



POETRY 101 STARTER KIT

A FOUNDATION

The word **'poem'** comes from the Greek, 'poiema,' meaning, 'a made thing.' *Poiema* is often translated in the New Testament as 'workmanship' where the Apostle Paul says we are God's workmanship, "His poem." In essence, a poem is *a thing that is made*.

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5-8 year olds CORAL

Mary Had a Little Lamb template for poem writing



9-12 year olds YELLOW

How to write a Limerick (with examples)



12-15 + GREEN

**How to write a Free Verse poem using homonyms
as a 'Launching Pad'** (with example)

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1. Why Teach Poetry

- Poetry hones our ears for language and new vocabulary
- It helps us learn to read metaphorically—a key skill for Bible readers!
- It requires careful attention—whether reading it or writing

Kids who hear poetry are:

- Better listeners,
- More engaged readers,
- and have the foundation needed to write poems of their own

2. Poetry-A Definition

WHAT POETRY IS *NOT*

First of all, **POETRY IS NOT** a genre, it is a *form*. People often compare poetry to prose.

Prose is not the counterpart of poetry, but the counterpart of verse; poems are written in verse. (More about that in a bit).

So, how do we tell the difference?

The most straightforward rule of thumb to know you're reading **PROSE** is there are no defined line breaks (like in a poem) but sentences or phrases go all the way to the edge of the page without “turning back” early. (More on that below). In prose there are many genres: memoir, humor, biography, fantasy, science fiction, historical fiction and so on.

POETRY is also not a list of words or a paragraph simply chopped up into sentences stacked one on top of the other. Sections in a poem are called *verses* after the Latin word *versus*, meaning “a line, row, or furrow,” stemming from the verb *vertere*, meaning ‘to turn.’ Most poems are written in verse. This is what makes a poem a poem; the lines break, or turn, before they reach the right margin.

WHAT POETRY *IS*:

Poetry at its core is distilled language, an intentional process where word choice and economy of language matters.

Poetry speaks to readers through evocative images or by eliciting strong emotions. To do this, poets often *choose an image* to hold an idea or emotion. These containers are called

metaphors, physical examples representing an idea or emotion. Words like—bowl, bark, shell, rock—or abstract words—channel, sound, cast—become the ‘bridge’ between a representation and an idea or emotion. **Metaphor** is from *meta*-Greek for ‘over’ or ‘across’ and *pheirein* ‘to carry, or ‘bear.’ In other words, an idea is transferred from a tangible item to something intangible.

There are two basic styles of Poetry—Free Verse and Rhyme & Meter

A. Free Verse: Free verse poems do not have end rhymes but are driven by line breaks and word choice, a writing process called ‘**enjambment.**’ Poets pay close attention to end words and focus on language that encourages the reader to turn and read the next line to discover more.

Enjambment is when a sentence or phrase continues from one line to the next without ending punctuation, essentially forcing the reader to move on to the next line to complete a thought. The short poem below is a good example of this where readers are drawn along by the images and ideas without an end rhyme (Although, if you listen carefully, you’ll hear a rhyme at the end).

Mother to Son By [Langston Hughes](#), 1922

*Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.*

B. Rhyme/meter: Poems written in rhyme or meter are driven by sound, syllables, and end rhymes. Choosing words based on rhyme and meter limits word choice and requires both creativity and intentionality. *But the function and form once they are in place can provide great freedom.*

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Here is my poem ‘Accompaniment’ that grew from the seed that was the sound of birds in the morning:

Accompaniment, Jody L. Collins

Birds, their tones both winged and bright
Harmonize from branches out of sight
Know their parts, score memorized
Flash and zoom before my eyes.
Soprano, alto, second, bass
Throaty praises from branchy place
Echo, float, reverberate
A pause, then celebrate
Mornings’ rise first slow and quiet
Against dull backdrops now a riot
Their songs reveal they know their place
Background my day, this hallowed space.

Poet Emily Dickinson’s work is probably the most widely known for her use of ‘slant rhymes.’ Slant rhymes are words at the end of a line that don’t sound exactly alike but are similar when they land on the ear. The short verse below is a good example of this, where Dickinson has placed ‘away’ and ‘poetry’ as end rhymes:

There is no Frigate Like a Book by Emily Dickinson, c. 1873

*There is no frigate like a book
To take us lands away,
Nor any coursers like a page
Of prancing poetry.*

3. Three Poetry Mini Lessons by Age Group

On the accompanying pages you will find three “Making Friends with Poetry” activities using rhyme & meter or free verse form for students *to write their own poems*.

The activities are grouped by age: 5-8 yr olds, 9-12 yr olds, 12-15+ up. **A note about these groups--***If you are a home-schooling parent, you know best what your children’s abilities are. Children’s development spans a wide range, hence the grouping by age, not grade level. (These age ranges align loosely with Sarah McKenzie’s at Read Aloud Revival.)*



5-8 year olds CORAL

“Mary had a little lamb” template for poem writing



9-12 year olds YELLOW

How to Write a Limerick (with example)



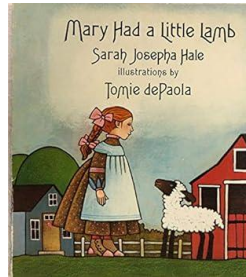
12-15 + GREEN

How to write a Free Verse poem using homonyms as a ‘Launching Pad’

Mini Lesson 1 5-8 yr. olds



5-8 year olds CORAL



Mary Had a Little Lamb--[Sarah Josepha Hale](#) wrote "Mary Had a Little Lamb," first publishing it as a poem in her book [Poems for our Children](#) in 1830, inspired by a real-life incident involving a student and her pet lamb in a New Hampshire school.

STEPS

#1 Read the Poem. *I'd recommend this version pictured above by Tomie de Paola.*

Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow;

And everywhere that Mary went, the lamb was sure to go.

It followed her to school one day, which was against the rule;

It made the children laugh and play to see a lamb at school.

And so the teacher turned it out, but still it lingered near;

And waited patiently about till Mary did appear.

"Why does the lamb love Mary so?" the eager children cry;

"Why, Mary loves the lamb, you know," the teacher did reply.

#2 Rewrite **the first stanza**, using your own words to fill in the rhyme. Here's an example:

Tommy had a little cat,

its fur was gray as smoke

And everywhere the cat was at

there went a happy bloke

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Here's a **template** for you to use to write your own. Grab a piece of blank, lined paper and have fun!

_____ had a little _____,

its _____ was _____ as _____

And everywhere that _____

There went _____

Mini Lesson #2 9-12 yr olds



9-12 year olds YELLOW

How to Write a Limerick

Limericks-A Foundation

Reading limericks offers a world of delight in listening, training our ears to hear both rhythm and rhyme. Limericks are usually nonsensical poems which makes them even more fun. They are always only 5 lines with a distinct pattern—

The 1st, 2nd and 5th line have the same end rhyme

And the 3rd and 4th do as well, making this an easy poem pattern to follow.

Edward Lear was the master of this style and often published them with his own (outlandish) illustrations.

Here are two of his more well-known limericks:

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!'

There Was An Old Man in a Garden
There was an old man in a garden,
Who always begg'd every-one's pardon;
When they asked him, 'What for?'
--He replied, 'You're a bore!
And I trust you'll go out of my garden.'

You can find a great collection of Lear poems online at [nonsenselit.org/Edward Lear](http://nonsenselit.org/EdwardLear)

How to Write a Limerick

Use the template below as a pattern, (or start with your own first line).

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Remember the limerick pattern above: The **first, second and fifth lines** will have the same end rhyme.

And the **third and fourth** lines will have the same rhyme as well.

Of course, you don't have to write a rhyme about a grouchy old man;

what if you wrote about

a young boy or girl

an old bird

a nice man,

a cool kid....and so on?

And substituted different places and expressions for where your character was and what they were saying? You can be as silly or serious as you want.

Like this:

There was a young girl in a rowboat

Who was paddling while fighting a sore throat.

She said, "Oh dear me, how I'd like some warm tea."

What she needed was a muffler and topcoat.

-J L Collins

Limerick Template: Copy the first sentence on another paper (or start with your own sentence).

There was a(n) _____ in a _____

Young girl

(House? School? Tree?

Cool kid

School bus? Highchair?)

Nice man

New mom

Old dog

Whatever the last word is in your first sentence will drive your rhyme scheme. Brainstorm some words that rhyme with *house, school, tree, school bus, highchair* or whatever you pick and go from there.

Have fun!

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Mini Lesson #3--12-15 year olds



12-15 + GREEN

How to write a Free Verse poem using homonyms as a 'Launching Pad'

A Foundation

When writing free verse, poets pay attention to end words, focusing on language that encourages the reader to turn to the next line to discover more. Poets accomplish this by using descriptive words, focusing not only on meaning but sound and syllables. This way of writing a poem will dictate its form. Remember, **poetry is a form, not a genre**—words written in verse.

The purpose of a poem is to elicit a feeling, convey an image or idea and connect with the reader, causing them to respond with, “Wow, I see that/feel that/think that too.” Or, “those words perfectly describe the feel of autumn or the look of a sunset or _____” (fill in the blank).

The English language has hundreds of words that are spelled the same but have more than one meaning, depending on their usage. **These are called homonyms.** (*'homo'*-same, *'nym'*-name)

Words like:

- *sound*,
 - *cast*,
 - *channel*,
 - *tender*,
 - *rule*,
 - *temper*,
 - *pitch*,
 - *scale*,
 - *foil*... Words rich with facets of meaning, depending on which way you turn them.
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To use homonyms as a jumping off place to write your own poem, you will need a dictionary.

Then follow these steps:

1. Choose a word from the previous list that could have multiple meanings (or choose one of your own.)
2. Look up the word and its various usages and meanings; see if you can find a minimum of 4-6 ways the word can be used.
3. Jot down the definitions in short phrases and from there, begin crafting sentences.

Example: When I played with the word **'sound.'** I found five different meanings for the word and wrote this poem:

Sailing

We sailed the Sound happily,
Sounding the depth to be sure of our way.
Sounds of seagulls and a distant ship
Kept us company in our sound
And sturdy sailboat. No need to sound
A warning, we were safe and sound.

4. As you write your poem, pay attention to three things:
 - Use strong verbs whenever possible. ex. 'break' instead of 'breaking', 'sing' instead of 'singing', 'glance' instead of 'glancing.'
 - Choose words for sound, syllable and meaning; how many ways can you say the word "green"?
 - Be careful of cliches or tired words. Grab a thesaurus or dictionary for your nouns and adjectives.

Note: there are a few rules in writing free verse—one of them is to not end a sentence with articles like *a*, *an* or *the*. You want to keep the reader's eyes moving from the end of one line to the next. Strong adjectives and images help do this.

After you've drafted your poem, read it out loud. What do you notice?

Erase or cross out words, rearrange sentences.

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Can you find more descriptive words (adjectives) to use?

What about line length? In other words, what does your poem look like on the page? See if you can arrange your phrases to be even-ish; this is more pleasing for the reader.

NOW REWRITE your final draft, re-read, and sit back.

My friend, you've got a poem!

(The space below is a great place to put your poetry brainstorm).