



Developed by Prof. Jonathan Holden, First Poet Laureate of Kansas

Poetry Lesson Plan: Poem of Instruction / Framing a Poem

Grades: 5-12 > College Level

Objective — The student will:

- write a free-verse poem based on providing an "instruction" (direction)
- utilize the skill of providing detailed instructions
- learn to explore for and/or identify opportunities to create poems from simple, everyday verbal or written instructions. (Ex. How to Bake Bread, How to Walk to School)
- become aware of everyday language that has merit as poetry.
- exercise decision in creating **line breaks** and the placement of appropriate "**first words**" at the beginning of lines in "**rebuilding**" the instructions into a recognizable poetry form.

Hint: For lower grades consider writing short, simple instructions in paragraph form. Then ask your students to separate the lines and words into a 10 line poem. (See Example #1, page 2)

Poem of Instruction / Framing a Poem

Write a poem which satisfies all of the following criteria:

1. The poem reads like a set of instructions.
2. The poem describes an activity which you know well, something most people are familiar with, but
3. Instead of giving the reader literal instructions, you are trying to capture in words the feel of the activity by:
 - Hitting the reader with surprising metaphors and similes
 - Selecting a few details which comprise the essence of the experience
 - Incorporating details which, though seemingly unimportant or unspectacular, are actually part of the hidden lore of the activity: (For example, if you were writing about how to get through a boring class you might recall things like deliberately making one leg go to sleep or crossing your eyes; if you were describing a snowball fight, you might talk about the moment when a harmless snowball begins to become an "ice-ball.")
4. The poem must not be end-rhymed.
5. The poem must be titled

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EXAMPLE 1

How to Eat a Cookie **(in paragraph form)**

Go to the store and find some Oreos. Buy them and put them in a sack. Then go home and get some milk, sit down at the table and eat them. Dip them in the milk first.

Rewrite in poem form.

How to Eat a Cookie

Go to the store
and find some Oreos.
Buy them and put
them in a sack.
Then go home
and get some milk, sit
down at the table
and eat them. Dip
them in the milk
first.

Continue the lesson by asking your students to come up with and write their own personal set of instructions in poetry form. With older students, expect more complex instructions.

EXAMPLE 2

How to Play Night Baseball

A pasture is best, freshly
mown so that by the time a grounder's
plowed through all that chewed, spit-out
grass to reach you, the ball
will be bruised with green kisses. Start
in the evening. Come
with a bad sunburn and smelling of chlorine,
water still crackling in your ears.
Play until the ball is khaki—
a moveable piece of the twilight—
the girls' bare arms in the bleachers are pale,
the heat lightning jumps in the west. Play
until you can only see pop-ups
and routine grounders get lost
in the sweet grass for extra bases.

-- Jonathan Holden

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EXAMPLE 3

Stealing the Christmas Greens

Fifty miles down the road you can give
five bucks to some guy
with a thread-riddled nose
like a road map of Vermont
and get a symmetrical tree.
Not me. Third growth pine
is best, where sand farmers have failed
and where it was recut
to fire a try-works in whaling days.
A broken puzzle of snow on the ground,
wear a coat long enough to bootleg in
a saw. This bottom as Ned
McLaughlin's, those mounds
are where he spaded his dead
horses. Look close
and you might see a wicket of ribs
stick up like a rotting skiff.
Now look for a tree
whose northeast side isn't flat
with wind off George's Bank.
Be sure to top it high and light enough
so you can drag it back. Keep off the roads,
or if you really have to move,
being seen, balance it easily over
one shoulder. It's more than likely
once you set it up you'll see the top
won't point, but forks,
imperfect as a life, no pinnacle
for an angel. A green bow
and a chocolate Santa Claus
dressed in red foil will camouflage
that gray spot on the trunk.
Now plug it in, no talk of ritual,
get out the bourbon (each sip's
Christmas Eve), and rinse a glass clean

--Brendan Galvin

EXAMPLE 4

How to Bake Bread

You must believe in the yeast.
Faith is the beginning of leavening.

Be distant, but careful, with the eggs.
An egg speaks only to other egg,
but complains loudly to the entire dough
if you break a yoke
before its time.

Shortening must be persuaded
to take part. You have to push it
from the spoon. Even then
it clings to the hand.

Explain the scalding to the milk.
Pain is easy when the reason is clear.

Kiss the sugar quickly;
it is eager to lose itself in the milk.

Speak kindly to the flour.
One good word is worth the sifting,
eases the stiffness of the stirring.

You can depend on the salt,
if you don't forget it. Toss it in
over your shoulder for luck.

Give a gentle hand to the kneading.
Let the dough know your palm;
it will remember your touch
in the final shaping.

Find it some warmth for the rising
and an hour's peace.
The baking is its own reward.

-- Elizabeth Banset

EXAMPLE 5

For Brothers Everywhere

There is a schoolyard that runs
from here to the dark's fence
where brothers keep goin to the hoop, keep
risin up with baske'balls ripe as pumpkins
toward rims hung like piñatas, pinned.
like thunderclouds to the sky's wide chest
an' everybody is spinnin an' bankin
off the glass, finger-rollin off the glass
with the same soft touch you'd give
the head of a child, a chile witta
big-ass pumpkin head, who stands
in the schoolyard lit by brothers--postin up,
givin, gain, taking the lane, flashin off
the pivot, dealin behind the back, between
the legs. cockin the rock an' 'glidin
like mad hawks--swoopin black with arms
for wings, palmin the sun, throwin it down,
and even with the day gone, without even
a crumb of light from the city, brothers
keep runnin-gunnin, fallin away takin
fall-away j's from the comer; their bodies
like muscular saxophones body-boppin
better than jazz, beyond summer, beyond
weather, beyond everything that moves-
an' with one shake, they're pullin-up
from the perimeter, shakin-bakin,
brothers be sweet pullin-up from
the edge a' the world, hangin like
air itself hangs in the air;
an' gravidy gotta giv'em.up: the ball
burning like a fruit with a soul
in their velvet hands, while the wrists
whisper backspin, an' the fingers comb the rock
once--givin it up, lettin it go, lettin it go
like good news because the hoop is a well,
a well with no bottom, an' they're
fillin that sucker up!

-- *Tim Seibles*