

# Ideas for Using Poetry in Upper School

Genuine poetry can  
communicate before it is  
understood.

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)

A poem is a painting.  
A poem is a painting that is  
not seen.  
A painting is a poem that is  
not heard.

Phoebé Hesketh

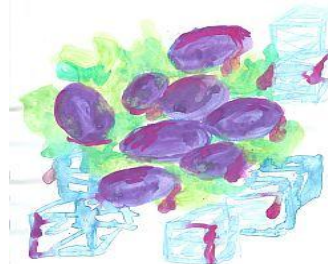
a poem is a mirror walking down a strange street

e.e. Cummings (1894 – 1962)

- **Pick a poem:** hang lots of poems up on a clothes line (use pegs). Students walk around, read lots of poems and pick one they like.
- **Painting a poem:** Students choose a poem (e.g. in the activity “pick a poem”) and try to express the same idea in a painting. Bring watercolors, water soluble wax crayons, paper, brushes, cups and a rag to clean up the mess.

Example:

William Carlos Williams  
**This Is Just to Say**  
I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox  
and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast  
Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet and  
so cold



Langston Hughes  
**Harlem**  
What happens to a  
dream deferred?  
Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the  
sun?  
Or fester like a sore--  
And then run?  
Does it stink like  
rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar  
over--  
like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.  
Or does it explode?

- **Writing poems:** students choose an object (sea-shell, stone, plastic toys, postcard....) and collect ideas on a sheet. Only single words are allowed. (10min) Then write a poem using (only) the words they have collected. Give a choice of formats e.g.: recipe poem, haiku, acrostic poem, limerick, visual poem...(see previous section)
- **Line-breaking:** Type a poem as run-on text. Ask students to rearrange the lines in form of a poem and decide where to break the lines. Compare different student versions, then show original and discuss the effects of the different versions.
- **Sonnets:** Teach typical rhyme and rhythm of sonnets, then cut up a sonnet – students reassemble it correctly.
- **Working with parodies:** Show students some parodies of famous poems (e.g. Roger Tagholm, *Poems not on the Underground* (Tagholm 2001)). Students choose a famous poem and write their own parody. Students may use internet poetry pages to find famous poems and parodies.
- **Poem into short story:** Find 3-4 poems where the speaker has a clearly identifiable problem. Students choose one poem and write a short story based upon it. The speaker of the poem becomes the protagonist of their short story.
- **Themes in Poetry:** Collect several poems around a theme (war poems, love and lust poems, dreams and nightmares, civil rights, growing up, family, ...) Do some of the above tasks.
- **Poems and Paintings:** Find famous poems that have inspired artists to paintings and vice versa. E.g: **Icarus poems and paintings:** Students read and discuss the myth, read different poems and discuss the different interpretations of the myth, then match poems with fitting paintings or paint their own. The following website is a great source of Icarus paintings: (<http://www.island-ikaria.com/multimedia/ikarosart.asp>)
- **Use a painting** (arts postcards or images of artwork on projector), students interpret the scene (collect ideas....) then write a poem or a short story about it. Hopper paintings work very well for this task (e.g.: The Automat...)
- **Found poems:** Hand out a recent newspaper article, advertisement or other prose text. Students highlight words they like and then use some of these words to make a poem. No extra words must be used. (The topic can be kept or changed, e.g. using a tourist brochure to praise or criticize tourism or a place...) See examples on page 5.

## Examples of short poetry projects

### *Writing Haikus: Snapshots of America*

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After our trip to America we will produce a collection of our memories in the form of haikus. A haiku is a minimalist form of poetry. The writer has 17 syllables through which to convey an experience.

A haiku is like a written snapshot. It recreates the atmosphere of a moment in 3 lines (5 syllables, 7 syllables, 5 syllables). Modern English haikus do not always follow this rule very strictly.

The content of a haiku is typically, but not always, focused on a small but important moment in a person's everyday life. Part of writing a haiku is finding the 'awe' that is usually passed by without notice – the act of creating a haiku is the act of focusing our attention more closely than we might otherwise do. It is like a picture in close-up.

Sometimes haikus deal with important realizations (epiphanies) in a person's life. Read the following examples and try to visualize the scenes and take in the atmosphere or understand the important realization.

**Midday hush  
the rasp of a mallard  
calling his mate**  
Ray Rasmussen

**street musicians resting –  
red maple leaf  
lands on the keyboard**

**Tompkins Square –  
an old man teaches Tai-Chi  
to a crowd of pigeons**  
Paul Mena

**what is that building?  
cobble-stoned streets, glass canyons.  
I'm tired. My feet hurt.**  
Margaret Hinchcliffe

**sunrise  
I forget my side  
of the argument**  
George Swede

**on every icicle's tip  
a drop  
of sunlight**  
Alexey Andreyev

**second husband  
painting the fence  
the same green**  
Carol Montgomery p.

**a supermarket  
in someone's cart – beef, beer,  
flowers and a child**  
Alexey Andreyev

**with a flourish  
the waitress leaves behind  
rearranged smears**  
Dee Evetts

**thundering surf  
seagull cries on the  
bitter winds**  
Stonecrow

**During our trip:** Walk around with open eyes and take in all the little things that contribute to the atmosphere of a place or situation. Take mental snapshots as well as pictures of little things with your camera.

**After the trip,** go through your pictures and memories and choose one specific moment. Capture your impression in a haiku. Layout your haiku nicely and add your picture.

All your haikus will be collected in our book "**Snapshots of America**" and the best ones will be published in the GIBS yearbook.

## More examples of haikus



What it's about

The Sunflower Project NYC started in the Spring of 2002 as a living memorial planting project to remember the people lost on September 11<sup>th</sup>, to honor their families, to thank the people everywhere who contributed to the recovery, and to make our world better, one patch at a time.

The idea is for individuals, groups and communities to create their own sunflower memorials everywhere—to remember and honor life with living, growing symbols of renewal and hope.

☀ A fork in my back Armed with black see  
Next to my comb some wet seeds I glance around furtive  
Armed and dangerous. then complete my task

☀ Dig hole with chopstick ☀ Look at me strange  
Make sure seed goes into hole Wonder why I'm poking d  
Mission accomplished Doesn't everyone?

☀ Watering somethin' ☀ Planting sunflower  
Not me, I just spilled water Large Federal Agent sa  
for the seventh time "et" see some ID"

☀ In New York, Cher can  
strut nude—no notice. Plant seeds?  
People stop. What's that?

☀ Small dog and small mi  
in town, local Tree La  
watches me closely.

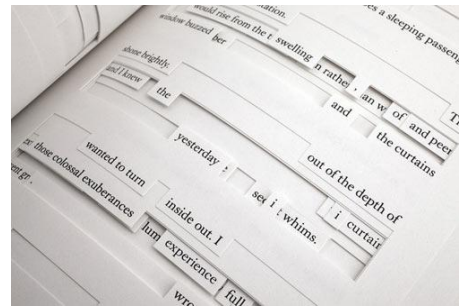
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# Found Poetry

Found poetry is the rearrangement of words or phrases taken randomly from other sources (such as clipped newspaper headlines, bits of advertising, handwritten cards ...) in a manner that gives the rearranged words a completely new meaning.

A famous example of found poetry – or “found writing” is Jonathan Safran Foer’s book *Tree of Codes*, which is based on *The Street of Crocodiles* by Bruno Schulz. Foer has used it as a canvas, cutting into and out of the pages, to arrive at an original new story.

The following examples written by GIBS students of year 7 are based on two letters to the editor of Newsweek.



## Letters

**London: A Millennial Metropolis**  
 YOU NEARLY GOT IT RIGHT ABOUT LONDON’S moment in history (“London Calling,” April 25). Yes, there’s the astonishing cultural and social tapestry woven to create a globally unique urban landscape and, yes, there are plans to make change on a heroic scale. But we’re still only teetering on the brink of success. London could easily slip back to being just another expensive, overcrowded sprawling muddle if bold decisions on transport, housing and core infrastructure are derailed by lack of direction or, worse still, needless dithering. Shaping the future on an unprecedented scale through the Thames Gateway project, thereby securing London’s position as a world city without compare, needs visionary leadership that will inspire the rest of us who still have our moments of doubt.

STAN HORNAGOLD  
 BRENTWOOD, ENGLAND

## Letters

**Mumbai: No Vision, No Dream**  
 YOUR ARTICLE “BOMBAY DREAMS” (APRIL 25) presents a shockingly one-sided picture of the people who inhabit Mumbai. The article rides roughshod over the basic human rights of the poor. Since November 2004, more than 400,000 people have been violently rendered homeless as part of the chief minister’s Vision Mumbai plan. No one has been made accountable for this crime and, in the hands of the current government, the future for the poor only threatens to get worse. I urge you to present a more holistic picture of urbanization that respects the human rights of all who contribute to the city’s economy and culture. Presenting a story biased toward the wealthy residents of Mumbai only reaffirms the trend of urban apartheid that is becoming evident across the world. And Shanghai is not a good example to follow, as it was built into a so-called world-class city on the backs of men, women and children who have been displaced from their traditional homes. Is this the future of urbanization that NEWSWEEK seeks to promote?

MILON KOTHARI  
*Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing*  
*U. N. Commission on Human Rights*  
 NEW DELHI, INDIA

**London**  
 Inspiring world city without compare  
 Globally unique urban landscape  
 Cultural tapestry woven to create  
 Change on a heroic scale

But we are still only teetering on the brink  
 derailed by lack of direction  
 another expensive,  
 overcrowded muddle,  
 full of doubt.

**Bombay Dreams of Urbanization**  
 on the backs of  
 men  
 women  
 and  
 children  
 displace  
 and  
 homeless.  
 Who is to blame?

# Let's LOOK at Imagist Poetry

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Imagism was a brief, complex yet influential poetic movement of the early 1900s, a time of reaction against late nineteenth-century styles in poetry as well as painting and architecture which was flowery and ornate.

In contrast, imagist poems are very short and describe one pure image or emotion. Imagist poets avoid any superfluous word. The image itself is the meaning.

- Read the following Imagist poems and try to imagine the scenes in detail. Share your mental images with a partner or small group.
- Choose your favorite poem and do the task “art beyond sight” on the next page.

## **The Red Wheelbarrow**

so much depends  
upon

a red wheel  
barrow

glazed with rain  
water

beside the white  
chickens.

William Carlos Williams

## **In a Station of the Metro**

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Ezra Pound

## **The City**

In the morning the city  
Spreads its wings  
Making a song  
In stone that sings.

In the evening the city  
Goes to bed  
Hanging lights  
Above its head.

Langston Hughes

## **The Toaster**

A silver-scaled dragon with jaws flaming red  
Sits at my elbow and toasts my bread.  
I hand him fat slices, and then, one by one,  
He hands them back when he sees they are done.

William Jay Smith

## **Apartment House**

A filing cabinet of human lives  
Where people swarm like bees in tunnelled hives,  
Each to his own cell in the covered comb,  
Identical and cramped -- we call it home.

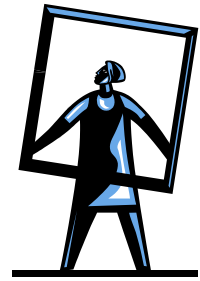
Gerald Raftery

## ***Describing a picture: Art beyond sight***

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Go to the website ["Art Beyond Sight"](http://www.artbeyondsight.org)

<http://www.artbeyondsight.org/handbook/acs-verbalsamples.shtml>



and choose three paintings that you find interesting. Read and listen to the descriptions and collect some useful phrases.

### **Useful phrases:**



Then choose one of the imagist poems on the previous page and **paint, find or imagine** a painting or photo that might have inspired the poet. What do you see? Describe your painting / photo in detail.

## Famous Sonnets and their Parodies

Read the following famous sonnets and their parodies. Then choose a sonnet (online) and write your own parody.

### William Shakespeare, SONNET 18

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.

### Sonnet at Journey's End

Shall I compare thee to a ticket collector?  
 Thou art more lovely and more even tempered  
 ('T would not be hard!)  
 Rough hands do take the darling tickets of May  
 And one's yearly Season hath all to short a date.  
 Sometimes my photocard is checked  
 Other times I am waved through at the gate:  
 This inconsistency doth leave me perplex'd  
 But 'tis not the traveller's place to question why,  
 For I know that at my journey's end –  
 (Despite snow that doth have some error and  
 Leaves that lieth where they shouldst not) –  
 I shall find thee waiting by our fire's grate,  
 And thy eternal summer shall never fade  
 Even though Knapp's boys often make me late.  
 (Tagholm 2001, 49)

### Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802

#### William Wordsworth

Earth has not anything to show more fair:  
 Dull would he be of soul who could pass by  
 A sight so touching in its majesty:  
 This City now doth, like a garment, wear  
 The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,  
 Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie  
 Open unto the fields, and to the sky;  
 All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.  
 Never did sun more beautifully steep  
 In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;  
 Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!  
 The river glideth at his own sweet will:  
 Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;  
 And all that mighty heart is lying still!

-- William Wordsworth

### Composed upon Oxford Street

Earth has plenty to show more fair:  
 Dull would he be of soul who could enjoy  
 Sights so grating in their commerciality:  
 This Street now doth, like an old rag, defile  
 The beauty of the morning; noisy, full,  
 Shops, department stores, burger bars and boutiques lie  
 Open unto the pavement, and to the sky;  
 All tacky and glittering in the fume-filled air.  
 Often did sun more beautifully bless  
 In his first splendour valley, rock or hill;  
 Ne'er saw I, and felt, a cacophony so deep!  
 The buses do charge at their own sweet will:  
 Dear God! The very pigeons seem tawdry and cheap;  
 And beneath the Street Londoners on the Central feel ill!  
 (Tagholm 2001, 17)

### Sonnet XLIII

By Edna St Vincent Millay,  
 1923  
 What seats my trousers have kissed, and where, and why,  
 I have forgotten, and what arms have lain  
 Under my elbow till morning, but the tune  
 Is full of ghosts tonight, that tap and sigh  
 Upon the glass and listen for reply,  
 Upon the pane as we rate for reply,  
 Through bank and chimney and tattered inn court?  
 For were remembered had that not again?  
 That the journey is resumed more often than  
 Will turn to me at midnight with a cry  
 No, I shall tell them the rain sing with joy,  
 That the air is like wine and the stars reserve a cup,  
 Nor knows its boughs more silent than before:  
 The Polzella in my head and say with the gap  
 I cannot say what loves have come and gone,  
 I only know that summer sang in me  
 A little while, that in me sings no more.

