

blackbird & company
exploring

Poetry

a journey through the forms
and fundamentals of poetry

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*A poem begins
in delight and
ends in wisdom.*

– Robert Frost



great poetry

Defining poetry is much like chasing the wind, just when you think you've got her in your grip, she slips through your fingers giggling and invites you into an invigorating game of tag. Poetry, at its foundation, is a vehicle of written and spoken language, but from there the possibilities are limitless. Poetry is compressed story told through inventive language, simultaneously economical and extravagant. Poets launch their observations through carefully crafted words, releasing subject, and delving into the depths of that subject. Great poetry evokes, engages, and inspires human curiosity. Poems bring shape to imagination. Whether the poem is traditional, utilizing strict rhyme and meter, or more modern in nature, it engages the reader in the essence of story, moving beyond the literal to the figurative.

Blackbird & Company poetry guides have been developed with the fundamental belief that reading and writing poetry expands the boundaries of the imagination and intellect. Reading and writing poetry unlocks the power to inspire imagination with immediacy, and intensity. Students who engage in writing poetry will develop confidence in their voice, strengthen their ability to communicate new ideas and convey observations of their world. Crafting poetry has the potential to translate ideas where prose may at times seem daunting. Moving from reading and recognizing poetic ideas, to engaging in personal expression through writing, develops an awareness of the world at large and will lead students to discover the interconnectedness of literary genres. When students are encouraged to engage in the process of writing poetry, they will discover that some things can only be said through a great poem.

Incorporating both analytic and creative exercises to spark the poet inside of your student, this guide will:

- Introduce students to the poet's kit of tools
- Provide creative opportunities to practice poetic expression
- Reveal connections between poetry and prose
- Develop the poet's unique voice
- Explore the diverse potential of language

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION: getting started	vii
SECTION 1: what is poetry?	1
SECTION 2: words & phrases	9
SECTION 3: imagination	19
SECTION 4: image	25
SECTION 5: mood	31
SECTION 6: rhythm & rhyme	37
SECTION 7: read, write, revise	45
Appendix: answer key	53

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

Have the following resources close-at-hand as you work through this guide:

How to Eat a Poem, A Smorgasbord of Tasty and Delicious Poems for Young Readers

Edited by The American Poetry & Literacy Project and The Academy of American Poets

Seeing the Blue Between: Advice and Inspiration for Young Poets

Compiled by Paul B. Janeczko

A Kick in the Head, An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms

Selected by Paul B. Janeczko

Art Cards

Dictionary

Thesaurus

Extra paper/writer's journal

HOW THE GUIDE IS ORGANIZED

The purpose of this guide is to discover the craft of writing poems and to delight in the reading of poetry. Over the course of seven weeks you will be introduced to some of the basic techniques used by poets, explore some excellent poetry, and practice writing original poems. Each section, designed to be completed in a about a two-hour period, is best accomplished in at least two sittings.

Contents:

Section 1: What is Poetry?
 Section 2: Words & Phrases
 Section 3: Imagination
 Section 4: Image
 Section 5: Mood
 Section 6: Rhyme & Rhythm
 Section 7: Read, Write, Revise
 Appendix: Answer Key

TIPS FOR UNDERSTANDING A POEM***Look at the poem.***

What does the poem look like? What do you notice about the poem's form? Do you notice any unusual or unfamiliar words?

Read slowly.

Do not rush the words on the page. Forcing yourself to read slowly helps your ear to hear the musical quality of poetry and to discover images. What hint does the title give you about the poem? Who is the speaker? What is the essence of the poem's purpose? What is the setting of the poem? When is the action taking place?

Read silently.

Enjoy a poem in the silence of your mind.

Read aloud.

Read aloud softly, then boldly to yourself.

Read aloud to someone.

Read aloud softly, then boldly to someone.

Graze for sounds.

Listen for the rich sounds that a poem has to offer. Do you hear consonants singing? What about the vowels? Do you hear words rhyming?

Gaze at images.

Look for the images the poem is painting. Does each line paint an image or do images form as stanzas close? Are the images real or surreal?

Linger in lines.

How do the lines move you through the poem?

Feel the poem.

What is the tone or mood of the poem?

Respond to the poem.

What will you remember about the poem?

SECTION 1:

what is poetry?

*To see the Summer Sky
Is Poetry, though never in a Book it lie—
True Poems flee.*

-Emily Dickinson

SECTION 1: what is poetry?

Think about it.

1. In your own words, what is poetry?

2. What is a poet?

3. How does the dictionary define poetry?

4. Can anyone be a poet? Why or why not?

5. Do you consider yourself a poet? Why or why not?

6. Do you know the names of any famous poets? List them here if you do.

> For the following questions refer to *How to Eat a Poem*.

Read *“Introduction to Poetry”* by Billy Collins. (pg. 4)

7. What things does Billy Collins compare a poem to?

8. What kinds of things does he want you to do with poetry?

9. Why is this poem a good “introduction” to poetry?

Read *“The Poem”* by Amy Lowell. (pg. 5)

10. What does Amy Lowell compare a poem to?

11. What does she want you to learn about poetry?

12. What does she teach you about the work of being a poet?

SECTION 1: what is poetry?

Read “Ars Poetica” by Archibald MacLeish. (pg. 6)

Note: An Ars Poetica is a special poem about the art of poetry itself.

13. What does Archibald MacLeish think a poem should be? Make a list of as many words as you can.

14. Select one stanza (two lines grouped together) and write in your own words what you think it means.

15. Archibald MacLeish uses irony and word play to describe what a poem should be. What do you think he wants you to learn about poetry?

Read “How to Eat a Poem” by Eve Merriam. (pg. 7)

16. What does Eve Merriam compare a poem to?

17. What words help you see this image the most?

18. What do you think she wants you to learn about poetry?

> For the following questions refer to *Seeing the Blue Between*.

Read Joseph Bruchac. (pgs. 2-3)
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19. According to Joseph Bruchac, where do ideas for poems come from? List some of his examples.

20. Take a few minutes to look around and think about your daily life. Also think about the places you've been and the people you know. Write down three ideas that you could turn into a poem.

1.

2.

3.

21. Choose one of your ideas from the list above and try writing a poem about it.

SECTION 1: what is poetry?

Read "Song to the Firefly" and "Longhouse Song." (pgs. 4-5)

22. What do you notice about the use of words and phrases in "Song to the Firefly"?

23. What do you notice about how Bruchac is describing the longhouse in "Longhouse Song"?

24. Which of the two poems do you like better? Explain why.

Read Siv Cedering. (pgs. 6-7)

25. According to Siv Cedering, where do poems come from?

26. How does she suggest you begin writing a poem?

Read "The Changeling." (pgs. 8-9)

27. What does this poem say about being different?

28. What does this poem express about writing poetry?

Read *Kalli Dakos*. (pgs. 10-11)

29. List some of the things Kalli Dakos mentions about the poet inside of her.

30. Kalli Dakos believes there are buried treasures all around waiting for the poet to discover. What examples does she give?

31. Think of three “places” you could mine for poetic gold? Try to think of both tangible and intangible places.

1.

2.

3.

Read “*My Writing Is an Awful Mess*” and “*I’d Mark with the Sunshine*.” (pgs. 12-13)

32. What do you notice about “My Writing Is an Awful Mess,” as compared to the other poems you have read so far?

33. Which of the two poems do you like better? Explain why.
