thee,	six syllables – declarative sentence
Little Lamb I'll tell thee!	six syllables – declarative sentence
He is called by thy name,	seven syllables
For he calls himself a Lamb:	seven syllables
He is meek & he is mild,	seven syllables
He became a little child:	seven syllables
I a child & thou a lamb,	seven syllables
We are called by his name.	seven syllables
Little Lamb God bless thee.	six syllables – textual imperative sentence
Little Lamb God bless thee.	six syllables – textual imperative sentence

Discuss in pairs or in small groups what you notice about the shape and the patterns in this poem.

You might use these questions as starting points:

1. Where would you expect to find phrases repeated?
2. What relationship do the first verse and the second verse seem to have with one another?
3. What do you notice about the patterns of syllables and of the line lengths?
4. What sentence types would you expect to find in the central six lines of each verse?

Now read "The Lamb" and discuss as a class whether you were able to accurately glean any meaning from the metre and shape of the poem.



# Learner Resource 4

Working in pairs, take it in turns to read the opening two lines of the poem. One person should read and the other should listen to where the reader places the stress. Repeat the exercise with the first two lines of verse two, and with the last two lines.

In your pair, can you decide on an adjective that would best describe the three heavy stresses in the final two lines? You may want to choose from one of the following, or to arrive at your own: lyrical, child-like, unsettling, abrupt, direct, gentle, certain, insistent, reassuring, assertive.

Compare your choices as a class.

Look at the following statements that use the syntactical and lexical choices that the poet has made to interpret the certainty or the uncertainty in this poem. Bearing in mind the contrasts and patterns you have already noticed, work in pairs to decide which you think is most relevant to an interpretation of this poem. You should negotiate until you agree in your pair.

The triple stress repeated eight times suggesting certainty.	The use of interrogatives suggesting uncertainty.
Move from the present tense ("dost thou") to past tense ("made thee"), to future ("I'll tell thee") suggesting a certainty: this will happen.	First verse appears to be a series of questions, yet grammatically it is a six-line minor sentence, and the subject of the verbs is missing, creating an uncertainty.
Present tense of "he is meek..." implies that this is an accepted truth ("he is called", "we are called") with the final idiomatic phrase "God bless thee" in the present tense connoting something that is ongoing; God continues to bless.	Lack of verbs in "I a child and thou a lamb" suggesting an uncertainty: did Blake "become" a child (echoing God in the previous line) to write from the perspective of innocence? Or is the verb "to be" missing, and, as the illustration indicates, this is a child speaking?

As a class you might go on to discuss the following two:

This poem reveals the harmony of God, nature and the child – all called by his name, as he is called a "lamb".	Declarative sentences suggest a control of child over lamb. The power that God has to "give" life" and "bid thee feed" also implies a superiority over the lamb.
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