**Narrative poetry**

is a form of [poetry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poetry) that tells a story, often using the voices of both a narrator and characters; the entire story is usually written in [metered](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metre_(poetry)) verse. Narrative poems do not need rhyme. The poems that make up this genre may be short or long, and the story it relates to may be complex. It is normally dramatic, with various characters.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narrative_poetry#cite_note-1) Narrative poems include all [epic poetry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_poetry), and the various types of "lay",[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narrative_poetry" \l "cite_note-2) most [ballads](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballad), and some [idylls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idyll), as well as many poems not falling into a distinct type.

Some narrative poetry takes the form of a [novel in verse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verse_novel). An example of this is [*The Ring and the Book*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ring_and_the_Book) by [Robert Browning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Browning). In terms of narrative poetry, [romance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romance_(heroic_literature)) is a narrative poem that tells a story of [chivalry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chivalry). Examples include the [*Romance of the Rose*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romance_of_the_Rose) or [Tennyson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Tennyson,_1st_Baron_Tennyson)'s [*Idylls of the King*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idylls_of_the_King). Although those examples use [medieval](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Ages) and [Arthurian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthurian) materials, romances may also tell stories from [classical mythology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mythology). Sometimes, these short narratives are collected into interrelated groups, as with [Chaucer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geoffrey_Chaucer)'s [*The Canterbury Tales*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Canterbury_Tales). So [sagas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saga) include both incidental poetry and the biographies of poets.

The predecessor of essentially all other modern forms of communication. For thousands of years, cultures passed on their history through oral tradition from generation to generation. Historically, much of poetry has its source in an [oral tradition](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_tradition): in more recent times the [Scots](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland) and [English](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England) [ballads](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballad), the tales of [Robin Hood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robin_Hood) poems all were originally intended for [recitation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recitation), rather than reading. In many cultures, there remains a lively tradition of the recitation of traditional tales in verse format. It has been suggested that some of the distinctive features that distinguish poetry from [prose](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prose), such as [metre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metre_(poetry)" \o "Metre (poetry)), [alliteration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alliteration), and [kennings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenning), at one time served as [memory aids](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memory_aid) that allowed the [bards](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bard) who recited traditional tales to reconstruct them from [memory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memory).[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narrative_poetry#cite_note-3)

A narrative poem usually tells a story using a poetic theme. Epics are very vital to narrative poems, although it is thought those narrative poems were created to explain oral traditions. The focus of narrative poetry is often the pros and cons of life.

The defining feature of a narrative poem is its plot. Narrative poems feature an entire story, told by one narrator from beginning to end. Narrative poetry is one of the major categories of poetry, but is distinguished from lyric poetry by its focus on plot over emotions. In practice, there is a crossover between these two types of poetry: poets often incorporate lyric elements into their narrative poems, and vice versa.

What Is a Narrative Poem?

A narrative poem is a longer form of poetry that tells an entire story, with a beginning, middle, and end. Narrative poems contain all of the elements of a fully developed story, including characters, plot, conflict, and resolution. These poems are typically told by just one narrator or speaker.

Narrative poems are distinguished from narrative prose, such as a short story or a novel, because they are written in verse and retain poetic devices and characteristics like meter and rhyme. Though some narrative poems may be written in [blank verse](https://www.masterclass.com/articles/poetry-101-what-is-the-difference-between-blank-verse-and-free-verse) (that is, in iambic pentameter but with no rhyme), most narrative poetry does retain a formal [rhyme scheme](https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-a-rhyme-scheme-learn-about-10-different-poetry-rhyme-schemes) such as ABCB, with the second and fourth lines rhyming.

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What Are the Origins of Narrative Poetry?

Narrative poetry grew out of oral traditions. Before written language, poets used elements like [repetition](https://www.masterclass.com/articles/writing-101-what-is-repetition-7-types-of-repetition-in-writing-with-examples) and rhyme to allow for poems to be more easily memorized, recited, and passed on. The ancient Greek poet Homer wrote the epic poems *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* as part of spoken tradition: both can be considered narrative poems. Homer’s work was passed down through the generations verbally, until it was later captured by written language.

Even when written language emerged, narrative poetry continued to be the dominant form of verse. It was favored by medieval poets, most notably exemplified by Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, which is a collection of 24 narrative poems.

Narrative poetry reigned in popularity all the way through the Renaissance. Its dominance began to wane only in the eighteenth century, when Romantic poets inspired a shift to lyric poetry.

Still, narrative poetry was far from abandoned. One of the most famous narrative poems was written well after the height of its popularity as a form: *Paul Revere’s Ride*, by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, is an enduring classic of the genre. Narrated by the innkeeper character, it tells the story of Paul Revere riding through Boston warning of the British invasion by sea. Today, narrative poetry is less dominant as a form of poetry than it used to be, but it is still common in song lyrics and in children’s books. Think of *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss, which uses rhythm, rhyming, and repetition to tell a complete story from beginning to end.

3 Different Types of Narrative Poems

Narrative poems vary in style, and have changed over the ages as both language and literary trends have evolved. Some were composed with the intention of being sung and danced to, while others are written to record human history.

1. 1. **Epics**. [Epic poems](https://www.masterclass.com/articles/poetry-101-what-is-an-epic-poem-learn-about-the-history-and-characteristics-of-epics-with-examples) were composed by ancient Greek poets like Homer and were intended to be recited rather than read. Epics are written in a grandiose style, and tell stories of historical events or legends of cultural importance. One example of an epic poem passing down history is Homer’s *The Iliad*, which contains a long passage called the Catalogue of Ships. This chapter lists in great detail, and in poetic verse, the contingents of the Achaean army that sailed to Troy. In a time before written language, this type of detail in a narrative poem worked to pass on historical events to the next generation.
2. 2. **Ballads**. Ballads derive from the French “chanson ballade,” which were poems set to music and intended for dancing. Because of its strong musical background, ballads are associated with a specific meter: Ballads are typically written with alternating lines of iambic tetrameter (dah-DUM dah-DUM dah-DUM dah-DUM) and iambic trimeter (da DUM da DUM da DUM), with every second and fourth line rhyming. They were most popular in Ireland and Britain starting in the Middle Ages, but also gained popularity around Europe and on other continents. Ballads may be relatively short narrative poems, compared to other types of narrative poetry.
3. 3. **Arthurian romances**. Arthurian romances derive from twelfth century France. They are any narrative poetry that tells stories of romance and adventure within the Arthurian court. King Arthur was an English ruler in the fifth and sixth centuries, best known for fighting off the Saxon invasions. According to some scholars, however, Arthur never existed but was instead a fictional character. Historical status aside, King Arthur and his knights are major figures in English and French folklore. Arthurian literature was hugely popular during the Middle Ages, and had a resurgence of popularity in the eighteenth century. Different stories focus on Arthur and his wife Guinevere, on the Knights of the Round Table and the search for the Holy Grail, or on any number of side characters associated with the Arthurian court.