POETRY 101 STARTER KIT

A Primer for Parents (and kids!)

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Why Teach Poetry?

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    - Two Basic Styles of Poetry- Free Verse and Rhyme & Meter
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    - **Ages 12-15+** *How to write a Free Verse poem* using homonyms as a 'Launching Pad'

*If you are a home educator you know best what your childrens' abilities are; 'grade level' does not always translate to age and vice-versa.

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A FOUNDATION

The word 'poem' comes from the Greek, 'poiema,' its root being 'poiein' meaning, '*to create*'. The Latin word is *'poema.'* In essence, a poem is *a thing that is made*. *'Poiema'* is often translated in the New Testament as 'workmanship,' where the Apostle Paul says we are *God's workmanship*.

Why Teach Poetry?

1. **Poetry**
    - Hones our ears for language and new vocabulary
    - It helps us learn to read metaphorically
    - It requires careful attention—whether reading it or writing

Kids who hear poetry are:

- Better listeners
- More engaged readers
- Have the foundation needed to write poems of their own

All these qualities help poetry weave its way into other skills for learning, which benefits all subjects that are taught.

2. **What IS Poetry?**

- Poetry at its core is distilled language, an intentional process where word choice and economy of language matters. Poets practice saying more with fewer words, making each one count.
- The purpose of a poem is an expression in words that communicates thoughts, feelings or ideas through images and language.
- People often compare poetry and prose as two different genres. However, prose is not a genre but a form (or mode) of writing. In other words, prose is the counterpart of *verse*.
- Poetry is a genre, as is fiction, nonfiction, and drama. Some works of fiction or nonfiction include *memoir, humor, biography, fantasy, science fiction, historical fiction, etc.* Prose and verse are modes; any of the genres can occur in either mode.

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- Saying that writing is either “poetry or prose” is better said its form is either “in verse or prose.”
  YES, I KNOW IT CAN BE CONFUSING!

So how do we tell the difference between the modes (or forms) of Verse and Prose?

In Prose 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.

Poems are written in verse, after the Latin word *versus*, meaning “a line, row, or furrow,” stemming from the verb *vertere,* meaning ‘to turn.’ In other words, the lines break, or turn, before they reach the right margin. The reader is urged to move on and complete the thought by turning to the next line.

There are two basic styles of Poetry—Free Verse and Rhyme & Meter
Free Verse: Free verse poems do not have end rhymes but are driven by line breaks and word choice, a writing process called **‘enjambment.’ 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.

They do this using ***metaphors*****,** physical examples representing 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. Words of tangible items like *bowl, bark, shell, rock*--or abstract words like *channel, sound, cast*--become the ‘bridge’ between a representation and an idea or emotion.

The short poem below is a good example of metaphor where African American poet Langston Hughes compares life to climbing a stair. (Although, if you listen carefully, you’ll hear a rhyme at the end).

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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.

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.*

Here is my poem that has a simple rhyming pattern:

Accompaniment from *"Mining the Bright Birds" 2023, Wipf & Stock*

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.

Once I had the beginning lines and end rhymes the rest of the poem was fairly easy to write. Read on for some simple ways to write your own rhyming poem.

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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. These groupings align loosely with Sarah McKenzie's at *Read Aloud Revival.*

NOTE: If you are a home educator you know best what your children's abilities are; 'grade level' does not always translate to age, and vice versa.



5–8 year olds

Using "Mary had a Little Lamb" to write a simple Rhyme Includes example and template for writing



9–12 year olds YELLOW

How to Write a Limerick Includes examples and template for writing



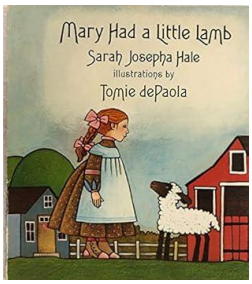
GREEN 12–15 year olds
Middle. Sch/High School

How to write a Free Verse poem using homonyms as a 'Launching Pad' From brainstorm to Revision and Final Draft. Includes examples & space for writing

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Mini Lesson #1 *Using "Mary Had a Little Lamb" to Write a Simple Rhyme*

5–8 year olds



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 Have some fun! 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** to use for your own rhyming poem. Grab a piece of blank, lined paper, or use the blank space here in the Starter Kit.

_____ had a little _____,

its _____ was _____ as _____

And everywhere that _____ _____ _____

There went _____ ___ _____ _____

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Mini Lesson #2 *How to Write a Limerick Ages 9-12*

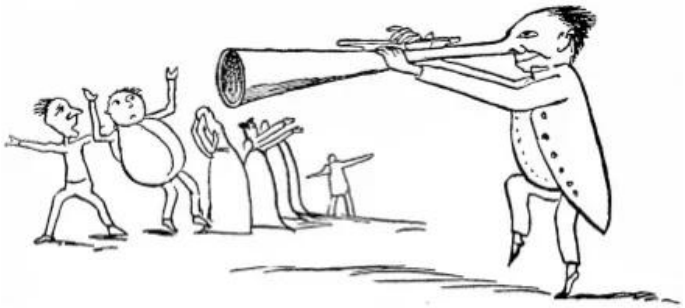
9–12 year olds

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. A limerick always has 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 his limericks with outlandish illustrations.



There was an old man of West Dumpet,
Who possessed a large nose like a trumpet;
When he blew it aloud, it astonished the crowd,
And was heard through the whole of West Dumpet.

You may be familiar with this limerick:

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!'

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. Here's my limerick:

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.

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 line will drive your rhyme scheme. Brainstorm 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 *How to write a Free Verse poem Ages 12-15+*



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).

Free verse poems often do the best job of this.

Remember from the introduction poems do not have end rhymes but are driven by line breaks and word choice, a writing process called **'enjambment'** 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.

Writers do this using ***metaphors*,** physical examples representing 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. Words like *bowl, bark, shell, rock*--or abstract words like *channel, sound, cast*--become the 'bridge' between a representation and an idea or emotion.

Poem prompts: 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** and are great words to use as a metaphor—a word container to hold the idea, thought or feeling that you want to express.

Words like:

- *cast*
- *sound*
- *channel*
- *tender*
- *rule*
- *temper*
- *pitch*
- *scale*

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- *foil…*

To use homonyms as a launching pad 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 free verse poem below:

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. use 'break' instead of 'breaking', 'sing' instead of 'singing', 'glance' instead of 'glancing.'
    - Choose words for sound, syllable and meaning; ex. 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.

5. Revision: After you've drafted your poem, read it out loud. What do you notice?
    - Erase or cross out words, rearrange sentences.
    - Can you find more descriptive words (adjectives) to use?

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- 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!

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About Me



I am a retired teacher--Elementary & Middle School--and spent over 20 years in the classroom, including five years working with Special Needs kids. I'm also a published poet and Nana of six grandkids ages 6-23. I'm passionate about helping parents, teachers and homeschoolers introduce children to poetry. My website www.jodyleecollins.com offers Free Teaching Resources like curated poetry lists, inspiration and how-to's for students ages 5-17+.

When I'm not at my desk writing or reading, I enjoy spending time with my children and grandchildren. My husband and I call the Seattle area home where we marvel at the birds and mess about in our garden.

You can find more of my FREE poetry resources by scanning the QR code below:

And be sure to Subscribe HERE for monthly inspiration and information to help you *Make Friends with Poetry.*

P.S. I love hearing from young poets. Email me your poem or limerick! I read every one jodyo (at) jodyleecollins dot com

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