

# Introduction to Poetry

## Literary Response Journal Prompts

*Each response should be thoughtful and well-developed. 2-3 pages in your LRJ per response is the proper range. Remember: Your LRJ will be collected and graded on exam day – for completeness, thoughtfulness, and effort. To receive full credit, you must include a header for each entry: title (e.g., Three Victorian “Found” Poems) and the due date of the entry; your entry must be legible; and it must be a minimum of two full pages, single-spaced.*

### 1. Three Victorian “Found” Poems

For this assignment, you will be creating an original free verse poem by “finding” well-written lines inside another writer’s story. Because this is free verse, your poem will not rhyme or have a regular rhythm. You will transform prose into a poem.

The original short story is  
in prose (or paragraphs) \_\_\_\_\_

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*To find a poem  
arrange words  
AND  
phrases  
to look like a poem  
to emphasize  
ideas AND feelings  
to compress meaning  
into every line.*

In modern free verse poetry, each linebreak is a decision. The flow of words literally gets broken or split, usually before it reaches the right-hand margin and continues on the next line until it gets broken again. And so on. When used well, linebreaks shape the poem and cause readers to continue more slowly. One of the poet’s most important resources, linebreaks help you emphasize ideas by setting words apart. Create a “modern” appearance on the page so your poem “looks” like a poem!

*A line can stop at a grammatical pause,  
and then go on to the next line.*

*This is an example of a word flow that just keeps coming at  
you in one poetic line and makes you read quickly it doesn’t  
want to be broken and lose its frenetic flow till suddenly it  
can’t hold on any longer and it  
bursts, spilling onto the next line  
and the next  
slowing  
you  
down.*

Dense novels, because of their length and depth, are most likely to have the rich language where poetry hides. Your assignment is to explore the language of any Victorian era novel. Look for descriptions, feelings, thoughts. Try to find a passage with especially vivid vocabulary. Look for figures of speech and other poetic devices. Choose a passage with expressive language and arrange it on the page to look like a poem. Select and arrange phrases from a single scene in the Victorian novel of your choice. You may add any necessary capitals and connecting words. Choose your phrases from anywhere in the story, in any order. Use line breaks for emphasis, and eliminate unimportant words. The example on the following page identifies interesting and vivid turns of phrase in a single passage from *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen:

## Blushed Again

From *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen

*Blushed again with shame and vexation  
Long yawning at the repetition of delights  
Triumphantly believing there was no chance  
In the train of agreeable reflections  
A most unlucky perverseness  
Significant looks and silent entreaties  
A proof of complaisance – but in vain.*

*Felicity in a less audible whisper  
The comforts of cold ham and chicken  
In the train of agreeable reflections  
The first points of self-gratulation  
Enumerate the advantage of the match  
Fixed with the most painful sensations  
Through stanzas with patience – but in vain.*

*The principal design and arrangement  
Pride and caprice were the cause  
Suffering and continuing to suffer  
The most affectionate heart in the world  
Agitation and tears are occasioned  
Whilst wandering on in slow manner  
To imitate politeness – but in vain.*

The full text of nearly every famous Victorian novel is located online. The novels listed below are rich in language and will easily lend themselves to this assignment. This is a list of recommendations to explore, but you are not limited to choosing from among these. Have a look at [bartleby.com](http://bartleby.com) for full text of these novels and others.

*Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte  
Any novel by Charles Dickens  
*Middlemarch* by George Eliot  
*The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins  
*Dracula* by Bram Stoker  
*Barchester Towers* by Anthony Trollope  
*Jekyll & Hyde* by R.L. Stevenson

*Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte  
*The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot  
*Vanity Fair* by William Thackeray  
*The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins  
*The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde  
*The Mayor of Castorbridge* by Thomas Hardy  
*Tess of the D'urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy

When you are finished you should have composed three “found” poems adding up to a minimum of 45 lines of poetry. Example: You may have three poems of 15 lines apiece. You MUST indicate from which Victorian novel each “found poem” is derived.

## 2. The E-A-T Lipograms

James Thurber’s “The Wonderful O” is a story about a country where the letter O is forbidden by a man named Black, who says: “I’ve had a hatred of this letter ever since the night my mother became wedged in a porthole.” The result of this ban, says Thurber, was that “Little Goody Two Shoes lost her O’s, and so did Goldilocks, and the former became a whisper, and the latter sounded like a key jiggled in a lck [sic].”

This is like the form of word play called a **lipogram** (from Greek *lipogrammatos*, “missing letter”), in which a particular letter of the alphabet is deliberately omitted from a piece of verse or prose. It may seem an esoteric pastime, but it has been practiced for centuries as a way of being creative with language: It also provides excellent practice in finding alternative ways of expressing things. Writing a lipogram is a trivial task for uncommon letters like *Z*, *J*, or *X*, but it is much more difficult for common letters like *E*, *A* or *T*. Writing this way, the author must omit many ordinary words, often resulting in stilted-sounding text that can be difficult to understand. Well-written lipograms are rare, providing a challenge to writers.

You are to take a nursery rhyme of your choice (as long as it has at least 8 lines) and write three lipograms of it: An *E* lipogram, an *A* lipogram, and a *T* lipogram. That means you will write three versions of the nursery rhyme: one without using *e*'s, one without using *a*'s, and one without using *t*'s. However, you must use real words.

### Two Examples

*Here is the original rhyme:*

#### **Sing a song of sixpence**

A pocket full of rye.  
Four-and-twenty blackbirds  
Baked in a pie.  
As the pie was opened  
The birds began to sing.  
Wasn't that a dainty dish  
To set before the King?  
The King was in the counting house  
Counting out his money.  
The Queen was in the parlor  
Eating bread and honey.  
The maid was in the garden  
Hanging out the clothes.  
When along came a blackbird  
And pecked off her nose.

*Here is an E lipogram*

#### **Hum a hymn of half-crowns,**

A pita full of bran,  
Four-and-thirty blackbirds  
Stuck within a flan.  
As this flan was cut apart,  
Said birds did chirp and caw.  
Wasn't that a dainty dish  
To win a Tsar's hurrah?  
His Royal was in his bursary  
To total up his booty.  
His bonny consort, parlor bound,  
Did sup of tutti-frutti.  
Maid Astrid trod his tulip patch  
To air his laundry out.  
But a blackbird from afar alit  
To snatch off Astrid's snout.

*Here is the original rhyme:*

#### **Mary had a little lamb**

Its fleece was white as snow.  
And everywhere that Mary went  
The lamb was sure to go.  
It followed her to school one day  
Which was against the rule.  
It made the children laugh and play  
To see a lamb at school.

*Here is an A lipogram*

#### **Muriel owned one mini-sheep**

Whose fur resembled gypsum.  
Wherever she hiked, her sheep likewise  
Did shuffle, hop, or skip some.  
He followed her in school, of course  
Proscribed by codes of rule.  
Her friends convulsed in gleeful chorus  
While eyeing her sheep in school.

### 3. Three Imagery Poems

For this LRJ assignment, you will be writing three poems using imagery, one that describes an object, one that describes an action, and one that describes a real person or fictional character. Here are four guidelines for using imagery in a poem:

- A. The image should be meaningful. Images can range from the straightforward to the absurd. Whatever your choice, though, the image should make sense within the context of the poem and should enhance the overall meaning or effect of the poem.
- B. Images should be original. This can be a difficult prospect considering the number of people who have had the chance to describe things before you, but it should be your goal to say things in a new way.
- C. Images should fit the tone of the poem. Each should enhance the other images in the poem. If one image in a poem is decidedly different from the rest of the images in a poem, it should be that way for a reason.
- D. Images should not overly rely on adjectives or adverbs. Heavy use of these in a poem can be counterproductive and cause the attention of the reader to wander.

For each of your three poems you are required to use at least four different types of imagery: auditory, visual, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, organic, and kinesthetic. Other than length and being written in verse, there are no other requirements for your poems. Length: at least 15 lines each.

### 4. Your Seven Limericks

A limerick is a funny little poem containing five lines. The rhyme pattern is A-A-B-B-A with lines 1, 2 and 5 containing 3 beats and rhyming, and lines 3 and 4 having two beats and rhyming. Some people say that the limerick was invented by soldiers returning from France to the Irish town of Limerick in the 1700's.

Limericks are meant to be funny. They often contain figures of speech such as hyperbole, onomatopoeia, idioms, puns, and other figurative devices. The last line of a good limerick contains the PUNCH LINE or "heart of the joke." As you work with limericks, remember to have fun! Say the following limericks out loud and clap to the rhythm.

There was an old man from Peru, (A)	da DUM da da DUM da da DUM (3 beats)
who dreamed he was eating his shoe. (A)	da DUM da da DUM da da DUM (3 beats)
He awoke in the night (B)	da DUM da da DUM (2 beats)
with a terrible fright, (B)	da da DUM da da DUM (2 beats)
and found out that it was quite true. (A)	da DUM da da DUM da da DUM (3 beats)

When you write a limerick, make sure that it has the same AABBA **rhyme** pattern. And make sure it also has the same Da DUM da da DUM da da DUM **rhythm** pattern. To make sure, recite your limerick, substituting "da" for all unaccented or unstressed syllables and "DUM" for all the accented or stressed syllables, as I have done above. If your poems don't have a similar rhythm pattern, then they will need to be adjusted.

Ideas for new limericks can come from almost anywhere. You will be writing about your name, your school, your Moeller house, and a city of your choice. If your name was Lynn, you might write something like this:

There was a young lady named Lynn (A)  
Who was so uncommonly thin. (A)  
That when she essayed (B)  
To drink lemonade (B)  
She slipped through the straw and fell in. (A)

### More Limerick Examples

The limerick packs laughs anatomical  
In space that is quite economical,

But the good ones I've seen  
So seldom are clean,

And the clean ones so seldom are comical.

There was an Old Man with a beard,  
Who said, "It is just as I feared!  
Two Owls and a Hen,  
Four Larks and a Wren,  
Have all built their nests in my beard!"

There was an old geezer from Butte  
His face was no longer so cute.  
His eyebrows were jutting.  
The hairs needed cutting.  
They ran down his face to his suit.

There was a young gal from Kentucky.  
Who said that her state was so sucky.  
She swam cross the river.  
Came out with a shiver.  
And said that Ohio was ducky.

There once was a man from Great Britain  
Who interrupted two girls at their knittin'.  
Said he with a sigh,  
"That park bench, well I  
Just painted it right where you're sittin'."

There was a young lady from Niger  
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger;  
They returned from the ride  
With the lady inside  
And the smile on the face of the tiger.

A tooter who tooted the flute  
Tried to teach two young tooters to toot.

For this LRJ assignment, take the seven limericks you wrote in class, revise them to fix any deficiencies in limerick form and then copy them into your Literary Response Journal. You should have one on each of the following subjects: your name, your school, your Moeller house, a city, a profession, a friend or family member, and one subject of your choice.

## 5. Poetry in Culture

It can be said that poetry is alive and kicking in America. Many records, films, advertisements, posters, and dances are conscious efforts at poetry. Some of these efforts are more successful than others, but all of them provide proof that poetry is not confined to the printed pages of textbooks.

Select one of the above media that you consider poetic and explain what elements of poetry it contains. Restrict your observations to a single recording, play, or film, or consider several advertisements or posters that are interrelated. Make a connection between the medium (film, play, etc.) you have selected and poetry clear by mentioning specific elements such as imagery, figurative language, rhymes, or rhythms.

If your imagination needs to be prodded, just think of the many figurative ways in which dirt, evil, danger, pollution, good, popularity, success, and so on, are portrayed in music; on film, videotape, television, or the stage.

Said the two to the tutor,  
"Is it harder to toot, or  
To tutor two tooters to toot?"

A goat on a stroll near a brook  
Found an old movie film and partook.  
"Was it good?" asked his mate.  
Said the goat, "Second rate!  
Not nearly as good as the book."

There was a young lady named Bright  
Whose speed was much faster than light.  
She set out one day  
In a relative way  
And returned on the previous night.

A cannibal said to her mate  
Who was in a deplorable state  
Of discomfort, "My dear,  
Do you think it's the beer  
Or is it just someone you ate?"

An epicure dining at Crewe  
Found a very large bug in his stew.  
Said the waiter, "Don't shout  
And wave it about,  
Or the rest will be wanting one too."

There once was a teacher named Rose  
Whose students would all but suppose  
That he'd wear a vest  
Pulled tight to his chest  
Holding in the cool tie that he chose.