



ACCESSIBLE POETRY

POETRY FOR THE ENTHUSIASTIC AND THE AVERSE

Poetry is an invitation to explore your story in a new way, to write about moments or emotions without specifically naming them, to play with the musicality of words and phrases, to choose words, punctuation, and line breaks carefully. There is no right or wrong way to read or write poetry, just an invitation to begin.

PICTURE A POSTCARD

Picture a postcard. As you start to write a poem, imagine you only have room to fill a single postcard. You must choose your words well. Essentially, poetry says the most with the fewest words. Every word, punctuation mark, line break, and stanza is necessary to carry the emotion you feel.

MYSTERY VS. MYSTERY

Poetry isn't a code to be cracked, and there isn't a meaning known only to select scholars. Instead poetry leans into the other meaning of mystery—the mystery of our faith. We believe in the holy Trinity without fully understanding its mystery. Likewise, we won't understand (or even like) every poem we read.

ICE CREAM

There is a difference between ice cream (or poem)-makers and ice cream (or poem)-eaters. A poem writer has something to say, and writing the poem satisfies their creative need. Yet the poet's meaning becomes unimportant the moment it's sent out into the world. Poem readers will read a poem however it hits them at the moment. They might be tired or frustrated, not feeling well, or suddenly transported to their childhood — all unrelated to the words on the page. Yet sometimes those *flavors* combine to create something brand new.

There's no right or wrong to poetry—there is only a small scoop of words laden with flavor.

POETRY HOW-TOS

Prose = words in their best order; poetry = the best words in the best order. (Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

There are three ways to learn and grow in poetry, and each is equally important.

READ POETRY

Reading poetry might occur at the recommendation of a friend, or perusing the poetry section at the library. It might be poetry discovered at a yard sale, a Kindle sale, or a wonderful used bookstore.

SOME POETS TO READ

- Emily Dickinson
- John Blase
- Gerhard E. Frost
- Robert Frost
- Joy Lenton
- Denise Levertov
- Luci Shaw
- Patricia McKernon
- Gerard Manley Hopkins
- Marilyn Nelson
- Walt Whitman
- Megan Willome

WRITE POETRY

“One reason to write a poem is to flush from the deep thickets of the self some thought, feeling, comprehension, question, music, you didn't know was in you, or in the world.” (Jane Hirshfield)

The **first guideline** for writing a poem is that *it doesn't have to be a good poem*. First poems are a little like stumbling around in the dark. We learn to write poetry by reading and writing poems.

The **second guideline** is journaling. Make notes about the poems you read. Include things you like or don't like, questions you have, what the poem makes you think of, and how it challenges you.

MEMORIZE POETRY

The **third way to learn and grow in poetry** is to memorize poetry. Nothing will teach you more about poetry than memorizing a good poem by a good poet.

Once you've memorized a poem, it's yours forever. Consider recording yourself reading the poem so you can listen to it on walks, in waiting rooms, when you can't fall asleep, when you're not feeling well, or are under a lot of stress.

Memorizing poems “imbues them with emotion through time ... To memorize poetry is to plant it. To memorize poetry is to give it life.” (Gabriel Robare)