

**Poetry.**

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(Cover page to make the packet an even 40 pages)

# Operation New Bulletin Board

As a start to our new unit of poetry, your job is to visually depict what poetry is using one of the following quotations on an 8x11 piece of paper. Embellish in any way you'd like. Color. Googly eyes. Whatever. We will then make a collage of all your responses.

Webster's Dictionary Definition:

Poetry n. ~~Compositions designed to convey a vivid and imaginative sense of experience, characterized by the use of condensed language, chosen for its sound and suggestive use of condensed language, chosen for its sound and suggestive power as well as its meaning, and by the use of such literary techniques as structured meter, natural cadences, rhyme, or metaphor.~~

## *Poetry is:*

"A poem is an idea caught in the act of dawning." --Robert Frost

"things that are true expressed in words that are beautiful." --Dante

"the art of uniting pleasure with truth by calling imagination to the help of reason." --Samuel Johnson

"the best words in the best order." --Samuel Taylor Coleridge

"the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." --William Wordsworth

"musical thought." --Thomas Carlyle

"emotion put into measure." --Thomas Hardy

"If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that it is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that it is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?" --Emily Dickinson

"speech framed-to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning." --Gerard Manley Hopkins

"a way of remembering what it would impoverish us to forget." --Robert Frost

"a revelation in words by means of the words." --Wallace Stevens

"not the assertion that something is true, but the making of that truth more fully real to us." --T.S. Eliot

"the body of linguistic constructions that men usually refer to as poems." --J. V. Cunningham

"hundreds of things coming together at the right moment." --Elizabeth Bishop

"anything said in such a way, or put on the page in such a way, as to invite from the hearer or the reader a certain kind of attention." --William Safford

"the clear expression of mixed feelings." W. H. Auden

"A poem should not mean but be." --Archibald MacLeish

"Poetry is to prose as dancing is to walking." --Paul Valery

## 5 Steps of Annotating

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When annotating our classwork, complete all of these steps in the margins of the text. This is important for responding to writing without needing a guide...create your own guide to study.

1. **Circle and define any unknown words.**
  - Be sure to define words that may have multiple meanings
  - Poetry is about word choice, so not knowing one word can alter the meaning entirely
  - Think about why an author uses certain words over others
  
2. **Summarize each section/stanza.**
  - Check your comprehension of each individual stanza
  - Note if the stanzas flow together to tell a story, or not
  - Important for refreshing the material for the test
  
3. **Underline/highlight key phrases and literary devices.**
  - Note key phrases that help prove what the poem is about
  - Point out major metaphors/similes
  - Highlight other poetry terms, such as alliteration, rhyme scheme, etc...
  
4. **Write down questions (at least 2).**
  - Practice guessing what Mr. Randon will ask on the test
  - Ask the big questions, do not get bogged down in specifics
  
5. **Determine the universal theme(s).**
  - Remember that a theme cannot be one word – a full theme
  - You should always be able to *support* your interpretation
  - A universal theme should be a message about life that **everyone** can learn from

# Stopping by the woods on a snowy evening

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Answer the following questions about this Robert Frost poem.

Whose woods these are I think I know.

His house is in the village though;

He will not see me stopping here

To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer

To stop without a farmhouse near

Between the woods and frozen lake

The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake

To ask if there is some mistake.

The only other sound's the sweep

Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep.

## Comprehension of Stopping by woods on a snow evening

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Answer the following questions about the literal meaning of the poem.

Draw a picture of what is described in the poem:

On the literal level, what is going on in the poem?

On the literal level, the speaker decides to keep going because he has promises to keep. What do you supposed these promises are?

What do you think the message is on the literal level? What is the poet trying to say?

## Comprehension of Stopping by woods on a snow evening (Cont...)

Answer the following questions about the **figurative** meaning of the poem.

Fill in the following table. Use the descriptions and the relationships to figure out what IDEA is represented (something NOT tangible)

Object	Connotation	Descriptions from poem	Relationship to other objects	IDEA
Village				
Woods				
Snow				
Farmhouse				
Horse				
Lake				
Promises				
Darkest evening of the year				
Miles				
Sleep				

The big question set up by the poem is what those lovely, dark, and deep woods symbolize to the traveler. What does your group think? What has the speaker said "no" to in passing them by?

Whatever the woods stand for, what has the speaker said yes to in deciding to go on? In other words, how has he resolved his conflict?

So what is the message of this poem? What is the theme?

# To Earthward

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Annotate the following poem by Robert Frost.

Love at the lips was touch  
As sweet as I could bear;  
And once that seemed too much;  
I lived on air

That crossed me from sweet things,  
The flow of--was it musk  
From hidden grapevine springs  
Downhill at dusk?

I had the swirl and ache  
From sprays of honeysuckle  
That when they're gathered shake  
Dew on the knuckle.

I craved strong sweets, but those  
Seemed strong when I was young;  
The petal of the rose  
It was that stung.

Now no joy but lacks salt,  
That is not dashed with pain  
And weariness and fault;  
I crave the stain

Of tears, the aftermark  
Of almost too much love,  
The sweet of bitter bark  
And burning clove.

When stiff and sore and scarred  
I take away my hand  
From leaning on it hard  
In grass and sand,

The hurt is not enough:  
I long for weight and strength  
To feel the earth as rough  
To all my length.



# Flanders Field

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Annotate the following poem by John McCrae.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

## Deciphering Meanings of Figures of Speech

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Label each example as a simile, metaphor, or personification. Interpret what the figurate language means based on the context. Use complete sentences and use the type of figure of speech in your answer.

1. The baby was like an octopus, grabbing at all the cans on the grocery store shelves.
2. As the teacher entered the room she muttered under her breath, "This class is like a three-ring circus!"
3. The giant's steps were thunder as he ran toward Jack.
4. The pillow was a cloud when I put my head upon it after a long day.
5. I feel like a limp dishrag.
6. Those girls are like two peas in a pod.
7. The fluorescent light was the sun during our test.
8. No one invites Harold to parties because he's a wet blanket.
9. The bar of soap was a slippery eel during the dog's bath.
10. Ted was as nervous as a cat with a long tail in a room full of rocking chairs.
11. The dawn tiptoed across Jenny's bedroom window sill.
12. The snow tucked Manassas in for a week long nap.
13. The leaves danced through the trees in the autumn breeze.
14. The smell of my mother's perfume kissed my cheek after she went through the door.
15. The daffodils poking through the mulch laughed at the snow.

## “Never Let You Down” by J. Ivy

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Mark the poem below and identify all the poetry terms.

We are all here for a reason on a particular path  
You don't need a curriculum to know that you are part of the math  
Cats think I'm delirious, but I'm so damn serious  
That's why I expose my soul to the globe, the world  
I'm trying to make it better for these little boys and girls  
I'm not just another individual, my spirit is a part of this  
That's why I get spiritual, but I get my hymns from Him  
So it's not me, it's He that's lyrical  
I'm not a miracle, I'm a heaven-sent instrument  
My rhythmic regimen navigates melodic notes for your soul and your mental  
That's why I'm instrumental  
Vibrations is what I'm into  
Yeah, I need my loot by rent day  
But that is not what gives me the heart of Kunte Kinte  
I'm trying to give us "us free" like Cinque  
I can't stop, that's why I'm hot  
Determination, dedication, motivation  
I'm talking to you, my many inspirations  
When I say I can't, let you or self down  
If I were of the highest cliff, on the highest riff  
And you slipped off the side and clinched on to your life in my grip  
I would never, ever let you down  
And when these words are found  
Let it been known that God's  
penmanship has been signed with a language called love  
That's why my breath is felt by the deaf  
And why my words are heard and confined to the ears of the blind  
I, too, dream in color and in rhyme  
So I guess I'm one of a kind in a full house  
'Cause whenever I open my heart, my soul, or my mouth  
A touch of God reigns out

# Alphabet Aerobics by Blackalicious

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Why hip-hop should be studied as poetry...

Artificial amateurs, aren't at all amazing  
Analytically, I assault, animate things  
Broken barriers bounded by the bomb beat  
Buildings are broken, basically I'm bombarding  
Casually create catastrophes, casualties  
Cancelling cats got their canopies collapsing  
Detonate a dime of dank daily doin' dough  
Demonstrations, Don Dada on the down low  
Eatin other editors with each and every energetic  
Epileptic episode, elevated etiquette  
Furious fat fabulous fantastic  
Flurries of funk felt feeding the fanatics  
Gift got great global goods gone glorious  
Getting' godly in his game with the goriest  
Hit 'em high, hella height, historical  
Hey holocaust hints hear 'em holler at your homeboy  
Imitators idolize, I intimidate  
In a instant, I'll rise in a irate state  
Juiced on my jams like jheri curls jockin' j-----  
Justly, it's just me, writing my journals  
Kindly I'm kindling all kinds of ink on  
Karate kick type brits in my kingdom  
Let me live a long life, lyrically lessons is  
Learned lame louses just lose to my livery  
My mind makes marvelous moves, masses  
Marvel and move, many mock what I've mastered  
N----- nap knowin' I'm nice naturally  
Knack, never lack, make noise nationally  
Operation, opposition, off, not optional  
Out of sight, out of mind, wide beaming opticals  
Perfected poem, powerful punchlines  
Pummelling petty powder puffs in my prime  
Quite quaint quotes keep quiet it's Quannum  
Quarrelers ain't got a quarter of what we got uh  
Really raw raps, risin' up rapidly  
Riding the rushing radioactivity  
Super scientific sound search sought  
Silencing super fire saps that are soft  
Tales ten times talented, too tough  
Take that, challengers, get a tune up  
Universal, unique untouched  
Unadulterated, the raw uncut  
Verb vice lord victorious valid  
Violate vibes that are vain make 'em vanished  
Well would a wise wordsmith just  
Weaving up words weeded up, I'm a workshift  
Xerox, my X-radiation holes extra large  
X-height letters, and xylophone tones  
Yellow back, yak mouth, young ones yaws  
Yesterday's lawn yards sell our (yawn?)  
Zig zag zombies, zoomin' to the zenith  
Zero in zen thoughts, overzealous rhyme zealots!

## Bad Love Poetry: Sunrise My Sweet

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Before I met you, the sun looked like a grape.  
Now the sun looks like a mass of flames.  
Speaking of flames,  
Have you felt the heat of the flames  
Of my love for you?  
Assuming you have, did it make you uncomfortable?  
If not, would you please fan those flames  
With the constant reassurance that you also love me?  
Although you probably don't love me,  
Because nobody ever has,  
I have this irrational hope that perhaps you could be the one,  
To finally bring a little light to my pathetic life,  
To love me for who I am,  
And believe in me,  
Even though I don't believe in myself,  
Because I'm not actually sure if I exist  
Or if I'm the figment of someone else's imagination.

### Analyzing Bad Love Poetry

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Let's grit our teeth for a second.

1. What makes the poetry bad?
2. If you were to give some advice to this guy on how to improve his love poetry, so he'd actually get the girl, what would it be?
3. What are the differences between Sunrise My Sweet and I Am Offering This Poem?
4. Make a list of strategies that could be used to create a perfect love poem. What would you try and do?

Now take your list and listen to "Brand New Colony" by Death Cab for Cutie...

# Brand New Colony

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## Death Cab for Cutie

I'll be the grapes fermented  
Bottled and served with the table set  
In my finest suit, like a perfect gentleman

I'll be the fire escape  
That's bolted to the ancient brick  
Where you will sit and contemplate your day

I'll be the waterwings  
That save you if you start drowning  
In an open tab when your judgment is on the brink

I'll be the phonograph  
That plays your favorite albums back  
As you're lying there, drifting off to sleep

I'll be the platform shoes  
And undo what heredity's done to you  
You won't have to strain to look into my eyes

I'll be your winter coat  
Buttoned and zipped straight to the throat  
With the collar up so you won't catch cold

I want to take you far  
From the cynics in this town  
And kiss you on the mouth  
We'll cut our bodies free  
From the tethers of this scene  
Start a brand new colony  
Where everything will change  
We'll give ourselves new names  
(Identities erased)  
The sun will heat the ground  
Under our bare feet  
In this brand new colony

Everything will change, oh, oh

5. Does Brand New Colony follow any of these rules? Which ones?

## Sonnet 130

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Annotate the following Shakespeare sonnet.

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun,  
Coral is far more red, than her lips red,  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun:  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head:

I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks,  
And in some perfumes is there more delight,  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know,

That music hath a far more pleasing sound:  
I grant I never saw a goddess go,  
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.

And yet by heaven I think my love as rare,  
As any she belied with false compare.

## Sonnet 18

Annotate the following Shakespeare sonnet.

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:  
  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;  
  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;  
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:  
  
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

# Disconnecting Clichés

Try to think of new metaphor and similes to replace clichés.

<b>Common Expression</b>	<b>Original and Fresh Imagery</b>
The sun burned like...	
Her eyes looked like...	
My love was like...	
The distance between us was like...	
Be creative...	

# Why I Love You

Shanelle Gabriel

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They say the human body  
Has over 50 billion white blood cells--  
And I need every single one  
Because you  
Make me--  
Sick.  
You are the fish that I would throw back,  
But for some reason  
As opposites,  
We attract!  
We show our admiration in love taps,  
"I Hate You!" matches,  
And sarcastic wise cracks.  
All the qualities of my soulmate...  
You lack.  
I wrote you a poem once.  
I mounted and framed it.  
It was perfect,  
And you gave me a pat on the back  
And said,  
"Hey, good stuff..."  
That was it.  
Your attempts at being romantic  
Are simply pathetic.  
The last massage you gave me  
Required a paramedic.  
The first time you cooked me dinner  
I had to pump my stomach.  
And you just like picking fights.  
If I say go left,  
You go right.  
If I say it's day,  
You swear it's night.  
You still think our anniversary  
Is the 10th of May;  
It's the 9th...  
Of MARCH!  
The Golden Arches  
Is the closest thing to jewelry  
I've ever seen from you.  
For my last birthday,  
You gave me a Twinkie

With one candle.  
You wear socks with your sandals!  
And not the short ones,  
The ones that pass your ankles.  
My idea of a tranquil evening,  
Involves a good book  
And peppermint tea.  
Yours only requires your PSP.  
You're a die hard Nas fan;  
I like Jay-Z.  
Like most Black folk and lactose products  
We just always seem to disagree.  
You think Angelina Jolie  
Is the epitome of beauty.  
I think she's overrated and her lips are  
crusty.  
Now, I'm a country kind of gal;  
You like the city life.  
I'm a revolutionary woman; You think  
We should all be barefoot housewives.  
I remember the last time I cried..  
You gently wiped my eyes,  
And whispered in my ears,  
"Baby...suck it up!"  
And I know it's bugged,  
But I still love you,  
Like Whitney loves crack.  
Cause for some reason as opposites,  
We attract.  
And truth be told,  
That romantic crap usually doesn't last.  
Flowers die,  
And many diamonds given  
May as well be cut glass,  
But what matters most is that  
You complement me  
Like air through my lungs.  
And there are over a trillion nerves  
In the central nervous system..  
You get on every single one.  
But for some reason,  
That's why I love you

# The Love Poem

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No one truly understands love—attempts to define love using prose typically fail:

**Love** (luv), n., **1.** a feeling of warm personal attachment **2.** to have a strong liking for **3.** a score of zero in tennis

Your assignment is to use poetry to accurately reflect what it means to love or to be loved. You have two options for this first poem:

## Idea 1:

Write a love poem in which you attempt to describe the emotion of love through all of things you would “be” for your admirer.

### Example:

I'll be the platform shoes,  
And undo what heredity has done to you  
You won't have to strain to look into my eyes.

**-OR-**

## Idea 2:

Write a poem in which you demonstrate your knowledge of the “good” characteristics of love poetry by acknowledging all of the **different** characteristics of the other.

### Example:

My idea of a tranquil evening,  
Involves a good book  
And peppermint tea.  
Yours only requires your PSP.  
You're a die hard Nas fan;  
I like Jay-Z.  
Like most Black folk and lactose products  
We just always seem to disagree.

## Notes & Ideas from Class

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# How to Write about Poetry

Notes on what to focus on when settling down to write your first explication of poetry.

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# since feeling is first

Annotate the following e.e. cummings poem.

since feeling is first  
who pays any attention  
to the syntax of things  
will never wholly kiss you;  
wholly to be a fool  
while Spring is in the world

my blood approves,  
and kisses are a better fate  
than wisdom  
lady i swear by all flowers. Don't cry  
-the best gesture of my brain is less than  
your eyelids' flutter which says

we are for each other: then  
laugh, leaning back in my arms  
for life's not a paragraph

And death i think is no parenthesis

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,grasshopper;

## “since feeling is first” comprehension questions

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This is a more difficult poem to read because of its structure. e. e. cummings likes to play with sentence structure and grammar rules in order to make a statement in a poem. Answer all of these questions in complete sentences as best you can.

1. Define syntax
2. Translate this line into your own words: “since feeling is first/ who pays attention/ to the syntax of things/ will never wholly kiss you;”
3. What connotation does “Spring” have to you? What do you think of in the springtime? Can you relate this season to love?
4. What does the second stanza say about love? This is a continuation of the line “who pays attention to the syntax of things will never...”
5. What does the statement “...kisses are a better **fate** than wisdom” mean? What is the author saying about what is most important in life?
6. How does the author respond to the woman’s tears?
7. To what does the author compare life to?
8. What are the characteristics of a paragraph?
9. Using the answer to 7-8, what is the poet saying about life?
10. Translate this statement into your own words: “then laugh, leaning back in my arms for life’s not a paragraph”
11. What does the poet compare death to?
12. What is the purpose of parenthesis in a sentence? What do parentheses do to the flow of a sentence? What does this statement say about death?
13. The poet compares different things to paragraphs, parenthesis, and syntax. What do these three things have in common?
14. So why do you think that the poet doesn’t use punctuation, correct sentence structure, or correct capitalization?
15. What is the **theme** (this should be a whole sentence) of this poem?

# Spring is like a perhaps hand

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Annotate this second poem by e e cummings.

Spring is like a perhaps hand  
(which comes carefully  
out of Nowhere)arranging  
a window,into which people look(while  
people stare  
arranging and changing placing  
carefully there a strange  
thing and a known thing here)and  
  
changing everything carefully  
  
spring is like a perhaps  
Hand in a window  
(carefully to  
and fro moving New and  
Old things,while  
people stare carefully  
moving a perhaps  
fraction of flower here placing  
an inch of air there)and  
  
without breaking anything.

# Making Structure Mean Something

Follow the directions below.

1. Flip to any page in the dictionary.
2. Choose one word with several definitions, one that appeals to you.
3. Write the word as the title of your poem.
4. In the dictionary, rank the definitions with number one as the most interesting, etc.
5. Write the definitions in the order you have chosen.

Word/title: \_\_\_\_\_

Definition #1:

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Definition #2:

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Definition #3:

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Definition #4:

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# Adding Meaning Through Structure

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At this point, all you have is a rank-order list of definitions. The next step is to evolve the list into a poem. This requires a poetic leap!

Try some of the following:

- ✓ Subtract repetitive words, such as excessive articles
- ✓ Substitute synonyms for words that are awkward or colorless
- ✓ Add linking words and/or punctuation for effect
- ✓ Add descriptive words
- ✓ Subtract definitions that no longer fit the total meaning
- ✓ Think about connotation (the emotion/feeling we associate with a word)
- ✓ Consider the overall tone of the poem
- ✓ Could the shape add meaning?
- ✓ Consider capitalization, punctuation, line breaks, stanza breaks that might add meaning

Write your structure poem on a separate sheet of paper.

## Examples

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Habit

A thing done often.

Condition. Disposition.

A thing done often.

Tendency to perform a certain action.

A thing done often.

Action of mind or body.

A thing done often.

Done easily. Difficult to break.

A thing done often.

Enforced by social disapproval.

A thing . . .

Error

blundER, mistake,, slip

deviation of behavioR from truth Or accuRacy

dEpaRture fROM what is

coRect

# Auto Wreck

Annotate the following poem by Karl Shapiro.

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Its quick soft silver bell beating, beating,  
And down the dark one ruby flare  
Pulsing out red light like an artery,  
The ambulance at top speed floating down  
Past beacons and illuminated clocks  
Wings in a heavy curve, dips down,  
And brakes speed, entering the crowd.  
The doors leap open, emptying light;  
Stretchers are laid out, the mangled lifted  
And stowed into the little hospital.  
Then the bell, breaking the hush, tolls once,  
And the ambulance with its terrible cargo  
Rocking, slightly rocking, moves away,  
As the doors, and afterthought, are closed.

We are deranged, walking among the cops  
Who sweep glass and are large and composed.  
One is still making notes under the light.  
One with a bucket douches ponds of blood  
Into the street and gutter.  
One hangs lanterns on the wrecks that cling,  
Empty husks of locusts, to iron poles.

Our throats were tight as tourniquets,  
Our feet were bound with splints, but now,  
Like convalescents intimate and gauche,  
We speak through sickly smiles and warn  
With the stubborn saw of common sense,  
The grim joke and the banal resolution.  
The traffic moves around with care,  
But we remain, touching a wound  
That opens to our richest horror.  
Already old, the question Who shall die?  
Becomes unspoken Who is innocent?  
For death in war is done by hands;  
Suicide has cause and stillbirth, logic;  
And cancer, simple as a flower, blooms.  
But this invites the occult mind,  
Cancels our physics with a sneer,  
And spatters all we knew of denouement  
Across the expedient and wicked stones.

# Courage

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Annotate the following poem by Anne Sexton.

It is in the small things we see it.  
The child's first step,  
as awesome as an earthquake.  
The first time you rode a bike,  
wallowing up the sidewalk.  
The first spanking when your heart  
went on a journey all alone.  
When they called you crybaby  
or poor or fatty or crazy  
and made you into an alien,  
you drank their acid  
and concealed it.

Later,  
if you faced the death of bombs and bullets  
you did not do it with a banner,  
you did it with only a hat to  
cover your heart.  
You did not fondle the weakness inside you  
though it was there.  
Your courage was a small coal  
that you kept swallowing.  
If your buddy saved you  
and died himself in so doing,  
then his courage was not courage,  
it was love; love as simple as shaving soap.

Later,  
if you have endured a great despair,  
then you did it alone,  
getting a transfusion from the fire,  
picking the scabs off your heart,  
then wringing it out like a sock.  
Next, my kinsman, you powdered your sorrow,  
you gave it a back rub  
and then you covered it with a blanket  
and after it had slept a while  
it woke to the wings of the roses  
and was transformed.

Later,  
when you face old age and its natural conclusion  
your courage will still be shown in the little ways,  
each spring will be a sword you'll sharpen,  
those you love will live in a fever of love,  
and you'll bargain with the calendar  
and at the last moment  
when death opens the back door  
you'll put on your carpet slippers  
and stride out.

# Comprehension of “Courage”

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Answering the following questions on Anne Sexton’s poem.

1. How does the metaphor of the alien in line 10 help you see a hurt child?
  
2. In line 15, Sexton refers to a banner. What does *banner* usually mean?
  
3. So what might it mean to face death not “with a banner” but with “only a hat to cover your heart”?
  
4. Referring to line 42, why would an old person’s love ones live in “a fever of love”?
  
5. In what acts does the speaker see courage in childhood? How are these acts “small”?
  
6. The last three stanzas begin with the word *later*. What progression does each stanza represent?
  
7. Describe the acts of courage in stanza three. What is the common theme of this stanza?
  
8. List the figures of speech in the first stanza. Which comparisons make these small acts seem large and heroic?
  
9. What unusual comparisons can you find in lines 20, 30, and 31? Do you think they all “work”? Do you understand them? Why or why not?
  
10. How does the speaker personify sorrow in lines 32-37? What seems to transform sorrow in the poem? Do you think this is true to life?
  
11. What is the theme of this poem?

# Tony Steinberg: Brave Seventh Grade Viking Warrior

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By Taylor Mali

Have you ever seen a Viking ship made out of popsicle sticks  
And balsa wood? With tiny coils of brown thread for ropes,  
Sixteen oars made out of chopsticks, and a red and yellow sail  
made from a baby's footie pajamas?

I have.

He died with his sword in his hand and so went straight to heaven.

The Vikings sometimes buried their bravest warriors in ships.  
Or set them adrift and on fire, a floating island of flames.  
The soul of the brave warrior rising slowly with the smoke.  
To understand life in Scandinavia in the Middle Ages,  
You must understand the Viking ship.

So here is the assignment:  
The class must build me a miniature Viking ship.  
You have a month. And you must all work together.  
Like warriors.

These projects are what I'm known for as a teacher.  
Like the Egyptian Pyramid Project.  
Have you ever seen a family of four standing around a card table after dinner,  
each one holding one triangular side of a miniature pyramid until the glue dried?  
I haven't either, but Mrs. Steinberg said it took 90 minutes,  
and even with the little brother on one side saying,  
*This is dumb! This is a stupid pyramid, Tony!*  
*You're going to fail this project.*  
*If I get Mr. Mali next year, my pyramid is going to be much better than this!*  
And Tony on the other side saying,  
*Shut up! Shut up! You little #@!*  
*No, no, no, no, no, no, no! Keep holding your side*  
*or I swear I'll kill you after the glue dries!*  
It was the best family time they'd spent together since Christmas.

He died with his sword in his hand and so went straight to heaven,  
which the Vikings called Valhalla.

*Mr. Mali, if that's true, that you would go straight to Valhalla*  
*if you died with your sword in your hand,*  
*then if you were an old Viking*  
*and you were about to die of old age,*  
*could you keep your sword right by your bed*  
*so if you felt like you were going to die*  
*you could reach out and grab it?*

I don't know if their gods would fall for that,  
but it sounds like a good idea to me.

Tony was out for a month before we heard what was wrong.  
And the 12 boys left whispered the name of the disease  
as if you could catch it from saying it too loud.

We'd been warned. The Middle School Head had come to class  
And said Tony was coming to school on Friday.  
But he's had a rough time.  
The medication he's taking has made all his hair fall out,  
and he's a little shy about it.  
So don't stare, don't point, don't laugh.

I always said I liked teaching in a private school  
Because I could talk about God  
And not be breaking the law.  
And for an Episcopalian kid who only went to church  
On Christmas and Easter, I sure talked about God a lot.  
In history of course, that's easy,  
Even the Egyptian Pyramid Project is essentially a spiritual exercise.  
But how can you study geometry and not believe in a God?

A God of perfect points and planes,  
Surrounded by angels and angles of all different degrees.  
Such a God wouldn't give cancer to a seventh grade boy.  
Wouldn't make his hair fall out from the chemo.  
Totally bald in a jacket and tie on Friday morning.  
And I don't mean Tony. Not one single boy in my class had hair;  
the other 12 had shaved their heads in solidarity.  
Have you ever seen 13 bald-headed seventh grade boys,  
all pointing at each other, all staring, all laughing?

I have.

It's a beautiful sight. And almost as striking as 12 boys  
six weeks later, now with crew cuts on a Saturday morning,  
outside the synagogue with heads bowed,  
holding hands and standing in a circle  
around the smoldering remains  
of a miniature Viking ship,  
the soul of the brave warrior  
rising slowly with the smoke.

1. Another simple question: What does this poem mean to you? And, how do you know?

2. Comparing this poem with "Auto Wreck," what similar themes can you find?  
Differences?

3. What is similar about the structure of these two poems? Why do you think the poets  
used this structure to convey their message?

## All

by Bei Dao

All is fated,  
all cloudy,

all an endless beginning,  
all a search for what vanishes,

all joys grave,  
all griefs tearless,

every speech a repetition,  
every meeting a first encounter,

all love buried in the heart,  
all history prisoned in a dream,

all hope hedged with doubt,  
all faith drowned in lamentation.

Every explosion heralds an instant of  
stillness,  
every death reverberates forever.

## Also All

By Shu Ting

Not all trees are felled by storms.  
Not every seed finds barren soil.  
Not all the wings of dream are broken,  
Nor is all affection doomed  
to wither in a desolate heart.

No, not all is as you say.

Not all flames consume themselves  
shedding no light on other lives.  
Not all starts announce the night  
and never dawn. Not every song  
will drift past every ear and heart.

No, not all is as you say.

Not every cry for help is silenced,  
nor every loss beyond recall.  
Not every chasm spells disaster.  
Not only the weak will be brought to their  
knees,  
nor every soul be trodden under.

It won't all end in tears and blood.  
Today is heavy with tomorrow—  
the future was planted yesterday.  
Hope is a burden all of us shoulder.  
though we might stumble under the load.

1. What does Dao say all is “a search for?” What does that mean?
2. What mood is created in the first poem? How do you know?
3. What does Ting say about trees? What does this mean?
4. Why do you think Ting felt the need to respond to Dao?
5. Identify the tone in each poem. How does that correspond with their themes?



# Slam Poetry

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An introduction to the Slam Poetry genre.

Poetry is simply a genre. Poetry Slam is a form of poetry that invites all different styles and techniques. Any poem that works in a performance setting is considered a slam poem. This could mean anything from a very quiet, personal piece that the audience can connect with to a piece ending with the poet releasing an ear-piercing howl. There is no limit to what slam poems can be. The definition of slam poetry is unlimited because the definition of poetry itself is unlimited. A poem is any piece of writing that has rhythm and spirit. This translates exactly into the style of poetry slam. This genre allows the spirit to come off the page and connect with its audience at a different level.

Poetry slam also welcomes experimentation. A common technique used by slam poets is to sing during a section of the poem. Usually, they sing a song that everyone is familiar with, but sometimes they make up their own short verse. The beauty of this is that no one judges a poet on how well he or she sings. Sometimes the poets will get the audience involved in their poem. The poet will encourage the audience to react to certain parts of the poem as part of their presentation. A poet may give the audience a line to repeat over and over again. While the audience recites this line, the poet performs his poem over the audience's chanting. New techniques are continually being invented. This will keep the audience guessing, so when people go to a poetry slam, they need to be prepared for anything.

Technique is not the only thing open for experimentation in slam poetry. The content of a poem is also often experimental. Some themes are very unusual and bizarre. Poems can be about math, mayonnaise, rubber ducks, nature, snake charmers, cats, orange juice, God's dog, and hip hop style verses about trees. Some of the most effective slam poems use the most unusual images and concepts. The ability poets have to play with every part of their poem is what makes the genre so unique and extraordinary.

One thing a poet must always pay attention to in poetry slam is the roots of this genre. Sometimes the genre tends to have a little more slam than poetry. As a slam poet, it is crucial never to lose sight that slam poetry still relies on the poetic aspect. Poetry is an art form. Someone cannot just come up with a great poem in a matter of an hour. This is also true with slam poetry. In a great slam poem, the first draft should never be the last. Usually it takes dozens of revisions to finally have a poem worthy of performing over and over again. It is important to pay attention to every little detail in the poem and nothing should be overlooked. Poetry is no different from music or painting in terms of being artistic. The only difference between poetry and poetry slam is that poetry slam is meant for a performance setting. This does not mean that it can't still work on paper. The ideal slam poem should be able to score perfect tens at a national competition and be published in the world's most respected literary magazine. The chances of this ever occurring are very slim, but this is always the goal that a slam poet wishes to achieve.

# Carbon Copy

Annotate the following poem by Joshua Bennett.

---

He may never know  
that there are fireflies  
growing inside him.  
Wings threatening to sprout from his spine  
if he would merely reach toward the heavens  
my father  
is no hero.  
He's a postal worker.  
A Vietnam vet  
with a Jim Crow education  
six children  
and enough regrets to fill a casket with  
sometimes sleeps with his eyes open  
as if he's looking for 3 AM redemption  
from whatever insomniac angels  
may be still watching over his body  
and with all his flaws  
I still love him  
with every bit  
of the jigsaw puzzle heart  
that pumps life through this thin frame  
the exact same blood  
that runs through my daddy's veins  
because no matter  
how many miles I put between us  
the undeniable truth remains  
that I'm a carbon copy of my father  
exactly 5 foot 10  
170 pounds with not a muscle in sight  
love to pretend  
that we're really good at basketball  
and have this amazing ability  
to emotionally damage  
the people we care about most.  
Take my mother for instance  
the woman who gave me life  
and the person my dad  
and I owe the biggest apology to  
for our unwillingness to be vulnerable.  
Mom, I'm sorry  
for being so ungrateful.  
for not being satisfied  
with the fact that most times  
it was only you in the audience at performances  
and watching me on the sidelines  
But if growing up as a Black man in America  
has taught me anything  
it's that there is nothing more dangerous  
than telling another man  
you care about him  
so at this moment  
right now  
I'm choosing to murder the  
monster that hides inside me  
the one that keeps me from crying when I need to  
and telling my little brother I love you  
Dad  
no matter what this world may say  
you are an inspiration  
a poetic painter on par with Pollock  
turned being a mailman  
into a metaphor

because for as long as I can remember  
for 10 hours a day  
every single week  
he would sling a 100-pound sack of mail  
over his shoulders  
carry the hopes and dreams  
of the masses  
on his back  
like a 60 year-old Atlas with  
an Alabama accent  
and though he may not know it  
there's not much difference  
between the work he does every night  
and the way I write poems  
see my hands turn into carrier pigeons  
when I pick up a pen  
allowing my words to rocket through  
the air like I was on a first name basis with the wind  
and so as i long its cool with my dad  
I'll continue to believe that  
the lights I write to every night  
are coming from within him  
the fireflies on his insides  
the sunbeams that gleam  
from his gut  
as a constant reminder  
that my father will never die  
even when we forget to act like family  
and he doesn't have the insight  
to see  
that I'm the only 19-year old  
I know who still wants to grow up  
to be just like his Dad  
that I'm fully aware  
that no one else could possibly bear  
the weight of my Earth-sized  
insecurities the way that he can  
and even when no one else gets him  
his second- youngest son understands  
that life ain't easy  
when you come from war  
with a purple heart fastened to your chest  
and a shattered one behind the seams  
when you come home from war  
and post office realities  
are spawned as  
the bastard children of your  
law school dreams  
I know what you sacrificed for me  
and I promise  
that i'll use this God-given gift  
to repay you one day  
but for right now  
Let go.  
no one's watching  
it's o.k. to be broken sometimes  
let the lightning bugs loose  
so I can illuminate the path for my children  
and provide them with undeniable proof  
that they are the descendants of a man  
who held the stars in his stomach  
could crumble a mountain with his smile  
and spoke truth to his son  
as if the entire world  
were watching.

# Totally like whatever, you know?

---

By Taylor Mali

In case you hadn't noticed,  
it has somehow become uncool  
to sound like you know what you're talking about?  
Or believe strongly in what you're saying?  
Invisible question marks and parenthetical (you know?)'s  
have been attaching themselves to the ends of our sentences?  
Even when those sentences aren't, like, questions? You know?

Declarative sentences—so-called  
because they used to, like, DECLARE things to be true, okay,  
as opposed to other things are, like, totally, you know, not—  
have been infected by a totally hip  
and tragically cool interrogative tone? You know?  
Like, don't think I'm uncool just because I've noticed this;  
this is just like the word on the street, you know?  
It's like what I've heard?  
I have nothing personally invested in my own opinions, okay?  
I'm just inviting you to join me in my uncertainty?

What has happened to our conviction?  
Where are the limbs out on which we once walked?  
Have they been, like, chopped down  
with the rest of the rain forest?  
Or do we have, like, nothing to say?  
Has society become so, like, totally . . .  
I mean absolutely . . . You know?  
That we've just gotten to the point where it's just, like . . .  
whatever!

And so actually our disarticulation . . . ness  
is just a clever sort of . . . thing  
to disguise the fact that we've become  
the most aggressively inarticulate generation  
to come along since . . .  
you know, a long, long time ago!

I entreat you, I implore you, I exhort you,  
I challenge you: To speak with conviction.

To say what you believe in a manner that bespeaks  
the determination with which you believe it.  
Because contrary to the wisdom of the bumper sticker,  
it is not enough these days to simply QUESTION AUTHORITY.  
You have to speak with it, too.

## Louder than a Bomb Guide

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Every year, more than six hundred teenagers from over sixty Chicago area schools gather for the world's largest youth poetry slam, a competition known as "Louder Than a Bomb". Founded in 2001, Louder Than a Bomb is the only event of its kind in the country—a youth poetry slam built from the beginning around teams. Rather than emphasize individual poets and performances, the structure of Louder Than a Bomb demands that kids work collaboratively with their peers, presenting, critiquing, and rewriting their pieces. To succeed, teams have to create an environment of mutual trust and support. For many kids, being a part of such an environment—in an academic context—is life-changing.

LOUDER THAN A BOMB chronicles the stereotype-confounding stories of four teams as they prepare for and compete in the 2008 event. By turns hopeful and heartbreaking, the film captures the tempestuous lives of these unforgettable kids, exploring the ways writing shapes their world, and vice versa. This is not "high school poetry" as we often think of it. This is language as a joyful release, irrepressibly talented teenagers obsessed with making words dance. How and why they do it—and the community they create along the way—is the story at the heart of this inspiring film.

*As you watch the documentary, pay close attention the power of the individual voice; how do the poets make sure the poems reflect them? How do their pieces reflect their individual experiences?*

After the first half of the film, think about to moments that you found particularly powerful. What made them powerful? What stands out to you? Why do you think you were moved by these moments/words?

What made the poems presented in the film so powerful? Would they have been as effective if they hadn't been spoken aloud?

What makes a slam poetry performance effective? Use specific examples to support.

Do you think the teenagers in the video needed to have a hard life to write such great poetry? Has the students' background/life have given them power to write these poems?

"The point is not the points. The point is the poetry." This is a quotation that comes up a lot in the film and is very applicable in a student's life. How is this applicable in our own and does this have a deeper meaning? If so, what?

The idea of a team being a "family" came up quite a bit in the video. Why was this important? Does it affect each poet?

Think about the messages these students were trying to pass on. What would you write about?

Describe the atmosphere at the competition. Was this a traditional demonstration of competition? What made it so successful?

## Slam Poetry: Concrete vs. Abstract Language

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Basic to all good writing is concrete language, or words or phrases that project on the minds of the audience vivid images, sounds, actions, and other sensations. If your text is rich with imagery your audience will see, smell, and taste what you're telling them.

Here is an excerpt from Lisa Busceni, a National Slam champion who is good at using concrete language:

And I thought of my brother down at the Popsicle factory,  
putting his hand on the guardrail as a two-ton punch press  
whistled millimeters from his fingers.

~from "Sirens at the Mill"

Here is the same excerpt revised to be in more abstract language:

And I thought of industrialization,  
Subjecting its workers to possible disfigurement  
As they worked near machines on the assembly line.

Abstract language is the stuff humans have created in their brains to generalize the world and human behavior. Words like "greed," "intelligence," "universal," and "thinking" are abstract words. We know what they mean, sort of, but can you smell intelligence? Can you touch thinking? When was the last time you tried to taste greed?

**Exercise:** As we watch the clips for slam poets, identify at least 3 examples of concrete language.

Poet:

Example:

Poet:

Example:

Poet:

Example:

## Slam Poetry Assignment

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For your last writing assignment of the year, your only “real” requirement is that the poem should be at least 20 lines. Everything else is up to you! There are a few options:

TBA 😊