

# POETRY MEETS NONFICTION WORKSHOP

Allan Wolf

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# Introduction to Poetry Meets Nonfiction

## Play with Poetic Structure

Don't be afraid to let our words play on the page. Let them line up like soldiers on parade. Let them dash down stairs. Let them fall fast and crash on the grass. Or skip from rock to rock across a stream. To emphasize a word, make it live alone on its very own line. Add stanza breaks or dashes to make the reader stop. Play with punctuation. Ellipses make the words trail off. Parenthesis add afterthought to a sly aside. Indent a line to expand on the thought of the line that came before. Let your words build and explode. Let them linger in the air. Let them slink away slowly till they are barely even there.

from *Immersed In Verse* by Allan Wolf (Lark Books, 2006).

Note the author's use of poetic language (rhyme, rhythm, assonance, consonance, personification, etc.) in the nonfiction prose above. Prose and poetry share much in common.

### Don't Be Afraid

to	let	your	words
play	on	the	page.
Let	them	line	up
like	soldiers	on	parade.

Let  
them  
dash  
down  
stairs.

Let  
them  
fall  
fast  
and  
CRASH on the grasssssss.

Or skip fromrock torock across a stream.

To emphasize a word, make it live  
alone  
on its very own line.

Add stanza breaks

or dashes to make the reader—stop.

Play with punctuation:

Ellipses make the words trail off . . .

Parentheses add afterthought (to a sly aside).

Indent a line

to expand on the thought

of the line that came before.

Let your words **build and explode!**

them            in            air.

Let            linger            the

Let them slink away

s l o w l y

till they're barely even there.

Note how this “poem” still relays the same information as the prose form. In fact, verse allows the text to actually demonstrate the concepts it is attempting to explain.

# You Can't Write a Poem About THAT!

## Finding Significance Within the Mundane

**Mundane:** from the Latin mundus (world) thus mundanus (of the world)

**Well-known poems that celebrate the mundane:**

*Something Is Going to Happen* (from *Delight*) by Robert Penn Warren

*The Road Not Taken; Dust of Snow* by Robert Frost

*The Red Wheelbarrow; This Is Just to Say* by William Carlos Williams

*Fog* by Carl Sandburg

*Miracles* by Walt Whitman

## Phases of Mundane Observation

Confining your field of focus to only what exists within a ten-foot circle around you, choose a suitable mundane subject, such as a pencil, ceiling fan, book, (Note: If you really must look beyond a ten-foot circle, then confine your observation to the space of the room.) Writing continually, move through these phases of observation in order to generate descriptions and brainstorm ideas for further writing.

### Describe

Describe, in detail, the subject's appearance, various parts, materials, size, weight, etc. Describe what it does. How does it move? What is its energy source? What does it sound like? Can you hold it? How does it feel? Evaluate What is its purpose? How does its existence make the world better? How does its existence make the world worse? Describe the subject's positive impact as well as its negative impact. Does it have a personality?

### Radiate

Look around your ten-foot circle. Are there others? Now look as far as your eyes can see. Are there others there? Use your imagination. Are there others outside of your field of vision? Within the building where you are? Beyond the block? Across the city where you reside? The country? The world?

### Connect

What other kinds exist? What other objects are related to it? What things have a similar look, function, movement? What other objects, mundane or otherwise, have a similar effect? Imagine if the subject of your study should disappear. What would happen? How would the world be changed? Why is the subject important to your own life? To the world?

## **Writing Prompts that Exercise Observation Powers**

### **Snapshot Safari**

In your notebook collect a variety of images from an “outing” around your house or school. Include sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. Be sure to keep each entry short (a single phrase will usually do), and don’t dwell on the significance of the image. Your object is simply to collect the images as a sensory record of your experience. Remember that poetry is not always confined by matters of narrative or logical continuity; seemingly disjointed images and sensations can sometimes provide a clarity and illumination which linear thoughts cannot.

### **Sound Safari**

Like the Snapshot Safari but with sounds alone. Just walk, listen, and write. The most challenging part of this exercise is to figure out how to spell the sounds.

### **Treasure Box of Priceless Things**

The teacher places a variety of “everyday objects” in a box (eraser, paper clip, wash cloth, shoe lace, chicken bone, button, house key, etc.) As the box is passed around, students are asked to reach into the box and feel around until they feel an object they want to write about.

### **Walk a Mile in Something Else’s Shoes**

Imagine what it would be like to be some mundane object, like a shoe or a coffee cup.

### **Thirteen Ways of Looking at Your Elbow**

Come up with thirteen different ways of looking at a mundane subject. You may slow down by way # seven, but don’t give up (See *Thirteen Ways of Looking at Your Knees and Elbows* by Allan Wolf).

### **Treasure Hunts and Riddles**

The teacher hides an object somewhere in the room and then describes its location in the form of a riddle. Students can also simply play a form of I-Spy by creating riddle poems about the everyday objects in the room. The emphasis should be more on choice of details rather than literary quality.

### **Everyday Object As Self Portrait**

Generate a list of characteristics of yourself. Include internal and external characteristics. (Be honest, this list is just for brainstorming, and you won’t be required to share it unless you want to.) After your list is complete, choose an everyday object that you feel shares a common characteristic(s) with you. Make a list of other characteristics of the object. Now write a poem that illustrates your comparison. You may start by simply saying, “I am like . . .”

## **Inquisition**

Write down a list of questions to ask of some mundane subject. You can speak directly to the subject or else ask the questions generally. This list of questions might prove to be a poem in itself, or it may trigger a poem that provides an answer to one or more of the questions.

## **Multi-Voice Dialogue Poem**

Similar to Inquisition, except this time your object actually answers back! Write a dialogue poem in which you conduct an interview or carry on a conversation with a mundane object. Your two (or more) voices can speak simultaneously or alternate, passing the lines back and forth.

## **Helpful “Mundane” Forms**

**Acrostic** An acrostic (pronounced uh-CRAW-stick) poem is an easy way for students to summarize what they know about a topic by gathering together thoughts, facts, ideas, and details into a poem in which the first letters of each line spell out the topic at hand. Add an extra degree of difficulty to this form by also arranging the last letters of each line so that they spell out a word or phrase that is appropriate to the topic.

## **Cinquain**

A cinquain (pronounced SING-cane) is a five-line unrhymed poem. It is easy to write and can be used in a variety of subject areas. Cinquains can be useful in helping students to gain new insights into a topic being studied. There are many variations. Here’s one that’s pretty popular: Line One: One noun that introduces the poem’s subject. Line Two: Two adjectives that describe the subject. Line Three: Three verbs (or verbals) related to the subject. Line Four: Four-word phrase telling feelings of the writer or describing the subject. Line Five: One noun (different from line one) that sums up the previous four lines.

## **Diamante**

The diamante (pronounced DIE-uh-MON-tay) is a perfect poem form to illustrate the contrast between two different subjects. The seven lines of this poem are in the shape of a diamond, with the different subjects acting as the top and bottom points of the diamond. Line One: Noun “A.” Line Two: Two adjectives describing the noun “A.” Line Three: Three “ing” or “ed” words describing noun “A.” Line Four: Four nouns. Two describing the noun “A”. Two describing noun “B.” Line Five: Three “ing” or “ed” words describing noun “B.” Line Six: Two adjectives describing the noun “B.” Line Seven: Noun “B” Note that immediately after writing Noun “A” in line one, the writer may want to go to line seven and enter the contrasting noun “B” there. Then the writer can go back and fill in the rest of the poem.

## **Limerick**

A limerick is a five-line poem, usually humorous in nature, arranged in a A-A-B-B-A rhyme pattern. Lines one and two consist of eight or nine syllables. Lines three and four consist of five or six syllables. The last line (which rhymes with the first two) consists of from eight to ten syllables. Limericks can be used to tell brief stories or to describe the characteristics of something being studied in class.

# Inquisition

Write down a list of questions to ask of someone (or something) you encounter on your outing. You can speak directly to the subject or else ask the questions generally. This list of questions might prove to be a poem in itself, or it may trigger a poem which provides an answer to one or more of the questions.

## Examples

### White Goat

White Goat, is your name Billie?  
What are you thinking as you  
Twist your head around the feeding bin?  
Do you miss your kids?  
Are they crying for you?  
Will you be with them ever again?

### Cheryl Bromley Jones, teacher

### Skyscrapers

Do skyscrapers ever grow tired  
of holding themselves up high?  
Do they ever shiver on frosty nights  
with their tops against the sky?  
Do they get lonely sometimes  
because they have grown so tall?  
Do they ever wish they could lie right down  
and never get up at all?

### Rose Fyleman

### Letter Poem

Write a letter as a poem, addressing someone or something you encounter on your outing.

### Malcolm, My Man

Malcolm (my man!)  
You don't know me.  
But I know you.  
I dream of you.  
In your blackness I see myself.  
I long to be the man you once were.  
What you are.  
Who you are.  
That is all that matters to you.  
You're like no one I've ever known.

I see all in your eyes.  
Malcolm (my man!)  
Man with no fear,  
No boundaries.  
show me the way.  
Damn!  
Malcolm, you had so far to go.  
Death, so bloody.  
Still it was a gift.  
The end was inevitable and so was your memory.  
True men live forever.  
That is the way it will always be. Forever.  
Never forgotten.  
That is what I want to be.

**Duane Shorter, student.**

### **Foster Student-Centered Assessment Skills**

Students compare texts to evaluate proficiency. Give students sample texts along a four point performance continuum and have them rank order them from most to least effective. Working in groups have them develop their own descriptions of each of the four score points and relate these descriptions to proficiency levels designated as *Advanced*, *Proficient*, *Needs Improvement*, and *Failing*.

Rank the following versions of the same poem from 1 to 4 with 1 being the least effective and 4 being the most effective. Explain your answers as best you can.

#### **The Boy**

The boy put his best toy over his head and  
threw it down on the floor  
and broke it.  
That made him sad so  
he started crying.

#### **Mad**

He lifts the toy  
his favorite one  
above his head  
He throws it—mad—  
He kicks it—mad—  
He stomps it—mad—  
in to pie ces  
His eyes grow wide  
He cries  
and cries



### **The Mad Boy**

He lifts the toy  
his best one  
he holds it over his head  
and  
throws it  
kicks it  
stomps it  
His eyes get wide  
and he cries.

### **The Boy**

The boy  
broke his toy.

## Share Example Poems in a Multi-Modal Way

Be sure to present examples in a “multi-modal” way, appealing to a variety of the senses. For example, you might allow students to see the poem on an overhead screen, blackboard, or chart paper. Allow students to hear poems by asking them to close their eyes as you recite or read. Students can even touch the poem if it is written on some appropriate object (a poem about a pumpkin might be written on a pumpkin). Poems about food can be accompanied by an appropriate snack to appeal to the sense of taste. Strike a match to call upon the sense of *smell* as you read a poem about fire.

Students like to listen to poems read aloud, but they also like to do poetry as active participants. You might invite students to join you at the front of the class to help act out a poem as you recite it. Encourage students to repeat certain lines or sound out a call-and-response of some sort. If you are illustrating a certain poetic device, you might ask your students to clap when they hear an example as you read aloud. Use your imagination and watch your students begin to use theirs.

## Introducing Writing Activities

- Introduce the writing activity, technique, topic, or theme. A verbal introduction can involve group brainstorming or some other prewriting activity.
- Present an example poem(s) by an established adult writer(s). This could be in the form of a reading, recitation, or performance. Example poems should illustrate the technique, topic, or theme. Remember to think “multi-modal.”
- Model writing on an overhead, blackboard, or chart paper. Write a group example poem. Allow students to suggest opening lines. Suggest a structure if students get stuck. Keep it flowing. You can create a complete poem or just the beginning of one.
- Present an example poem(s) by a student writer(s) who has participated in the activity in the past. This is a great time to share a poem that you have written yourself.
- Allow students to write on their own. As much as possible, the teacher should write along with the students. This further establishes your class as a “community of writers” and lets your students see that writing is a lifetime pursuit. I like to alternate between “writing and roaming.”
- Allow students to share. Share as a large group (always in a circle) or in small teams. “Pair share” if sharing time is very limited.

# Mystery Poem

Write a “Who Am I?” or a “What Am I?” poem in which the speaker only gives descriptive clues to the reader who must guess who, or what, the speaker is. This answer can be given as part of the poem’s ending or not at all. The poem can take whatever form you choose.

## Examples

### The Mountain Chicken

I’m called the Mountain Chicken  
but I never, ever cluck.  
You’ll find me in Dominica  
if you have any luck.  
I do not peck. I do not scratch.  
My name must be a joke.  
I do not strut. Instead I hop.  
I do not cluck. I croak.  
Don’t look inside the chicken coop.  
I’m underneath this log.  
I’m really not a chicken, see  
I really am a . . .

*Allan Wolf*

### Who Am I?

I played a sport, Round Ball the game.  
I flew through the air, and all knew my name.  
To the greatest heights, I did reach,  
When playing with the dream,  
this—no one could teach.  
The size of the ball did change but once,  
And to the larger did I return.  
From fame and glory did I retire,  
Wearing red and black attire.  
Who am I?

*P.J. Purdy and Tammy Roberts*

### Metaphors

I’m a riddle in nine syllables,  
An elephant, a ponderous house,  
A melon strolling on two tendrils,  
O red fruit, ivory, vine timbers!  
This loaf’s big with its yeasty rising.  
Money’s new-minted in this fat purse.  
I’m a means, a stage, a cow in calf.  
I’ve eaten a bag of green apples,  
Boarded the train there’s no getting off.

*Sylvia Plath*

### Riddle

We are little airy creatures,  
All of different voice and features:  
One of us in glass is set,  
One of us is found in jet,  
One of us is set in tin,  
One a lump of gold within;  
If the last you should pursue,  
It can never fly from you.

*Author unknown*

# Limerick

A limerick is a five-line poem, usually humorous in nature, arranged in a A-A-B-B-A rhyme pattern. Lines one and two consist of eight or nine syllables. Lines three and four consist of five or six syllables. The last line (which rhymes with the first two) consists of from eight to ten syllables. Limericks can be used to tell brief stories or to describe the characteristics of something being studied in class.

## Examples

### Biology

A chameleon when he's feeling blue,  
Can alter his glum point of view.  
By changing his hue  
To a color that's new:  
I'd like to do that, wouldn't you?

*Eve Merriam*

### Sammy

There was a young hopeful named Sam  
Who loved diving into the jam.  
When his mother said, "Sammy!  
Don't make yourself jammy."  
He said, "You're too late ma, I am."

*Elizabeth Ripley*

### Ecology/Social Issues

Said an envious, erudite ermine:  
"There's one thing I cannot determine:  
When a man wears my coat,  
He's a person of note.  
While I'm but a species of vermin!"

*Oliver Hereford*

### Physics

There was a young lady named Bright,  
Whose speed was much faster than light.  
She went out one day  
In a relative way  
And returned on the previous night.

*A.H. Reginald Butler*

# Diamante

The diamante (pronounced DIE-uh-MON-tay) is a perfect poem form to illustrate the contrast between two different subjects. The seven lines of this poem are in the shape of a diamond, with the different subjects acting as the top and bottom points of the diamond.

- Line One: Noun “A.”
- Line Two: Two adjectives describing the noun “A.”
- Line Three: Three “ing” or “ed” words describing noun “A.”
- Line Four: Four nouns. Two describing the noun “A”. Two describing noun “B.”
- Line Five: Three “ing” or “ed” words describing noun “B.”
- Line Six: Two adjectives describing the noun “B.”
- Line Seven: Noun “B”

Note that immediately after writing Noun “A” in line one, the writer may want to go to line seven and enter the contrasting noun “B” there. Then the writer can go back and fill in the rest of the poem.

## Examples

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
Younger, easier  
Old friends, one teacher, one class  
Bonner, Holly Hill Elementary / Holly Hill Junior High, Campbell  
Changing classes, changing teachers, finding new friends  
Older, harder  
JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

**Note:** I picked up these diamante examples from an unknown presenter to whom I owe thanks.

*Group Poem, 6th graders  
Bonner Elementary School*

DEMOCRACY  
Many, representative  
Self-governed, elected, tolerating  
Legislature, constitution / despotism, absolutism  
Inherited, exploiting, oppressing  
Machiavellian, single  
AUTOCRACY

*Group Poem, 11th graders  
Spruce Creek Senior High*

You can adapt the diamante to reinforce vocabulary or concepts that you have been studying in any content area.

## Adapted for Earth Science

- Line one: Write the word “SWAMP.”
- Line two: Write the names of two famous swamps.
- Line three: Three words that describe swamp geography or climate.

- Line four: Name a swamp plant, a swamp animal, a desert plant, a desert animal.  
Line five: Three words that describe desert geography or climate  
Line six: Write the names of two famous deserts.  
Line seven: Write the word "DESERT."

**Example**

SWAMP  
Okefenokee, Everglades  
wet, spongy, low-lying  
fern, egret / cactus, lizard  
hot, dry, sandy  
Sahara, Mojave  
DESERT

**Adapted for Environmental Science**

- Line one: Write the word "POLLUTION."  
Line two: Write two adjectives which describe pollution.  
Line three: Three verbs which tell how humankind pollutes the earth.  
Line four: Two specific examples of pollution / Two specific examples of conservation.  
Line five: Three verbs which tell how humankind conserves the earth.  
Line six: Write two adjectives which describe conservation.  
Line seven: Write the word "CONSERVATION."

**Example**

POLLUTION  
foul, noisy  
stripping, exhausting, contaminating  
clear cutting, dumping poisonous chemicals / treating wastes, banning dioxin  
recycling, replenishing, preserving  
clear, unspoiled  
CONSERVATION

# Cinquain

A cinquain (pronounced SEEN-cane) is a five-line unrhymed poem. It is easy to write and can be used in a variety of subject areas. Cinquains can be useful in helping students to gain new insights into a topic being studied. Although there are variations, the cinquain generally takes the following form:

Line One: One noun that introduces the poem's subject.

Line Two: Two adjectives that describe the subject.

Line Three: Three verbs (or verbals) related to the subject.

Line Four: Four-word phrase telling feelings of the writer or describing the subject.

Line Five: One noun (different from line one) that sums up the previous four lines.

## Examples

Spiders  
Tiny, busy  
Spinning, moving, floating  
Building fragile wispy nests  
Artists

Tree frogs  
Brown, glistening  
Prowling, leaping, hanging  
Stretching throats to sing  
Woodsprites

*Jennings and Telfer*

Grackles  
Iridescent, black  
Splashing, hopping, dunking  
Fluttering feathered creek communion  
Bath time

*Allan Wolf*

Orangutan  
Playful, busy  
Climbing, swinging, chewing  
Getting into everything, everywhere  
Toddler

*Karen Rose*

Heron  
White, long-necked  
Watching, wading, eating  
Segregated from the others  
Fisherman

*Joy Ray*

# Acrostic Poem

An acrostic (pronounced uh-CRAW-stick) poem is an easy way for students to summarize what they know about a topic by gathering together thoughts, facts, ideas, and details into a poem in which the first letters of each line spell out the topic at hand. Add an extra degree of difficulty to this form, by also arranging the last letters of each line so that they spell out a word or phrase that is appropriate to the topic.

## Examples

**W**ishing for freedom  
**H**aughty look in your eyes  
**I**solated in your too-small space  
**T**undra dweller  
**E**rmine-colored  
**F**urry and fuzzy  
**O**ut of place in a St. Louis summer  
**X**tremely quiet *Joy Ray*

## Editing the Chrysalis

“At last,” cried  
Butterfly,  
Poised  
Over its  
Empty chrysalis,  
“My final draft!”

*Avis Harley*

Unknown,  
Vanished  
World,  
X-tinct:  
Yesterday’s  
Zoo.

*Abecedarian*  
*by Avis Harley*

from Avis Harley’s excellent book titled Fly With Poetry: An ABC of Poetry (Wordsong/B oyds Mills Press).
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## Forgotten Giants

**A**ncient  
**B**ogs  
**C**ontain  
**D**inosaur  
**E**ggs,  
**F**orgotten  
**G**iants  
**H**idden  
**I**nside  
**J**urassic  
**K**ingdoms.  
**L**ike  
**M**emories  
**N**ever  
**O**pened,  
**P**rehistoric  
**Q**uagmires  
**R**etain  
**S**ecrets.



## Tanka Talk

**Students create a classroom dialectic in verse by writing tankas (5 lines of 5,7,5, 7, and 7 syllables respectively) about a variety of topics (shopping, sorrow, hair, victory, cars, friendship, peer pressure, anger, math, a historical figure, a scientific fact, etc)**

Depression is not  
a sour look on my face.  
Looks are a symptom  
that my heart is deflated,  
trust and hope have gone missing.  
*S.H.*

Depression is not  
my voice becoming silent.  
My silence is a symptom  
of the look on your face,  
Trust? Hope? Missing all along.  
*A.W.*

Fun is a giggle,  
pink lipstick, blue nail polish,  
whispering girlfriends,  
a good cry at a movie  
then laughing all the way home.  
*S.H.*

Fun is a joy ride,  
a spitting competition  
telling raunchy jokes  
laughing till our stomachs ache  
knowing that we all belong.  
*A.W.*

Underwear in brief:  
Mostly equipped with front flaps;  
Underoos; jock straps;  
Low-rise; boxer; bikini;  
Jumbo or teeny-weeny.  
*A.W.*

# Persona Poems, Monologue Poems

- offer a student-centered approach to learning.
- lend themselves to performance and presentation.
- are handy content memorization tools.
- reinforce audience awareness.
- place young perf-poets in the role of teacher by intrinsically asking, “What do I want my audience to learn?”
- help students to organize, prioritize, and categorize content.
- require close reading of any primary texts.
- encourage the use of specialized vocabulary in context.
- encourage text-to-self connections.
- promote independent, supplementary research.
- are useful across the curriculum.
- provide a fun, engaging, and authentic way to assess learning.

## **Private Patrick Gass, the Carpenter, Makes His Case to Lewis and Clark**

Welcome to Fort Kaskaskia, Sirs.  
I know that you’ve had a rough journey thus far,  
and I know that you have plenty soldiers to see  
so I thank you for taking the time to see me.  
Now Captain Bissell claims he can’t spare me  
but with all due respect I’d like to plead my case.

Do I have any special skills?

Well, I’m a right handy carpenter.  
With the proper tools and a few hands  
I can clear you a field of trees in a week  
and build you a cabin to boot.  
Give me a broadax and a hewing dog  
and I’ll square the logs if you choose.  
Give me a froe  
and I’ll build you a clapboard roof.  
Give me a wedge and a maul  
and I’ll split a hundred rails in a day.  
I can saddle notch a log  
or make a saddle for your horse.  
Or a bed for to lay on or a bench for to sit on.  
I know the ins and outs of raising a fort  
which I know you’ll be needin’ up north  
and with your permission, sirs, I’ve an idea or two  
to expand the capabilities of your keelboat.  
I can row and push a setting pole.  
I can shoot a gun and throw a hawk.

I can swim like a fish. I can run like the devil.  
I'm strong and I'm fit.  
I'm a soldier's soldier, Sirs.  
I never shirk and I do my work.  
And I do the other feller's too.

What's that? *Why* do I want to join?

I mainly . . . Mainly, I want to see the trees.

from *New Found Land: Lewis and Clark's Voyage of Discovery* by Allan Wolf.  
Candlewick Press (Cambridge, 2004), pp 77-78.

# Multi-Voice Poem

Write a two-voice poem, a la Paul Fleischman's *Joyful Noise*. Perhaps a conversation between two (or more) speakers. Your two voices can speak simultaneously or alternate, passing the lines back and forth. Example (from *Math Talk: Mathematical Ideas in Poems for Two Voices* by Theoni Pappas, see bibliography.)

**One**

One.  
The numbers that is.  
I was the  
Counting  
started with me.

One  
Every number  
I can multiply any number

One  
I can divide any number  
and leave it  
And when you think you've  
just add me to the last  
I'm number one,  
the first.

I was the first of them.  
The numbers that is.  
initiator.and computation  
One  
has me as a factor.  
and amazingly leave it unchanged.  
that's me.  
you name it  
the same.  
reached the end of the numbers,  
and the list goes on.  
the first.

# Bio-Poem Examples

## Seventh Grade Student

### **Molly**

Who is energetic, creative, athletic and short.  
Daughter of Sandra and John.  
Lover of fun, marine life, and John.  
Who feels pessimistic, left out, and sometimes happy.  
Who needs love, time, and hugs.  
Who fears sharks, death, and homework.  
Who gives friendship, advice, and love.  
Who would like to see a cure for cancer, Alaska, and my parents back together.  
Resident of Mount Air.

### **McDonald**

## Character from Literature

### **Queeny**

Angry, defiant, bright, frightened  
Daughter of a prison inmate  
Cares deeply about her mom and dad  
Who feels alone  
Who needs someone to see through her defenses  
Who gives friendship to those who believe in her  
Who fears going to jail  
Who would like to see her father  
Resident of Cotton Junction, Georgia

### **Peavy**

## Historical Figure

### **Abe**

Strong, brooding, witty, compassionate  
Husband of Mary Todd Lincoln  
Cares deeply about saving the Union  
Who feels committed to ending slavery  
Who needs the nation's understanding  
Who gives freely of himself  
Who fears war  
Who would like to see North and South as one again  
Resident of the ages

### **Lincoln**

## **“Bio Poem” Example**

### **Sammy**

Two poems based on *Sammy* by Elizabeth Ripley

Both of these poems—one a “Bio Poem,” the other an “I Am Poem”—show how poem forms can be used to assess how well students understand literary characters or historical figures. The “bio poem” and “I am poem” also make excellent pre-performance character studies for students who may be acting out a character from literature or poetry.

Naughty, happy, hungry, and sly  
Son of Mommy  
Lover of fun, jam, and mom  
Who feels motivated, happy, and guilt-free  
Who needs jam, bread, and a chair to stand on  
Who gives headaches, grief, and hugs  
Who would like to see his mommy happy  
and a swimming pool filled with jam.  
Resident of The Kitchen  
**Jaminsky**

### **“I Am Poem” Example**

**Mommy of Sammy** by Elizabeth Ripley  
I am a harried mom in a heckuva hurry.  
I wonder why my son can't stay out of trouble.  
I hear huge lips smacking in the kitchen.  
I see mounds of jam everywhere.  
I want a vacation!  
I am a harried mom in a heckuva hurry.  
I pretend not to find my child annoying.  
I touch my child's sticky sweet face.  
I worry that he will wipe his face on my new curtains.  
I cry to think he won't be a child forever.  
I am a harried mom in a heckuva hurry.  
I understand that children will make messes.  
I say, Sammy! Don't make yourself jammy.  
(I say, I'm thankful that we've food to eat at all.)  
I dream of the day that Sammy becomes self-cleaning.  
I try to remember that this is just a phase.  
I hope when I am old, my son will clean up after me.  
I am a harried mom in a heckuva hurry.

# Resources

## Titles of Some of the Poems I Shared

*Something Is Going to Happen* (from *Delight*) by Robert Penn Warren  
*The Road Not Taken; Dust of Snow* by Robert Frost  
*The Red Wheelbarrow; This Is Just to Say* by William Carlos Williams  
*Fog* by Carl Sandburg  
*Miracles* by Walt Whitman

From *Immersed In Verse: An Informative, Slightly Irreverent & Totally Tremendous Guide to Living the Poet's Life* by Allan Wolf

- *The Red Wheelbarrow* by William Carlos Williams
- *Write About A Radish* by Karla Kuskin
- *Don't Be Afraid* by Allan Wolf
- *Hamburger Haiku* by Allan Wolf
- *A Simile is Like a Song* Author Unknown
- *Where I'm From* by George Ella Lyon

From *The Blood-Hungry Spleen and Other Poems About Our Parts* by Allan Wolf

- Bone Chart
- You Can't Beat Your Heart
- Thirteen Ways of Looking at Your Knees and Elbows
- etc.

From *New Found Land* by Allan Wolf

- *Sgt. Patrick Gass, The Carpenter*

Other poems I might have shared:

- *Arithmetic* by Carl Sandburg
- *Math Lesson* by Bobbi Katz

## BOOKS I REFERENCED

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Katz, Bobbi. *Upside Down and Inside Out*. Honesdale: Boyds Mills Press, 1992.

Lane, Barry. *51 Wacky We-Search Reports: Face the Facts with Fun!* Shoreham, VT: Discover Writing Press, 2003.

Lyon, George Ella. *Where I'm From, Where Poems Come From*. Spring, TX: Absey & Co., Inc., 1999.

Pappas, Theoni. *Math Talk: Mathematical Ideas in Poems for Two Voices*. San Carlos, CA: Wide World Publishing/Tetra, 1999.

Wolf, Allan. *Immersed in Verse: An Informative, Slightly Irreverent & Totally Tremendous Guide to Living the Poet's Life*. Asheville, NC: Lark Books, 2006.

Wolf, Allan. *The Blood-Hungry Spleen and Other Poems About Our Parts*. Cambridge: Candlewick Press, 2003.

Wolf, Allan. *New Found Land: Lewis and Clark's Voyage of Discovery*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2004.



## A (Very) Limited Bibliography of “NonFiction” Poetry

Note: These titles are just to get you going. There are plenty more, but a handout can only be so long before it turns into a book!

### Animals

Esbensen, Barbara Juster. *Words with Wrinkled Knees*. Honesdale, PA: Wordsong/Boyd's Mills Press, 1986.

George, Kristine O'Connell. *Little Dog Poems*. New York: Clarion Books, 1999.

Ghigna, Charles. *Animal Trunk: Silly Poems to Read Aloud*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1998.

Heard, Georgia. *Creatures of Earth, Sea, and Sky*. Honesdale, PA: Wordsong/Boyd's Mills Press, 1992.

Sierra, Judy. *Antarctic Antics: A Book of Penguin Poems*. San Diego: Gulliver Books, 1998.

Springer, Nancy. *Music of Their Hooves: Poems About Horses*. Honesdale, PA: Wordsong/Boyd's Mills, 1994.

### Emotions, Self-Esteem

Angelou, Maya. *Life Doesn't Frighten Me*. New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1993.

Curtis, Jamie Lee. *Today I Feel Silly and Other Moods that Make My Day*. New York: Joanna Cotler Books, 1998.

Curtis, Jamie Lee. *I'm Gonna Like Me: Letting Off a Little Self-Esteem*. New York: Joanna Cotler Books, 2002.

Gordon, Ruth, ed. *Pierced By a Ray of Sun: Poems About the Times We Feel Alone*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.

Heard, Georgia, ed. *This Place I Know: Poems of Comfort*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2002.

Holbrook, Sara. *Nothing's the End of the World*. Honesdale, PA: Wordsong/Boyd's Mills Press, 1995.

Holbrook, Sara. *Walking on the Boundaries of Change: Poems of Transition*. Honesdale, PA: Wordsong/Boyd's Mills Press, 2000.

### History

Benét, Rosemary and Stephen Vincent Benét. *A Book of Americans*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1963.

Hopkins, Lee Bennett. *Hand in Hand: An American History Through Poetry*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1994.

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*. Illustrated by Christopher Bing. Brooklyn, NY: Handprint Books, 2001.

Neil, Philip, ed. *Singing America: Poems that Define a Nation*. New York: Viking, 1995.

Panzer, Nora, ed. *Celebrate America in Poetry and Art*. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 1994.

### Math

Pappas, Theoni. *Math Talk: Mathematical Ideas in Poems for Two Voices*. San Carlos, CA: Wide World Publishing/Tetra, 1999.

Tang, Greg. *The Grapes of Math*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2001.  
\_\_\_\_\_. *Math Appeal: Mind-Stretching Math Riddles*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2003.

### **Nature, Earth and Life Sciences**

Esbensen, Barbara Juster. *Echoes for the Eye: Poems to Celebrate Patterns in Nature*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996.

Fleischman, Paul. *I Am Phoenix: Poems for Two Voices*. New York: Harper & Row, 1985.  
\_\_\_\_\_. *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988.

Hopkins, Lee Bennett, ed. *Blast Off! Poems About Space*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.

Wolf, Allan. *The Blood-Hungry Spleen and Other Poems About Our Parts*. Cambridge: Candlewick Press, 2003.

Yolen, Jane, ed. *Weather Report*. Honesdale, PA: Wordsong/Boyd's Mills Press, 1993.

### **Reading/Writing/Grammar Instruction**

Katz, Bobbi. *25 Great Grammar Poems with Activities*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2000.

Katz, Bobbi. *Poems Just For Us with Cross Curriculum Activities*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 1996.

Katz, Bobbi. *Partner Poems for Building Fluency*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2006.

Willen, Jennifer. *70 Wonderful Word Family Poems: A Delightful Collection of Fun-To-Read Rhyming Poems With an Easy-To-Use Lesson Plan for Teaching the Top 35 Word Families*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2002.

### **Riddles**

Franco, Betsy. *100 Riddle Poems for Pocket Charts*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2001.

Smith, William Jay and Carol Ra, eds. *Behind the King's Kitchen: A Roster of Rhyming Riddles*. Honesdale, PA: Wordsong/Boyd's Mills Press, 1992.

### **School**

Appelt, Kathi. *Poems from Homeroom: A Writer's Place to Start*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002.

Dakos, Kalli. *If You're Not Here, Please Raise Your Hand and Other Poems About School*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990.

George, Christine O'Connell. *Swimming Upstream: Middle School Poems*. New York: Clarion, 2002.

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Seuss, Dr. and Jack Prelutsky. *Hooray for Diffendoofer Day!* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998.

Shields, Carol Diggory. *Lunch Money And Other Poems About School*. New York: Dutton Juvenile, 1995.

### **Seasons, Holidays, Months**

Ghigna, Charles and Debra Ghigna. *Christmas Is Coming!* Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing, 2000.

Hopkins, Lee Bennett, ed. *Happy Birthday*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991.

Moore (?), Clement C. *'Twas the Night Before Christmas or Account of a Visit From St. Nicholas*. Illustrated by Matt Tavares. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2002.

Thomas, Joyce Carol. *Gingerbread Days*. New York: Joanna Cotler Books, 1995.

### **Sports**

Knudson, R.R. and May Swenson, eds. *American Sports Poems*. New York: Orchard Books, 1988.

Hopkins, Lee Bennett, ed. *Extra Innings: Baseball Poems*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1999.

Nonfiction. Whether it's an experience found in your kitchen or halfway around the world, whether it's an idea you can't forget or a conversation with a fascinating person, sometimes the most intriguing stories are true. Course Catalogue. Nonfiction. Whether it's an experience found in your kitchen or halfway around the world, whether it's an idea you can't forget or a conversation with a fascinating person, sometimes the most intriguing stories are true. Course Catalogue. The Green Street Poetry Workshop meets at least once a month, bringing together poets of all stripes to share. Simply put, we create an atmosphere where poets can be open, honest, and courageous about who they are and what they want as writers. Whether you want to be published and make a name for yourself, or you just use poetry as a way to vent, our workshops inspire connections, conversations, and fruitful relationships that help our members achieve their goals as writers and as people. Also, if you couldn't tell already, a defining characteristic of our shop is that it's fun. Poetry is so important because it helps us understand and appreciate the world around us. Poetry's strength lies in its ability to shed a "sideways" light on the world, so the truth sneaks up on you. No question about it. Poetry teaches us how to live. Poetry is like the Windex on a grubby car window—it bares open the vulnerabilities of human beings so we can all relate to each other a little better. You know how I'm a flag-waving advocate of poetry and I'm so thrilled to feature fellow poet Lidy Wilks on my blog today.