

# The Poet in You

**P**oetry can be serious, fun, emotional, or silly. It can rhyme or not rhyme. It can be long or short. Some forms of poetry have specific rules, and some do not. Poetry can really be anything the poet needs it to be, to express his or her thoughts and feelings.

## WHAT TO DO

Use the internet, library, or your own collection to find two poems you like. Answer the questions below. Use the website [poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/poetry-writing-lessons/](http://poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/poetry-writing-lessons/) to help you determine the form or style. If you repeat this project, select new poems each year.

### Poem 1

Title:

Form or style:

What is the poem about? Give a brief explanation.

### Poem 2

Title:

Form or style:

What is the poem about? Give a brief explanation.

Now choose a form or style you would like to experiment with and write your own poem. Don't worry about being perfect. Just give it a try!

#### LEARNING OUTCOMES

**Project skill:** Writing poetry

**Life skill:** Practicing creativity

**Educational standard:** CCELA-W 6-10: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

**Success indicator:** Writes a poem

Save what you  
write for your  
portfolio!



## More Challenges

*Many songs you listen to today are actually poems set to music. Choose two of your favorite songs and find the lyrics. Choose songs with lyrics that are 4-H appropriate. Using what you have learned about poetry, analyze the lyrics and describe why or why not the song is actually a poem.*

### BACKGROUND

**K**enn Nesbitt, a former Children's Poet Laureate (2013-2015), gives an easy way to think about poetry styles and forms on his website Poetry4Kids.

He describes a **poetic form** as a set of rules for writing a certain type of poem. That might be the number of lines or syllables the poem should have, the way the poem rhymes, or how the poetry is created. A haiku is an example of a poetic form. By definition, a haiku has a set amount of syllables in each line.

**Poetic styles**, Nesbitt says, do not have firm rules about length, syllable count, or other elements, but instead include a particular feature. An **alliteration** poem is an example of a poetic style. In this type of poem, the author picks a consonant and uses words beginning with that letter in a poem.

When thinking about poetic forms and styles there are many terms to know. **Meter** is a common one. It refers to the measurement of rhythm as indicated by the syllables in each word that are stressed. Each unit of that measurement is called a **foot**. One common type of meter, and there are many, is **iambic pentameter**. It consists of five iambic feet or ten syllables. William Shakespeare used this type of meter. Here is an example from the play *Romeo and Juliet*:

But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?  
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.  
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,  
Who is already sick and pale with grief.

Here are those same lines with the feet separated and capital letters for the stressed syllables:

but, SOFT! | what LIGHT | through YON | der WIN | dow BREAKS?  
it IS | the EAST, | and JU | liet IS | the SUN.  
aRISE, | fair SUN, | and KILL | the EN | vious MOON,  
who IS | alREAD | y SICK | and PALE | with GRIEF.



Another poetry term to know is **stanza**. A stanza is a group of lines whose form is repeated. Rhymed poetry can have different patterns at the ends of lines. A **couplet** has a pattern of 1 and 1.

When the trees take on ice plating, 1  
Do squirrels go twigure skating? 1

1  
1

Here is an example of a 1-2-3-1 rhyming pattern:

### LEAVES OF LEARNING

My first pole was of bamboo; 1  
My hook, a crooked pin; 2  
My teacher, my Aunt Lillian— 3  
But how I pulled 'em in! 2

I caught some oak and maple 1  
Trapped by the trickling flow, 2  
And wouldn't leave until I had 3  
A pocketful to show. 2

I'd toss the line out gently 1  
Then yank it with a swish. 2  
I laughed, and so did Auntie— 3  
What a day! I'd learned to fish. 2

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1  
2  
3  
2

Some people prefer to write poems that do not rhyme. **Blank verse**, for instance, is verse with lines that do not rhyme but are written with a rhythmic pattern. Specifically, blank verse is iambic with five iambic feet to the line. Sound familiar? It's iambic pentameter again. Most of Shakespeare's writing is blank verse.



**Free verse** is even less restrictive than blank verse because it is unrhymed *and* is written with no standard metric pattern. The rhythm in free verse varies according to the poet's sense of what is needed or what best serves the purpose. Following is an example of a free verse poem:

## SPRING

Spring drifts into our days  
like the fragrance of lilacs on an April evening.  
It may come slowly or suddenly,  
but soon it penetrates our whole senses.

Stark winter colors brighten to bluegrass greens,  
forsythia yellow, tulip reds and apple blossom pinks.

New sounds liven our listening moments:  
mellow notes of the bobolink,  
laughter of kite-flying children,  
chatting of neighbors across backyard fences,  
cries of "Batter up" at the old ball park.

Fresh earth aroma surrounds gardeners and farmers  
as they work the soil toward another planting, another harvest.  
Leaves reclothe the dormant skeletons of trees and shrubs.  
The sun erases night's darkness a bit earlier each dawn.

Yes, spring stirs all our emotions, our restlessness, our hopes.  
And today is the bright tomorrow we dreamed about all winter.  
Like the fragrance of lilacs, spring springs into our realization—  
sometimes slowly, sometimes suddenly, but always completely.  
No calendar can foretell precisely when it will come, or how.  
Yet, when spring comes, no one need tell us,  
for spring is in the air—everywhere.

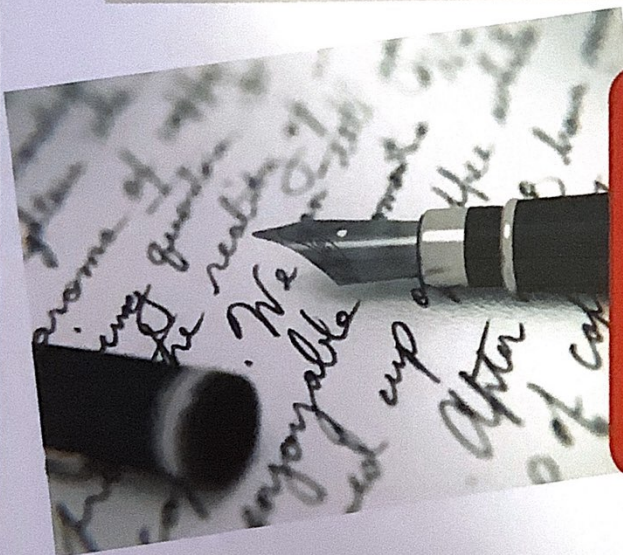
Poetry has as much variety as the poets who write it. Exploring all the different forms and styles and their characteristics can help a poet find what is best for what he or she wishes to express.



### Metric Foot

A group of words or syllables has a rhythm to it determined by where the spoken accents fall. The rhythm a word creates in a poem is called a metric foot. Generally, there are four major types of metric feet:

1. **Iamb.** A word with an unaccented syllable followed by an accented one, such as the word delight. The second syllable is accented. De-LIGHT
  2. **Trochee.** A word with an accented syllable followed by an unaccented one, such as the word going. In this case the first syllable is accented. GO-ing
  3. **Anapest.** Two unaccented syllables followed by an accented one, such as the word intervene. The emphasis is on the last syllable. in-ter-**VENE**
  4. **Dactyl.** An accented syllable followed by two unaccented syllables, such as the word merrily. The first syllable is accented. **MER**-ri-ly
- The number of feet per line varies depending on the poem's form.



### ? Did you know?

March 21 is World Poetry Day. This day is recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. UNESCO "recognizes the unique ability of poetry to capture the creative spirit of the human mind."

### T RESOURCES

- Look for information and examples of poetry here: [poets.org](http://poets.org).
- In the Favorite Poem Project, everyday Americans recite their favorite poems: [favoritepoem.org](http://favoritepoem.org).
- Examples of poetry can be found here: [rpo.library.utoronto.ca/display](http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/display).
- On Poetry 180, The Library of Congress shares tips on how to read a poem: [loc.gov/poetry/180/p180-howtoread.html](http://loc.gov/poetry/180/p180-howtoread.html).
- Poetry4Kids offers more about poetic forms and styles here: [poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/poetry-writing-lessons](http://poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/poetry-writing-lessons).

