

# Write It Out

## TOOLKITS FOR WRITERS



## POETRY

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# Introduction

## POETRY

If you hear someone say they “don’t like poetry,” you might ask if they have read every type, which is unlikely because there are more than 50 kinds! Just as there are kinds of fiction a reader prefers, say, for example, traditional mystery novels instead of romance stories or experimental narratives, there is certainly at least one kind of poem that every reader will enjoy.

No one writes the same kind of poems all the time, in either topic or style. The diversity of topics (what a poem is “about”) and style (how it is written: word choice, line length, tone, etc.) make poetry exciting to read.

This toolkit has been designed to introduce your students to poetry - both exploring and analyzing written works, as well as drafting their own original works.

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## So what is poetry, anyway?

To start, there is **free verse poetry**, which means poems that do not have strict patterns of rhyme or meter. Many of the poems often taught in school are **formal verse**, or poems that do have clear repetition or patterns of **rhyme** and **meter**. Formal verse itself consists of so many kinds, or forms, such as **haiku**, **sonnet**, **villanelle**, and **sestina**, just to name a few. Some poems—free verse or formal verse—tell a story (**narrative poems**), sometimes quickly in a short space and other times in a detailed way that stretches for many pages, even to the size of a small novel! In fact, novels (long fictional stories) started off as free verse, with a plot and dialogue, recited aloud, long before stories were recorded on paper.

How can you identify something as a poem as opposed to a fictional story, which implies **prose** (non-metrical writing)? In simple terms, we identify poetry as being in **verse**, the opposite of prose. Prose and poetry are both kinds of literature, but prose is told in regular wording and sentences while poets make careful choices about word meaning, sound, line endings (called **line breaks**), and sometimes rhyme and meter.

People often disagree on what makes a piece of literature a poem or a short story (or a short-short story!); they even disagree on a good definition of poetry itself.

One thing most agree on is that poetry more than prose is concerned with the way it sounds. Poet Mary Oliver said that poetry was closer to singing than other forms of writing, and that this made it easier to remember, that when you remember a poem, it becomes your own, to carry with you.

These genres, categories, and characteristics are not usually neatly divided, nor should they be. Successful fiction writers certainly choose their words with care and often include lovely “poetic” descriptions, and many fictional works are told in verse (epic verse), or contain elements typically found in poetry. Similarly, there are prose poems, in which the endings of individual lines of the poem are not chosen by the poet but continue until the margin is reached, like the text in these paragraphs. The blurring of genres may make some uncomfortable but keep the following in mind: When we discuss such issues, literature lovers are simply enjoying the debate as an occasion for discussion. No one should get so weighed down by the details that they are unable to enjoy the works themselves, or to create their own works! An interesting, well-crafted piece of writing is always easy to identify, be it a poem, fictional story, or longer novel.

Poets themselves have and continue to try defining poetry. Perhaps the best approach is to teach students to identify those elements common to poetry then ask students “What do you think poetry is? How would you define it?” The best way to understand any literary genre, perhaps especially poetry, is to read many works by lots of different authors and, for a deep dive, to try writing it. Here is one more definition of poetry:

**Though poetry can share qualities of prose and vice versa, poetry is distinguished from prose by the writer’s attempt to create certain emotions in readers in a smaller textual space, with great care given to line length, line breaks, word choice, and, often, rhyme and meter.**

The Glossary included in this Toolkit, from Kenn Nesbitt, will help students learn more about this expansive, wonderful genre of literature; the activities are meant to encourage students to write their own poems. We hope this toolkit highlights the poetic diversity that exists in literature and in the possibilities available to students to explore their creativity.

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## ACTIVITY

# Pondering Poetry

**Educators, please note:** This activity should be done at the start of a poetry unit.

### Step 1:

Invite students, either individually or with a partner, to answer the introductory questions about poetry. Questions are listed here, as well as on a printable worksheet included on the next page. Partners can record the other person's answers then each give an overview of what they learned when the class returns to discuss.

- What is a poem? Try to explain it as if the person reading your definition has never heard the word "poem."
- What do you think most poems are "about"--what topics are suitable for poems? What topics are not appropriate? Why?
- Have you ever written a poem? If yes, what led you to do it? If no, why not?

### Step 2:

Have the class discuss what they discovered in Step 1.

- On the board (or computer document, if virtual) make a list of the characteristics as they call out their answers.
- What characteristics were mentioned several times? What is still needed?
- Now make a list of topics that students thought were suitable for poems. Also ask and record the answers to "What topics would we not use as a poem subject?" (Note to educators: ANY topic can make a good poem! Let the students discover this as they read poems on a variety of subjects.)
- Help the class summarize their beliefs about appropriate and inappropriate poetry topics.

### Step 3:

Have a class discussion about writing poems—who has written one and why? Who has not and why?

### Step 4:

Share the following topic list and see which ones students would NOT think are appropriate for poetry:

rain	sleeping	potatoes	anger
socks	morning	birthdays	chickens
night	your toes	cats	love
worries	gardens	siblings	washing machine

ALL are topics poets have written about! Students should understand that no topic is off limits because it has been written about—each writer will create a poem unique to his/her/their experiences, writing style, and perspective of the world.

### Age-Appropriate Poetry Examples

PBS LearningMedia (PBSLearningMedia.org), a free online repository of classroom-ready resources, has illustrated examples of poetry for young learners-

- Poem: I Like It When It's Mizzly
- Poem: Ode to the Washing Machine
- Poem: Baby Chick
- Poem: You Never Hear the Garden Grow
- ... among others.

For older students, PBS LearningMedia's collection *Poetry Everywhere* has several examples, as does the Poetry Foundation (PoetryFoundation.org).

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# Pondering Poetry

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

What is a **poem**? (Hint: Try to explain it as if the person reading your definition has never heard the word "poem.")

What do you think most poems are "about"--what topics are suitable for poems? What topics are **not** appropriate? Why?

Have you ever written a poem?

**YES**    **NO**

If **yes**, what led you to do it?  
If **no**, why not?



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## GLOSSARY

# Elements of a Poem

Though not every poem will have each of these elements, most will, or some variation. Learning the basic characteristics of a poem helps to talk about poetry more confidently and build on each concept learned.

### TITLE

A title should indicate to the reader what the subject of the poem is. At times, poets can reveal important information not included in the poem itself.

### SPEAKER

The speaker of the poem is similar to the narrator in a prose work. i.e. first person, third person. The poet is not always the speaker.

### INTERNAL RHYME

Rhymes within a line of poetry

### END RHYME

Rhyming words at the ends of the lines of a poem

### RHYME SCHEME

The pattern of end rhymes in a poem, written out as letters, such as AABB or ABAB. In this case, the rhyme scheme is ABA in each stanza.

### ENJAMBED LINE

The sentence or thought continues into the following line(s) without any grammatical stops

### END-STOPPED LINE

End-stopped lines end a complete thought or phrase with a grammatical marker -- such as with a dash, parenthesis, colon, semi-colon, or period.

### STANZA

A group of lines in a poem, separated by space from other stanzas, much like a paragraph in prose.

Momma Possum By: Arwen Drew

My father says she comes at night  
to hiss and maybe bite. He thinks  
she's mean, but he's not right!

I told my dad that's not fair, no way!  
You shouldn't judge a book by its cover.  
Dad also likes to sleep all day!

She wants to get along with you <sup>A</sup>  
and visits when she can. She's busy <sup>B</sup>  
with her babies, faces white as moons. <sup>A</sup>

I like to leave her tasty scraps,  
a melon rind or two, that she can nibble  
and share with the riders on her back.

Her teeth and snarl are just a show,  
to care for what she has. Her children eat  
and she says "thanks" with a twitch of her nose.

She has not a snout but an actual nose,  
a pink button like a cat. Her eyes  
are large and full of what she knows.

Wait until you see this friend and mother  
in the tree tonight. With her tail  
she does better chin-ups than my brother!



Kenn Nesbitt's

# Glossary of Poetic Terms

## A

### Accent

The emphasis placed on some syllables in words more than others. For example, the word "apple" has two syllables, and the accent is on the first syllable, so it is pronounced "AP-pull." "Banana," on the other hand, has three syllables, with the accent on the second syllable, so it is pronounced "buh-NA-nuh."

### Acrostic

A form of poem in which the first syllables of each line spell out a word, name, or phrase.

### Alliteration

Repeating the consonant sounds at the beginnings of nearby words, such as the "p" sound in the words "My puppy makes pizza" in the poem My Puppy Makes Pizza.

### Anagram

A word or phrase created by rearranging the letters of another word or phrase. For example, "notes" is an anagram of "stone."

### Antonym

A word that has the opposite meaning of another word. For example, "dark" is an antonym of "light."

### Assonance

Repeating the vowel sounds in the stressed, or accented, syllables in nearby words. For example, in the phrase "flying kites" the repeated long "i" sound are assonant.

## B

### Ballad

A form of poetry, usually suitable for singing, that tells a story in stanzas of two or four lines, and often has a refrain.

## C

### Cinquain

A five-line poetic form in which the lines have 2, 4, 6, 8, and 2 syllables, in that order.

### Clerihew

A four-line humorous poetic form comprised of two rhymed couplets, with the first line usually being the someone's name.

### Close Rhyme

A rhyme of two words that are next to one another or close to one another, such as "Humpty Dumpty," "tighty-whitey," "fat cat," or "fair and square." Not to be confused with Near Rhyme.

### Concrete Poem

A poem in which the meaning is conveyed by the placement and design of the words on the page instead of, or in addition to, the usual arrangement of words. Also sometimes called a "shape poem" or "visual poem."

### Consonance

The repetition of consonant sounds within nearby words, especially the consonant sounds at the ends of words, as in "a stroke of luck" or "a bite to eat."

### Couplet

Two lines of poetry, one after the other, that rhyme and are of the same length and rhythm. For example, "I do not like green eggs and ham. / I do not like them Sam I Am."

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## D

### Double Rhyme

A rhyme where the stress is on the second-to-last syllable of the words, and the end sounds are the same, starting with the vowel of the stressed syllables. Some examples are batter / fatter, ocean / lotion, and camping / stamping. Double rhymes and triple rhymes are also called “feminine rhymes.”

## E

### End Rhyme

Rhyming words at the ends of the lines of a poem.

### Epitaph

A short poem written about someone who has died, often inscribed on the headstone of their grave. Epitaphs usually praise the person, and are sometimes humorous.

### Exaggeration

To overstate something; to claim that it is bigger, better, faster, smellier, etc. than is actually true. When Larry Made Lasagna is an example of a exaggeration poem.

## F

### Feminine Rhyme

A double rhyme or triple rhyme.

### Foot

In poetry, a group of two or more syllables, one of which is stressed. Metrical poems are often written in feet with the same number of syllables with the stress in the same place in each foot. For example, the line “My puppy punched me in the eye” is made up of four feet, each with the stress on the second syllable, as in “my PUP | py PUNCHED | me IN | the EYE.” The most common poetic feet are two or three syllables long.

### Forced Rhyme

Most commonly, an end rhyme where the lines are written in an unnatural manner in order to “force” the words to rhyme. A forced rhyme may also be a near rhyme, wrenched rhyme, or a line where irrelevant or unnecessary information is added to the poem for the sake of making lines rhyme.

### Form

A “type” of poem, written by following a set of rules such as the number of lines or syllables, the placement of rhymes, etc.. Common poetic forms include acrostic, cinquain, free verse, haiku, etc.

### Free Verse

A poetic form that avoids using fixed patterns of meter. Free verse often also avoids rhymes, but still may make use of other poetic techniques such as imagery and metaphor, as well as sound devices such as assonance and alliteration.

## H

### Haiku

A short, unrhymed Japanese poetic form with three lines of five syllables, seven syllables, and five syllables.

### Homonym

A word that has the same spelling and sound as another word, but a different meaning. For example “fine” (an adjective meaning nice) and “fine” (a noun meaning money you have to pay as a punishment) are homonyms.

### Homophone

A word that has the same sound as another word, but a different spelling and meaning. For example, “there,” “their,” and “they’re” are homophones.

### Hyperbole

Pronounced “hi-PER-buh-lee.” A extreme and obvious exaggeration, not meant to be believed or taken literally. For example, “he has million-dollar hair” or “this test is taking forever.”

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## I

### **Imagery**

Language and poetic techniques used to appeal to the reader's senses (sight, sound, smell, etc.) to create mental pictures and cause emotions in the reader.

### **Internal Rhyme**

Rhymes within a line of poetry.

## L

### **Light Verse**

Poetry that is intended to be humorous, amusing, or entertaining. While there is some light verse written in free verse, most light verse is written in rhyme and meter. There are also many light-verse poetic forms, such as limericks, clerihews, double-dactyls, etc.

### **Limerick**

A humorous 5-line poetic form with an AABBA rhyme scheme.

### **Line**

A single row of words in a poem. For example, a limerick has five lines, while a haiku has three lines. Lines are one of the main things that distinguish poetry from prose.

### **List Poem**

A poem that contains a list of things, people, places, etc.

## M

### **Masculine Rhyme**

A single rhyme.

### **Metaphor**

A figure of speech, where a thing is described as being something else in order to suggest a similarity between the two. For example, "The cat was a rag doll in my arms" or "Nature wore its winter robe."

### **Meter**

Rhythmical patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables in poetry.

## N

### **Narrative Poem**

A poem that tells a story. Narrative poems usually have a plot and one or more characters.

### **Near Rhyme**

Also called a "slant rhyme" or a "half rhyme," "near rhyme" is a general term describing words that sound similar, but aren't a perfect rhyme. Assonance, consonance and sight rhymes are common types of near rhymes.

### **Nonsense Poem**

A form of light verse, usually rhymed and metrical, often with strange characters, fantastic or impossible situations, and made-up words. Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky* and Edward Lear's *The Owl* and the *Pussycat* are famous examples of nonsense poetry.

### **Nursery Rhyme**

A short, rhyming poem for young children, often telling a short story or describing an interesting character. The most well-known nursery rhymes in the English language are those attributed to Mother Goose.

## O

### **Occasional Poem**

A poem written to commemorate a specific occasion or event, such as a birthday, wedding, funeral, anniversary, graduation, military victory, etc.

### **Onomatopoeia**

A word whose sound is similar to the thing or action it refers to, such as "buzz" or "hiss."

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## P

### **Palindrome**

A word or phrase that is spelled the same backward as it is forward, ignoring spaces, capitalization, and punctuation, such as “Bob,” “mom,” “radar,” “race car,” “madam, I’m Adam,” etc.

### **Parody**

A poem written in the style of another poem, usually humorous. Parodies usually assume the reader is familiar with the original work. For example, the poem “Let Me Out of the Classroom” by Kenn Nesbitt is a parody of the song “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.”

### **Perfect Rhyme**

Two words that have exactly the same vowel and consonant sounds at the ends, starting with the first vowel of the last stressed syllable. For example, green/bean, dummy/tummy, and cavity/gravity are all perfect rhymes. Note that the first consonant sound of the last stressed syllable must be different. For example leaf/belief is not a perfect rhyme because the final stressed syllable of each word begins with the same consonant “l” sound. See also: Near Rhyme, Assonance, and Consonance.

### **Personification**

Giving human characteristics to non-human things, such as animals, inanimate objects, or ideas. For example, “The sun smiled down on the beach” or, “The trees waved at the birds flying by.”

### **Poem**

A written composition, often using rhythm, rhyme, metaphor, and other such artistic techniques to express an idea, feelings, or a story.

### **Poet**

A person who writes poems.

### **Poetry**

Literature written in verse, as opposed to prose, often written in metrical lines.

### **Prose**

Ordinary writing or spoken language, usually written in sentences and paragraphs, as opposed to rhythmical lines.

### **Pun**

A “play on words,” usually using homophones or homonyms, where a word or phrase has multiple meanings. For example, “Six was afraid of Seven because Seven ate Nine.” This is a pun because the word “ate” sounds like “eight.”

## Q

### **Quatrain**

A four-line poem or stanza.

## R

### **Refrain**

A phrase, line, or stanza that is repeated throughout a poem, often after each stanza.

### **Repetition**

Using the same word, phrase, line, or stanza two or more times in a poem. See How to Write a Repetition Poem to learn how to use repetition in your own poetry.

### **Rhyme**

Having the same sound at the end of two or more words such as pine / fine, nickel / pickle, and ability / fragility. See also Perfect Rhyme, Near Rhyme, Wrenched Rhyme, and How to Rhyme Video Lesson Plan.

### **Rhyme Scheme**

The pattern of end rhymes in a poem, written out as letters, such as AABB or ABAB.

### **Rhythm**

The sound and feel created by the pattern of accented and unaccented syllables, usually repeated, in a poem.

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## S

### Sight Rhyme

Words that end with the same letters, but not the same sound, such as rough / cough / plough or prove / love / grove.

### Simile

A comparison between two unlike things, usually using “like,” “as,” or “than.” For example, “his imagination was like a bird in flight.”

### Single Rhyme

A rhyme in which the stress is on the final syllable of the words, such as cat / hat, and play / away. Also called a “masculine rhyme.”

### Stanza

A group of lines in a poem, separated by space from other stanzas, much like a paragraph in prose.

### Stress

Same as accent.

### Subject

The main idea of a poem, or what the poem is about. For example, Basketball Is Lots of Fun is a poem about basketball, so basketball is the subject.

### Syllable

A part of a word, usually a vowel and its surrounding consonants, that makes a single sound when spoken. All words have at least one syllable. For example, cat, I, and would are all one syllable long because they are spoken with a single movement of the mouth. Cattle, eyeball, and wouldn't are all two syllables because they require two separate sounds to be spoken.

### Synonym

A word that has the same, or nearly the same, meaning as another word.

## T

### Tanka

A 5-line, 31-syllable unrhymed traditional Japanese poetic form, with five syllables on the first and third lines, and seven syllables on the second, fourth, and fifth lines.

### Tercet

A group of three lines that rhyme with one another, or are connected to another tercet by their rhyme scheme.

### Theme

The main idea or point of a poem. The theme is different than the subject or topic of the poem. The subject is what the poem is about, while the theme is what the poem means. For example, in the poem “We Ate all the Cheetos,” the subject of the poem is eating tasty foods, but the theme of the poem is that it can be hard to eat healthy foods.

### Topic

Same as subject.

### Triple Rhyme

A rhyme in which the third-to-last syllable in the words final stressed syllable. For example, cavity / gravity, hammering / stammering, and nobility / agility are all triple rhymes. Double rhymes and triple rhymes are also called “feminine rhymes.”

## V

### Verse

Verse has several meanings, including:

- A line of a poem
- A poem
- A stanza within a poem
- Poetry in general, especially metrical poetry

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## W

### **Wrenched Rhyme**

Rhyming the final syllables of two words, where one is stressed and the other is not. For example the words “sing” and “morning” are a wrenched rhyme because “sing” is stressed on the final (and only) syllable, but “morning” is stressed on the second-to-last syllable. Other examples include tin/imagine, frog/catalog, etc. See also Perfect Rhyme.

See Kenn's online glossary, which includes related links to lessons, games, and additional resources:  
[poetry4kids.com/glossary/poetry-dictionary-for-kids/](http://poetry4kids.com/glossary/poetry-dictionary-for-kids/)

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## KENN NESBITT'S ACTIVITY

# Poetry Charades

Kids love to get up and get moving, which is great because movement can help reinforce learning. Most children also love games. Put movement and games together, and you have a high energy activity that can be done quietly in any classroom: Charades!

The following game of charades uses the twenty-seven activities found in the poem "I Don't Know What to Do Today," by former Children's Poet Laureate, Kenn Nesbitt. It's simple to prepare, exciting, and teaches children that poetry is fun while helping them reinforce important skills like memorization, cooperation, and word association.

- 1 Print and prepare the game cards. (Pages AA-BB)
- 2 Distribute the poem to students. (Page AAA)
- 3 Read the poem out loud together.
- 4 Distribute the "game cards," one to each student. Ask them to look at their card, then turn it upside down on their desk. It's a secret!
- 5 Explain the rules of charades:
  - Tell them to use their body to act out the activity written on their card.
  - NO talking!
  - You may want to put a time limit on each turn.
  - As one student acts out his or her card, the other students guess what they're doing. Have the students raise their hands, and you (the teacher) can call on them. It's best if they're not shouting out answers.
  - The student who is the first to guess the answer gets to go next. Once they've been a guesser and an actor, they may not guess any more.
  - Once all the activities have been guessed, the game is over!
- 6 Finally, line the children up in the correct order of the poem. You read the introductory line (adding your own "I don't know" motion). Have the students recite their line of the poem while making their motion for the activity. When it gets to the end of the line, you can recite the final verse or choose a student to do so.

You can practice this a couple of times, and then record it and have the children watch themselves bring the poem to life! Be sure to share your fun with administration, families, and KET! (Tag @EducationKET on Twitter or Facebook to share the fun!)

This activity was adapted, with permission, from the many additional poetry lessons and activities at Kenn Nesbitt's website: [poetry4kids.com](http://poetry4kids.com)

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## I Don't Know What to Do Today

I don't know what to do today.  
Perhaps I'll go outside and play,  
or stay indoors and watch TV,  
or take a bath, or climb a tree.  
Or maybe I'll go ride my bike,  
or pick my nose, or take a hike,  
or jump a rope, or scratch my head,  
or play a game, or stay in bed,  
or dance a jig, or pet the cat,  
or drink some milk, or buy a hat,  
or sing a song, or read a book,  
or change my socks, or learn to cook,  
or dig a hole, or eat a pear,  
or call my friends, or brush my hair,  
or hold my breath, or have a race,  
or stand around and slap my face.  
I'm so confused, and bored, and blue,  
to not know what I ought to do.  
I guess that I should just ask you.  
So, what do you think I should do?

-Kenn Nesbitt

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**I don't know  
what to do  
today.**

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Perhaps I'll go  
**outside and play,**

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or stay indoors and  
**watch TV,**

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or  
**take a bath,**

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or  
**climb a tree.**

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Or maybe I'll go  
**ride my bike,**

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or

**pick my nose,**

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or

**take a hike,**

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or

**jump a rope,**

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or

**scratch my  
head,**

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or

**play a game,**

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or

**stay in bed,**

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or

**dance a jig,**

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or

**pet the cat,**

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or

**drink some milk,**

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or

**buy a hat,**

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or

**sing a song,**

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or

**read a book,**

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**have a race,**

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or

**stand around**

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and

**slap my face.**

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I'm so

**confused,**

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and

**bored,**

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and  
**blue,**

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to not know what I  
ought to do.  
I guess that I should  
just  
**ask you,**

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**So, what do you  
think I should  
do?**

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## ACTIVITY

# Take a Look

Poet Ted Kooser explained his goal when writing poems: "I write for other people with the hope that I can help them to see the wonderful things within their everyday experiences. In short, I want to show people how interesting the ordinary world can be if you pay attention."

Often, when we look closely at or think about something considered ordinary, the way William Carlos Williams does in his short poem, "The Red Wheelbarrow," we find something to celebrate and sometimes are surprised by the discovery. This process can lead to writing a poem called an ode. To do that, you must "pay attention" (to quote Mr. Kooser) to something often overlooked.

### Step 1:

Using the provided template, ask students to describe a wheelbarrow. How would they describe it to someone who has never seen nor used one?

Consider doing a class gallery walk so that students can see how peers have described the wheelbarrow, using metacognition to add to their own knowledge base.

Extend the discussion by asking students to think about, and share, what wheelbarrows may help someone do, or who might be likely to use a wheelbarrow in their daily work.

### Step 2:

Provide a copy, (included on the next page for convenience) of the famous poem "The Red Wheelbarrow" by William Carlos Williams.

### Step 3:

Assist students in analyzing the poem.

- What do your students notice?
- What patterns can be identified?
- Look closely at the number of words in each line of the poem.
- Consider the syllables in each stanza's second line (upon, barrow, water, chickens).

### Step 4:

Ask students if they have ever seen a unicycle or ever tried to ride one. Then, read out loud Ken Nesbitt's humorous ode on these one-wheeled wonders, included in the following pages for your convenience. As students read along or listen carefully—can they spot the play on words he sprinkles throughout the poem?

### Step 5:

Using a fresh copy of the "Take a Look" student thought-sheet, included in the following pages for convenience, ask students to create their own ode - perhaps to a mundane, everyday object. Once students have collected their thoughts, they should compose a poem. Challenge students to include several poetic elements in their poem. Students should reference the Glossary as needed.

When in doubt, when you are looking to a specific poem or specific style of a writer, you should cite that reference just beneath the poem title and author.

For example:

The Darkest Hour By Janet Boshears  
In the style of Langston Hughes' "Mother to Son"

Cow Song By William F. Glass  
Inspired by Elizabeth Bishop's "The Fish."

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# Take a Look

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Item: \_\_\_\_\_

What is it? How would you describe it to someone who has never seen, felt, or touched it?

Illustrate it. Add labels, if necessary.

How might it be important or useful to someone?

Who might find it important or useful?

What did you discover upon taking a closer look at it?

## The Red Wheelbarrow

By William Carlos Williams

so much depends  
upon

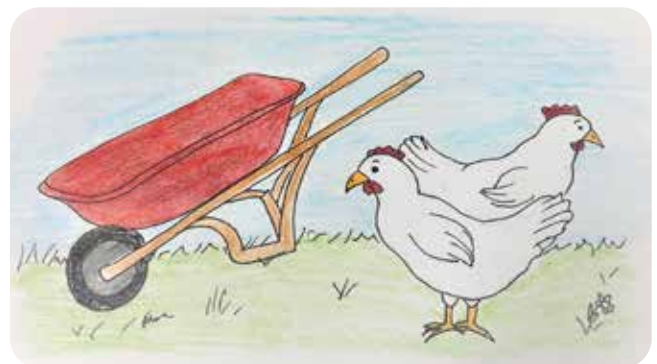
a red wheel  
barrow

glazed with rain  
water

beside the white  
chickens

This work is in the public domain in the United States because it was published before January 1, 1927.

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## Ode on a Unicycle

Unicycle, unicycle,  
radiant and round.  
Spying you, you spoke to me  
without a single sound.

Unicycle, unicycle,  
beautiful and kind,  
like the petals on a flower  
wheeling through my mind.

Unicycle, unicycle,  
you're my one desire.  
Losing you would break my heart.  
Of you I'll never tire.

Unicycle, unicycle  
always by my side.  
That's, of course, because you are  
impossible to ride.

-Kenn Nesbitt



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## ACTIVITY

# Unwrapping A Poem

Checking each line of a poem to determine the meter (pattern and number of stressed and unstressed syllables) is called scansion. To “scan” a poem as well as look at how it is organized and what it means is called analysis. That sounds scientific and analytical, but it can also be thought, more poetically, as unwrapping the present of the poem--what have we the readers been given? If we look carefully, we will see!

Though there is no one “right” way to read or interpret a poem, it is also untrue that, as is sometimes stated, poems “can mean anything.” A good analysis uses examples from the poem itself to support the interpretation.

## for younger poets

- 1 Ask students to read Shel Silverstein’s poem “One Inch Tall.” Read it a second time, aloud.
- 2 Play the video “Predicting a Poem” from the *Let’s Learn* collection in PBS LearningMedia (PBS LearningMedia.org).  
\*Note: Educators should watch the video beforehand to be ready to pause the video as the host asks questions.
- 3 As the host asks questions, pause the video to allow students to mark parts of the poem (rhyming words) or to share their answers.
- 4 Do the shared writing as directed by the video host.
- 5 Write a poem! Have students write their own poems (individually or with a partner) that starts “If I was invisible.” Encourage your poets to use end rhyme in their poems.

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## ACTIVITY

# Unwrapping A Poem

### for older poets

- Share with students the following title: "Those Winter Sundays."
- Then, ask students to think about and discuss this title:
  - What might this poem be about, based on the title?
  - How does the title try to interest and/or inform readers?
  - What word(s) in the poem's title provide important or revealing information?
- Provide students with a copy of the poem "Those Winter Sundays" by Robert Hayden, which can be found in the student materials section included with the "Those Winter Sundays" video clip in PBS LearningMedia's *Poetry in America* collection.
- Ask a student to read it aloud, once through to experience the poem, without making notes just yet.
- Now the educator should read the poem aloud, asking students to circle or underline anything they find interesting or have questions about.
- Watch the video "WorkKeys Reading for Information" in PBS LearningMedia.
- Discuss: Who had similar insights about the poem? Who learned something new they had not considered? \*Note to educators: A detailed analysis guide is available in the video "Those Winter Sundays" in PBS LearningMedia's collection *Poetry in America* ("Using This Resource").
- Ask for students to discuss or jot down any personal connections they found to the poem.
- Watch the video "Those Winter Sundays" from the PBS LearningMedia collection *Poetry in America*.
- *Write a Poem!* Ask students to make a short list (in 1 minute) in response to the following question: If you were to write a poem about someone you love and a job (for pay or not) that person did, who might you choose?
- Ask for volunteers to share their choices.
- If time, give students a chance to start writing their poem. If anyone is having trouble starting, instruct them to use Hayden's poem as a template, making sure to give credit in their finished poem: **In the style of or Inspired by Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays"**

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## ACTIVITY

# Have you considered... ?

Poetry often allows writers to take a deeper dive into known thoughts, objects, and experiences to find new and sometimes surprising aspects.

Invite students to look at Kenn Nesbitt's definitions for the words **simile** and **metaphor** in the glossary, then ask "What makes simile and metaphor similar? How are they different?" Discuss.

Watch the video "Figurative Language" from PBS LearningMedia collection *Literary Elements and Techniques*.

Share with students the following lines of poetry excerpted from C. Lynn Shaffer's poem "Earthworm Love Poem" (Don't reveal the title):

Beneath a just-raised mossy stump  
ever shining and hardening  
with a sediment of fish scales,  
in the moments before  
the silhouetted world vanishes  
from mystery to sunlight,

I have seen . . . .

Ask "What common thing do these lines describe? It is something that almost everyone has seen."  
Record a list of answers for the class.

Reveal the answer: earthworms! Have students look at photos of earthworms, included on the next page. Ask them to try to see them as if looking at them for the first time. Record their findings.

Next, students should write their own earthworm poems using their shared findings.

### Extension

Consider a class gallery walk so that students can see peer poems. Though everyone wrote about earthworms, see how many similarities and differences you see in the poems.

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# Have you considered... ?



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## Earthworm Love Poem by C. Lynn Shaffer

Beneath a just-raised mossy stump  
ever shining and hardening  
with a sediment of fish scales,  
in the moments before  
the silhouetted world vanishes  
from mystery to sunlight,

I have seen them  
clutch like a hand  
freeing itself from the earth.  
I have speared them with hooks  
while the unchosen whispered  
against the sides of a Styrofoam cup.

And what manner of glistening!  
Coated with pond sludge,  
swallowed whole but somehow  
intact, wet with the spittle of fish.  
I have studiously  
scrutinized their innards  
in biology class, stretched them until

they narrowed beyond belief without breaking,  
and have wiped their guts on my jeans,  
across my sweaty young brow  
like war paint. Today  
I do the closest thing I know to prayer  
and pick one up from a sunlit walk,  
loose it into unmown grass.

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## ACTIVITY

# Jump Start

Do students often have difficulty finding ideas to write about? Students do not have to wait for inspiration to strike them out of the blue to write a poem (or a story, for that matter). Inspiration can come from anywhere! -- even other poetry!

Here are two activities to help jump-start the writing process and show students the creative topics that others have written about as a basis for creating their own, original works.

- Look at poem titles in a poetry collection and write about something you see there. Keep an ongoing list of subject ideas so that you always have something to write about when the mood strikes. Tip: Do not use the full title of someone else's poem but take a topic from it; for example, I wouldn't write my own poem called "Backyard Swing Set" (Thomas Lux wrote that one), but I might be inspired to write my own poem about a swing set or maybe a see-saw.
  - PreK-5 See Kenn Nesbitt's Poetry4Kids website and click on "Poems."
  - 6-12 Go to PBS LearningMedia's collection *Poetry Everywhere* and browse the titles.
- Find creative poem titles. Examples are listed below, for reference. Ask students to create new titles based on the list.
  - Students might write down one word from several poem titles, in any order, until they have a NEW title. For example, from the list below (which are actual poems you can find in PBS LearningMedia or online at The Poetry Foundation website), students might create the title: "Kung-Fu Heron Like Daddy" by pulling words from several titles listed.
  - Or, students might be inspired by the words in the titles -- *cake* might lead students to think of birthday parties, for example, or *heron* might lead students to think of flight. They could create the title: "Flying Cakes."
  - Students can also choose an inspired word, along with an actual word found in the title, to create "The Gray Heron's Birthday Party" for example, or "Birthday Party on the Day of a Tornado."
  - "The Gray Heron" (Galway Kinnell)
  - "Decorating a Cake While Listening to Tennis" (Peg Duthie)
  - "If I Had A Dollar" (Kenn Nesbitt)
  - "Daddy Long Legs" (Ted Kooser)
  - "Love Like Salt" (LISEL MUELLER)
  - "Tornado Child" (Kwame Dawes)
  - "Chinese Female Kung-Fu Superheroes" (TERESA MEI CHUC)
- Then, use this new creative title to create a complete poem.

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## ACTIVITY

# Bugly

Choose something usually considered either stereotypically beautiful or ugly, from the photos below or pick a subject that comes to mind. Without using the words “beautiful” or “ugly,” write at least four lines of poetry describing what you chose by showing it in a new, or non-clichéd, way.

- If your subject is usually thought of as beautiful or appealing,
  - describe it to show how it is not—what are we overlooking?
- If your subject is usually considered ugly or unappealing,
  - describe it to show how it is the opposite; reveal the deeper qualities others overlook.



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## ACTIVITY

# Alliteration or Tongue-Twister Poetry

This activity, edited for format, is shared with permission by Sara Young, a Library Media Specialist in Georgetown, Kentucky.

Alliteration, or Tongue-Twister Poems, have no predetermined pattern, but are more focused on sounds.

- Choose a letter to focus on. Remember, **alliteration** is the repetition of sounds! Some letters are *much* harder than others. Not every word in your poem has to start with this letter, but have as much of it as you can get.
- An easy way to start is with an animal or two to be in your poem and give them names starting with the matching letter. (i.e. Henrietta Hippo, Lilly Lee the Lion, Bernie Bear...)
- Create a super short story poem (could be as short as 4 lines long-or MUCH longer if you can keep coming up with words/lines for your target letter/sound)
- When read aloud, this poem could sound like a tongue twister because of the repetitive sounds. Try reading it really fast.
- This poem can be challenging if the letter you pick does not provide a lot of word choices.
- Have fun!

To start brainstorming, make a big list of words that start with/contain the chosen letter or sound. If you can't make a long list, choose a different letter or sound.

### Examples:

Tim the terrifying tiger  
Tiptoes through the tangled trees,  
His twitching tail thumping,  
His terrible teeth terrifying turtles,  
Who tumble away.

---

Simmie the sloth slowly scuttled over the snake.  
Sage the snake slithered backwards to Simmie the sloth.  
Sage the snake has sights on Simmie the sloth.  
She slips in the ground, slithering away,  
then suddenly slips back up, slaying Simmie the sloth.

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## ACTIVITY

# Mystery Poems

This activity, edited for format, is shared with permission by Sara Young, a Library Media Specialist in Georgetown, Kentucky.

Mystery Poems are fun way to practice descriptive skills like similes and metaphors, while also playing with rhyme scheme, or other poetic elements. Can your audience guess your mystery item or topic based on your poem clues?

Sara says:

- 3-5 line stanzas work best
- Include short clues in each line about your topic word
- Each line must describe the topic word WITHOUT ACTUALLY NAMING IT
- Use similes and metaphors to replace or describe the topic word
- Be mysterious!
- Never post your answer with the poem if you want to let others guess.

Example:

### Mystery Poem By: Sara Young

Often shallow as a puddle  
But with waves I can flood  
I can be a calming bubbly oasis  
And dirt's worst nightmare  
Soak me in, for I am short-lived  
What am I?

I used to be a tree (or three)  
I have legs but do not walk  
I do not eat but sometimes get so  
Full of food that I can't hold anymore  
I am always surrounded by family and friends  
What am I?

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## ACTIVITY

# Roll-A-Poem







Continue to stretch students' creative powers by exploring new writing topics. One way to accomplish this is to use a Roll-A-Poem activity.

Students should choose one speaker or subject. Their poem may be written from that perspective (speaker) or about that noun (subject). A chart with examples for younger students as well as a chart with examples for older students are included below. Students should roll a die two times, the first roll determines the row, the second roll determines the column. The intersection of the two rolls determines the subject or speaker the student should use in their poem.

SPEAKER OR SUBJECT				
		a genie stuck in a old soda bottle	a famous sports player	a house spider
		George Washington	a scientist	a garbage collector
		a garden scarecrow	your dentist	something that scares you

SPEAKER OR SUBJECT				
		Ruby Bridges, age 6	an ancient Egyptian prince	an elected government official
		yourself as an 80-year old	Frankenstein's monster	a farmer during the Great Depression
		a martian who just crash-landed on Earth	a WWII military General	something that scares you







Students should use the same die rolling technique to determine their poem's form. Students may refer to the glossary as needed.

POETIC FORM				
		a haiku	repetition or refrain	acrostic
		cinquain	limerick	a list poem
		traditional nursery rhyme	fractured nursery rhyme	free verse (no end rhyme)







Use the premade examples above with students, or involve them in the creation using the provided template.



SPEAKER OR  
SUBJECT

POETIC  
FORM

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## ACTIVITY

# No Adjectives, Please!

Sometimes we use adjectives (words that describe nouns and pronouns, like **smart** girl or **generous** boy) instead of describing in a detailed way that reveals their qualities. Adjectives can help describe, but we should not use them to the exclusion of actual description.

Readers enjoy descriptions that reveal things rather than words (like "generous") that sum up—how might we describe a girl to show that she is smart or a boy to show he is generous? How can we "show" that the character truly is this description?

Write a poem of 6-12 lines in which you use no adjectives. You can always make the poem longer or add in adjectives you think are needed later, but for this first try, see if you can write without them.

For inspiration, on the next page is a short poem by Kenn Nesbitt that uses only one adjective! Can you find it? What noun does it describe?

Also included is a poem better suited to older middle and high school students (grades 7-12) by C. Lynn Shaffer. This poem includes only two adjectives.

### Extension

Invite students to type up the poem and create different line breaks. Have students share their new versions with the class; discuss the following questions:

- How does the poem change (beyond the obvious) with the new line breaks--does it read different? Does it change the impact on readers--explain.
- What did you discover about word choice and line breaks from trying this activity?

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## And Backed My Car into a Tree

and backed my car into a tree.  
I wrote this poem back to front  
or else you may end up like me.  
So do not try this silly stunt,

I'm stunned and don't know what to say.  
Now things could not be any worse.  
while driving in my car today.  
I wrote this poem in reverse

-Kenn Nesbitt

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**At White Creek Farm** By C. Lynn Shaffer

You choked the tractor  
and trodded into the barn  
to see the rats I thought were kittens.  
Cupped in my hands, their pulses  
beat like the rain  
you prayed would cover your crops.  
You said Babies or not  
they were rats  
and snuffed them under your heel,  
skulls giving way beneath you.  
You rubbed your boots  
across the floor, on some hay,  
to clean them. As you walked,  
your shoes splayed mud.  
The tractor belched, wrenched smoke,  
made the earth red and pungent.

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## TITLE

# Haiku Diary

Would it surprise you to learn that the poetic form called **haiku** delights word lovers and many people write as many as they can fit into their schedules?

The reason may be that haikus are short (only 3 lines)! The first line includes 5 syllables, the second 7 syllables, the third 5 syllables. They are meant to be *experienced* rather than analyzed deeply and do not even require titles. They are fun to write and fun to read, little poetic bursts of observation recorded in lyric imagery. Thanks to the Japanese writers who first composed them hundreds of years ago!

writing quick haiku  
five, seven, five syllables  
on each line, and done!

Haikus are most often written in present tense and usually reference nature or the world seen around us, rather than our inner lives, such as this example written by Sydney from Paris, Kentucky:

Winter in New York  
Kaleidoscopic buildings  
Bright cathedral glass

Encourage students to write their own haiku by sharing Jarrett Lerner's inspiring Haiku Diary activity.



Printable handout included on the following page or at the author's website:  
<https://jarrettlerner.com/>



# KEEP A HAIKU DIARY

FOR ONE WHOLE DAY

A HAIKU is, GENERALLY, A THREE-LINE POEM WHOSE LINES CONTAIN FIVE, SEVEN, AND FIVE SYLLABLES, RESPECTIVELY.

YOU COULD COMPOSE A POEM AT EVERY MEAL, OR WRITE ONE EVERY HOUR. PAY ATTENTION. BE OBSERVANT. LOOK FOR "POEM-WORTHY" THINGS AROUND YOU.

## EXAMPLE:

FRUIT LOOPS FOR BREAKFAST  
MY MILK BECAME A RAINBOW  
I GULPED IT ALL DOWN



BONUS ACTIVITY:  
**ILLUSTRATE**  
YOUR HAIKUS!

BONUS BONUS ACTIVITY:  
LOOK UP SOME OTHER  
**POETIC FORMS** AND  
KEEP ANOTHER POEM DIARY!

jarrettlerner.com

THIS ACTIVITY WAS  
INSPIRED BY → JILL MERKLE!



## ACTIVITY

# Name that foot!

Unlike songs which have a beat, or rhythm, created by musicians with instruments like the drum and the bass guitar (or the voice itself as in the work of beat-box artists), the rhythm of poetry is created by the choice and arrangement of words in the poetic line.

When we speak, we stress, or leave unstressed, certain syllables or words. In poetry, the pattern of stresses and unstresses create the line's rhythm and, cumulatively, that of the poem.

As Kenn Nesbitt explains:

In most words that have more than one syllable, one of the syllables is pronounced more strongly than the others. We say that this syllable is "stressed" or "accented." For example, the word "apple" has two syllables - ap-ple - and the first syllable is pronounced more strongly than the second. That's why the word is pronounced "AP-pull" and not "ap-PULL."

If a word has just a single syllable, that syllable might be stressed, or it might not be. Generally, short words like "a" and "I" and "the" are not stressed. Nouns and verbs (things and action words), on the other hand are often stressed, even when they are just one syllable long. So, for example, words like "cat" and "jump" are stressed syllables.

The easiest way to tell if a word is stressed or not is to put it in a sentence and then read it aloud. Listen carefully to how you pronounce it to see if you can tell which words or syllables are stressed and which ones aren't.

This quick activity will allow students to begin to understand the basic poetic **foot** and the two most common feet - the iamb (**i-am**) and the trochee (**trou-kee**).

### Step 1

Begin by writing students' first names on the board, but **ONLY** the students who have two syllable names. Hint: Trochee imitates the type of foot it is (TROchee: stressed, unstressed).

### Step 2

Introduce and define each term: iamb and trochee.

### Step 3

Using the names chosen, students should decide—which names are IAMBs and which are TROCHEES, and create a visual to depict their findings.

Example:

**iamb**

Colette  
(coLETT**E**)

Michelle  
(mich**EL**LE)

**trochee**

Amy (AM**y**)

Sydney  
(SYD**ne**y)

### Extension

For a deeper dive, check out Kenn Nesbitt's lesson ([poetry4kids.com](http://poetry4kids.com)) on **Rhythm in Poetry - You Can Scan, Man**.



## POETRY

# Special Thanks

In addition to our colleagues, the team at KET Education would like to extend special thanks to those who contributed to the creation of this toolkit.

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**Kenn Nesbitt**

<https://poetry4kids.com/>

**Jarrett Lerner**

<https://jarrettlerner.com/>

**Sara Young**

Library Media Specialist | Georgetown, KY

**Vivé Griffith**

Writer and Educator

**Cynthia Nitz Ris**

Professor, University of Cincinnati

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