

Poems In Praise Of Ordinary Things—Ode And Tribute Poems

Developed By Cathleen Micheaels

Focus

- Introduction to poems as means of discovery about ourselves, the world around us and language
- Writing poems as a way of paying close attention to and celebrating the objects, animals, people and themes in the world around us

Concepts

- Line, Enjambment and Juxtaposition
- Descriptive Language and Vocabulary
- Simile, Metaphor and Venereal Phrases or Collective Nouns

Model Poems

- Excerpts from *Ode To The Watermelon*, Pablo Neruda
- Excerpt from *For My Cat Jeoffrey*, Christopher Smart
- *Ode To A Cheeky Jay! Jay!*, Mr. Jimerson, 2nd Grade Teacher, Point Arena, CA
- *The Guardian Of Heat*, Ms. Schmitz, 1st Grade Teacher, Point Arena, CA

Student Poems

- *Ode To A Dry Wrinkly Rhino*, Lincoln Storm, 1st Grade, Point Arena, CA
- *Ode To A Sneaky Ninja*, Jaime González, 1st Grade, Point Arena, CA
- *Oda a un sol de oro*, José López, 1st Grade, Anderson Valley, CA
- *Ode To A Fluttering Wing*, Ashley Garibay-Espinoza, 1st Grade, Anderson Valley, CA
- *For The Intelligent Wild Gatherer*, McKena Kramer, 6th Grade, Point Arena, CA
- *For The Stubborn Leader*, Joby Baker, 7th Grade, Point Arena, CA
- *For The Waka-Waka Caller*, Alan Aguilera, 3rd Grade, Anderson Valley, CA
- *For The Scurrier Of The Brush*, Norymar Ferreyra, 3rd Grade, Anderson Valley, CA
- *For The Tunneler Of Your Garden*, Angus Fraser, 5th Grade, Anderson Valley, CA
- *For The King Of The Highlands*, Fabian D. Rodríguez, 8th Grade, Point Arena, CA

Emphasis

- Reading poems aloud and giving voice to lines
- Writing poems in praise of or in tribute to someone or something
- Discovering the wide range of familiar and unfamiliar words available and how language is a living thing shaped by culture and history
- How language communicates abstract ideas (color and texture) and emotions
- Writing poems out of immediate observation and direct experience as well as past memories and recollected experiences
- How content reveals the length of lines and forms of poems
- How poems occupy space on a page and when read aloud— the idea of turn and return in poems

Relevant Content Standards

English/Language Arts K-5

- Phonemic awareness: track sounds, blend vowel-consonant sounds, count the number of sounds in syllables (K)
- Blend two to four phonemes into recognizable words (K)
- Read and write from left to right (K)
- Write uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet independently, attending to the form and proper spacing of the letters (K)
- Print legibly and space letters, words and sentences appropriately (I)
- Recite poems, rhymes, songs and stories (I)

- Select a focus when writing and use descriptive words (1)
- Read prose and poetry aloud with fluency, rhythm and pace, using appropriate intonation and vocal patterns to emphasize important passages of the text being read (3)
- Use clear and specific vocabulary to communicate ideas and establish the tone (3)
- Understand and be able to use complete and correct declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamatory sentences in writing and speaking (3)
- Make descriptive presentations that use concrete sensory details to set forth and support unified impressions of people, places, things or experiences (3)
- Plan and present dramatic interpretations of experiences, stories, poems or plays with clear diction, pitch, tempo and tone (3)
- Students relate ideas, observations or recollections about an event or an experience (4)
- Make narrative presentations: deliver oral summaries of articles and books and recite poems (4)
- Recite brief poems (i.e., two or three stanzas), soliloquies, or dramatic dialogue, using clear diction, tempo, volume and phrasing (4)
- Edit and revise selected drafts to improve coherence and progression by adding, deleting, consolidating and rearranging text (4)
- Students read and respond to historically or culturally significant works of literature that reflect and enhance their studies of history and social science (5)
- Choose the form of writing (e.g., personal letter, letter to the editor, review, poem, report, narrative) that best suits the intended purpose (5)
- Write persuasive letters or compositions (5)
- Edit and revise manuscripts to improve the meaning and focus of writing by adding, deleting, consolidating, clarifying and rearranging words and sentences (5)

Writing An Ode Or Tribute Poem

Ode (Greek: *to sing, to chant*). In modern usage the name for the most formal, ceremonious and complexly organized form of lyric poetry, usually of considerable length. It is frequently the vehicle for public utterance on state occasions—a ruler's birthday, accession, funeral, the unveiling or dedication of some imposing memorial or public work.

The ode as it has evolved in contemporary literature generally shows a dual inheritance from classic sources, combining the reflective or philosophical character of the *Oration* ode with the occasional character of the *Pindaric* ode. Frequently, elaborate and complex stanzas are used, based upon either the triadic structure of the *Pindaric* ode or upon imitations of, or developments from it, combining great variety in length of line with ingenious rhyme schemes. The serious tone of the ode calls for heightened diction and enrichment. A third form of the modern ode, the *Anacreontic*, utilizes shorter lines and, in comparison with the *Pindaric* ode, simpler forms (love or drinking).

from **Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics and Poetry**, Alex Preminger

The Contemporary Ode As A Form of Poetry

Certainly the most famous poet to bring the ode into the twentieth century was Pablo Neruda with his odes to the ordinary things which make up the daily aspect of our lives. In writing in exalted language about shoes, watermelon, laziness and salt, Pablo Neruda revolutionized the ode. Many contemporary lyric poets draw on the inspiration provided by Pablo Neruda in using the traditional devices of the ode to sing praise to the ordinary. The model and student poems included in this handout are examples of odes which give tribute to animals rather than to people or objects. The ode calls for heightened diction, ingenious rhyme schemes. The ode calls for song and dance and ceremony. The ode is elaborate and exalted, unafraid of raw passion. The ode transforms the ordinary into the exotic. Tribute poems are a variation on the ode and are distinguished from the ode in very subtle ways including that they usually do not speak directly to the object, animal or person they are honoring.

The contemporary ode or tribute poem encourages invention and new word use teaches students the meaning of a number of poetic devices—simile, metaphor, venereal phrases or collective nouns and enjambment and juxtaposition. A **simile** is simply a comparison of one thing with another, explicitly announced by the words *like* and *as*. A **metaphor** is a figure of speech in which an idea, image or symbol may, by the presence of one or more other ideas, images or symbols, be enhanced in vividness, complexity or breadth or implication. A simile is, therefore, a kind of metaphor. A **venereal phrase** or **collective noun** is an invention of language. Many collective nouns or venereal phrases become, through time, figures of speech. The collective noun or venereal phrase is a categorization which is characterized by lyrical, even fanciful, word choice and explicitly announced with the word *of*. For example, a school of dolphins, a pride of lions, a murder of crows or an exaltation of larks. Or, in Pablo Neruda's great *Ode to the Watermelon*, green whale of summer, queen of the fruit shop or storehouse of profundity. **Enjambment** is simply a line which carries an idea from one line into the next without a pause in between—what is also called a "run-on" line. **Juxtaposition** is the placement of one thing next to another in a way that is unlikely and reveals a new insight—in poems juxtaposition refers to the placement of one line next to another.

Subject Or Content

The subject or content of the contemporary ode or tribute poem can be about anything and everything—a vegetable or fruit, a feeling, an animal, a person—and in that way offers endless opportunities for integration into language arts, science, social science—really any subject area. Contemporary ode or tribute poems in praise of objects usually focus on an object which is both common and universal—such as salt which is both common and yet essential in our lives.

Length

The overall length of the contemporary ode or tribute poem can vary greatly as can the length of individual lines. Typically, Pablo Neruda's odes run 60-120 usually short lines. However, the length of the contemporary ode is determined not by an external structure but by the heart of the object or person the poem is paying tribute to or praising.

Rules For Writing An Ode Or Tribute Poem

1. Decide on an object or subject.
2. Study and research facts about the characteristics of that object or subject.
3. Describe the object or subject using the senses—size, color, shape and feel (and smell and taste in the case of odes to fruits or vegetables)—and using inventive vocabulary and language drawing from your research and a thesaurus to praise object or subject.
4. Brainstorm metaphors and similes (comparisons using *like* or *as*) to describe the object or subject.
5. Create a collective noun or venereal phrase (_____ of _____) which makes a new discovery about the object or subject.
6. Consider what secret the "heart" of the object or subject reveals to you and what, if any, memories you have that are associated with that object or subject.
7. Remember try to think and write in lines—short or long—that strung together turn into sentences.

Note: Remember all good writing rules are meant as a point of departure to inspire and guide the writer and "breaking" the rules is not entirely forbidden!

from **Ode to the Watermelon**

. . . and then
the coolest
of all planets
crosses the sky,
the round, supreme
star-filled watermelon.

It's the fruit of the tree of thirst.
It's the green whale of summer.

. . . its hemispheres open
showing a flag
green, white, scarlet,
that dissolves
into a waterfall, into sugar,
into delight!

Jewel box of water, placid
queen
of the fruit shops,
warehouse
of profundity, moon
on earth!
You are pure
rubies fall apart
in your abundance . . .

When we're thirsty
we glimpse you
like a mine or a mountain
of fantastic food
but you change
simply into cool light
that slips in turn into
spring water
that touched us once
singing.

And that is why
you don't weigh us down
in the siesta hour
that's like an oven . . .
you just
go by
and your great heart like a cold ember
changed into the water
of a single drop.

Pablo Neruda
Chilean Poet, 1904-1973

from **Ode to the Watermelon**

. . . and then
the coolest
of all planets
crosses the sky,
the round, supreme
star-filled watermelon.

It's the green whale of summer.

Jewel box of water,
queen of the fruit shops,
moon on earth!
You are pure
rubies fall apart
in your abundance . . .

When we're thirsty
we glimpse you
like a mine or a mountain
of fantastic food
but you change
simply into cool light
that slips in turn into
spring water
that touched us once
singing.

Pablo Neruda
Chilean Poet, 1904-1973

Excerpts from Pablo Neruda's Ode To The Watermelon to use as models with older and younger students.

from For My Cat Geoffrey

For I will consider my cat Geoffrey.
For at the first glance of the glory of God in the East he worships in his way,
by wreathing his body seven times round with elegant quickness.
For having done duty and received blessing he begins to consider himself:
first he looks upon his fore-paws to see if they are clean.
secondly he kicks up behind to clear away there,
thirdly he works upon stretch with the fore-paws extended,
fourthly he sharpens his paws by wood,
fifthly he washes himself,
sixthly he rolls upon wash,
seventhly he fleas himself, that he may not be interrupted upon the beat,
eighthly he rubs himself against a post,
ninthly he looks up for his instructions.
and tenthly he goes in quest of food.
For having considered God and himself he will consider his neighbor:
if he meets another cat he will kiss her in kindness
and when he takes his prey he plays with it to give it chance
with one mouse in seven escaping by his dallying.
For he loves the sun and the sun loves him
and he will not do destruction if he is well-fed, neither will he spit without provocation.
For he purrs in thankfulness and is an instrument for the children to learn benevolence upon.
For every house is incomplete without him and a blessing is lacking in the spirit.
For when his day's work is done his business more properly begins
as he keeps watch in the night against the adversary.
For he camels his back to bear the first notion of business,
counteracts the powers of darkness by his electrical skin and glaring eyes.
For he is of the tribe of the Tiger
and made a great figure in Egypt for his signal services.
For his tongue is exceedingly pure, his ears acute and by stroking him I have found out electricity.
For there is nothing sweeter than his peace when at rest,
nothing brisker than his life when in motion.
For he can jump from an eminence into his master's arms,
can catch a cork and toss it again.
For he is good to think on, if a man would express himself neatly.
For God has blessed him in the variety of his movements
and though he cannot fly, he is an excellent clamberer
and can tread to all the measures upon music.
For he can swim for life,
for he can creep.

Christopher Smart
English Poet, 1722-1771

Excerpt from Christopher Smart's tribute poem For My Cat Geoffrey to use as model for older students.

Ode To A Cheeky Jay! Jay!

Oh, hunter, thief, racket-making jay,
you are the color of a brilliant summer sky,
that capers on tree tops,
you are like the rapacious watchdog,
that barks his hawkish scream,
native of pine, oak and scrub,
you show us how to prize the peanut.

*Mr. Jimerson, 2nd Grade Teacher
Point Arena, CA*

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Ode To The Guardian Of Heat

Oh, warm, fluffy king of the snow,
you are the color of vanilla ice cream
that lumbers and paddles through life,
you are like an ooey, gooey marshmallow
that is on the brink of extinction,
native of the arctic region,
you show us love and comfort.

*Ms. Schmitz, 1st Grade Teacher
Point Arena, CA*

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Ode To A Dry Wrinkly Rhino

Oh, huge, aggressive rhino,
you are the color of a rocky road
that runs through the grasslands,
you are like a wet sidewalk
that is furious and upset,
native of Africa's many grasslands,
you show us how to charge for safety.

*Lincoln Storm, 1st Grade
Point Arena, CA*

Ode To A Sneaky Ninja

Oh, striped, sneaky raccoon,
you are the color of a foggy grey day
that is found in my garbage at night,
you are like a ninja on a mission
that likes to make a mess,
native of the wet woods,
you teach us to be independent.

*Jaime González, 1st Grade
Point Arena, CA*

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Oda a un sol de oro

Oh, gordo, grande puma,
tú eres del color de las colinas marrones
de oro que rodean el Valle de Anderson,
tú eres como una sombra rápida
que se mueve en las montañas,
nativa de California,
nos muestra como cazar para la vida.

*José López, 1st Grade
Anderson Valley, CA*

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Ode To A Fluttering Wing

Oh, fluttering, flying Monarch Butterfly,
you are the color of daisies
that grow in the grass,
you are like a bird's wing
that is spread open,
native of North and South America,
you show us how to be light.

*Ashley Garibay-Espinoza, 1st Grade
Anderson Valley, CA*

For The Intelligent Wild Gatherer

For the nervous, herbivore,
gatherer of nuts and seeds,
who is the color of salt and pepper with a pinch of tree bark,
who lives in the woods climbing trees,
who scurries across the road and leaps through forests,
who is as sneaky as a Ninja,
who loves to gather acorns high up in the oak trees
and teaches us how to climb down trees head first.

*McKena Kramer, 6th Grade
Point Arena, CA*

Animal: Squirrel

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For The Stubborn Leader

For the stubborn leader,
the guardian of sheep,
who is the color of the stormy night,
who is seen in the deserts of North America and Mexico,
who gallops slowly, steadily
who is like a grey cloud,
who loves being replenished
and shows us how to be bull-headed.

*Joby Baker, 7th Grade
Point Arena, CA*

Animal: Wild Burro

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For The Waka-Waka Caller

For the pecking, crowned
knocker of tree trunks,
who is the color of
blood and midnight,
who lives in oak and pine trees,
who is a bark forager
and flicker of wings,
who is like a king wearing a crown,
who loves to collect acorns
and teaches us how to
make a waka-waka call.

*Alan Aguilera, 3rd Grade
Anderson Valley, CA*

Animal: Acorn Woodpecker

For The Scurrier Of The Brush

For the plump, gentle scurrier of the brush,
who is the color of rain falling from the sky,
who hops around the neighborhoods,
who scurries and flaps in the dirt,
who is like a friendly puppy,
who loves to call “Chi-ca-go!”
and shows us how to keep
our families together.

*Norymar Ferreyra, 3rd Grade
Anderson Valley, CA*

Animal: California Quail

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For The Tunneler Of Your Garden

For the tunneler of your garden,
who is darker than night,
who is scarcely seen above ground,
who swims in the underearth,
who is like a gopher but not,
who has no arms,
who loves earthworms for lunch,
and shows us how to dig,
whose funny nose is like radar.

*Angus Fraser, 5th Grade
Anderson Valley, CA*

Animal: Star-Nosed Mole

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For The King Of The Highlands

For the hairy, lumbering
king of the jungle,
who is the color of extra dark chocolate,
who lives in the highlands and mountains of Africa,
who moves aggressively and stands its ground,
who is like an unmoving statue,
who loves to relax, be social and groom
and teaches us how to defend ourselves.

*Fabian D. Rodríguez, 8th Grade
Point Arena, CA*

Animal: Mountain Gorilla