

Winter Forest

The snow falls,
gently, quietly down
to blanket the trees
as nature puts them to bed.

Long, gleaming crystal icicles
hang from my window
like fangs dripping clear blood,
one falls to the ground
and shatters like a glass cup
dropped by the busy housewife.

All is quiet outside
except for the snow falling
gently, quietly down
to blanket the trees.
Nature puts them to bed.

— Lisa

Snowflake

I once found a snowflake in a field
an utterly exquisite crystal from god
and yet I found it odd
that it was unlike all
in this field
it was without flaw
with lines made out of lace
and nothing out of place
unique by itself
even though very small
about the size of a minute elf
I shall take it to school with me
and it shall be
the nicest flake they ever beheld
it shall be with me not on a shelf
I shall be the one who holds
the precious flake of glass
but alas
when I got to school the flake was no longer
there
it was just water like any other melted
snowflake

— Brendan Dickinson, #11

Oda a la noche

Noche,
viniste sola en el aire
como guitarra volante.
Llena de brisas
Que me acariciaban en la noche.
Tus grandes ojos
Me miraban desde la ventana.
Llegaste con pequeñas lágrimas
Que refrescaron la naturaleza.
Noche,
Llegaste oscura y desolada
Como la capa del día.
Siempre alumbrada
Por pequeñas estrellas brillantes.
Las flores bailaban
Con tu pequeña brisa.
Y tu hermosa luna brillante
Me acompañaba en mis sueños.

— Karla Figueróa

Ode to the Night

Night,
You came alone in the air
Like a flying guitar
Full of breezes
That caressed me in the night.
The great eyes
watched me from the window.
You came with small tears
That refreshed nature.
Night,
You came dark and desolate
Like the cape of the day.
Always illuminated by small bright stars.
The flowers danced with your small breeze.
And your beautiful, bright moon came
with me in my dream.

— Karla Figueróa
translated by Josefina Bosch

3. Beehive

Within this black hive to-night
 There swarm a million bees;
 Bees passing in and out the moon,
 Bees escaping out the moon,
 Bees returning through the moon,
 Silver bees intently buzzing,
 Silver honey dripping from the swarm of bees
 Earth is a waxen cell of the world comb,
 And I, a drone,
 Lying on my back,
 Lipping honey,
 Getting drunk with silver honey
 Wish that I might fly out past the moon
 And curl forever in some far-off farmyard
 flower.

— Jean Toomer

4. The Fly

Little Fly,
 Thy summer's Play
 My thoughtless hand
 Has brushed away.
 Am not I
 A fly like thee?
 Or art not thou
 A Man like me?
 For I dance
 And I drink and sing.
 Till some blind hand
 Shall brush my wing.
 If thought is life
 And strength and breath,
 And the want
 Of thought is death,
 Then am I
 A happy Fly
 If I live
 Or if I die.

—William Blake

5. The Fox

Because the snow is deep
 Without spot that white falling through
 white air
 Because she limps a little—bleeds
 Where they shot her
 Because hunters have guns
 And dogs have hangmen's legs
 Because I'd like to take her in my arms
 And tend her wound
 Because she can't afford to die
 Killing the young in her belly
 I don't know what to say of a soldier's dying
 Because there are no proportions in death.

— Kenneth Patchen

6. Wild Things

What is it that makes us love wild things?
 That after long patience and a kind of thirst,
 after speculating on the slap of water,
 whir of wings,
 out of the grainy dusk, some wild
 creature bursts
 from the forest. Before we focus on its shape,
 almost before it can be named,
 it twists back, leaps, makes its escape.
 Whatever it was, we know it can't be tamed.
 Do we want the whole deer quivering
 under our gaze?
 The fox frozen as a statue in its track?
 No. Only the glaze of eyes,
 the lightning bolt of legs.
 the otter's wake. We want the power to attract.
 Wildness to be skimmed, sensed, not faced.
 We want to love wildness,
 to feel that we've been graced.

— Judith Steinbergh

The Base Stealer

Poised between going on and back, pulled
Both ways taut like a tightrope-walker,
Fingertips pointing the opposites,
Now bouncing tiptoe like a dropped ball
Or a kid skipping rope, come on, come on,
Running a scattering of steps sidewise,
How he teeters, skitters, tingles, teases,
Taunts them, hovers like an ecstatic bird,
He's only flirting, crowd him, crowd him,
Delicate, delicate, delicate, delicate—now!

— Robert Francis

Poetry Exercise #3

Choose a sport you play or watch. Focus on one aspect of a game or event. Carefully choose your images. Imagine you are a video camera technician with only a small amount of tape. What images must you capture to convey the essence of the scene?

Student Examples

The Wonder of Flight

The Celtics and Bulls match up head to head.
Everybody is standing up cheering, anxious
to see the end result.
One minute to go in the fourth quarter.
Passing, passing, what . . . Jordan steals the ball,
Sprinting down the court, dribbling from
the ball,
The tracks of smoke disappear into the faces
of millions.
No one can catch him, everyone stares, while
trapped in time.

Faced with the determination, the sweat is
pumping like waterfalls off his face.
Up, up, leaping, climbing stairs while he drives,
In goes the ball, DUNK, SWISHH
The building roars and shakes like an
earthquake,
Screams and praises, celebration as he scores.
Everybody should know the Wonder of Flight . . .

— Kara Nicole Dunn

Notice how the line breaks of the following poem construct a diving board.

Diving

Climbing the ladder like a caterpillar climbing
a tree.
Fear is gathering up like dust in an attic.
The board wobbles
an old bridge.
I jump up
a frog after a fly.
Pointing my body
like a needle.
The wind rushing
past is a hurricane.
Water glistens below.
Twisting and turning.
Bracing myself.
Splash!
Silent cheering
Alone and at peace
like a dolphin
Fear is all gone
Swimming back
Fear now returns.

— Matthew Garvey Snover

3. Rough

My parents kept me from children who were rough
 Who threw words like stones and who wore torn clothes.
 Their thighs showed through rags. They ran in the street
 And climbed cliffs and stripped by the country streams.

I feared more than tigers their muscles like iron
 Their jerking hands and their knees tight on my arm.
 I feared the salt coarse pointing of those boys
 Who copied my lisp behind me on the road.

They were lithe, they sprang out behind hedges
 Like dogs to bark at my world. They threw mud
 While I looked the other way, pretending to smile.
 I longed to forgive them, but they never smiled.

— Stephen Spender

4. This Morning

(for the Girls of Eastern High School)

this morning
 this morning
 i met myself

coming in
 a bright
 jungle girl
 shining
 quick as a snake
 a tall
 tree girl a
 me girl

 i met myself

this morning
 coming in
 and all day
 i have been
 a black bell
 ringing
 i survive

 survive

survive

— Lucille Clifton

5. Variation on a Theme by Rilke

(The Book of Hours, Book I, Poem I, Stanza I)

A certain day became a presence to me;
 there it was, confronting me—a sky, air, light:
 a being. And before it started to descend
 from the height of noon, it leaned over
 and struck my shoulder as if with
 the flat of a sword, granting me
 honor and a task. The day's blow
 rang out, metallic—or it was I, a bell awakened,
 and what I heard was my whole self
 saying and singing what it knew: *I can*.

— Denise Levertov

6. The Young Ones, Flip Side

In tight pants, tight skirts,
 stretched or squeezed,
 Youth hurts.
 Crammed in, bursting out,
 Flesh will sing and hide its doubt.
 In nervous hips, hopping glance
 Usurping rouge,
 Provoking stance.
 Put off, or put on,
 Youth hurts. And then
 It's gone.

— James Emanuel

5. Sonnet 116

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments. Love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds
 Or bends with the remover to remove.
 O, no! It is an ever-fixed mark
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken.
 It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
 Within his bending sickle's compass come.
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
 If this be error and upon me proved,
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

— *William Shakespeare*

6. somewhere i have never travelled

somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond
 any experience, your eyes have their silence:
 in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
 or which i cannot touch because they are too near
 your slightest look easily will unclose me
 though i have closed myself as fingers,
 you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
 (touching skillfully, mysteriously) her first rose
 or if your wish be to close me, i and
 my life will shut very beautifully, suddenly,
 as when the heart of this flower imagines
 the snow carefully everywhere descending;
 nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
 the power of your intense fragility: whose texture
 compels me with the colour of its countries,
 rendering death and forever with each breathing
 (i do not know what it is about you that closes
 and opens; only something in me understands
 the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
 nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands

— *e.e. cummings*

I cultivate
 Being Uppity
 It's something
 My Grandmom taught me
 It's about time I learned
 My lesson.

— *Kate Rushin*

Poetry Exercise #1

Choose a person in your family or someone you know well and create a portrait with words. Choose a setting in which to place this person, such as at home, at school, at play, or in the context of a social event or family affair. This setting becomes the background to your family portrait and helps bring the portrait to life. Senses, similes, metaphors will bring color, texture, and style to your portrait. You might try a poem which represents a teenage point of view in coping with parents. What central image would you choose?

Student Examples

La Madre,

La persona mas dulce y comprensiva
 que lo que puede ser un dulce
 su mirada dulce y penetrante como
 la de un aguila, su corazón
 fuerte y vigoroso capas de soportar
 cualquier dolor. Si yo tuviese poder
 alguno buscaría en todo el universo
 alguna estrella que pudiese significar
 su gran amor. Cada vez que te veo en
 alguna foto
 me recuerdo de aquellos días en que tu y yo nos
 acostabamos tardicimo estudiando matemáticas,
 cada vez que me veo en un espejo
 se me refleja tu dulce cara y me trae una
 gran sensación de tristeza el no poderte
 tener aquí conmigo.

— *Rafael Angarita*

The Mother,

The sweetest, most understanding person,
 like what a candy can be,
 her sweet and penetrating glance like
 that of an eagle, her heart
 strong and vigorous capable of supporting
 any pain. If I had any power
 I would search the universe
 for some star that could signify
 her great love.

Every time I see you in a photo
 I remember the days when you and I
 would go to bed so late studying math,
 every time I see myself in the mirror,
 your sweet face is reflected and it brings me
 a great sensation of sadness to not have
 you here with me.

— *Rafael Angarita*
 translated by *Maria Marrero*

Morning Treat

Tender eyes blink open
 In the early morn.
 The soft padding of bare feet
 Down a warm, furry carpeted staircase.
 The clock's tick is heard throughout the house
 As an early dawn silence rests peacefully
 Like a warm blanket
 Upon the household.
 The next step brings warm, tiny toes
 To a chilling, square patterned kitchen floor.
 The kitchen: warm sunlight streams in,
 And the quiet hum of the fridge is constant.
 A hunger and curiousness
 Starts the innocent mind thinking.
 There sits a tasty, vulnerable watermelon.
 Pudgy, clumsy hands grip the melon.
 Soft lips and tiny teeth sink into it.
 Sweet, sticky juice drips down the chin
 And onto the floor.
 The soft clutter of seeds being deposited
 On the kitchen floor.
 A chew, a swallow, a little burp.
 Satisfaction. Rest. Peace. A mess.
 A look, a smile, a laugh.
 Look what the baby has done now!
 She says.

— *Ronny Weiner*

My Poems

I am a rainbow poet sitting in the deep sky
upon a rainbow creating magical and mystical
poems. My poems then seep into the cracks
of the earth and fill them with color.

I am a thunder poet walking through a storm
making loud images in my head
to turn into a poem.

I am a rhythm poet riding a seahorse
in a blue green lagoon writing poems
as I listen to the
currents of the water. Then slowly
my poems crawl and play with the sand.

I am a poet.

I am a poet upon the moon
writing mysterious silver poems
as I look back to the earth and wonder.

I am a sun poet walking on a golden bridge
of light writing warm glowing poems.
My poems are then separated and come alive.

I am a poet that blooms with the flowers
dreaming on a silky rose petal of memories.
I am a people poet making my way
through a storm in a city
while thinking of writing a
poem about feelings.

I am a poet.

— Linh O.

Ode to Colors

Without bright, shining colors the world
would be but a bleak dismal dungeon.
Without colors there would be no need
to draw or paint

Or stay out an extra hour
to watch the golden sunset.

There would be no reason to wait for spring
And run through a lush green field
picking the purple violet

And drinking the sweet golden nectar
from the pink honeysuckle.

There would be no color for the halos of angels
or for the tail of Satan.

There would be no color for the dark eyes
of the raven or for the lucky rainbow.

There would be no need to make large bouquets
of wildflowers for your mother.

There would be no reason to wear
matching socks
Or go to the seashore to collect shells.
Without colors there would be
no shiny red apples for the teachers.

— Kate Latson

Ode to Merengue

Merengue,
I feel my body move to the beat,
The natural sounds of the instruments
get my body in motion.
The rhythm of the music keeps my
body out of control.
In the morning, noon, and night,
I listen to the sounds of the conga drums,
organs, horns, and many more instruments
that fill my heart with soul.

— Mercedes María Molina

In Praise of Dance

A Dance of Love . . .
of curving elbows and circling shoulders and
open palms and parted lips, whispering stones
of sunrise and midnight and ocean and lilac dreams,

A Dance of Passion . . .
of heaving torso and stretching limbs and beckoning
fingers and spiraling vertebrae, unwinding from
sincerity into sensuality, wistfulness into want.

A Dance of Need . . .
of desperately reaching arms that have nothing to
hold on to, straining neck, empty eyes, iron lungs,
Searching for light, suffocated in darkness.

A Dance of Confusion . . .
of snapping head, darting eyes, ragged breath,
lurching back—Where Am I Going? What Am I
Looking For?

A Dance of Power . . .
of slamming fists and pounding feet, fierce hips,
contracting ribcage. Raising a raging flame
from within, Set the World on Fire!

A Dance of Revelation . . .
of soaring wings and weightless legs and swooping
skirt and trip of ascension up from the mundane
toward the shining.

A Dance For You.

— Rachel Rosner

12. Facing It

My black face fades,
 hiding inside the black granite.
 I said I wouldn't,
 dammit: No tears.
 I'm stone. I'm flesh.
 My clouded reflection eyes me
 like a bird of prey, the profile of night
 slanted against morning. I turn
 this way—the stone lets me go.
 I turn that way—I'm inside
 the Vietnam Veterans Memorial
 again, depending on the light
 to make a difference.
 I go down the 58,022 names,
 half-expecting to find
 my own in letters like smoke.
 I touch the name Andrew Johnson;
 I see the booby trap's white flash.
 Names shimmer on a woman's blouse
 but when she walks away
 the names stay on the wall.
 Brushstrokes flash, a red bird's
 wings cutting across my stare.
 The sky. A plane in the sky.
 A white vet's image floats
 closer to me, then his pale eyes
 look through mine. I'm a window.
 He's lost his right arm
 inside the stone. In the black mirror
 a woman's trying to erase names:
 No, she's brushing a boy's hair.

— *Yusef Komunyakaa*

13. Sneaker Still-Life

A single solitary sneaker
 lying amongst debris on dirt ground
 next to a random mound of quiet rubble.
 A still-life of a small town square
 in a far away land.
 An empty sneaker, an empty square,
 a market place no longer there
 on a bright sunny May morning.
 A still death of a small town

in a far away land.

Brand new almost, this still white sneaker,
 (size two male, nine or ten years old),
 to be placed on a pile, all colors and every size.
 Children taken from their worlds,
 blown out of their sneakers
 in a far away land.

Still spectators to mind numbing horror.
 Still voices to the crying of children.
 Still witnesses to a senseless century.
 Still-life of a sneaker,
 still warm in a far away land.

— *Fredric Lown*

14. So Long, Mom

(a song for World War III)

So long, Mom,
 I'm off to drop the bomb,
 So don't wait up for me,
 But while you swelter
 Down there in your shelter,
 You can see me
 On your T.V.
 While we're attacking frontally,
 Watch Brinkally and Huntally,
 Describing contrapuntally
 The cities we have lost.
 No need for you to miss a minute of the
 agonizing holocaust.
 Little Johnny Jones he was a U.S. pilot,
 And no shrinking vi'let was he.
 He was mighty proud when World War Three
 was declared,
 He wasn't scared,
 Nosiree!

And this is what he said on
 His way to Armageddon:

So long, Mom,
 I'm off to drop the bomb,
 So don't wait up for me,
 But though I may roam,
 I'll come hack to my home,
 Although it may be
 A pile of debris.