



Poetry



“If there were a recipe for a poem, these would be the ingredients: word sounds, rhythms, description, feeling, memory, rhyme and imagination. They can be put together a thousand different ways, a thousand, thousand . . . more.”

—Karla Kuskin

A poem can be about almost anything. It can start with whatever is right in front of you: a spider, a pair of sneakers, even your nose. The poem grows with color, sound, rhythm, each word carefully chosen to build an image or tell a story. As the poem grows, familiar things may change and begin to look less familiar. Poems often end in a very different place from where they began.

After you’ve read these poems, you can discover how a poem grows by writing a poem of your own.

Contents

Places and Seasons

- Árbol de limón/Lemon Tree ... 235
by Jennifer Clement
- Travel..... 236
by Edna St. Vincent Millay
- knoxville, tennessee..... 237
by nikki giovanni
- A Patch of Old Snow 238
by Robert Frost
- Early Spring..... 239
by Shonto Begay
- Civilization..... 240
by Myra Cohn Livingston

Animals

- Dinner Together 241
by Diana Rivera
- Whirligig Beetles..... 242
by Paul Fleischman
- The Shark 243
by John Ciardi
- It's All the Same to
the Clam..... 244
by Shel Silverstein
- The Bat..... 245
by Theodore Roethke

People

- Campfire..... 246
by Janet Wong
- Be Glad Your Nose Is on
Your Face..... 247
by Jack Prelutsky
- Reggie..... 248
by Eloise Greenfield
- Pockets..... 249
by David McCord
- Ode to Pablo's
Tennis Shoes..... 250
by Gary Soto
- Dream Variation 251
by Langston Hughes



Places and Seasons

Árbol de limón

Si te subes a un árbol de limón
siente la corteza
con tus rodillas y pies,
huele sus flores blancas,
talla las hojas
entre tus manos.
Recuerda,
el árbol es mayor que tú
y tal vez encuentres cuentos
entre sus ramas.

— *Jennifer Clement*

Lemon Tree

If you climb a lemon tree
feel the bark
under your knees and feet,
smell the white flowers,
rub the leaves
in your hands.
Remember,
the tree is older than you are
and you might find stories
in its branches.

— *Jennifer Clement*

*Translated by
Consuelo de Aerenlund*



Travel

The railroad track is miles away,
And the day is loud with voices speaking,
Yet there isn't a train goes by all day
But I hear its whistle shrieking.

All night there isn't a train goes by,
Though the night is still for sleep and dreaming,
But I see its cinders red on the sky,
And hear its engine steaming.

My heart is warm with the friends I make,
And better friends I'll not be knowing;
Yet there isn't a train I wouldn't take,
No matter where it's going.

— *Edna St. Vincent Millay*



knoxville, tennessee

I always like summer
best
you can eat fresh corn
from daddy's garden
and okra
and greens
and cabbage
and lots of
barbecue
and buttermilk
and homemade ice-cream
at the church picnic
and listen to
gospel music
outside
at the church
homecoming
and go to the mountains with
your grandmother
and go barefooted
and be warm
all the time
not only when you go to bed
and sleep



— *nikki giovanni*

A photograph of a mountain range with patches of snow and a bright sun in the sky. The sun is positioned behind a mountain peak, creating a lens flare effect. The sky is a mix of white and light blue, and the mountains are dark with white snow patches. The overall scene is bright and somewhat hazy.

A Patch of Old Snow

There's a patch of old snow in a corner
That I should have guessed
Was a blow-away paper the rain
Had brought to rest.

It is speckled with grime as if
Small print overspread it,
The news of a day I've forgotten —
If I ever read it.

— Robert Frost

Early Spring

In the early spring, the snowfall is light
upon the mesa.
It does not stick to the ground very long.
I walk through this patchwork of snow and earth,
watching the ground for early signs.
Signs of growth. Signs of rebirth.

Larkspur and wild onions are still
within the warmth of the earth.
I hear cries of crows off in the distance.
A rabbit bounds off into the sagebrush flat.
A shadow of a hawk disturbs the landscape momentarily.
It sees food and life abundant below that I cannot see.
The cycle of life continues.

Even as I stand here shivering in the afternoon chill,
just below me, young seedlings start
their upward journey.
Insects begin to stir.
Rodents and snakes are comfortable in their burrows.
Maybe to them we also disappear with the cold.
Not to be seen until spring.

For this generation, and many more to come,
this land is beautiful and filled with mysteries.
They reveal themselves and their stories —
if you look very carefully, and listen . . .

— *Shonto Begay*



Civilization

I've stood here lately, looking at the path
Where deer once came to watch the sun go down,
Standing with their ears pricked for the sound
Of cars along the street.

I've longed to hear coyotes call again
Across the valley, howling from the hill,
Baying when the night stands black and still
Where sky and mountain meet.

I've watched for the raccoons, who crept
Along the rocks and over fallen wood,
Begging near our windows for some food,
Staring with black-ringed eyes.

Lizards, rabbits, snakes and moles. They came,
Chewing the poppies, digging up the lawn,
Burrowing homes and holes. But they have gone.
The mournful owls remember. So do I.

— *Myra Cohn Livingston*

Animals

Dinner Together

Sitting by the barbecue
waiting for sausages and hot dogs
blue-gray smoke the same color
of the sky
I see a tiny spider
walking down from the sky with tiny six-
footed steps
down
down
in a perfectly straight
line
all the way
down
to the floor
then back up
the same line
rising from one cloud
up to another,
a silver speck
glistening
at its mouth,
climbing the invisible ladder.

— Diana Rivera



In this poem for two voices, each column is read by a separate voice. Lines next to each other are read at the same time.

Whirligig Beetles



We're whirligig beetles
we're swimming in circles,
black backs by the hundred.

We're spinning and swerving
as if we were on a
mad merry-go-round.

We never get dizzy
from whirling and weaving
and wheeling and swirling.

The same goes for turning,
revolving and curving,
gyrating and twirling.
The crows fly directly,
but we prefer spirals,
arcs, ovals, and loops.

"As the whirligig swims"

We're whirligig beetles
we're swimming in circles,
black backs by the hundred.
We're spinning and swerving
as if we were on a
mad merry-go-round.

We never get dizzy
from whirling and weaving
and wheeling and swirling.
The same goes for turning,
revolving and curving,
gyrating and twirling.

The crows fly directly,
but we prefer spirals,
arcs, ovals, and loops.
We're fond of the phrase
"As the whirligig swims"
meaning traveling by
the most circular



circular
roundabout
backtracking
indirect
serpentine
tortuous
twisty,
best possible
route.

roundabout
backtracking
indirect
serpentine
tortuous
twisty and
turny,
best possible
route.



— Paul Fleischman

The Shark

My sweet, let me tell you about the shark.
Though his eyes are bright, his thought is dark.
He's quiet — that speaks well of him.
So does the fact that he can swim.
But though he swims without a sound,
Wherever he swims he looks around
With those two bright eyes and that one
dark thought.
He has only one, but he thinks it a lot.
And the thought he thinks but can never complete
Is his long dark thought of something to eat.
Most anything does, and I have to add
That when he eats his manners are bad.
He's a gulper, a ripper, a snatcher, a grabber.
Yes, his manners are drab. But his thought
is drabber.
That one dark thought he can never complete
Of something — anything — somehow to eat.

Be careful where you swim, my sweet.

— John Ciardi

It's All the Same to the Clam

You may leave the clam on the ocean's floor,
It's all the same to the clam.

For a hundred thousand years or more,
It's all the same to the clam.

You may bury him deep in mud and muck
Or carry him 'round to bring you luck,
Or use him for a hockey puck,
It's all the same to the clam.

You may call him Jim or Frank or Nell,
It's all the same to the clam.

Or make an ashtray from his shell,
It's all the same to the clam.

You may take him riding on the train
Or leave him sitting in the rain.

You'll never hear the clam complain,
It's all the same to the clam.

Yes, the world may stop or the world may spin,
It's all the same to the clam.

And the sky may come a-fallin' in,
It's all the same to the clam.

And man may sing his endless songs
Of wronging rights and righting wrongs.

The clam just sets — and gets along,
It's all the same to the clam.



— Shel Silverstein



THE BAT

By day the bat is cousin to the mouse.
He likes the attic of an aging house.

His fingers make a hat about his head.
His pulse beat is so slow we think him dead.

He loops in crazy figures half the night
Among the trees that face the corner light.

But when he brushes up against a screen,
We are afraid of what our eyes have seen:

For something is amiss or out of place
When mice with wings can wear a human face.

— *Theodore Roethke*

People

CAMPFIRE

Just think —
when Mother was my age,
she could build a fire
with sparks from rocks,
catch a bunch of
grasshoppers and
roast them whole
for a summer
night's snack!

"Get me a good stick,"
she says, "thin but strong,"
and I bring her one
from the woods
behind our tent.
On the way back
I see a brown bag
by her feet —
could it be?

When the fire is spitting ready,
she reaches
in the bag, rustling,
and hands me
one big, fat, luscious
marshmallow.

— *Janet Wong*



Be Glad Your Nose Is on Your Face

Be glad your nose is on your face,
not pasted on some other place,
for if it were where it is not,
you might dislike your nose a lot.

Imagine if your precious nose
were sandwiched in between your toes,
that clearly would not be a treat,
for you'd be forced to smell your feet.

Your nose would be a source of dread
were it attached atop your head,
it soon would drive you to despair,
forever tickled by your hair.

Within your ear, your nose would be
an absolute catastrophe,
for when you were obliged to sneeze,
your brain would rattle from the breeze.

Your nose, instead, through thick and thin,
remains between your eyes and chin,
not pasted on some other place —
be glad your nose is on your face!

— *Jack Prelutsky*

Reggie

It's summertime
And Reggie doesn't live here anymore
He lives across the street
Spends his time with the round ball
Jump, turn, shoot
Through the hoop
Spends his time with arguments
 and sweaty friends
And not with us
He's moved away
Comes here just to eat and sleep
 and sometimes pat my head
Then goes back home
To run and dribble and jump and stretch
And stretch
And shoot
Thinks he's Kareem
And not my brother

— *Eloise Greenfield*

WHAT ARE POCKETS FOR?

What are pockets for?

An old piece of sash cord,
a knob from a door;
a small U magnet,
if you can find it;
a sprung clock spring,
with the key to wind it;
oodles of marbles,
a twist of copper wire;
a baseball calendar,
a flint for fire;
one soiled jack of hearts
or the five of spades;
that unshown copy of
your last month's grades;
two colored pebbles,
one hickory nut;
a shell, some fish line
with three feet of gut;
a cog out of something
which never did run;
a cellophane of candy —
I'll give you one;



your first circus ticket stub,
the snap you took
of the clown on the slack
wire before it shook;
a flashlight bulb,
a dirty green stamp;
the long-missing part of
your bicycle lamp;
one thin pair of pliers
to ply or to nip;
one old zipper fastener
with nothing to zip;
that half-busted harness-
bell you found inside
the barn on the farm,
and the buckle too wide
for its three-inch strap;
and a whole lot more
of stuff. Did you say,
What are pockets for?



— *David McCord*





Ode to Pablo's Tennis Shoes

They wait under Pablo's bed,
Rain-beaten, sun-beaten,
A scuff of green
At their tips
From when he fell
In the school yard.
He fell leaping for a football
That sailed his way.
But Pablo fell and got up,
Green on his shoes,
With the football
Out of reach.

Now it's night.
Pablo is in bed listening
To his mother laughing
To the Mexican *novelas* on TV.
His shoes, twin pets
That snuggle his toes,
Are under his bed.
He should have bathed,
But he didn't.
(Dirt rolls from his palm,
Blades of grass
Tumble from his hair.)

He wants to be
Like his shoes,
A little dirty
From the road,
A little worn
From racing to the drinking fountain
A hundred times in one day.
It takes water
To make him go,
And his shoes to get him
There. He loves his shoes,
Cloth like a sail,
Rubber like
A lifeboat on rough sea.
Pablo is tired,
Sinking into the mattress.
His eyes sting from
Grass and long words in books.
He needs eight hours
Of sleep
To cool his shoes,
The tongues hanging
Out, exhausted.

— Gary Soto

Dream Variation



To fling my arms wide
In some place of the sun,
To whirl and to dance
Till the white day is done.
Then rest at cool evening
Beneath a tall tree
While night comes on gently,
 Dark like me —
That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide
In the face of the sun,
Dance! Whirl! Whirl!
Till the quick day is done.
Rest at a pale evening. . . .
A tall, slim tree. . . .
Night coming tenderly
 Black like me.

— *Langston Hughes*



Creating

Write a Poem

Write a poem that begins with the words “I wish” or “I see” or “I remember.” Repeat the opening phrase on every line or on alternating lines. Be as free and imaginative as you like. Do not try to make the poem rhyme.

Variation: Choose another phrase of your own to begin the poem.



Tips

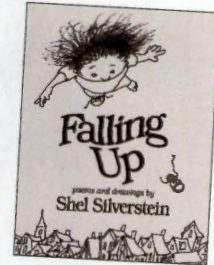
- If you need help getting started, work with a partner. Take turns adding lines.
- Try adding a color, a place name, or an animal to each line of the poem.
- Wait to correct your spelling and punctuation until after the poem is finished.

Read On Your Own

Falling Up

by *Shel Silverstein* (Harper)

Silverstein's last collection contains over a hundred poems and drawings, all in his distinctive style.



The Earth Under Sky Bear's Feet

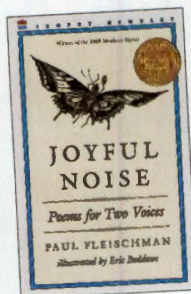
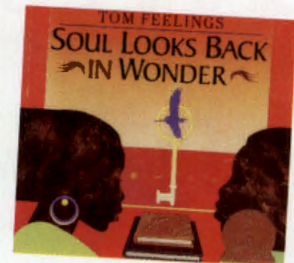
by *Joseph Bruchac* (Philomel)

These poems of the land represent the Mohawk, Pima, Pawnee, Navajo, and other Native peoples.

Soul Looks Back in Wonder

by *Tom Feelings* (Dial)

Langston Hughes, Mari Evans, and Lucille Clifton are among the African American poets featured in this collection.



Joyful Noise

by *Paul Fleischman* (Harper)

The fourteen poems in this Newbery-winning collection are meant to be read aloud by two voices.

Peeling the Onion

by *Ruth Gordon* (Harper)

This collection contains poems by Roethke, Whitman, Paz, Rexroth, and many others.

