

Lesson 16

Understanding Literary Structure



Learning Target



Knowing how dramas and poems are structured will help you better understand what they mean.

- ▶ **Read** Dramas and poems have **structures** that organize what they say and help the reader understand what they mean.
 - **Dramas** are divided into **acts**. Each act tells a main part of the drama. Acts are often divided into **scenes**, which show different times and places.
 - Poems are often organized in **stanzas**, or groups of lines that have something in common.

Examining how such features work together can help you understand not just how a text is structured but why it is structured that way.

Read this poem. Notice how the lines are organized into stanzas. Why do you think the poet organized the lines this way?

FROM

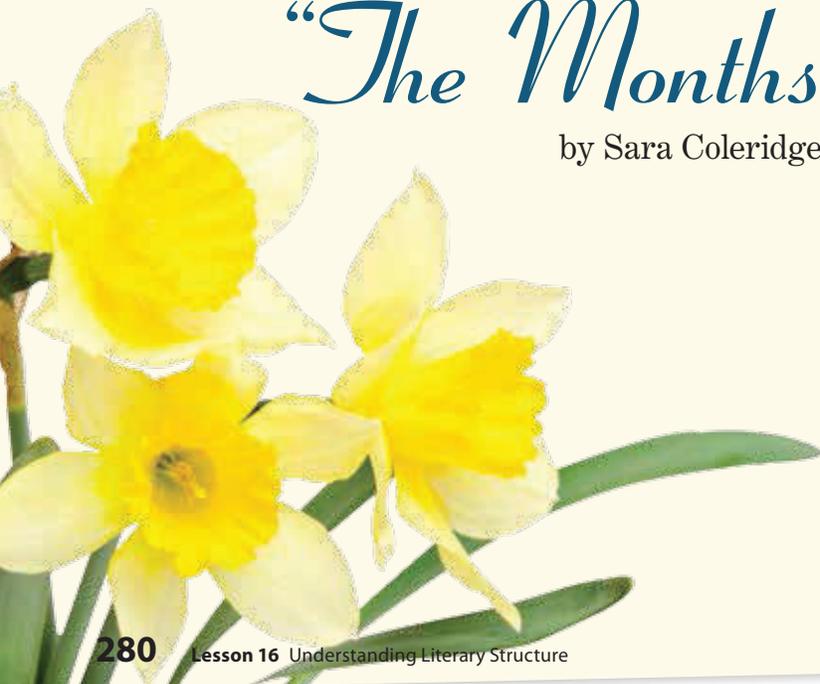
“The Months”

by Sara Coleridge

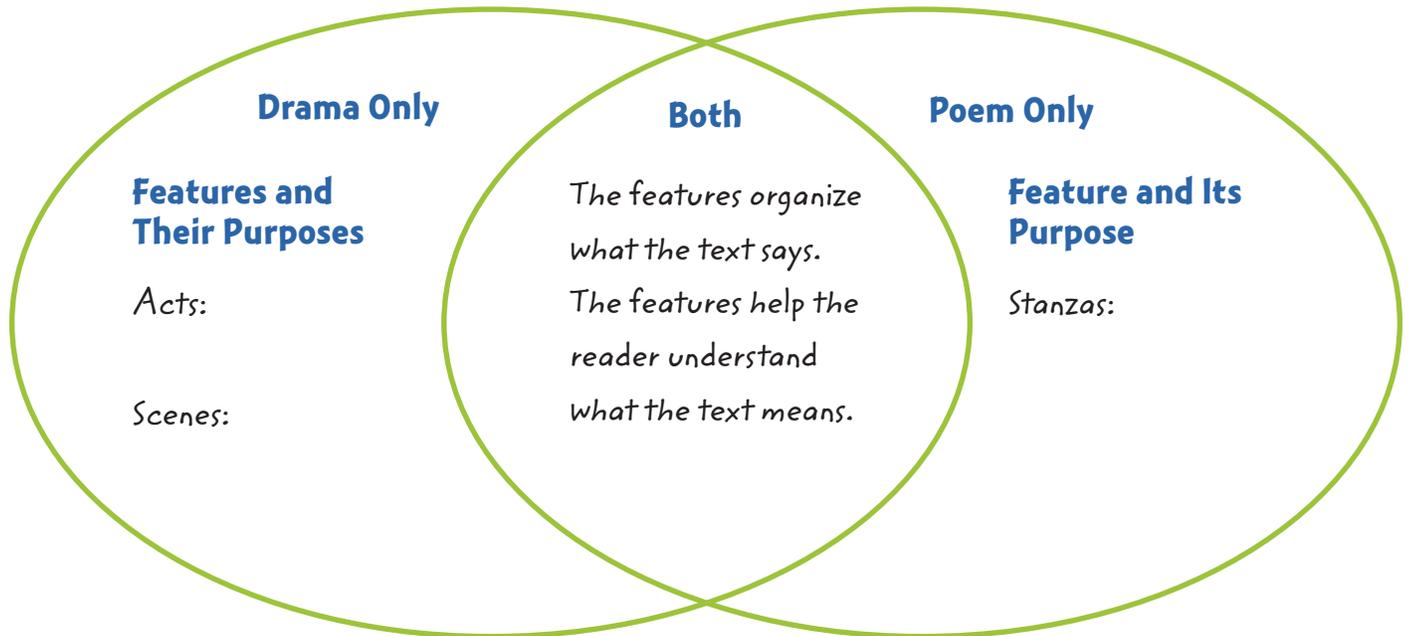
January brings the snow,
Makes our feet and fingers glow.

February brings the rain,
Thaws the frozen lake again.

March brings breezes loud and shrill,
Stirs the dancing daffodil.



► **Think** Consider what you know about the features of dramas and poems. What are their main features? What purposes do those features share? Use the *Venn diagram* to organize your thoughts.



Use the words *lines* and *stanzas* to describe the structure of “The Months.” Explain why the poet chose the structure she did.

► **Talk** Discuss the poem “The Months” with a partner.

- What features of poetry did you see in the excerpt from “The Months”?
- How did those features help you understand what the poem is about?



Academic Talk

Use these words to talk about the text.

- acts
- scenes
- dramas
- stanzas
- structures

Three Wise Old Women

by Elizabeth T. Corbett

- 1 Three wise old women were they, were they,
Who went to walk on a winter day:
One carried a basket to hold some berries,
One carried a ladder to climb for cherries,
5 The third, and she was the wisest one,
Carried a fan to keep off the sun.
- But they went so far, and they went so fast,
They quite forgot their way at last,
So one of the wise women cried in a fright,
10 “Suppose we should meet a bear tonight!
Suppose he should eat me!” “And me!!” “And me!!!”
“What is to be done?” cried all the three.
- “Dear, dear!” said one, “we’ll climb a tree,
There out of the way of the bears we’ll be.”
15 But there wasn’t a tree for miles around;
They were too frightened to stay on the ground,
So they climbed their ladder up to the top,
And sat there screaming “We’ll drop! We’ll drop!”
- But the wind was strong as the wind could be,
20 And blew their ladder right out to sea;
So the three wise women were all afloat
In a leaky ladder instead of a boat,
And every time the waves rolled in,
Of course the poor things were wet to the skin.
- 25 Then they took their basket, the water to bale,
They put up their fan instead of a sail:
But what became of the wise women then,
Whether they ever sailed home again,
Whether they saw any bears, or no,
30 You must find out, for I don’t know.

Close Reader Habits

Stanzas 1 through 4 each describe one main event. Reread the poem.

Underline one line in *each* stanza that sums up the event the stanza describes.

Think Use what you learned from reading the narrative poem to answer the following questions.

- 1** This question has two parts. Answer Part A. Then answer Part B.

Part A

What purpose do stanzas 1 and 2 serve in “Three Wise Old Women”?

- A** They show the women’s fear of meeting a bear.
- B** They introduce all three women and a problem they face.
- C** They show that the third woman was the wisest of the three.
- D** They describe the adventures the three women have after they get lost.

Part B

Choose **one** detail from **each** stanza to support your answer to Part A.

- A** “Three wise old women were they, were they” (stanza 1)
- B** “One carried a basket to hold some berries,” (stanza 1)
- C** “The third, and she was the wisest one” (stanza 1)
- D** “But they went so far, and they went so fast” (stanza 2)
- E** “They quite forgot their way at last” (stanza 2)
- F** “So one of the wise women cried in a fright” (stanza 2)



Like the early paragraphs of a story, the early stanzas of a narrative poem may introduce the characters, a setting, and a problem.

Talk

- 2** Describe what stanzas 3 and 4 add to the narrative in terms of settings and events. Use the chart on page 287 to organize your ideas and record details from the stanzas.

Write

- 3 Short Response** Explain how stanzas 3 and 4 help to develop the narrative. Using your chart, support your answer with **two** details from the text. Use the space provided on page 287 to write your answer.

HINT First describe what happens in stanzas 3 and 4. Then explain how they connect the beginning to the end of the poem.

Read

WORDS TO KNOW

As you read, look inside, around, and beyond these words to figure out what they mean.

- **exception**
- **vibrations**
- **theory**

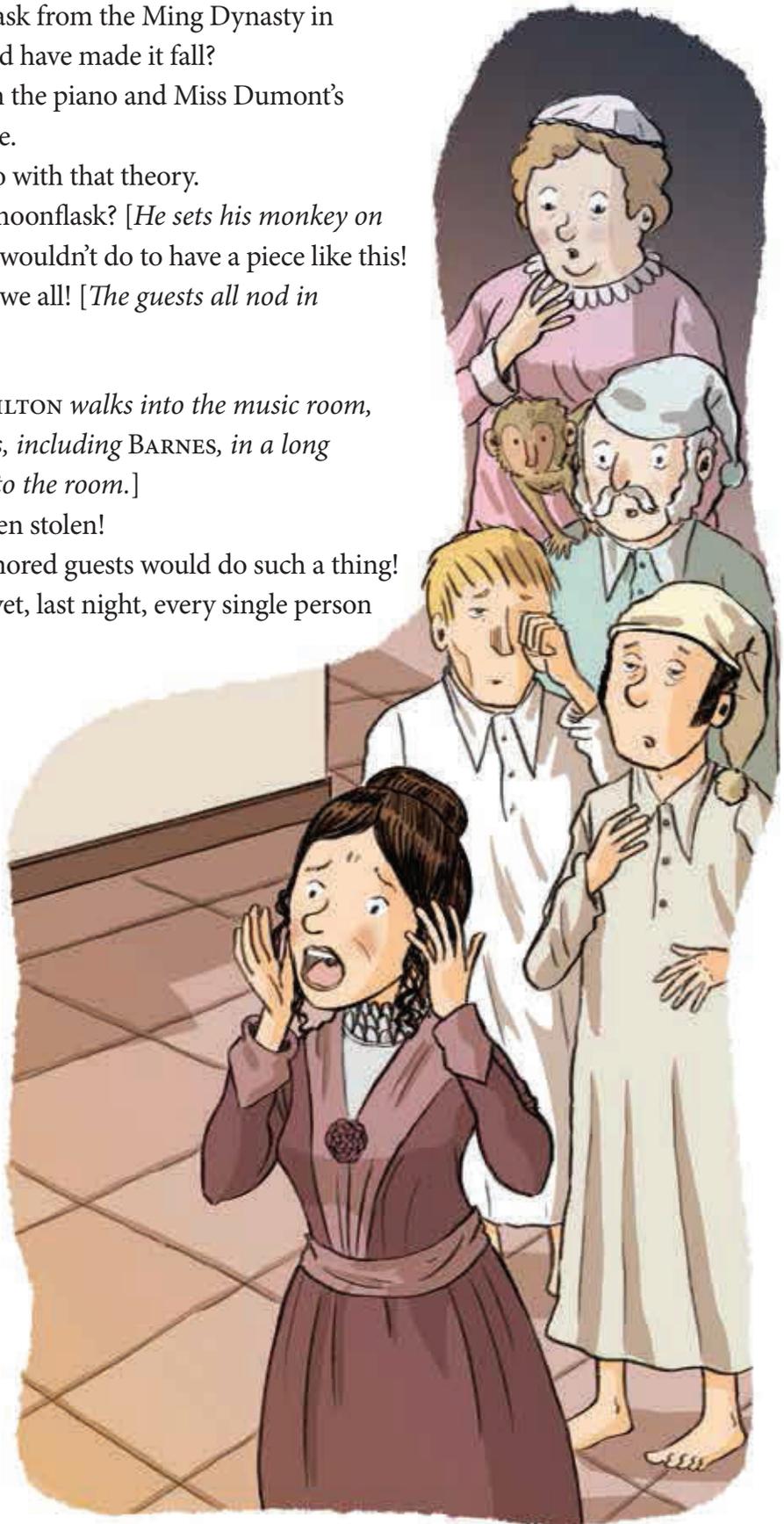
THE CASE OF THE Missing Ming

by Wendell Riley

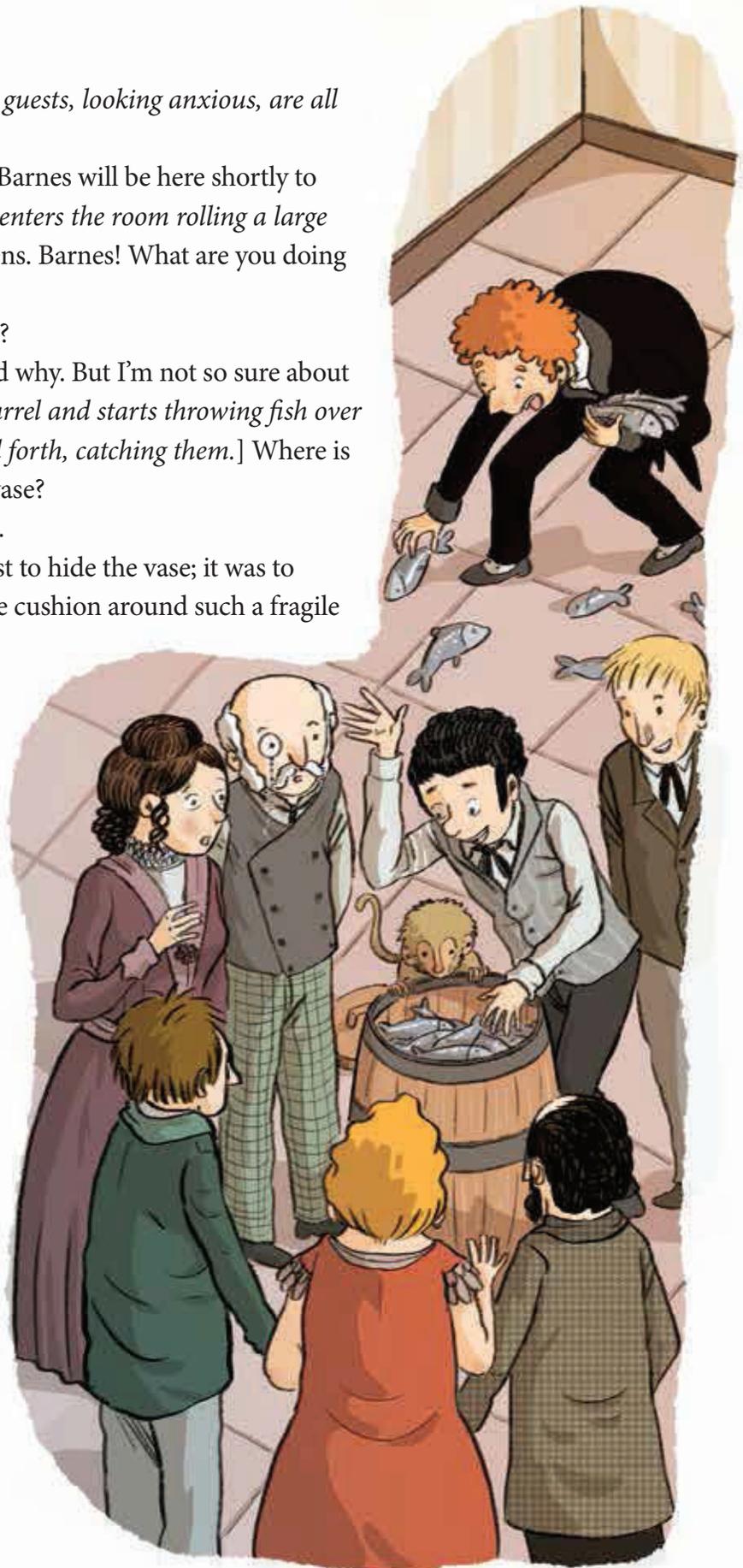
- 1 **CAST OF CHARACTERS:** FENWICK BARNES, a famous detective; DR. ARTHUR HAMISH, friend and assistant to Barnes; LADY VICTORIA MILTON, owner of the house; DIANA DUMONT, a singer; RUPERT, a piano player; GILES, the butler; WENDY, the maid; COUNT OTTO ORLOG, a visitor; MISHA, the count's pet monkey; assorted guests.
- 2 **ACT ONE:** [*The curtain opens on the music room of the mansion. DIANA is singing as RUPERT plays the piano. The guests are seated in rows of chairs around the piano, listening with complete attention. The exception is FENWICK BARNES, who is clearly falling asleep in the back row. As DIANA hits a long high note, the sleeping BARNES falls back into a shelf. A large vase falls off the shelf into his lap. He catches it. Only WENDY, the maid, sees what caused the vase to fall. She gasps. The concert stops, and everyone turns to BARNES.*]
- 3 LADY MILTON: Oh, Mr. Barnes! You've saved the day again.
- 4 BARNES: A detective is always on his toes. Even when he is seated. [*He stands, nearly dropping the vase.*]



- 5 LADY MILTON: [*taking the large blue and white vase from his hands*] This vase is priceless to me! It is a rare moonflask from the Ming Dynasty in China. It's worth millions! Whatever could have made it fall?
- 6 DR. HAMISH: Perhaps the vibrations from the piano and Miss Dumont's extraordinary voice shook it from its place.
- 7 BARNES: Yes, Doctor! Good work! Let's go with that theory.
- 8 COUNT ORLOG: May I see this beautiful moonflask? [*He sets his monkey on the piano and takes the vase.*] Oh, what I wouldn't do to have a piece like this!
- 9 DIANA: Wouldn't we all, Count, wouldn't we all! [*The guests all nod in agreement.*]
- 10 **ACT TWO:** [*The next morning. LADY MILTON walks into the music room, looks around, then screams. All her guests, including BARNES, in a long nightshirt and nightcap, come running into the room.*]
- 11 LADY MILTON: My Ming! It's gone! It's been stolen!
- 12 DR. HAMISH: But surely none of your honored guests would do such a thing!
- 13 BARNES: [*looking from face to face*] And yet, last night, every single person in the room expressed the wish that he or she might possess such a piece of priceless beauty! [*The guests all mutter amongst themselves, offended.*] Someone is missing. Where is Wendy, the maid?
- 14 LADY MILTON: Why, she left at dawn for her mother's in the village. It's her day off.
- 15 BARNES: Everyone else stays until we get to the bottom of this. [*He turns to DR. HAMISH.*] A private word with you, Doctor. [*He leads him away from the other guests.*] There's one thing you must do for me.
- 16 DR. HAMISH: Anything, Fenwick! You know that!
- 17 BARNES: Don't let me sleep past noon. I've got a case to solve! [*He leaves the room.*]



- 18 **ACT THREE:** *[Evening of the same day. The guests, looking anxious, are all gathered in the music room.]*
- 19 **DR. HAMISH:** Thank you all for coming. Mr. Barnes will be here shortly to solve the mystery. *[At that moment, BARNES enters the room rolling a large barrel, which he stands upright.]* Good heavens. Barnes! What are you doing with a barrel of herring?
- 20 **LADY MILTON:** And have you solved the case?
- 21 **BARNES:** I think I know where the vase is, and why. But I'm not so sure about who put it there. *[He pries the lid from the barrel and starts throwing fish over his shoulder. GILES, the butler, runs back and forth, catching them.]* Where is the last place you would look for a priceless vase?
- 22 **DR. HAMISH:** Why, in a fish barrel, I suppose.
- 23 **BARNES:** Exactly! But the purpose was not just to hide the vase; it was to protect it. The herring provide a perfectly safe cushion around such a fragile object. Ah, I have it! *[Just as he pulls the vase from the barrel, WENDY enters wearing her hat and coat.]*
- 24 **WENDY:** Oh, no! You've found it!
- 25 **BARNES:** Safe and sound, just as you intended. *[He turns to the guests.]* You see, the vase never actually was stolen. After the events of last night, Wendy meant only to protect it.
- 26 **WENDY:** What you say is true, sir. I know how much the Ming means to Lady Milton. And you sir, more than anyone, know how accidents can happen.
- 27 **BARNES:** And that's why you'd best look after this. *[As he walks toward WENDY, he trips. The vase flies high into the air but WENDY catches it.]* Case solved!



Think Use what you learned from reading the drama to answer the following questions.

- 1 Why did the playwright **most likely** include stage directions in line 2?
 - A to give details about who the characters are
 - B to let the audience know who stole the Ming vase
 - C to explain that the play is set in the music room of a wealthy woman's mansion
 - D to describe the setting and events that happen before the first actor's line

- 2 The playwright used the event of the concert in Act One to set up events for Act Two and Act Three. Why did the playwright **most likely** do this?
 - A to explain to the audience why Fenwick Barnes fell asleep
 - B to describe the value of, and interest in, the Ming moonflask
 - C to explain why Lady Milton thinks Fenwick Barnes is a great detective
 - D to describe a theory about how sound vibrations can make things fall

- 3 Read line 13 from Act Two of the drama.

BARNES: *[looking from face to face]* And yet, last night, every single person in the room expressed the wish that he or she might possess such a piece of priceless beauty! *[The guests all mutter amongst themselves, offended.]* Someone is missing. Where is Wendy, the maid?

Select **three** choices that **best** describe why the playwright included line 13.

- A to show Lady Milton's distress over the loss
- B to show that every person is a suspect
- C to show the value of the Ming vase
- D to show the characters' suspicion of Wendy
- E to show the guests do not like Barnes
- F to show that no guest caused the vase's disappearance

