

The Grammar
of
Poetry
Primer

(TEACHERS EDITION)

IMITATION IN WRITING

by Matt Whiting

Imitation In Writing

The Grammar of Poetry Primer is the sixth book in a growing series of Imitation in Writing materials designed to teach aspiring writers the art and discipline of crafting delightful prose and poetry. This primer was created to provide introductory level instruction and practice before the student begins The Grammar of Poetry.

Aesop's Fables
Fairy Tales
Greek Myths
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The Grammar of Poetry
The Grammar of Poetry Primer

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The Grammar of Poetry Primer

The Lady of Lorien! Galadriel!” cried Sam. “You should see her, indeed you should, sir. I am only a hobbit, and gardening’s my job at home, sir, if you understand me, and I’m not much good at poetry – not at making it: a bit of comic rhyme, perhaps, now and again, you know, but not real poetry – so I can’t tell you what I mean...

It ought to be sung. You’d have to get Strider, Aragorn that is, or old Mr. Bilbo, for that.

But I wish I could make a song about her...

Beautiful she is, sir! Lovely! Sometimes like a great tree in flower, sometimes like a white daffadowndilly, small and slender like. Hard as di’monds, soft as moonlight. Warm as sunlight, cold as frost in the stars. Proud and far-off as a snow-mountain, and as merry as any lass I ever saw with the daisies in her hair in springtime.

But that’s a lot o’ nonsense, and all wide of my mark.”

– Master Samwise (*The Two Towers*)

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What To Think About Poetry?

Many young people today, especially boys, think that poetry is something that only wimps and sissies are interested in. After all, who wants to lie around in the daisies all day writing stupid love notes about flowers, kisses, and butterflies? While I was growing up, I had heard enough poetry to know that I was not for it and that it was certainly not for me. Consider the following stanza from a poem titled *Little Girls are Best*.

*Little girls are mighty nice,
Take 'em any way they come;
They are always worth their price;
Life without 'em would be glum;
Run earth's lists of treasures through,
Pile 'em high until they fall,
Gold an' costly jewels, too –
Little girls are best of all.*

Now, imagine that this is the first real glimpse a young man has of poetry. His seventh grade English teacher requires all of her pupils to memorize this little poem as an introductory exercise, and she's frustrated each year by the poor response of the boys in the class. We should all be very concerned for him or any other boy in seventh grade who finds this sort of stuff tolerable. Let's change the scenario and pretend that the following stanza about the Red Cross Knight fighting a dangerous dragon, is the first that our young lad comes across.

*Which when the valiant Elf perceived, he leapt
As Lion fierce upon the fleeing prey,
And with his trenchand blade her boldly kept
From turning back, and forced her to stay.
Therewith enraged, she loudly gan to bray,
And turning fierce, her speckled tail advanced,
Threatening her angry sting, him to dismay.
Who, not aghast, his mighty hand enhanced.
The stroke down from her head unto her shoulder glanced.*

This encounter would produce an entirely different effect on the student. So, the first lesson is this, "Don't judge poetry based on some fluffy piece you heard once – take the time to investigate what poetry really is, and determine to like it." There will certainly be some types of poems that you prefer over others, this just makes the search more interesting.

What is poetry?

Poetry has been defined in many different ways. **For our purposes, we will define poetry as a language of pictures and music.** A good poet paints pictures with his words, and those words are written in such a way that makes them sound like a song. The pictures of poetry are called tropes or figures of speech, while the music is called meter.

Epiphany Graph

In order to write a good poem, you will need to have a topic to write about. Below is an epiphany graph designed to help you organize your topics. The word epiphany means to “show” or “reveal.” By completing the graph, you will be listing items that show or reveal something significant about you.

Directions: In the columns below, write down as many ideas as you can in each section. Start off with things that are true to your life; if you run out of ideas, you may use your imagination to create additional topics.

TOPIC IDEAS FOR POETRY		
PEOPLE I RESPECT	SPECIAL OCCASIONS	SPECIAL POSSESSIONS
SPECIAL PLACES	BEST DAY IN MY LIFE	WORST DAY IN MY LIFE

RIDDLE RENDEZVOUS #1

From time to time there will be a riddle at the bottom of your poetry worksheet. Some are posers and others are chestnuts, but all are just for fun and should be attempted after the worksheet has been completed!

*Thirty white horses upon a red hill,
Now they tramp, now they champ,
now they stand still.*

(teeth)

Thankfulness in Poetry

In order for you to become a good poet, you will need to become an avid reader of poetry. Reading lots of great poetry will not be much fun unless you enjoy it; this brings up a very important point. Whenever you begin to study something for the first time, you have a choice to make. Are you going to like this subject and relish it or will it be sour to your tastes and drive you away? You will find in your study of poetry, as in other subjects, that if you determine to set your affections upon it from the beginning that you will have a delightful time learning to read and write poetry along the way. In order to do this, be thankful for the chance to learn about poetry. When it is time to study poetry during the course of your week, think of it as a time in which you *get* to learn poetry instead of a time when you *have* to. Poetry will not always be easy, but the more thankful and tenacious you are when you study it, the more you will learn and enjoy as you study it. In short, teach yourself to love poetry.

Reading Poetry

In this lesson you will learn how to read and recite poetry that you are interested in. The first thing you should do when you attempt a poem is to read the title. This might seem too obvious to need pointing out, but consider for a moment the importance of the title. Oftentimes in poetry the title contains information that must be understood in order for the reader to comprehend what the poem is about. The title might contain the setting of the poem, the time in which the poem takes place, or the name of a person the poem is describing.

After reading the title, make a guess at what the poem is going to be about. Next, read the poem quietly to yourself. As you read it, try to figure out how the poem should sound. Do not stop at the end of each line; pay attention to the punctuation as you read. When a line ends with a comma you should pause briefly, if the line ends with a period your pause should be longer. Poetry is very similar to music in that it has a distinct rhythm or beat that you need to detect.

Finally, read the poem aloud, this time paying very close attention to what the poem means. As you read aloud be careful not to overemphasize the rhythm of the words, your reading should be natural, not forced. The rhythm or beat of the poem should not be so obvious that everyone in the room begins bobbing their heads as you read.

If you are reciting poetry for a group it is a common practice to state the title and author, recite the poem, and then restate the title and author. This restating helps to wrap the poem up and provide a firm conclusion to the performance.

Practice

A. Practice reading the following stanzas and see if you can guess what the rest of the poem is about. Remember to follow the guidelines above (read the title, read quietly, read aloud naturally).

The Building of the Ship

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

“Build me straight, O worthy Master!
Staunch and strong, a goodly vessel,
That shall laugh at all disaster,
And with wave and whirlwind wrestle!”

The Flesh and the Spirit

by Anne Bradstreet

In secret place where once I stood,
Close by the banks of lacrym flood,
I heard two sisters reason on
Things that are past and things to come.

Eldorado

by Edgar Allan Poe

Gaily bedight,
A gallant knight,
In sunshine and in shadow,
Had journeyed long,
Singing a song,
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old –
This knight so bold, –
And o’er his heart a shadow
Fell as he found
No spot of ground
That looked like Eldorado.

The Faerie Queene
(a selection)
by Edmund Spenser

A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plain,
Clad in mighty arms and silver shield,
Wherein old dents of deep wounds did remain,
The cruel marks of many a bloody field;
Yet arms until that time did he never wield.
His angry steed did chide his foaming bit,
As much disdainful to the curb to yield.
Full jolly knight he seemed, and fair did sit,
As one for knightly giusts and fierce encounters fit.

Adieu, Farewell Earth's Bliss
by Thomas Nashe

Adieu, farewell earth's bliss;
This world uncertain is;
Fond are life's lustful joys;
Death proves them all but toys;
None from his darts can fly;
I am sick, I must die.
 Lord, have mercy on us!

The Sick Rose
by William Blake

O Rose, thou art sick!
The invisible worm
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,
Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy:
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud
by William Wordsworth

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The Village Blacksmith
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Under a spreading chestnut tree
The village smithy stands;
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With huge and sinewy hands;
And the muscles of his brawny arms
Are strong as iron bands.
His hair is crisp, and black, and long,
His face is like the tan;
His brow is wet with honest sweat,
He earns whate'er he can,
And looks the whole world in the face,
For he owes not any man.