

Word: The Poet's Voice Coursebook



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Table of Contents

Introduction	v
--------------------	---

UNIT I: Nature	1
----------------------	---

Lesson 1 Painting Pictures with Words	5
---	---

Lesson 2 Nature and the Self	9
------------------------------------	---

Lesson 3 Environmentally Speaking	13
---	----

Lesson 4 Nature's Stream of Consciousness	17
---	----

Lesson 5 Unit I Revision and Review	19
---	----

UNIT II: Love	23
---------------------	----

Lesson 6 Divine Love	25
----------------------------	----

Lesson 7 The Saddest Lines	29
----------------------------------	----

Lesson 8 Letters of Love	37
--------------------------------	----

Lesson 9 Love's Stream of Consciousness	41
---	----

Lesson 10 Unit II Revision and Review	43
---	----

UNIT III: Spoken Word..... 45

Lesson 11 Coding the Language 47

Lesson 12 The Flow..... 51

Lesson 13 An International Language of Words 55

Lesson 14 Unit III Revision and Review 59

UNIT IV: The Female Voice 61

Lesson 15 Women on Fire 63

Lesson 16 Movements in Color..... 67

Lesson 17 Setting the Table..... 71

Lesson 18 Create a Poet’s Folio 75



Introduction

Welcome to *Word: The Poet's Voice*! This course will teach you the writing tools and analytical skills necessary to create moving poems, while giving you a foundation from which to better comprehend how a writer creates a poem.

This course is divided into four main units: Nature, Love, Spoken Word, and The Female Voice. In each of these units you will learn different aspects of poetic craft, and perform various writing exercises that allow you to experiment with these writing tools before crafting your poems. For each unit, you will choose a poetry book to read and study to further enrich your own poetic creations. All of your writing will be presented in a booklet format of your creation. You will also be asked to keep a reading journal in the form of a notebook that will also house your poetic craft notes.

Save everything you write. Fill up your notebook! Even a single line or phrase, or the inspiration for an image or metaphor, can sow the seeds of a future poem.

Recommended Resources for This Course

The following resources provide an excellent introduction into the art and craft of poetry. You are encouraged to read one or more of the books on this list, and visit each website to familiarize yourself with the online resources available to you.

Books

The Book of Forms by Lewis Turco

Letters to a Young Poet by Rainer Maria Rilke

The Art of the Poetic Line by James Longenbach

A Poetry Handbook by Mary Oliver

Poetic Meter and Poetic Form by Paul Fussell

Slang: The People's Poetry by Michael Adams

Websites

<i>Poetry Foundation</i>	www.poetryfoundation.org
<i>Academy of American Poets</i>	www.poets.org
<i>Poetry.com</i>	www.poetry.com
<i>Poetry 180</i>	www.loc.gov/poetry/180
<i>Poetry Soup</i>	www.poetrysoup.com
<i>Free Word</i>	www.freewordcentre.com

In addition to these, you will find more links and resources on the Oak Meadow poetry course web page at www.oakmeadow.com/curriculum-links. Many of the links provide the text to the poems read in each unit. There is also an article called “How to Read a Poem” that might be helpful to you. You might want to read it at the beginning of the course, or later in the lessons, when you are ready for new ways to engage with the poetry you are reading.

The Reading Journal

One of the goals of being a poet is to read what has come before you. Poetry is meant to be read and shared, and all poets can learn from reading the poetry of others.

With each unit of this course, you will be asked to keep a reading journal on a book of poetry that corresponds to each topic. A list of poets and books has been compiled for you to choose from, or you are welcome to choose a book by a poet not included on the list. You do not need to write responses to every poem in the book. Choose no less than four poems, so that you can achieve a complete picture of how the poet writes. It is highly encouraged that you try to read as much of the book as possible to gain a better sense for the writing style of each poet.

After you read a poem in the book that especially moves you, use that poem to answer the questions found in your reading journal assignment for each unit. Label your journal entries clearly, as your journal will be handed in for your teacher to review at the end of each unit.

Keep your reading journal with you at all times, as this will also serve as your poetic tool kit and notebook throughout this course. When you have ideas inspired by what you have read, jot them down in your notebook. When you see something or hear something that you think could be used in a poem later on, jot it down. This notebook can become a treasure chest of ideas and inspirations for you to use and return to as needed.

Suggested Reading List for Your Journal

Choose one book to read for each unit. If you would like to choose a book not on the list, please let your teacher know which book you've chosen. You will find reading journal prompts in each unit.

UNIT I: Nature

Mary Oliver, *White Pine: Poems and Prose Poems*

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

W. S. Merwin, *Migration: New and Selected Poems*

Pablo Neruda, *Odes to Opposites*

Pablo Neruda, *Neruda's Garden: An Anthology of Odes*

William Stafford, *The Way It Is: New and Selected Poems*

Emily Dickinson, *Acts of Light*

Gary Snyder, *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems*

Wendell Berry, *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry*

Robert Bly, *Silence in the Snowy Fields*

Elizabeth Bishop, *Poems*

UNIT II: Love

John Keats, *Bright Star: Love Letters and Poems of John Keats to Fanny Brawne*

Pablo Neruda, *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*

Pablo Neruda, *100 Love Sonnets*

Anne Sexton, *Love Poems*

William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*

Rumi, *Love Is a Stranger: Selected Lyric Poetry of Jelaluddin Rumi*

Brian Patten, *Love Poems*

Erica Jong, *Love Comes First*

Petrarch, *The Sonnets, Triumphs, and Other Poems of Petrarch*

UNIT III: Spoken Word

Saul Williams, *She*

John Murillo, *Up Jump the Boogie*

Nick Flynn, *Some Ether: Poems*

E. E. Cummings, *Selected Poems*

Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *A Coney Island of the Mind*

Allen Ginsberg, *Howl, Kaddish and Other Poems*

Langston Hughes, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*

Audre Lorde, *The Black Unicorn: Poems*

T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

UNIT IV: The Female Voice

Anne Sexton, *Live or Die: Poems*

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Rosario Murillo, *Angel in the Deluge*

Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*

Jorie Graham, *The Dream of the Unified Field: Selected Poems*

Alice Walker, *Her Blue Body Everything We Know: Earthling Poems*

Julia Alvarez, *The Woman I Kept To Myself*

Gwendolyn Brooks, *In the Mecca*

Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems*

Phillis Wheatley, *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley: With Letters and a Memoir*

Emily Brontë, *The Complete Poems of Emily Brontë*

Emily Dickinson, *The Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson*

The Poetic Tool Kit

The craft of poetry consists of various tools that assist in the creation and revision of a poem. In this course you will learn an assortment of poetic crafts that you will keep in your **poetic tool kit**. By learning how to use these tools, you will come to realize that the art of writing a poem is just as complex as learning to paint a picture using any number of different styles. The beauty of language is that it is not static. Yet, a poem is very different from a song that is meant to be sung. In poetry, the craft you use, the language and imagery, or the overall style, should be metaphorically singing on the page whenever it is read.

The meaning behind a poem is extremely important and often more readily accessible to your reader, but to make a poem more like a tapestry of images and feeling, you will need to use all the poetic tools in your tool kit.

Think of a one-person play or monologue on an empty stage lit by a single light, with only the actor to give breadth to the story and feeling behind the playwright's words. Now imagine a stage lit by a collection of carefully positioned lights of varying colors and shades, set pieces built to enhance and bring to life the meaning of the playwright's words, and every aspect of the stage designed to assist the

actor as they recite the lines. Everywhere the audience looks on stage, a different sensory experience helps them better escape into the story being told.

Both of these theatrical examples can be thrilling ways to stage a play that impart on the audience the different intentions of not simply the playwright, but also the director of the performance, the set builder and light coordinator, and of course, the actor. When writing a poem, you get to be the director of every aspect of your poem, but it is the poetic craft you employ that allows for the stage to come to life on the page in a myriad of ways.

On your shared Google course doc for this course, you will find a section to add your poetic tool kit notes. Be sure to write the definition of each poetic term in your notes, as this will serve as a reference for you to return to as you craft your poems. You may also keep a list of terms in your reading journal if you choose to. **Note:** Your teacher will need to see that you are taking notes on each poetic term.

Express Yourself

As you learn each element of poetic craft and add it to your tool kit, apply what you have learned to every writing exercise you do in this course and every idea or line you come up with in your notebook.

Poetry is a distinctive art form. As you progress through this course, you will learn how poetry relates to other art forms, drawing on principles of painting, photography, music, and the theater. Keep your imagination open and your muse (your inspirational source) always close at hand, for this course is about poetry and about you. You already possess the unique power of language and expression; this course will assist you in transforming these talents into poetry.



UNIT I: Nature

In nature poetry, the five senses are perhaps the poet's greatest tool in crafting a poem. From early Native American tribal stories and speeches, to early American poetry, to modern environmental writers and poets, nature has been one of the consistent threads uniting literature throughout history. Two people observing the same tree may verbally describe it in a similar way, but when asked to compose a poem about that tree, the differences in style and sentiment, and imagination, are endless. Art allows a person to express themselves in a totally unique way. When nature becomes the focus of art, the possibilities for expression are as boundless as the root system of an old tree, ever growing and expanding beneath the earth.

In this unit, you will be asked to complete a series of observation exercises that will take you into the world outside your front door. The world you can see from your window, be it a backyard or a small patch of grass, the rolling hills of farmland, a river, or an apartment building, will become your literary laboratory. You will carry with you five senses: hearing, seeing, smelling, feeling, and tasting. Along with these universal tools, let imagination and memory work together to connect you with the world around you. Always bring your notebook and a pen or pencil, and be ready to document what you see and experience in the natural world, keeping in mind that a single leaf found on a sidewalk among the gray of a city landscape can hold just as much beauty, just as many stories needing to be told, as a countryside teeming with color. As the poet, you bring as much to your subject matter as it brings to you.

ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- ☐ Complete Unit I Reading Journal reading and questions.

*"Man did not weave
the web of life, he is
merely a strand in it.
Whatever he does to
the web, he does to
himself."*

Chief Seattle

Unit I Reading Journal: Nature

With each unit of this course, you will be asked to keep a reading journal on a book of poetry that corresponds to each topic. Choose a book from the suggested reading list for Unit I (found below and in the introduction of this course), or choose one of your own. Choose four poems to write about in your journal—this lets you develop a clear picture of how the poet writes. You are highly encouraged to try to read as much of the book as possible to gain a better sense for the writing style of each poet.

Choose one poem in the book that particularly resonates with you, and answer the following questions about the craft of the poem.

1. Create a list of images you find in the poem. Describe these images and what they evoke in you as a reader.
2. Read the poem out loud and see if you can discover how the poet uses diction and syntax. Is the order of the words in each line different from what you are accustomed to reading? If so, what do you think this does to the overall mood and sound of the poem?
3. Identify three examples of metaphor and three examples of simile in the poem. List them and explain what makes them work as either a metaphor or a simile.
4. Read the poem once more and think about the poet's use of language. Is the vocabulary accessible to you as the reader? Is it over your head? What kind of impact does language—the choice of words in the poem—have on your reading of the poem?
5. How does the poem conclude? Is the ending dramatic? Does the ending serve the poem well, or is it confusing? Does the ending leave you, as the reader, wanting to know more? If you could change one thing about the ending, what would it be?
6. After reading the poem several times, how has your comprehension of the poem changed? Has the focus on the craft of the poem altered your initial reaction when you first read the poem? Please explain why or why not in as detailed a way as possible.

"Life is divided into three terms—that which was, which is, and which will be. Let us learn from the past to profit by the present, and from the present, to live better in the future."

William Wordsworth

Suggested Reading List for Reading Journal Unit I: Nature

Mary Oliver, *White Pine: Poems and Prose Poems*

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

W. S. Merwin, *Migration: New and Selected Poems*

Pablo Neruda, *Odes to Opposites*

Pablo Neruda, *Neruda's Garden: An Anthology of Odes*

William Stafford, *The Way It Is: New and Selected Poems*

Emily Dickinson, *Acts of Light*

Gary Snyder, *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems*

Wendell Berry, *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry*

Robert Bly, *Silence in the Snowy Fields*

Elizabeth Bishop, *Poems*

Remember to keep your reading journal with you at all times, as this will serve as your journal, poetic notebook, and tool kit throughout this course. When you have ideas inspired perhaps by what you have read, write them down in your notebook. When you see something, or hear something that you think could be used in a poem later on, jot it down. As is often said in a poetry workshop, “Throw away nothing. Keep everything. You never know when it might be needed in a poem.”

You will be sending your reading journal to your teacher at the end of each unit.

Lesson

1

Painting Pictures with Words

A blank canvas awaits you. Your colors are not made of pigment, there are no brushes to use, but you have language and imagination—and endless possibility. In this lesson, you will be asked to create rich images of nature, and of memories that you have, feelings and ideas, and all the different things a poet calls on for inspiration. You will choose your first book of poetry to read and discuss in your reading journal, and you will add your first writing tool to your poetic tool kit.

Thus begins your journey through the literary world of *Word: The Poet's Voice*.

ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- ☐ Read the poetic tool kit (imagery).
- ☐ Read “Crossings” by Ravi Shankar and answer questions.
- ☐ Complete nature imagery writing exercise.

Poetic Tool Kit: Imagery

Imagery is the name given to the elements in a poem that spark off the senses. Imagery is a tool every poet uses to describe the setting for a poem, and to assist in creating the impression of a subject matter in the reader. Imagery in literature can direct the thoughts of a reader to a specific moment, or inspire feelings of wonder and memory. For example, when a writer describes a bank of clouds in the sky as *perching on the horizon*, immediately the idea of birds may come to mind, and an experience of waiting for something to happen, both of which a poet can consciously choose to include in the poem for a specific reason. When imagery is not intentional, the reader can just as easily be thrown off course and miss the meaning behind the poet's words.

Describing something without using **metaphor** or **simile** allows the poet to focus specifically on what picture is being created in the mind of the reader. Later on in this course, you will add metaphors to imagery, and your intentions as a poet will become even more focused, yet at the same time multilayered so that the reader must peel away line after line to discover what it is you are expressing. A poet can simply write, “I see an old tree” or “I see a blue cloud,” but it is much more rewarding to be specific with the imagery created—

*“ . . . there's a standing
invitation to lie back
as sky's unpredictable
theater proceeds.”*

from “Crossings”
by Ravi Shankar

using tools like simile (“an old tree like a chimney missing bricks after a storm”) or metaphor (“a blue cloud swimming across the sea of sky”).

Mastering this technique is not unlike the layering of paint on a canvas to create a desired effect, or the way shadows move and change not what exists before you, but how you see what is actually before you. Let your language become the different colors of a palette waiting to be mixed.

When you know exactly what you intend to say in a poem, you can then go about the great work of using poetic craft to say it in new ways, unique only to you as the poet!

Read and Reflect

Read “Crossings” by Ravi Shankar. This poem, and all the poems you will read in this course, can be found on the Oak Meadow course web page: www.oakmeadow.com/curriculum-links.

After reading the poem, answer the following questions.

1. List three examples of imagery found in the poem and explain how the poet uses imagery to create an experience of being in nature for the reader.
2. What feeling does the poet evoke in you in the first stanza? Explain what it is and how the poet achieves it through his writing.
3. Given everything we know scientifically about the sky, how can the sky still be an “unpredictable theater”?
4. Using Shankar’s opening phrase “Between forest and field,” write a stanza or create an entire poem incorporating imagery and your own experience with nature.

Writing Exercise

Go to a place in your yard that you remember spending time in when you were younger (or if you have recently moved, find a place outside where you have spent some time). Bring your journal and a pencil or pen. Make sure the day is warm enough that you can spend at least 10–15 minutes sitting or standing in relative silence. Once you are comfortable, make each sense a different page in your journal: one page each for *Seeing*, *Listening*, *Smelling*, *Touching*, and *Tasting*. Now take a moment to think about what it means to see something, and then find an object outside that you are curious about, and observe that object without writing down anything. When inspiration strikes, or you feel compelled to write something, go to the page labeled *Seeing* and jot down your thoughts and impressions, keeping in mind how you could use an image to represent that object. Do the same exercise for each corresponding sense, using the same object. You may have to move to touch or smell the object. If there are no sounds to focus on, let imagination fill in the quiet for you. *What would the birds sound like today if they were chirping on that branch? If the wind roared through this tree, what would the branches sound like?* For taste, imagination will again be the tool to use to imagine what a flower or tree branch might taste like. Imagination allows the poet to have no limitations in the quest to create impressions of the world.

When your five sensory impressions are complete, and you have constructed at least one image of the object for each sense, you may head back inside if you are cold, or stay in your spot and add each line to a new page, deciding which sense makes a better beginning, what fits better as an ending, etc. Rearrange them as necessary. Keep it simple. If your lines do not make sense together, don't worry about it. Think about what is missing.

- Is there an impression of the object that isn't clear enough?
- Do you see a story that needs to be told in your lines? What is missing?
- What is already established in your construction zone of a poem?

If you have a clear idea of what needs fixing and you know how to do it, go ahead and write the poem in full. If you do not feel inspired to complete it yet, close your journal and head back inside, or let yourself linger as long as you like. Save everything you create in your journal. Please try to avoid the image of crumpled up papers on the floor beneath a writer's desk that is so often depicted in movies about writers. Everything you create has value.

SHARE YOUR WORK

When you are ready, please share your completed poem with your teacher, along with your writing exercise notes (sensory pages), and the answers to the questions above.

It's always a good idea to read over what you are submitting, and make any small edits that you feel are necessary. Formal revising will come later, at the end of each unit, but in general, reading over your poem before handing it in is a good habit to get into.

For Your Consideration

Step back from an image you have written to decide why it is there. Remind yourself of the purpose of your poem so that the images you include have reason and are not just imagery for its own sake, but have actual meaning that is true to your poem.

Lesson

2

Nature and the Self

How do you relate to the natural world? What aspects of nature exist inside you as a human being? While the wildness of nature can at times be difficult to relate to and find comfort in, the connection the human being is able to feel to nature in a familiar field or along a path littered with footprints through a stand of trees, or even from the view out a bedroom window overlooking a garden, strikes a chord in us that we can all experience. The question then becomes *Where in the natural world can we find reflections of ourselves waiting for us to discover?*

Poetry demands that the kind of observation skills you explored in lesson 1 be put to good use. When we use our senses, we are able to penetrate beyond the surface of what we see immediately before us. A poem can then become a stage for us to translate what we have witnessed, from a minute detail to the profoundest of feelings, and through words we recreate the experience for the reader.

In this lesson, you will be asked to find your own unique way of expressing what you can find in nature that relates to your experience as a human being. When you take the time to explore a tree with your eyes, where in the shape of the limbs or the bark formations along the trunk can you find something to relate to? Is there a face in the tree, or the shape of an eye? Do the limbs stretch out into delicate fingers? Look closer.

You have already described nature using imagery, now you will learn to create metaphors and similes that help bring your subject matter to life in a new way. Instead of simply stating what you see, this lesson invites you to create a fresh world *within* the natural world, using imagination and your own human experience. *Look closer.*

ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- ☐ Read the introduction and poetic tool kit (metaphor and simile).
- ☐ Read “The Weed” by Elizabeth Bishop and answer questions.
- ☐ Complete metaphor/simile writing exercise.

*“The stem grew thick. The nervous roots
reached to each side; the graceful head
changed its position mysteriously,
since there was neither sun nor moon
to catch its young attention.”*

from “The Weed” by Elizabeth Bishop

Poetic Tool Kit: Metaphor and Simile

Of all the tools to learn about poetry, **metaphors** and **similes** are often the most referred to, and the most important. A metaphor makes a specific, implied, or hidden comparison between two things or objects that are different yet have some common characteristics.

A simile makes a comparison, showing similarities between two distinctly different things. Unlike a metaphor, a simile creates a likeness by using the words “like” or “as,” and is a direct comparison between two things. While it may sound like there is a bit of magic involved in creating a metaphor that contains a hidden comparison, there is just as much magic when creating a unique simile that works best in your poem. There are so many common similes in the English language, such as being *as slow as a snail* or *as fast as a cheetah*; it truly takes effort to find the right kind of simile to add to your poem.

Here is a great example of a common metaphor: *Her laughter was music to my ears*. This is a beautiful way to imply that a person's laughter alone took on all of the wonderful qualities of music, which in turn created a pleasant listening experience. How different would this sentence sound without a metaphor: *Her laughter made my ears feel good*. Any way you try to capture the meaning of the experience without using a metaphor or a simile fails to fully embody it properly, which is what sets poetry apart as a written art form. Poetry seeks to enliven language, and to embody the true sensory, emotional, and intellectual experience of the reader. Adding a clear understanding of how to create and use metaphors and similes to your poetic tool kit will assist you greatly in expressing yourself in original ways.

A simple example of the difference between metaphor and simile:

Metaphor: *Your eyes are sparks from a fire.*

By adding one word (“like”), it becomes a simile: *Your eyes are like sparks from a fire.*

Read and Reflect

Read “The Weed” by Elizabeth Bishop, found on the Oak Meadow course web page: www.oakmeadow.com/curriculum-links.

After reading the poem, answer the following questions.

1. How does this poem connect the loss of life with the power of new life?
2. What do you think the weed represents in this poem? What is its purpose?
3. How does the poet use metaphors and similes in this poem? List three (make sure to specify whether each is a metaphor or simile—include at least one of each) and explain what you think they add to the poem.
4. As a human being, can you relate to descriptions of “growing” detailed in this poem? Can you imagine yourself as having once struggled with your leaves?

5. What description of nature can you think of that best describes how you have grown up? Here is one example: *Before there was tall grass on this dune, each blade had to break through the sand on its way to the sun, and I've found myself often struggling to break the surface of everything I've wanted to do in life so far.*

Writing Exercise

Venture outside and look around your yard, or the neighborhood park, for something natural that you can hold. Take the object back inside your house. Now look around your house for something that interests you that you can also hold (an object made by humans). Create a short list of metaphors and similes using these two objects. Be sure to use both objects in the lines that you come up with. For example, if your objects were a maple leaf and a spoon, a metaphor for the two could be *The leaf held spoonfuls of rain.* A simile could be *The leaf, like a spoon, held the rain.*

Try to come up with five metaphors and five similes for these two completely different objects.

Do the exercise again, but this time find some natural object *inside* the house first, and then go outside and find another object that isn't natural, such as a metal gate, mailbox, bike, etc. You do not need to be able to carry the nonnatural object you find. Identify it and remember what it is and what it looks like when you come back inside to write your next set of metaphors and similes.

Make another list of five metaphors and five similes using these two objects.

Now read over the lines you have created and see if one of them triggers you to write something more. If you feel inspired by one metaphor or simile, begin writing a poem with it as your first line. If you do not find inspiration in your lists, try the exercise once again, or simply pick one line randomly and trust that inspiration will strike. Once you begin writing a poem using one of the metaphors or similes, try to incorporate a few others into your poem (either the ones you've already come up with or new ones that come to you).

SHARE YOUR WORK

When you are ready, please share your completed poem with your teacher, along with your writing exercise notes and the answers to the questions above. Remember to read over your poem before handing it in so you can catch and correct anything that doesn't look right—a single misspelled word can change the entire meaning of your piece.

For Your Consideration

Stay aware of where in a poem you are every now and then. Be your own signpost as the writer. If you feel lost as the poet, your reader will be too.



UNIT II: Love

*"Tonight I can write the saddest lines.
I loved her, and sometimes she loved me too."*

from "Tonight I Can Write" by Pablo Neruda

ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- ☐ Complete Unit II Reading Journal reading and questions.

The lines above are from one of the most famous love poems, written when the poet, Pablo Neruda, was 17. At a poetry reading many years later, an audience member requested that Neruda read this poem, at which point Neruda replied that he did not bring that poem with him to read. After hearing that, most of the large audience stood up and recited the poem to him from memory.

Love poetry has the power to affect a reader deeply. Given the private nature of an individual writing about love, it is how the poet bares their soul, the heartbreak or the affection, the companionship and the longing, using the poetic tools of language, that gives the poem as much staying power as the sentiment being expressed.

In this unit, you will have the opportunity to read a wide assortment of love poems from around the world, and to construct your own using the tools you already have in your poetic tool kit, along with new elements of craft that you will learn, such as **imagination**, **personification**, and how to create effective **titles**.

Just as nature is a universal theme that can be explored in poetry, love is a feeling that weaves through the human experience, linking us all by the emotions we feel on a daily basis. Love is the common thread connecting all other emotions, a foundation of human existence and experience.

How do you bring something new to this familiar theme? This unit will ask you to call upon your own experience in life so far in crafting your poems and completing each exercise. By doing so, you will create original love poems that reflect the uniqueness of your perspective and life experience, your dreams, and your imagination. You may not have been in love with someone yet in your life in a romantic way, but love exists in many other ways, in other relationships you have had. Abstractly, love can be a feeling you have when admiring the beauty of a tulip. Love can be the bond you feel for a pet or the way you observe two people looking at each other. You may not know who they are, yet being a witness to the love of others can be equally powerful and inspiring to write about. Love can be found everywhere you look, and has been a critical part of literature, present in virtually every book ever written.

You are invited to explore the boundaries of love in this unit, knowing that given the universality of feeling that love possesses, there are truly *no* boundaries to what you can create and express.

Unit II Reading Journal: Love

Choose from the list of poets and books about love from the reading list provided, or do your own research and find some different ones to read for this unit. Remember that you do not need to write responses to *every* poem in the book. Choose four poems, so that you can achieve a complete picture of how the poet writes. You are highly encouraged to try to read as much of the book as possible to gain a better sense for the writing style of each poet. After you read a poem in the book that particularly resonates with you, answer the following questions about the craft of that poem.

1. How does imagination come into play in the poetry you are reading? List a few examples from different poems in the book that you feel represent imagination and explain how each works in the poem, and how it effects the poem.
2. Make a running list of the title of every poem you read. When you have finished reading the book, go back over each title and try to remember something about the poem simply by reading the title again. Describe what you recall and explain what it is about the title that helped you remember that specific impression, image, phrase, etc.
3. Where has personification come into play in the poetry you have read? Describe instances of personification and how it has affected the poem.
4. Read the poem once more and think about the poet's use of language. Is the vocabulary accessible to you as the reader? Is it over your head? What kind of impact does language—the choice of words in the poem—have on your reading of the poem?
5. How does the poem conclude? Is the ending dramatic? Does the ending serve the poem well, or is it confusing? Does the ending leave you, as the reader, wanting to know more? If you could change one thing about the ending, what would it be?
6. After reading the poem several times, how has your comprehension of the poem changed? Has the focus on the craft of the poem altered your initial reaction when you first read the poem? Please explain why or why not in as detailed a way as possible.

You will send your reading journal to your teacher after completing this unit.

Suggested Reading List for Reading Journal Unit II: Love

John Keats, *Bright Star: Love Letters and Poems of John Keats to Fanny Brawne*

Pablo Neruda, *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*

Pablo Neruda, *100 Love Sonnets*

Anne Sexton, *Love Poems*

William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*

Rumi, *Love Is a Stranger: Selected Lyric Poetry of Jelaluddin Rumi*

Brian Patten, *Love Poems*

Erica Jong, *Love Comes First*

Petrarch, *The Sonnets, Triumphs, and Other Poems of Petrarch*

Lesson

6

Divine Love

Love poetry can be written about anything. In this lesson, you will be asked to look inside yourself and contemplate what it is that means something special to you—so special that you would say that you indeed *love* it. For the famous Persian poet, Rumi, his love poems are offerings to the divine, the source of all life that he felt impelled to compose his verse to. Without knowing this, a reader might read his love poems and believe that he was writing about a romantic love interest, a human being capable of receiving and giving back the same love expressed in his verses. And yet, this love was physically invisible in life, but fully actualized in Rumi's poems through his imagination and the beauty of language.

Now it will be your turn to write about the invisible love you feel toward something that you hold sacred in life, be it a picture of your family, a stone you found while walking on a beach that spoke to you in such a way that you had to pick it up and take it home, a bird that returns each morning to a feeder you made by hand, a character in a book you have read more than once, or a memory. There is no limit to what might move you in a way that feels sacred to you. There is beauty all around you, but beauty alone is not the only thing to look for. Search for something deeper that makes you feel connected, that breeds the emotions of admiration and affection in a way that endures.

Imagination will be your new tool to learn about and use, and add to your poetic tool kit. Utilizing all the tools you have learned so far in this course, your verses will now embody love.

ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- ☐ Read the introduction and poetic tool kit (imagination).
- ☐ Read “My Beloved” by Rumi and answer questions.
- ☐ Complete imagination writing exercise.

*“Know that she is the life
in my body and in my soul”*

from “My Beloved” by Rumi

Poetic Tool Kit: Imagination

The use of **imagination** in poetry is essential. In what other art form can holding hands become *the closing of broken shells finally whole* or a kiss be referred to as *the first sign of spring in my heart*. Because of imagination, there is no limit to how a poet can describe something, and no limit to how a reader might interpret what a poet writes. Imagination makes up a collection of tools that can be used in different ways throughout a poem. Think of imagination as the invisible feelings and visions that you create inside you, as if your mind were an artist's studio. The reader may see the finished version of your

poem, but it is the behind-the-scenes work that happens inside you, as the poet, that helps to bring your poem to life, and give it the richness it needs to be unique.

Instead of simply writing about what something is, in poetry you can write about what it was or can become, what it might be, what you want it to be, and what it can represent. In love poetry, poets often compare the object of their affection to something using metaphor and simile. Yet as you have learned, to create truly unique and fresh metaphors, you need to harness the creative powers of your imagination. Love is not often described in mundane language because love is personified best by beauty and desire, and feelings of the heart. When describing the loss of love and the complicated feelings this unearths in a person, why not look to a bramble bush to best represent the tangled crush of feelings being experienced, where the beautiful web of vines is also lined with thorns? If written in an imaginative way, the reader of such a poem might never look at a bramble bush again without thinking of the loss described in the poem. Do you see how imagination blended with real human emotion and feeling can set the stage for some powerful, endearing poetry?

Now it is your turn to go out into the world of your own imagination, a world that can be whatever you allow it to be, free of boundaries or restrictions, able to turn river stones into stars, cause skyscraper windows to reflect the framed wholeness of a face you admire, or make the crashing of waves form the cadence of a love poem you are composing. Trust your imagination to come up with new and fresh ways to say something you might have heard time and time again in a poem or a piece of writing, or spoken out loud. After all, if a writing assignment asked you to express the most common phrase *I love you* over and over in a poem without actually writing those words, what would you write?

Read and Reflect

Read the following poem and then answer the questions below.

My Beloved

by Rumi

*Know that my beloved is hidden from everyone
Know that she is beyond the belief of all beliefs
Know that in my heart she is as clear as the moon
Know that she is the life in my body and in my soul*

1. This poem is short, but each line can be analyzed carefully. By stating “my beloved is hidden from everyone” how is the poet using imagination in this particular line? Keep in mind that, as mentioned earlier in this lesson, the imagination a poet employs in a poem might not only be that of themselves, but that of the reader as well.
2. Using your imagination, how can the heart be a place where the beloved can be “as clear as the moon”?
3. Compose your own four line poem using the phrase “Know that in my heart . . .” to begin each line.

Writing Exercise

Find the plainest room or part of a room in your house where you can sit and write, either holding your notebook in your hand, or your computer in your lap. Make sure that the spot you choose is truly plain, such as a section of a wall that has no pictures hanging on it, or a spot in your basement or attic. The key to this exercise is finding a place that doesn't feed your imagination so that you have to summon your own ideas and images, calling on your poetic gifts to create your verse. This is like a meditative writing exercise in that by not focusing on a single thing except the bareness of the space before you, you are actually attempting to paint the wall with your own imagination.

Now that you have found the right space, take a seat and set your gaze ahead, focusing not on the wall, but on the emptiness of the wall, the vast expanse of space before you. Keep in mind that vastness is not determined by size when you are using your imagination. Even the smallest corner of an attic can become an ever-expanding field when you use your imagination to fill in the blanks.

Once you have gazed at the emptiness for a minute, think of the word *love* and write down the first thoughts or images or feelings that you have. Return your gaze to the wall for another minute and repeat this exercise, introducing the word *love* into the emptiness of your thoughts and once again write down whatever comes to you. By now you should have a bit of a list going.

Now reread your list and determine which of the things might in some way be sacred to you. If there is more than one, or all of them, that's great. If nothing on the list is even remotely related to *love* in your opinion, try the exercise again and see if your list is different. Remember that something sacred doesn't have to be holy in a religious or divine sense. If you have written down the word *kitten* because you adore a new kitten you have, this is fine to use for the poem you will create. Not judging your own creativity and inspiration is extremely important when composing poetry, or creating art of any kind. An idea is only an idea until you actually do something with it, and thus, through revision you always have a chance to edit or change anything that you wish. For now, trust in your initial instinct and see where inspiration leads you.

Choose one thing from your list and write about the love you feel for it. Do not censor yourself here. If you just love that kitten with all your heart, try to express this love in five different lines using your imagination to come up with unique ways to explain it to your reader. Capturing the essence of an emotion in an imaginative way is one of the keys to writing beautiful love poetry.

When you have composed five lines, find ways to connect them into a poem that expresses what you believe is the purest reflection of the love you feel. Take a break from your work and then try writing another poem based on another item on your list. Feel free to revise your poems as needed before sharing them both with your teacher.

SHARE YOUR WORK

When you are ready, please share all writing assignments and the answers to the questions with your teacher for review. As always, read over what you are submitting, and make any small edits that you feel are necessary.

For Your Consideration

Poets often paint the picture of an experience without always telling the story of what's taking place between the lines—that can tell the story too.

Lesson

14

Unit III Revision and Review

Now that you have written several spoken-word poems using the poetic tools you have learned throughout this course, and new ones introduced in this unit (persona, alliteration, sound, flow, and rhyme), it's time to revisit your writing and review your work.

Writing Exercise

As with the conclusion of each unit in this course, it is important to continue to hone your revision and editing skills before you progress further. Take the time necessary to go over your spoken-word pieces now that you have received feedback from your teacher. Take stock of the suggestions your teacher has given you; it is important to take ownership over your writing and decide for yourself which suggestions you agree with and which you do not.

It is also important to not let your ego stand in the way of improving your writing. Always remember that if you have composed a specific line that you absolutely adore, but your teacher has suggested it be cut from the poem for some reason, you can always save that line and use it in another poem. Every line in a poem can be its own work of art, so try to stay flexible in how you contemplate your writing as you revise it. Sometimes a particularly poignant or beautiful line can be too strong for the poem you are writing, and sometimes it can simply end up being its own poem or the first or last line of a different poem. Nothing should ever be deleted in poetry, even though working on a computer makes it very easy to do so.

As it has been stated throughout this course so far, *save everything*.

Once you have revised your work to your satisfaction, it's time to try reading your spoken-word pieces out loud as if you were performing them. When you feel particularly good about one piece, ask your parents, siblings, a close friend, or a neighbor to listen to you perform it. Invite whomever you feel comfortable with.

Have your audience write down their impression of both your poem and your performance. They might feel shy about this at first, so it could help to assure them that you really want their opinion (you aren't just looking for compliments).

ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- ☐ Revise each of the spoken-word poems written for Unit III.
- ☐ Perform one or more pieces, soliciting feedback from your audience.
- ☐ Write a reflection about your own performance.

Finally, take a moment to write about your experience performing your own poem in front of people. It is not easy to perform spoken-word poetry, so you should be rewarded for taking a chance! You will be given extra credit for taking advantage of the opportunity to perform your spoken-word piece in front of an audience, even if it is just one person. Feel free to perform all of your poems from this unit if you feel up to the challenge.

SHARE YOUR WORK

Send all of your revised spoken-word poems to your teacher, along with comments from an audience member and your own reflection on the performance. Remember to send your reading journal to your teacher too.

For Your Consideration

Congratulations on completing Unit III! Your poetic tool kit must be getting full by now. Hopefully your understanding and appreciation for poetry has grown as you have read an array of poems from around the world, and contemplated the meaning behind the words and the craft each poet employed in these works of literary art.