

Popular Poetic Forms

From Nikki Grimes' Poetry Prompts

- **Acrostic:** A poem in which the first letter of each line spells out a word, name, or phrase when organized vertically. E.g. "Dre":

Don't for once imagine
Rain only falls on the
Evil. The good get pretty soaked, too.

- **Blues:** Sheila Maldonado has described poetry as a container of feelings that can help you express what's on your heart, and the Blues Poem is one of those containers. The Blues Poetry form is based on the traditional African American music structure called The Blues, but it's a container anyone can use. Often tackling tough subject matter, the first line of a blues poem typically presents a statement, the second line offers a variation on that statement, and the third line introduces an ironic alternative. (Pull samples or mentor text from Walter Dean Myers poetry collections for middle grade, and from Langston Hughes for young adults.)
- **Concrete:** Also known as shape poetry. Visual poetry created by arranging text on the page to form an image or pattern that relates directly to the central content and meaning of the poem.
- **Couplet:** A couple, or pair of lines of poetry, usually but not always rhymed. A couplet may be closed or open. In a closed couplet, a complete thought is packaged in two lines. In an open couplet, the second line runs right into the next couplet, or pair of lines. (This is also called enjambment, a device that keeps couplets from becoming predictable or sing-songy.) In other words, there are different ways of making couplets work. A couplet is a reminder that nothing is as simple as it seems!
- **Epistle:** Poem written in the form of a letter, sometimes, but not always, beginning with the greeting "Dear."
- **Found Poems:** Poetry constructed of words taken from non-poetic sources, e.g. catalogs, newspapers, advertisements, etc, and then arranged to form a cohesive poem. It is a collage of words.

- **Free Verse:** An open form of poetry that does not follow a strict meter, rhyme scheme, or consistent rhythm. This is currently the most common form of poetry being written. ("I have eaten/the plums/that were/in the icebox and which/you were probably/saving/for breakfast". These are lines from "This is just to say", a free verse poem by William Carlos Williams.)
- **Golden Shovel:** A poem formed by borrowing one or more lines from an existing poem, and ending each line of the new poem using, in order, one of the words from the original poem. If the line you borrowed has five words, your new poem will be five lines long; if seven words, seven lines long, and so on.
- **Haiku:** A Japanese poetry form that is three lines long. Most often, the lines are structured in seventeen syllables. Line #1 is 5 syllables, Line #2 is 7 syllables, and Line #3 is 5 syllables.
- **List:** The name describes the form. It is a poem consisting of an organized list of adjectives, building one upon another, to create meaning, and to describe the main subject of the poem, as in Whitman's "Song of Myself" (I celebrate myself, and sing myself/ And what I assume you shall assume/For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you..../My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air...)
- **Ode:** A poem that celebrates a specific person, place, thing, or idea. They are sometimes elaborate, structured and complex. At other times, they don't follow a strict rhyme scheme or pattern at all. Honoring or celebrate the subject of the poem is the one thing all odes have in common.
- **Quatrain:** A poem or stanza of four lines. Often part of a longer poem, rhymed or unrhymed. (Famous quatrain by William Blake: "Tyger! Tyger! burning bright/ In the forests of the night,/What immortal hand or eye/ Could frame thy fearful symmetry?")
- **Rap:** Oral and written poetry form combining rhyme, rhythm, and a musical beat. Uses metaphor, assonance, and complex rhyme schemes to tell a story.
- **Sonnet:** A fourteen-line poem written in iambic pentameter, incorporating a rhyme scheme that often varies from poet to poet.
- It's a great structure for storytelling, which is why Shakespeare was fond of using it. My all-time favorite book, Edgar Lee Masters'

- *Spoon River Anthology* was written in that form. So was the poem "My Own Man" from my picture book, *My Man Blue*.
- **Tanka:** Japanese poem, five lines long. Some poets who write tanka are only strict about the number of lines, while others pattern their poems according to a syllable breakdown of 5/7/5/7/7.