Lyric Poetry

**Lyric poetry** expresses thoughts and feelings about a subject in a musical, and usually brief, way. Of all the different types of poetry, lyrics are the most closely related to song. The word “lyric” comes from the word “lyre,” which is a stringed instrument which was played as an accompaniment to the sung words, or lyrics. Not all lyric poetry is set to music, but a lyric poem often uses **musical devices** and has other song-like qualities that distinguish it from other types of poems.

Sympathy

by Paul Laurence Dunbar

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!   
 When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;  
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,  
And the river flows like a stream of glass;  
 When the first bird sings and the first bud opes, 5  
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals—  
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing  
 Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;  
For he must fly back to his perch and cling 10  
When he fain[[1]](#footnote-1) would be on the bough a-swing;  
 And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars  
And they pulse again with a keener sting—  
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me, 15  
 When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—  
When he beats his bars and he would be free;  
It is not a carol of joy or glee,  
 But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,  
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings— 20  
I know why the caged bird sings!

chalice (n): a bowl-shaped drinking vessel or goblet

bosom (n): the chest; especially when considered as the source of emotion

1. Why is the poem called “Sympathy”? How does the title connect to the theme of the poem?

2. How is the bird used as a **symbol**? How is it **personified**? Why did Dunbar choose a bird to express his feelings?

3. What is the poem’s **rhyme scheme**? Note it below. How does the rhyme scheme reinforce the poem’s theme?

4. Give an example of each of the following in the poem and why that technique was used in that particular example:

**alliteration:**

**metaphor:**

**simile:**

1. **fain** (adv) gladly; willingly [↑](#footnote-ref-1)