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,
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
When he fain\(^1\) 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,
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—
I know why the caged bird sings!

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chalice (n): a bowl-shaped drinking vessel or goblet
bosom (n): the chest; especially when considered as the source of emotion

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\(^1\) fain (adv) gladly; willingly
Lyric Poetry

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

   alliteration:

   metaphor:

   simile: