



## Getting Started.... Some Suggestions to Help Support Poetry Writing Exercises

### Discuss the following questions with your students.

1. Why are poem titles important?
2. Why is the first line of any poem important?
3. Why is the last line of any poem important?
4. Why might word or letter "sounds" be important to a poem?
5. What is meant by the reference: "speaker of the poem?"
6. What does "place" mean in reference to poetry?
7. Why is poetry an important literary form?
8. How has poetry been used throughout the ages?

### Have your students define the following literary terms.

concrete specific	image imagery	antagonist protagonist narrator persona
abstract vague general	metaphor extended metaphor simile epigram	rhythm rhyme
figurative literal	alliteration prosody	free verse poetry sonnet stanza line break
cliché irony		

### Avoiding cliché ... *Common Knowledge*

A cliché is a phrase that has been repeated so often it no longer communicates anything fresh. A cliché may be false or true, but it is so familiar to a writer's or reader's ear that they simply don't think about it. Clichés fool writers into thinking they are saying something meaningful. **AVOID the trap of Clichés!** Clichés take away from any form of writing. Some examples follow:

White as snow...	Buried in thought...
Dark as night...	Silky-like hair...
Soft as a feather...	Board flat
Red as an apple...	Slimy as worms...
Hard as a rock...	Hotter than fire...
Icy blue eyes...	Ruby red lips...
Sparkled like diamonds...	Heavy heart...
the big picture...	A chill in my bones...

Have students come up with additional examples of cliché.



**The poet being honest to his experience is the halo that illuminates a poem to a high level of success.**

--Prof. Jonathan Holden, Kansas' 1st Poet Laureate

**...courage is tied with speaking a truth.**

--Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Ph.D., Kansas' 3<sup>rd</sup> Poet Laureate.

Following is an excerpt from a talk on poetics given at Goddard College January, 2004 by Mirriam-Goldberg, award-winning writer, professor, and the author of five books, including three collections of poetry.

*To take ourselves, in the words we inhale or exhale, to new places where we don't know our way, where we have to learn new ways of riding our minds and lifting the wings of our heart is always an act of courage. That **courage is tied with speaking a truth** beneath the realities of our culture or the myths we hold to in defining ourselves or being defined by others. That's why it's so effective as explains Audre Lorde in her essay, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," in breaking silences, in speaking for the unheard or marginalized or invisible. That courage to dwell in the wild of shaped language, of language made of careful attention to sound and image and movement, takes us beyond compasses and maps that reinforce what we already know, where we've already traveled. Yet it can lead us toward a kind of verbally-launched ecstasy, a place we can dwell if we're lucky enough in: a poem.*



## When Writing Free-Verse Poetry

- Is the title of the poem working to draw readers into the poem?
- Does the FIRST line of the poem grab the reader's attention?
- What is literally happening in the poem?
- What images and scenes are being developed?
- Are the images and metaphors working for the poem? How? Why?
- Are the line breaks working? (line end-words / line first-words) How?
- If anything, what else is the poem trying to say metaphorically?
- Does the poem have a successful rhythm and flow?
- What is the tone or attitude of the speaker? Poem?
- Is the LAST line of the poem strong? Does it leave the reader awed?

## Poet ... Poetry ... Poem

### A poet...

- writes that he might better understand himself and the world surrounding him.
- like a taxidermist, catches and then preserves physical and mental emotion
- like a painter, captures place

### Poetry is a means of...

- extracting "the special" from anything.
- learning more about ourselves.
- touching personal emotions.
- delivering a writer's insight
- providing glimpses of worldly experiences often overlooked
- offering us a chance to see things afresh, through metaphor, with new eyes.

### A poem is...

- the "magnifying glass" to those pieces of life that people are too busy to see.
- the "reducing machine" for those things that seem to huge to comprehend.
- an emotion or feeling that has been etched in stone.
- a painting of words.