



Your Turn

33 Lessons in Poetry

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I. Read, discuss, and internalize the following poem:

TO A YUCCA POD

Who crafted your chalice,
your stem and your stalk,
now hollow and brittle
yet still standing strong,
surviving the snows and the wind
and the dark?

Nature has sculpted me,
sturdily, carefully,
and placed me a sentinel
high on a hill.
Within my cupped hands
lie seeds of tomorrow,
gilded by moonlight and catching
the dew.
But sunrise has whispered a secret!
So, silently bowing,
I welcome with wonder
new life at my feet,
tender touch from above.

II. YOUR TURN!



Write a “nature poem” modeled on the above. Here’s how:

1. Choose a topic: a piece of bark, a pheasant feather, seashell, ivy leaf, blade of wheat, pinecone, dandelion, turkey fluff, wild cucumber, bittersweet, etc.
2. If you have an example of your topic, examine it carefully and quietly for at least five minutes. Look at it from every angle, feel it lovingly, think about it, listen to it!
3. List words that might describe its shape, texture, color, size. Don’t worry about writing sentences. (The “Treasure Trove” list may help you, or you might use a thesaurus.)
4. Ask it questions (or let it ask you questions) about how it was made, by what craftsperson, with what materials, using what tools, in what manner, with what actions, etc. Write these questions down.
5. Listen to its (or your) answers. Write them down too.

Read over what you’ve written. Rearrange ideas, add, cross out, change. In other words, REVISE! When you’re a little more than satisfied, REWRITE and EDIT out any mistakes in spelling or punctuation. Take your time. Later, revise again—or take a completely new approach. Rejoice! You’re in touch with nature!



A Treasure Trove of Words for Nature Poems

A. Craftsperson/Artist/Master/Creator/Designer/Inventor

- | | | | |
|-----------|------------|----------------|-------------|
| 1. weaver | 3. carver | 5. sculptor | 7. sketcher |
| 2. potter | 4. painter | 6. glassblower | |

B. Actions/Techniques (numbered groups correspond to A above)

1. weave/card/stretch/pull/comb
2. mold/trim/knead/shape/glaze/fire/throw/pinch
3. engrave/rub/shine/wax/shave/chop
4. paint/stain/wash/varnish/swish
5. carve/chisel/polish/gloss/strike
6. heat/grasp/pull
7. sketch/limn/compose/combine

C. Tools/Equipment/Terms (corresponding to A above)

1. loom/warp/woof/shuttle/bobbin/needle
2. wheel/kiln/model/coiled/sandpaper
3. saw/knife/hammer/axe/hatchet/blade/chisel (also for 5, sculptor)
4. spatula/brush/pen/easel/canvas/frame/collage/palette/pencil
6. vise/flame/bottle/tongs/furnace/pipe

D. Materials (corresponding to A above)

1. skein/twine/silk/thread/string/wool
2. clay/moisture/plaster/shard/enamel
3. wood/wax
4. ink/paint/charcoal/oil/pastel/tempera
5. bronze/tin/lead/gold/silver

E. Shapes

1. flat/oval/fluted/spiky/curved
2. hollow/clustered/rounded/vaulted
3. pointed/scalloped/bony
4. knobby/cupped/angled/jagged

(continued)

F. Textures

1. hard/rough/snarled/gnarled
2. buttery/slippery/milky
3. velvety/smooth/satiny/downy
4. lacy/airy/wispy/silky(-en)/delicate
5. crystalline/lumpy/bumpy/poked

G. Manner (add *-ly* to some of these)

1. deft/clever/practiced
2. certain/sure/constant
3. calm/serene/mellow
4. loving/caressing/careful
5. fragile/sturdy/strong
6. searching/knowing/masterly
7. patient/joyful/kindly/smiling

H. Sizes

1. small/tiny/miniature/dwarfed
2. mighty/huge/giant/monster/towering

I. Colors/Dyes/Hues/Shades/Pigments

1. jet black/ebony/snowy
2. spring-green/sapphire/azure
3. crimson/scarlet/violet
4. butter-yellow/lemon/ivory
5. faded/brilliant/flashy/dusty
6. pearly/silvery/gilded

J. Skill

1. art/talent/genius
2. spirit/power

Can You Add to These?

I. Read the following:

Late afternoon.
Sunbaked playgrounds steam with quivering heat.
Withered weeds choke and droop.
Twitching dogs doze in thirsty shade.

Skies darken.
Gusty winds swirl through dusty soil.
Rolling trash cans clank against fences.
Backyard clotheslines are hurriedly stripped.

Splatter!
Beparceled shoppers scoot to safety.
Streams spout from clogged drainpipes.
Lawn rivers flatten soaked grass.

It's over!
Birds and worms play tug-o'-war.
Barefoot children splash in street puddles.
A cleansed world glistens and sparkles!

Is the first line of each stanza a complete sentence? Why is this acceptable? Does the content of each stanza follow the outline below (in Part II)? Do you feel there are too many descriptive adjectives? If so, can you suggest a few adverbs to replace some of them?

II. YOUR TURN!



Using the outline below as a logical framework, write a description of a rainstorm or shower. Bring us with you into the experience. Let us SEE, HEAR, SMELL, FEEL, and TASTE the storm! To involve us even more, keep verbs in the present tense (as in the model above). The lists at the end of this lesson may help you to arrive at vivid word pictures.

- First stanza: Before the storm. (Set the mood, the time of day or night, the way people feel, what they are doing, how the animals are acting, etc.)
- Second stanza: The approach of the storm. (Show how the people or animals sense the coming of the storm, what some do to prepare for it, etc.)
- Third stanza: The rain. (Describe the storm—the thunder, rain, wind, etc.—and some effects on the earth, people, animals, buildings, trees, etc.)
- Fourth stanza: After the storm. (Describe how everyone/everything feels or looks or acts when the rain has stopped.)

(continued)



LESSON 13

Showers and Storms
(continued)

The World of Nature

As you reread, note the rhythm and improve it if necessary. Have you repeated words? Replace them. Edit, rewrite, share, and enjoy!

Can you add more words to any of these lists?

Rain Words

raindrops
shower
downpour
splatter
trickle
sparkle
pour
beat
splash
sprinkle
drench
soak

Water Words

cleanse
purify
refresh
wash
moisten
gush
spout
spill
gurgle
wavy
rushing

Sun Words

warm
bright
friendly
cheerful
glisten
beam
ray
stream
clear
shining
beating

Dry Words

sunbaked
dried
withered
thirsty
arid
parched
scorched
waterless
smothering
glaring

Land Words

soil
earth
ground
hillside
valley
field
plain
prairie
rocky

Mood Words

tired
peaceful
anxious
lazy
serene
foreboding
fearful
sleepy
angry

Cloud Words

overcast
rain cloud
dark
dim
gloomy
shadow
thunderhead
loom

Wind Words

gust
sigh
moan
howl
whistle
blow

Besides adding new words to the above, you can change many by adding or omitting a suffix (*-ing, -ed, etc.*).

LESSON 14

Origin Stories

The World of Nature

- I. In the Native American tradition, nature is the source of many legends. These might inspire us to make up our own poetic stories, especially concerning the origin of some attractive aspects of nature. Our poems would be imaginative explanations of how these things in nature began. They would never appear in a biology book or an astronomy book or in any other scientific study. However, they could tell something about human nature, or they could reflect our belief in the spirit world.

Example:

One night
 when the world was very young,
 a moonbeam was dancing
 on a quiet mountain lake.
 Seeing it, a woodland fairy ran to the shore,
 scooped it up in his hands,
 and brought it to his home next to the meadow.
 In the morning when he woke up,
 he rubbed his eyes in amazement!
 Where he had laid his shining treasure
 were three golden buttercups!

Can you give this poem an appropriate title?

II. YOUR TURN!



Choose one of the following (or something similar) for your imaginative origin story-poem:

dew	daisy	turquoise	a blue jay's
frost	sunflower	pearl	squawk
fog	poison ivy	emerald	a horse's mane
thunder	tulip	ruby	a rabbit's ears
lightning	bittersweet	gold	an owl's hoot
rainbow	water lily	silver	a raccoon's mask
			a fawn's spots

- First, outline the story of your subject's origin (where it came from):
 - What was it originally?
 - Where and when was this?
 - What happened to change it to what it is now?
- You may include fairies, gnomes, guardian spirits, angels, elves, sprites, etc., but use only *one* of these groups in your story. If you wish to write the exact words spoken by one or more of your characters, use quotation marks. Write your story in "poetic lines."
- Reread your story-poem. Have you repeated words unnecessarily? Could you omit them and replace them with more "exciting" words? Did you vary your structure, with some lines long, and others short and crisp? Did you include some figurative language and strong color words? REVISE.
- Are your punctuation and spelling correct? EDIT. If necessary—and it undoubtedly is!—REWRITE your story-poem, making it neat and legible, ready for the rest of us to enjoy.



I. Read the following poem:

THE CHIPMUNK

Just feet away he spied my apple core
 and picked it up—his violin!
 With silent song he munched his melody,
 then played a solo on his flute
 and chewed a clarinet concerto to the wind.
 A pause. A bow, dramatic and profound!
 Intermission over, his symphony resumed.
 A sax took up the score—so versatile was he,
 then a muted oboe gave the final note.
 The virtuoso stood erect
 and scanned the grass—
 For audience reaction? Perhaps.
 I nodded my approval. He seemed content.
 Baton aside, the leader left the stage
 and zigzagged through the field.

Do you see how this poem is actually one long (or “extended”) metaphor, containing within itself many individual metaphors? The way the chipmunk was holding the apple core was like someone playing different musical instruments—like a one-person orchestra! But note that it doesn’t say he held it “like a violin” or “like a flute” (or any other similes) but remains in the form of a series of metaphors.

II. Let’s try something similar. Choose an animal and think about how it would remind you of a person. Possibilities:

an ant—a construction worker

a giraffe—someone rubbernecking in a crowd

an owl—a blues singer

a squirrel—a tightrope walker or trapeze artist

a blue jay—a scolding parent or teacher

What does your animal do to act like a person? What other animals can we add? Canary? Poodle? Turtle? Frog? Rabbit? Shark? Leopard?

III. YOUR TURN!



1. First, decide *which* animal you’ll write about. Be sure it reminds you of a person doing something.
2. Next, write down words and phrases connected with this “animal person.” Then weave these words into a brief story (as in the poem above) or into a brief description, using a METAPHOR, not a simile.
3. If you wish to include your reaction as you “watch” it, keep up the metaphor. (In the poem above, who was the “audience?”)
4. Reread and revise. Edit and rewrite. Make your “animal person” come to life!

