

# Grace's Painful Pattern Repeated; See It?

by Jesse Kohn

"Do you know what a 'sestina' is?" Grace asked.

"Sounds painful," Pete said.

"A sestina is a nine-hundred-year-old poetic structure," said Grace, "in which six stanzas are each composed of six lines, and the same words that end the first six lines are repeated as the endings of the six lines in each of the six stanzas, except, of course, the order of the words is reconfigured according to a set pattern."

"Sounds painful," Pete repeated.

"If the lines in the first stanza end with the six words, numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, in that order," said Grace, "in the second stanza the lines end with the same words but in this order: 6, 1, 5, 2, 4, 3, you see?"

Pete said, "So, in the second stanza, it's the last word, the first, the second to last, the second, the third to last, and the third, as though you had drawn a spiral through the first six lines-is that it?"

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After she had explained the way the poem structure works-with the third stanza reconfiguring the order of the words that end the lines of the second stanza in the same way the second stanza had reconfigured the order of the words that had ended the lines of the first stanza (the third stanza thus: 3, 6, 4, 1, 2, 5) and so on through all six stanzas-Grace explained that she had become rather enamored with the sestina, though Pete didn't see the point of it.

"When I go for a walk, I always end up walking on the exact same streets, no matter how hard I try to find streets I've never been on before," said Grace.

Pete said, "I see...?"

"I start to find the city boring," said Grace, "and walking becomes painful."

"I think I know what you mean: every new thing seems like an old thing repeated."

"Whether walking around the city, or writing a poem, I think we're always following one pattern or another," said Grace, "and, to me, writing a sestina is one way of choosing a new pattern."

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Pete thought all the rest of the day about what Grace had said about her pattern.

As he left the café and boarded the subway heading uptown, he just couldn't make sense of it.

But wasn't this the same train he had taken a few days ago when he and Grace went to see that film about the man whose day, no matter what he did the next day and the day after and the day after

that, just repeated?

The train came to a stop, the doors opened, and a woman-she must have been a dancer-leapt onto the train with a dancer's grace.

The train started so abruptly, Pete banged his head against a handrail, which was surprisingly painful.

"Say, weren't you on this same train the other day?" asked the dancer, but Pete had hit his head so hard, he could hardly see.

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It turned out the dancer's name was Sestina, a strange name, and a stranger coincidence.

She said, "Isn't it strange the way strangers get caught up-like strands of thread in a tapestry-following the same pattern?"

"Stranger than you know," Pete said, nursing the bump on his head, "maybe even a little painful."

Sestina laughed and said, "Tell me about it!"

"I can't imagine you hurt yourself very often," Pete said, "what with your divine dancer's grace."

Sestina said, "I'll tell you what's painful: leaping the same graceful leap a thousand times."

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Even though Pete hadn't been to the museum in several weeks, he was beginning to get quite worried that everything he was doing-even this-was just something he'd already done, once more, repeated.

Then Sestina said, "Well this is my stop, but I have a feeling we might see each other-"

"Again?" Pete said, finally starting to understand what he had learned from Grace.

"I'm guessing you're going to the museum, too," said Sestina, laughing, "and you're starting to sense a pattern?"

So Sestina and Pete decided to go to the museum together since-what else could they do? The pattern had commanded it.

At least what the pattern commanded, seeing as Pete was beginning to grow rather fond of Sestina, wasn't the least bit painful for Pete.

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"The colors are so bright," Pete said, wincing at a modern abstract painting, "looking at it is literally painful."

"Sometimes," Sestina said, "painters have to paint something painful in order to avoid painting something that's just another painting repeated."

"Well, whatever it is," Pete said, his head still hurting, "I sure don't like it."

Next, they stood in front of a series of paintings-there must have been a hundred of them, all exactly the same, as far as the eye could see.

"This artist," said Sestina, "by exactly repeating the patterns of her own painting, avoided repeating any other artist's pattern."

At that moment Pete realized that he had never been to the modern art section before, having always returned to the familiar rooms where the art was easier to understand, and, as the newness of this filled him with a sense of joy, he said to Sestina, "Sestina, you've broken my pattern, and I attribute our new friendship to a rare state of grace."

# grace grace

## Definition

### noun

1. beauty in form, style, motion, or behavior.

*She moved with grace.*

2. a prayer said before, or sometimes after, eating.

*We bowed our heads and said grace.*

## Advanced Definition

### noun

1. beauty, harmony, or charm in bearing, appearance, or motion.

*She inherited her mother's athletic grace.*

*She danced with the grace of a ballerina.*

2. any aspect of one's bearing, personality, or talents that reveals beauty, harmony, or charm.

*the grace of eloquence.*

3. the inclination to do what is kind, right, or considerate.

*She had the grace not to point out his error.*

4. the temporary extending of a deadline.

5. in some religions, esp. Christianity, the condition of being favored, loved, or saved by God, esp. if this favor is unearned.

6. in some religions, esp. Christianity, the manifestation of God's action in man.

7. a prayer said before, or sometimes after, eating.

8. (pl.; cap.) in Greek and Roman mythology, the three goddesses that spread grace, charm, and beauty in human lives.

9. (sometimes cap.) a conventional title used in speaking to a duke, duchess, or archbishop, and formerly to a king or queen (usu. prec. by his, her, or your).

### transitive verb

1. to provide beauty, harmony, or charm to.

*His presence graced our party.*

## Spanish cognate

*gracia*: The Spanish word *gracia* means grace.

### These are some examples of how the word or forms of the word are used:

1. Ironically, he was a member of the class that seemed to benefit most from the current structure of government in France. Joining the American cause had the potential to both alienate him and **disgrace** his family. But Lafayette was determined to help the American cause.
2. Even though he was relatively short, Abraham was strong, fast, and he retained the **graceful** movements of a practiced dancer. The female elephants liked this, and during confrontations with humans or other herds, the different groups of males all competed to recruit Abraham to their team.
3. This morning, we celebrate a seamstress, slight in stature but mighty in courage. She defied the odds, and she defied injustice. She lived a life of activism, but also a life of dignity and **grace**. And in a single moment, with the simplest of gestures, she helped change America and change the world.
4. His projects have taken him all over. Besides the panorama he got to see atop Starbucks in Seattle, he was a photographer at a small paper in Seattle called the Mercer Island Reporter, and his photos **graced** the front page and insider pages alike, filling out the written stories with poignant images.
5. Penguins have evolved so they can spend time both in water and on land-although they are much more **graceful** in the water than they are on land! (Look at how they waddle awkwardly on land and how they glide smoothly through the water.)
6. "The ocean beneath the depths really is another world. The waves, plankton, coral, fish, turtles, rays, dolphins, whales and sharks are all connected and need each other to survive. Watching how the world works so **gracefully** in that circle of life is amazing."
7. Public artwork now **graces** 140 subway stations as part of the Art for Transit program. "You can probably say that the New York subway system is one of the largest art museums in the world," Roxanne Robertson of the New York Transit Museum told Weekly Reader.

# pattern pat · tern

## Definition

### noun

1. an arrangement of shapes, lines, letters, numbers, or colors that can be repeated or used again and again.

*The new dishes have a pattern with leaves and flowers.*

2. a guide; model.

*Lay the pattern carefully over the fabric.*

## Advanced Definition

### noun

1. a regular or formal design, esp. one used to decorate something.

*The wallpaper has a pattern of dainty flowers and pale stripes.*

2. any design that resembles this.

*the pattern in a snowflake*

3. an ideal to be imitated; archetype.
4. a guide; model.

*Both dresses were made from the same pattern.*

5. a distinctive style or form of something.

*a new pattern of cookware*

6. the characteristic activities and qualities of a group, person, or thing.

*patterns of animal behavior*

7. a plan for making a garment.

### transitive verb

1. to make, fashion, or behave according to a pattern.

*He patterns himself after his teacher.*

2. to cover with a pattern or design.

## Spanish cognate

*patrón*: The Spanish word *patrón* means pattern.

### These are some examples of how the word or forms of the word are used:

1. The world is changing. That much is certain. Populations are being forced to endure events, weather **patterns** and temperatures that could not have been imagined previously.
2. Although Mars is significantly farther from the sun than Earth, both planets orbit the same star. Their distance from each other changes during each cycle, but Earth comes into alignment with Mars once every 26 months-"lapping" t in a perpetual race around the sun. Observing this **pattern**, astronomers can work with engineers to pinpoint the optimal month, day, and time for a spacecraft to leave Earth on a speedy oneway trip
3. I looked at her stooped shoulders and her shriveled hands in a neat little pile on her lap, and wondered how long I could go on doing the same thing every day. I was filled with an urge to suddenly jump up and break the **pattern**, but all I could really master was moving my coffee to my other side and switching which leg was crossed over the other, exhaling sharply, like a cat that had been inadvertently kicked in the middle of the night.
4. This **pattern** of storms and the lightning they often bring is predictable. It is so common that Florida has been called the Lightning Capital of the World, and the people of Florida know when to go inside!
5. As Rodriguez gives his short burst of flame, the air inside swirls in complicated, invisible **patterns**. Little of it escapes out the hole in the bottom-instead, it cools off gradually by coming into contact with the surrounding air outside the balloon's thin nylon wall.
6. The power of an earthquake is measured by using a seismograph. When an earthquake hits an area, it feels like the ground is shaking. A seismograph uses a pen to draw a zig-zag **pattern** that shows how bad the shakes are during an earthquake.
7. In the United States the Burmese python is a popular pet. Docile and beautifully **patterned** in brown and gold diamond shapes, these snakes can be purchased at pet stores or reptile shows. Owners keep them in cages or tanks and feed them rats or mice.
8. Even stronger evidence is found in the rocks of these two continents. Africa and South America are thousands of miles apart, but share very similar rock layers and **patterns**. These shared rock layers and patterns may indicate that the two continents (and their rocks) used to make up one larger piece of the big Pangaea puzzle.
9. Professor Helfand explained that each computer was connected to a specific telescope, and that there was one person in charge of each telescope, and observing the movement of one planet, or star. Jeremy noticed that some of the charts showed **patterns**: numbers that repeated, timings separated by exactly one hour. The professor showed him that the repeating numbers were distances between planets, or between planets and their moons, or distances between stars, and showed him how the orbits of these planetary bodies created patterns of collective behavior.

# repeat re · peat

## Definition

### verb

1. to say or produce sound a second time.

*The teacher repeated the question.*

*The ship repeated its signal.*

2. to make the same sounds or say the same words that someone else has just said.

*The children repeated the words that the teacher read to them.*

*The students repeated the sounds of the letters.*

3. to do or experience again.

*You must repeat these safety procedures each time you use the machine.*

## Advanced Definition

### transitive verb

1. to state or utter again (what has already been said).
2. to restate or duplicate (the words of someone else).
3. to tell (something one has heard) to another.
4. to do or experience again (something that has gone on before).

### intransitive verb

1. to state or do something again.

### noun

1. the act of repeating.
2. something repeated.

## Spanish cognate

*repetir*: The Spanish word *repetir* means repeat.

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**These are some examples of how the word or forms of the word are used:**

1. The taller elephant looked ancient but, in fact, the old bull was just 10 years old. **Repeated** stretches of starvation had left his skin wrinkled and loose on his ribs. His left trunk was broken from so many fights for dominance.
2. You might think of sports injuries as sudden: You trip and twist your ankle, say. But those two teens developed overuse injuries, which occur when the stress from running, throwing, or another **repeated** motion adds up over time. Eventually, your muscles, bones, joints, or ligaments can't handle the strain.
3. The Hebrew Bible is the central text of the faith. It consists of a number of books, beginning with the Torah, which is the same as the Christian Old Testament. These books assert **repeatedly** that the Jewish god is the one god, and that all the other gods that other religions believe or have believed in are not real. This is told over and over from the revelation of God to Abraham in the Book of Genesis and the revelation to the Israelites on Mount Sinai.
4. Throwing a ball puts stress on the shoulder and the elbow. **Repeated**, forceful throwing can cause these overuse injuries.
5. Kramer recently followed healthy men and women who were screened **repeatedly** for four common cancers-colorectal cancer and lung cancer, plus breast cancer in the women and prostate cancer in the men. The prostate is a gland in the male reproductive system. The results were startling. In three years of regular screening, the women had a 50 percent chance and the men a 60 percent chance of receiving a false positive.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is a sestina?

- A. a dance in which people make the same graceful leap a thousand times
- B. an abstract painting that makes people wince when they look at it
- C. a movie about a man whose days repeat themselves over and over
- D. a nine-hundred-year-old poetic structure that follows a pattern of sixes

2. What is the structure of this story?

- A. It is divided into six sections, and each section is divided into six paragraphs.
- B. It is divided into two sections, and each section presents the point of view of a different character.
- C. It is divided into four sections, which move back and forth between the lives of two characters.
- D. It is divided into three sections, and each section ends with the same sentence.

3. Read the following sentence from the story: "Sometimes," Sestina said, "painters have to paint something painful in order to avoid painting something that's just another painting repeated."

- A. Sestina believes that painters would rather paint something that looks like another painting than paint something painful.
- B. Sestina believes that painters would rather paint something painful than paint something that looks like another painting.
- C. Sestina believes that painters make paintings because they enjoy causing pain in people who visit art museums.
- D. Sestina believes that painters should make more paintings that look like other paintings and fewer paintings that are painful.

4. What is Grace's attitude toward patterns?

- A. Grace likes following familiar patterns when she is walking around the city but not when she is writing a poem.
- B. Grace likes following familiar patterns when she is walking around the city and when she is writing poems.
- C. Grace likes patterns that are new to her more than patterns that are familiar to her.
- D. Grace likes patterns that are familiar to her more than patterns that are new to her.

5. What is the theme of this story?

- A. the joy of painting
- B. the joy of dancing
- C. the consequences of telling lies
- D. the significance of patterns

6. Read the following sentence from the story: "The colors are so bright,' Pete said, wincing at a modern abstract painting, 'looking at it is **literally painful**."

What does Pete mean when he says that looking at the painting is "**literally painful**"?

- A. Looking at the painting reminds him of a sestina.
- B. Looking at the painting reminds him of a painful moment in his life.
- C. Looking at the painting causes him to feel pain.
- D. Looking at the painting causes him to imagine something painful.

7. Select the word that best completes the sentence.

Grace likes the sestina very much; \_\_\_\_\_, Pete doesn't see the point of it.

- A. in contrast
- B. therefore
- C. for instance
- D. most importantly

8. Where do Pete and Sestina go after they get off the train?

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**9.** Describe Pete's feelings at the museum.

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**10.** At the end of the story, Pete says to Sestina, "Sestina, you've broken my pattern, and I attribute our new friendship to a rare state of grace." What does Pete mean by this statement? Support your answer with evidence from the passage.

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