

Poetry Writing Prompts

Grades 4-12

Poetry is a literary genre that focuses on rhythm and wordplay. Often associated with self-expression, poetry is a great place to explore figurative language and complex or abstract ideas. Responding to poetry prompts at home can help students find their voice, consider an audience, explore personal themes, and express their ideas without concern for grammatical rules. Creative writing can also help reinforce reading skills, especially when students are encouraged to read their written responses aloud.

This guide includes poetry writing prompts for children and teens in Grades 4-12. While originally intended for use at home, these prompts would also be appropriate for classroom use and can be utilized in conversation with course literature. For more information on writing prompts, read our ["Understanding and Responding to Writing Prompts Guide."](#)

Epic Poetry

Did you know that one of the earliest surviving works of literature is a poem from ancient Mesopotamia? The Epic of Gilgamesh describes a demigod king's quest for immortality following the death of his friend, a man created by the gods and raised in the wilderness. Epic poems are long works that recount heroic journeys and extraordinary adventures, often involving gods, monsters, and other mythical elements. Think of a character and write your own epic poem describing their travels and triumphs. Where is your character going? What is their biggest flaw, and how do they overcome it or adapt to it? Who do they travel with or meet along the way? For further guidance on writing epic poetry, check out [this guide](#).

Figurative Language

It's common for poetry to use [figurative language](#) such as simile, metaphor, personification, alliteration, and more. Let's take a look at metaphors! You might have heard of Shakespeare's "Sonnet 18" with the famous line, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" Shakespeare goes on to detail the similarities between the subject of the poem and a summer's day. Choose two objects or concepts that seem unrelated and write a poem comparing them. Remember: similes use "like" or "as" to make a direct comparison, whereas metaphors do not. Instead, metaphors make a comparison by saying that one thing is equivalent to another.

Blackout Poetry

When writing blackout poetry (also known as "redacted poetry" or "erasure poetry"), poets carefully select words and phrases from existing texts before blacking out the rest of the text. For this activity, you can use a newspaper, magazine, article, or novel. Select the words that stand out to you, and black out the rest with a black marker. Don't want to permanently mark up a book or article? You can secure a laminated sheet of plastic over any text and use a dry erase marker for easy, erasable blackout poetry. Check out [this poem](#) or [these examples](#) for further guidance.

Valuing the Word

The fewer words used in a piece, the more important each individual word becomes. This is why many poets will edit their work over and over, just to find the exact phrasing that captures their vision, or the overall theme and emotions the writer is conveying to their imagined audience. Write a poem that is around 150 words. Then, try to cut it down to about 80 words. Think about what words are most important to your creative vision and consider how the theme develops as you write.

Ekphrastic Poetry

Have you ever been moved by a piece of art in a gallery or museum? Ekphrastic poems are inspired by artwork and often describe the scene, setting, and/or perspective of a painting or sculpture. Find a piece of artwork in a book, online, or in a public collection that evokes a strong emotional response. Then, take notes on what you see and use these details to write a poem.

Haiku

Haikus are a Japanese form of short poetry containing three lines with five syllables in the first line, seven syllables in the second line, and five syllables in the third line. These poems often draw themes from nature. Go outside and engage your senses – what do you hear, smell, taste, touch, and see? Write a haiku using this information. For more guidance, check out [this example](#).

Acrostic Poetry

An acrostic poem spells out a word or phrase when you read the first letter of each line. [Lewis Carroll's "A Boat Beneath a Sunny Sky"](#) is a great example of an acrostic poem. When read vertically, the first letters of the first five lines of the poem reveal the name of Carroll's inspiration for Alice in Wonderland. On the left side of your paper, write a word with letters going from the top of the page to the bottom. Now you can fill in your poem, starting each line with a letter from the word you chose.

Visual Poetry

Also called concrete poetry, a visual poem takes the shape of an image, often one related to the poem's content. For example, the lines of a poem about a forest may be arranged to form a tree when you look at the page. Pick an object around you or an inspiring shape that comes to mind and create a visual poem. This shape can be obvious, like in [these poems](#), or more subtle, like in [this example](#). How might the shape of the object you chose impact your poem? What other sensory aspects (touch, taste, smell, or sound) of this object might you incorporate in your poem?

Poetry and Prose

Poetry often follows metric rules – an intentional pattern of stressed syllables. Prose, on the other hand, refers to the regular flow of written language, as is used in novels, news articles, and academic essays. Writing in prose can help poets develop writing skills that they can transfer to their poetry writing. Understanding how to write prose helps poets consider thematic relationships and order. Likewise, understanding poetry helps prose writers consider word choice and imagery. Write a poem on any topic, and then rewrite it as a prose piece. This may involve adding and subtracting components, or even changing the narrative of the piece! Writing with a friend? Have them turn your prose back into a poem and compare how the two poems are similar and different in their themes and approach to rhythm.