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# The emotional power of poetry and its impact on our brains

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This research was conducted by **Eugen Wassiliwizky**, **Valentin Wagner**, **Stefan Koelsch**, and **Winfried Menninghaus** at **Frankfurt am Main**, and **Thomas Jacobson** at **Helmut Schmidt University, Germany.**

## Summary

It is widely accepted that music can engage us, triggering emotional responses such us “chills” and “goosebumps”. In this study, scientists demonstrated that recited poetry can generate similar emotional impacts, although the brain circuits involved seem to be different.

## Measuring chills and goosebumps to understand our emotions

Recited poetry is the most ancient record of human literature, however there has been very little research on the emotional experiences it can trigger. In this study, recordings of a set of poems where played and participants reported when they felt chills by pushing a button. Also, a “goose-cam” was used to capture videos of the skin surface to evaluate the generation and duration of goosebumps. They also evaluated heart rate and activity of facial muscles associated with both happiness and sadness. In a separate experiment, they monitored participants’ brains to assess the areas activated while listening to poem soundtracks.

## People experienced chills and/or goosebumps while listening to recited poetry

They also activated facial muscles linked to sadness. According to the brain scans, this is thought to be related to areas of the brain that are devoted to mediating rewarding experiences. Altogether, the negative effect associated to

the facial muscle activity along with activation of the rewarding brain system could explain for the very first time the philosophical and artistic concept of “being moved” by some artistic experiences.

This summary is by **Ailin Buzzi, King’s Knowledge Exchange Associate**

## Keywords

**poetry** **experiment** **Emotions** **Germany**

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