



Poetry

A poem expresses emotions, experiences, and ideas. The lines of a poem are often short. Groups of these lines are called stanzas, or verses. Poets—people who write poems—may choose words for the way they sound. You will read two poems, one about a bat and the other about a snake.

The Bat

By day the bat is cousin to the mouse.
He likes the attic of an **aging** house.

His fingers make a hat about his head.
His **pulse beat** is so slow we think him dead.

1 He **loops** in crazy **figures** half the night
Among the trees that face the corner light.

But when he **brushes up** against a **screen**,
We are afraid of what our eyes have seen:

For something is **amiss** or **out of place**
When mice with wings can wear a human face.

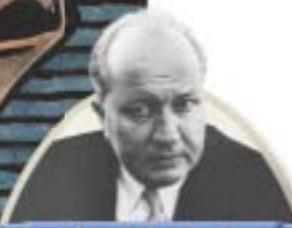
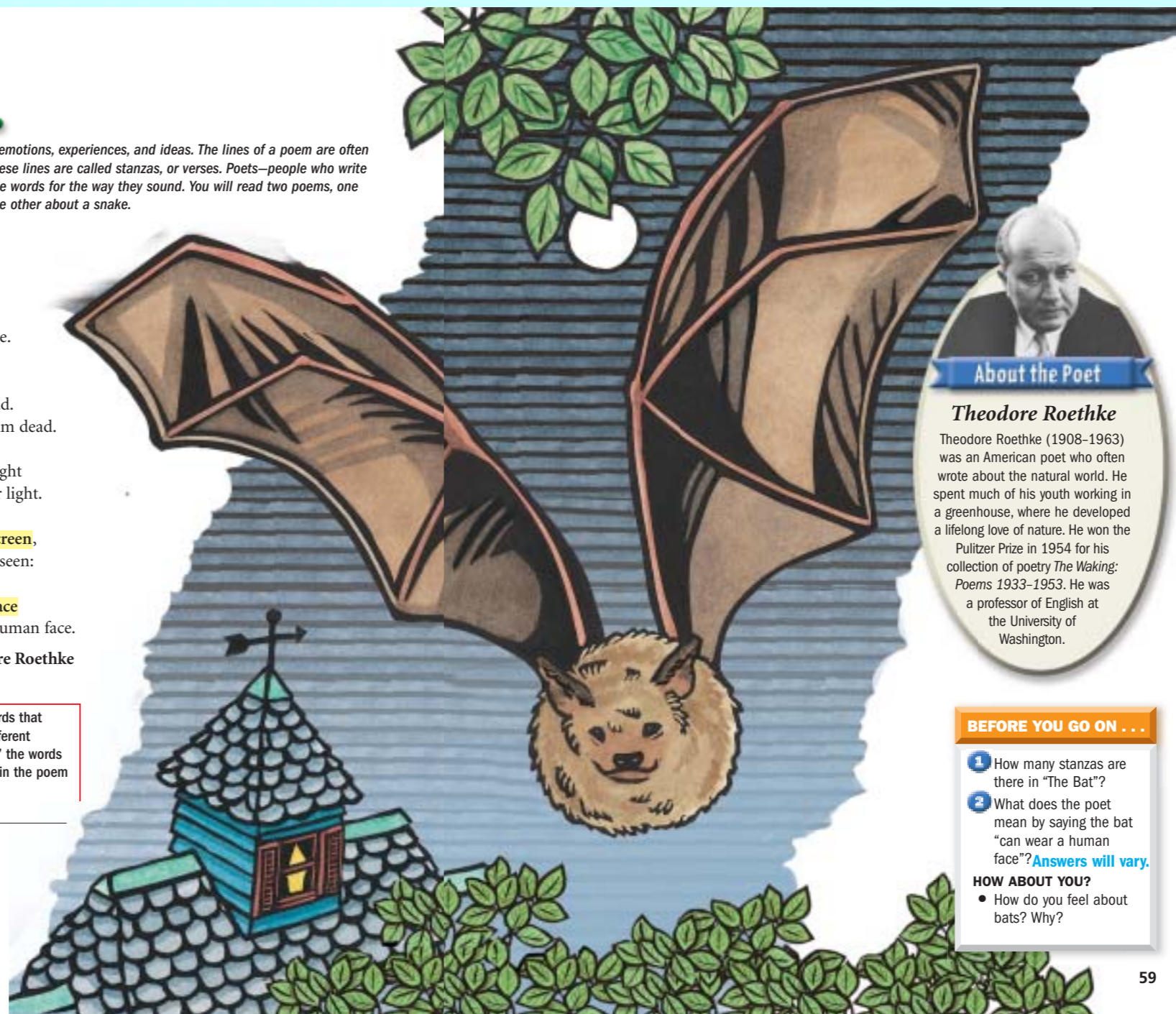
Theodore Roethke

LITERARY ELEMENT

Sometimes words in a poem **rhyme**. Two words that rhyme have the same ending sounds but different beginning sounds. For example, in “The Bat,” the words *mouse* and *house* rhyme. What other words in the poem rhyme?

- aging, becoming older
- pulse beat, heartbeat
- loops, flies in circles
- figures, patterns
- brushes up, touches lightly
- screen, wire net that covers a window
- amiss, wrong
- out of place, strange or unusual

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About the Poet

Theodore Roethke

Theodore Roethke (1908–1963) was an American poet who often wrote about the natural world. He spent much of his youth working in a greenhouse, where he developed a lifelong love of nature. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1954 for his collection of poetry *The Waking: Poems 1933–1953*. He was a professor of English at the University of Washington.

BEFORE YOU GO ON . . .

- 1 How many stanzas are there in “The Bat”?
 - 2 What does the poet mean by saying the bat “can wear a human face”? *Answers will vary.*
- HOW ABOUT YOU?
- How do you feel about bats? Why?

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READING SUMMARY

Roethke’s poem “The Bat” describes a bat’s habits. It also describes its unusual and startling appearance.

MODELING THE READING STRATEGY

Skimming: Discuss with students how skimming a poem’s title and first stanza can help them make predictions about a poem’s subject and form. Explain that it can be helpful to skim to find out whether a poet has used a particular rhyming pattern. For example, skimming the last word of each line can help students find out whether the poem contains end rhymes.

SCAFFOLDING

Have students read the introductory text. Then, as a class, have them share everything they know about bats. Next, tell students to listen to the CD/tape as they read the poem twice. The first time, they should listen to the sounds and rhythms of the poem. The second time, they should pay attention to the meanings of the words and use the definitions that are provided to help them.

GUIDED READING

1. Where do the bats go during the day? (*the attic of an old house*)
2. What do the bats do at night? (*fly*)
3. How does the poet react to seeing the bat up close? (*He feels afraid.*)

CRITICAL THINKING

Have students respond orally or in writing to these questions:

- What is the meaning of the phrase “his fingers make a hat”? (*Possible answer: He sleeps with his hands over his head.*)
- How do the last two lines of the poem make you feel? (*Answers will vary.*)
- Do you think bats are really scary creatures? Explain. (*Possible answer: No, because most of them eat fruit and don’t bother humans.*)

Viewpoint

Ask students whether they think the illustration on pages 58–59 supports the poem. Have students explain their answers.

LITERARY ELEMENT

Have volunteers read aloud the text in the box. Then have students identify the other rhyming words in the poem. Next, suggest variations on the first line, such as *By day the bat is cousin to the mole (rat, squirrel)*. Students can brainstorm words that rhyme with *mole*, *rat*, or *squirrel* and choose one to create a new second line.

ABOUT THE POET

Theodore Roethke read the works of many notable poets. His reading helped him learn more about how to use words, and it inspired him to express his own feelings and experiences in poetry. Although he wrote mainly for adults, his collection *I am!* Says *the Lamb* is for young people.

REACHING ALL STUDENTS

LANGUAGE LEVELS

Beginning: Have pairs of students work together to read the poem and act out the actions that Roethke describes, such as covering their heads with their hands, flying in crazy loops, and reacting with fear. Have each pair present their rendition of the poem and pantomime to the group.

Advanced: Have student pairs work together to state “bat facts” using the information that Roethke provides in the poem. One student can read a stanza. The other can state the bat fact. For example, a bat fact for the first stanza could be “Bats live in attics.” You can record students’ bat facts and then have them read the list together.