

Torrington Library
Poetry Writing WS
April 10, 2010

Free Write Warm Up

Pick from one of the following prompts or just write what you want!

- Write a series of questions and answers to compose a poem.
- Write a poem concerning the "absence" of something. Consider the absence as a positive, or a negative.
- Write a poem that begins with a description of an event, telling what appears to be happening. Then give a description of what is really occurring.
- Write a poem using the words, "paper and chalk".
- Write a poem about something that "spirals".
- Write a culinary poem celebrating food.

Time: 15 Minutes

What is Poetry

Poetry is an imaginative awareness of experience expressed through meaning, sound, and rhythmic language choices so as to evoke an emotional response. Poetry has been known to employ meter and rhyme, but this is by no means necessary. Poetry is an ancient form that has gone through numerous and drastic reinvention over time. The very nature of poetry as an authentic and individual mode of expression makes it nearly impossible to define.

There are as many definitions of poetry as there are poets. Wordsworth defined poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings;" Emily Dickinson said, "If I read a book and it makes my body so cold no fire ever can warm me, I know that is poetry;" and Dylan Thomas defined poetry this way: "Poetry is what makes me laugh or cry or yawn, what makes my toenails twinkle, what makes me want to do this or that or nothing."

Perhaps the characteristic most central to the definition of poetry is its unwillingness to be defined, labeled, or nailed down.

A Few Poetic Devices to Remember and Know

Alliteration: Repetition of sounds, primarily at the beginning of a word.

Allusion: Reference to a person, event, or work outside of the literary event

Connotation: The implied or suggested meaning connected with a word.

Denotation: The dictionary meaning of a word.

Enjambment: the running on of the thought from one line, couplet, or stanza to the next without a syntactical break.

Imagery: A word or sequence of words representing a sensory experience. Example: "Bells knelling classes to a close."

Simile: A figure of speech in which two unlike things are explicitly compared, as in "Loneliness spreading/fast like a gas fire" (Francis Mayes).

Metaphor: 1-A comparison between essentially unlike things without using words OR application of a name or description to something which is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance. Example: "A mighty fortress is our God." 2-something used, or regarded as being used, to represent something else; emblem; symbol.

Meter: Measured pattern of rhythmic accent in a line of verse.

Personification: Giving inanimate objects animate or living qualities

Poetry Writing Tips by John Hewitt

When you write a good poem, one you really like, immediately write another. Maybe that one poem was your peak for the night, but maybe you're on a roll. There's only one way to find out.

The bigger your theme, the more important the details are. A poem with *Love, Destiny, Hate* or other huge themes in the title already has two strikes against it (and I like love poems).

Say what you want to say. Let your readers decide what your poem means.

Feel free to write a bad poem.

Poems that focus on form are rarely my favorites, but most of my favorite poets learned how to write in forms before they discarded them. Writing in forms is a challenge. It makes you think.

That one perfect line in a thirty-line poem may be what makes it all worthwhile. It may also be what is ruining the rest of your poem. Keep an eye on it.

Don't explain *everything*.

Untitled poems are like unnamed children.

People will remember an image long after they've forgotten why it was there.

Develop your voice. Get comfortable with how *you* write.

The more you read, the more you learn. Read poetry often.

The more you write, the more you develop. Write poetry often.

Don't be afraid to write from a different point of view. Write a poem that says exactly the opposite of what you believe. If you can, do it without irony.

If you don't like a poem or poet you read, figure out exactly why. It may reflect something you don't like about your own poetry.

Make a list of poems you can remember specific lines from. Go back and read those poems. Figure out why they stuck with you.

Keep a dream journal. Dreams are your mind at it's most creative so pay attention to them. Don't feel you have to write a poem about your dreams unless one truly inspires you. The main goal is to see what thoughts the dreams lead you to.

Analyze other writer's poems. Figure out what works, what doesn't work, and why. Think about how you would work with the same material and concepts.

Use humor, irony, and melodrama, but don't abuse them.

Write the worst poem you can possibly write. Use clichés, use pretentious words, and beat your reader over the head with your point. Felt good, didn't it? Now get back to work. The point is, don't be afraid to write a bad poem. Every great poet has written a bad poem. Most great poets have written hundreds, even thousands of bad poems. The great poets kept writing though, and so should you. If it takes a hundred bad poems to produce a poem you like, finish those hundred poems.

Every line of a poem should be important to the poem, and interesting to read. A poem with only 3 great lines should be 3 lines long.

Poems should progress. There should be a reason why the first stanza comes before the second, the second before the third, and so on.

Follow your fear. Don't back away from subjects that make you uncomfortable, and don't try to keep your personal demons off the page. Even if you never publish the poems they produce, you have to push yourself and write as honestly as possible.

Whatever else you do, keep writing.

Prompt: Word Groups

On a scrap piece of paper, write down:

5 Adjectives

5 Verbs

5 Nouns

5 Images

Now, take those words and use them to create a poem. You don't need to use all of them! But you must use at least one (1) from each group. Don't worry if the poem makes sense. Just write.

Time: 15 Minutes

Prompt: Writing with a Form (from Poets.org)

Haiku

A traditional Japanese haiku is a three-line poem with seventeen syllables, written in a 5/7/5 syllable count. Often focusing on images from nature, haiku emphasizes simplicity, intensity, and directness of expression.

Haiku began in thirteenth-century Japan as the opening phrase of renga, an oral poem, generally 100 stanzas long, which was also composed syllabically. The much shorter haiku broke away from renga in the sixteenth-century.

Haiku was traditionally written in the present tense and focused on associations between images. There was a pause at the end of the first or second line, and a "season word," or *kigo*, specified the time of year.

As the form has evolved, many of these rules--including the 5/7/5 practice--have been routinely broken. However, the philosophy of haiku has been preserved: the focus on a brief moment in time; a use of provocative, colorful images; an ability to be read in one breath; and a sense of sudden enlightenment and illumination.

This philosophy influenced poet Ezra Pound, who noted the power of haiku's brevity and juxtaposed images. He wrote, "The image itself is speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language." The influence of haiku on Pound is most evident in his poem *In a Station of the Metro*, which began as a thirty-line poem, but was eventually pared down to two:

*The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.*

Limerick

A popular form in children's verse, the limerick is often comical, nonsensical, and sometimes even lewd. The form is well known to generations of English-speaking readers, by way of Mother Goose nursery rhymes, first published in 1791. Composed of five lines, the limerick adheres to a strict rhyme scheme and bouncy rhythm, making it easy to memorize.

Typically, the first two lines rhyme with each other, the third and fourth rhyme together, and the fifth line either repeats the first line or rhymes with it. The limerick's anapestic rhythm is created by an accentual pattern that contains many sets of double weakly-stressed syllables. The pattern can be illustrated with dashes denoting weak syllables, and back-slashes for stresses:

Line	Syllable Count and Stress	Rhyme Patter
	- / - - / - - / 8	a
	- / - - / - - / 8	a
3)	- / - - / 5	b
4)	- / - - / 5	b
5)	- / - - / - - / 8	a

Though the origin of the limerick is not entirely known, it has an active, if not long, history. Limericks published in eighteenth-century *Mother Goose's Melodies* are thought to be among the oldest. Poets quickly adopted the form and published limericks widely. Among them, Edward Lear's self-illustrated *Book of Nonsense*, from 1846, remains a benchmark. He preferred the term "nonsense" to "limerick," and wrote many funny examples, including the following:

There was an Old Man with a beard,
Who said, "It is just as I feared!
Two Owls and a Hen,

Four Larks and a Wren,
Have all built their nests in my beard!"

Other limericks can be found in the work of Tennyson, Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson, and W.S. Gilbert. A good collection of limericks can be found in the *Penguin Book of Limericks* edited by E. O. Parrott.

Villanelle

French for Italian folksong; 19 lines of five tercets (three line stanzas) and a closing quatrain (4 line stanza). Two lines get repeated throughout the entire poem, in a particular order, plus there's a rhyme scheme: the three tercets rhyme aba, the quatrain abaa.

DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT by Dylan Thomas

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Prompt 3: Writing In a Form

Here's your task...write 1 Haiku and 1 Limerick OR write a villanelle. Good luck!

Time: 30 Minutes