



# Speak Your Truth: Poetry Part II

## Sample lesson

Welcome to *Speak Your Truth: Poetry Part II*! This one-semester elective course builds on the foundation of the poet's craft developed in *Word: The Poet's Voice*, and expands it to include performance skills you will need to recite poetry before an audience. By studying videos of selected poetry readings by well known poets of various genres and attending local poetry readings, you will explore the reading styles and techniques employed by each author. Various writing exercises each week are designed to develop your poetic repertoire, drawing inspiration from personal experience, current events, nature, relationships, and the imagination to writing meaningful poetry. You are required to participate in monthly online poetry workshops to collaborate with peers and examine the work of others in this course. Each workshop will provide you with the chance to read your own work aloud to the group, and be praised and critiqued in a supportive environment. As a final project, you will be asked to read from your completed poems in front of an audience of family or friends, at a local library, bookstore, or café, or any other venue of your choosing.

## SESSION ONE

### Constructing Rainbows

#### Poetic Toolkit: Imagery

**Imagery** is the name given to the elements in a poem that spark the senses. Imagery is a poetic tool every poet uses to describe the setting for a poem, and to assist in creating the impression of the subject matter in the reader's mind. Imagery in literature can direct the thoughts of a reader to a specific moment or inspire feelings of wonder and memory.

### Writing Assignment

#### Assignment #1

Think of your favorite color. Now write down 15 different images or descriptions of that color, using metaphors, similes, and imagery to best capture an essence of that color. You can also think of your chosen color as a character. There are no bounds to your imagination.



When you have your list, read it over to decide if anything needs changing, if there's something you forgot, or something you want to add. When your list is complete, save it.

## Assignment #2

After you feel confident about your list, take each line and arrange it on a blank page, seeing if the lines will work together to form a poem. Think of it like a puzzle. You are assembling your poem from pre-written lines all describing the same thing. They may be totally different, but a common theme should emerge that you can work with to build into a poem.

Once you have some sort of order, start playing with the poetic craft of each line, finding ways to connect each line to the next. Look at line breaks: Can a line be broken in a way that allows it to flow into the following line? What about the poem or imagery can be re-arranged?

Try your best to not delete anything as it was first written (you want the final poem to include all the original phrases) but do feel free to switch up other aspects of your budding poem. Later, after your teacher has seen what you have created, you will be given the opportunity to cut words or alter images that may not be strong. For now, see what you can do with the poetic puzzle pieces you have on the page or screen in front of you.

## Reflection Journal

Choose a poetry reading to listen to or view online, or attend a live poetry reading. Feel free to use one of the links included on the Reflection Journal page or find another poetry reading to use. Answer the following questions afterward.

1. What poem was read and who was the author? Who read the poem?
2. Does the reader introduce the poem, or anything about themselves, or do they just begin reading it right away? In your opinion, what do you think would be the most effective way to begin a poetry reading? Should how a poet begins a reading differ based on the poetry they are reading? Explain your thoughts.
3. What have you retained about the poem after hearing it read aloud? After you list a few things, listen to the poet read the poem again, and see if you can add to the list until you have a firm understanding of the poem being read. If it is impossible to do this (as in a live poetry reading), explain why and how the poet could have made the poem easier to understand when read out loud.



4. Are there any places in the reader's recitation where they reach a song-like quality, where you sense a rhythmic flow to their words? This is common in spoken word poetry, but it can also be found in all different types of poetry depending on the poet.

## Share Your Work

When you have completed your list and poem, and answered the Reflection Journal questions about the poetry reading you watched or listened to, use your Google course doc to share your work with your teacher. Remember to include the original list.

# SESSION FOUR

## Field Notes

### Poetic Toolkit: Imagination

**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.

Often when people see a beautiful or striking sight in nature, they want to capture the essence of the moment in visual form to revisit it later. Photographs of nature can bring about the same kinds of feelings as actually being in nature. For instance, seeing an image years later can return you to the very moment when you first observed sunlight strike the tips of maple tree leaves, or caught a glimpse of a bald eagle and quickly snapped a photograph of it.

But there are other ways to return to the essence of a moment in art, and poetry is a powerful medium to employ to do so. A camera uses a lens to capture the minute details of a flower or a stone, but the invention of the camera was based on the eye, the first "camera" lens ever created. Your mind translates an image you see, instantaneously working to add words to what you perceive, words that define and explain the image. This image-to-perception-to-knowing all takes place in fractions of a second, as quickly perhaps as a moment comes and goes, the flash of bird wings disappearing or a dragonfly zooming away before you can take a second look.



Think of yourself as a transcriber of what you see. Your eyes are now your camera, but the visuals it captures will not appear to the viewer as a photograph, but as words on a page.

## Writing Assignment

### Assignment #1

Spend an hour or more outside in a natural setting. Take detailed notes of what you see and discover in the nature you find outside your front door. If outside your door is a forest or field, explore that environment. If it is a city sidewalk with weeds reaching through the cracks, observe those weeds and find a story to tell, a picture to create with your words. Nothing in nature is greater or more beautiful than anything else. All plants compete for sunlight, whether in a garden or in a tiny pot on an apartment balcony. Wherever you live, there will be some aspect of nature to find and observe.

As you sit in nature or stroll through a park or woods, keep a watchful eye on the details of things. The shapes and colors of the plants, the size and texture of a tree, the character of rocks and streams. You may witness wildlife that interests you: a bird, an insect, a squirrel. Remember that nature means animals, too, ones that exist as part of nature. (For this assignment, do not include observations of pets or livestock such as dogs, cats, horses, chickens, or cows). Look for the wildness all round you.

A poem will be constructed from the field notes you jot down about your observations. A stone is just a stone, unless you take the time to truly observe it, exploring its surface with your own unique perception. When you really look at something, you activate your mind, which triggers your knowledge, imagination, and memories, and suddenly ideas start to form. The story of the stone will begin to unearth itself inside you. And remember, there is no “correct” story to tell. Each person perceives things differently, and you will perceive the same stone differently at different times. Nature is as alive as you are, changing each and every moment of every day.

### Assignment #2

After taking at least one page of notes on something in nature that you feel drawn to or interested in, begin to use those notes in a poem. Try to weave your notes together into a poem. Don’t worry if it reads like a running list at first—you will have time later to alter the order and play around with what you have jotted down. And remember that you are attempting to capture a moment in time like a photograph. Keep in mind that the visuals of the photograph may be what first entices your viewer, but it is the frozen-in-time story of the moment being portrayed that leaves a lasting impression. What story is your poem telling?



## Reflection Journal

Choose a poetry reading to watch or listen to, and answer the following questions afterward.

1. What poem was read and who was the author? Who read the poem?
2. Does the reader introduce the poem, or anything about themselves, or do they just begin reading it right away? In your opinion, what might have been a more effective way to begin the poetry reading?
3. As a listener, do you find yourself closing your eyes when listening to a reader, or do you keep your eyes on the reader at all times? If you close your eyes, explain why you choose to do this and how it might benefit the overall listening experience. If you keep your eyes open, explain why you think you do this and how it might change the listening experience.
4. What would you want your audience's lasting impression to be after you have given a poetry reading? Does this change depending on the poem you choose to read?

## Share Your Work

Please share with your teacher your nature observation notes and poem, along with your responses to the Reflection Journal questions.

# SESSION FIVE

## Voice Work

Now that you have written four poems, it is a good time to take a break from writing and work on reading your poetry aloud. For this exercise, your mirror will be your audience. Much like an actor gazes in the mirror to work on facial expressions, consider your own reflection to be the first audience member to hear you recite your poetry.



## Poetry Reading Practice

### Assignment #1

At this point, your poems have been revised and polished (based on your teacher's feedback) so you should have a good feel for them. When giving a reading, **confidence** and **familiarity** with the work are important. Read over each poem and decide the order you think fits best.

### Assignment #2

Without practicing beforehand, stand up straight and read your first poem to your reflection in the mirror. Remember to look up and make eye contact with your listener (yourself). Trust yourself that you know your work well enough that you don't have to stare at the words on the page every moment.

After reading the first poem, reflect on the experience. How did it sound? Did you read slowly or quickly? Did you speak up clearly? Did a feeling of self-consciousness cause you to whisper or mumble your way through your poem?

Most first-time readers will read their poems too fast, as you might notice in the monthly poetry workshops. Slowing down without sounding too methodical will be something to work on. Treat each word and phrase as if it is important—because it is! If your poem is written in spoken word form, you may have read it fairly quickly, injecting emotion into your voice and finding a clear rhythm and flow, but you don't have to rush. Give your audience enough time to hear what you are saying, to take it in. All of these are great things to keep in mind when reading a poem aloud because you are bringing it to life with your voice.

Now read the second poem. Pause afterward to take a few breaths and refocus your mind or center yourself. Then read the third, and pause, then read the fourth and final poem.

Always remember that these are *your* poems, so you can read them the way you want them to be heard. However, in order to do that, you need to first know exactly how you want your reader to hear them. Only you know your true intention for writing each piece, and the meaning and emotion you want to impart to your listener. Keep all of that in mind as you continue practicing reading and experimenting with how to speak your poems.

When you have read each of your poems aloud, take some mental notes on places where you stumbled or your words might have slurred, or if you got lost and had to find your place in the poem. Did anything not sound right? Were there any confusing parts to your poem, or some lines that sounded weak to you as you read them?



Sometimes reading a poem out loud can give us greater insight into how to better edit and shape a poem to bring a more moving overall experience to your reader or listener.

### Assignment #3

Take a moment to write about your experience with this exercise, keeping detailed notes about what you think you can strengthen in your poetry reading. What was successful? What would you like to change, improve, or do differently next time? If you have questions for your teacher about this experience or how to improve your skills, jot these down as well.

## Reflection Journal

Now that you've given your first reading of your poems, viewing another poet giving a poetry reading should be a different experience. Choose a poetry reading to experience and then respond to the following questions.

1. What poem was read and who was the author? Who read the poem?
2. Did the poet introduce the poem in a way that made you interested in what was to come? Did they offer any useful or interesting story or fact about why they wrote the poem?
3. In your opinion, should poetry be presented simply as it is, or does adding musical accompaniment to the reading, or background visual effects, enhance or detract from the poem? What do you believe would be the best way to present poetry to an audience? (Do not just automatically give the same answer as when you first encountered this question; think carefully about how you feel now.)
4. Does the reader's voice sound different than it might in a normal conversation? How does it sound different? Give a few examples, lines from the poem being read, that best highlight this. If the reader did not sound different than in normal conversation, how might doing so have changed the listening experience for you?

## Share Your Work

When you have completed work from this lesson, please send to your teacher your reflections about your mirror poetry reading poem and your answers to the Reflection Journal questions.