

Name: _____

Free Verse

Review the article below

¹ Many people consider free verse to be a modern form of poetry. The truth is that it has been around for several centuries; only in the 20th century did it become one of the most popular forms of poetry. Its popularity stems from the belief that free verse is poetry without rules; after all, it doesn't rhyme, and it doesn't have a meter. However, what separates poetry from prose is the arrangement of *carefully chosen* words into verses.

² There's more to free verse than a sudden thought recorded on paper. It's not that no rules apply to free verse; rather, the poet makes up the rules for each poem! Free verse *done well* will have rhythm, though it may not have a regular beat. A variety of poetic devices may be woven throughout the piece. There may be patterns of sound and repetition. Free verse can be compared to a song that doesn't rhyme. There is still a lyric quality to it.

³ It may be more difficult to write free verse than any other form, simply because the poet has more decisions to make. With a haiku, you know the exact measurement of the poem; your task is easily defined. You need only follow the rules of the pattern. With free verse, there is no pattern until the poet creates one!

⁴ Without set rules, you are *free* to decide where to break your poem into stanzas. You may arrange your poem in stanzas of two or more lines. You may break at each new thought, much like paragraphs. You may break stanzas in mid-sentence to draw attention to a specific word or phrase. Like American poet Walt Whitman, you might break stanzas at the point where one would take a breath, were he or she reading aloud. It's up to you.

⁵ As we try our hand at writing free verse, we will begin by writing our thoughts all together, without stanzas. Then we can go back and edit the words, removing unnecessary ones or choosing more powerful synonyms, and working to cut and shape the poem. We'll know we are through when we're satisfied with the message and the shape of our poem.

⁶ First, let's analyze this short free verse poem.

I Dream'd in a Dream
by Walt Whitman

I DREAM'D in a dream I saw a city invincible to the attacks of the

whole of the rest of the earth,
I dream'd that was the new city of Friends,
Nothing was greater there than the quality of robust love, it led
the rest,
It was seen every hour in the actions of the men of that city,
And in all their looks and words.

⁷ Walt Whitman is gone; he cannot tell us what this poem means. That is something we can only guess. So here's a thought to ponder—is this poem about a real city, or is it about friendship? How would you interpret this poem?

⁸ Did you notice any rhyme, rhythm, consonance, assonance, alliteration, imagery, or other poetical devices? Are you getting comfortable with the idea of writing your own free verse? Before we start, let's look at two more poems written in the free verse style. The first one is a simple poem of 21 words written by American poet Carl Sandburg. It gives the reader a different mental image of fog.

Fog
by Carl Sandburg

The fog comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

⁹ Notice that the first stanza has only two lines, while the second stanza has four. Also, the author used imagery in describing fog as a cat. Imagery is another poetical device with which you might wish to experiment. This is a very short poem, to state the obvious. If writing poetry leaves you feeling awkward, remind yourself that it need not be long, labored, or detailed.

¹⁰ The last poem I want to share contains a completely capitalized word, two sets of

parentheses, and a creatively spelled word. As you read, circle the word with the unusual spelling and underline the parenthetical phrases.

When I read the book
by Walt Whitman

WHEN I read the book, the biography famous,
And is this then (said I) what the author calls a man's life?
And so will some one when I am dead and gone write my life?
(As if any man really knew aught of my life,
Why even I myself I often think know little or nothing of my real
life,
Only a few hints, a few diffused faint clews and indirections
I seek for my own use to trace out here.)

11 What is Whitman's impression of biographies?

12 With this brief introduction to free verse, you should now see that it can be about any subject with as few or as many words as you like. You are allowed to get creative with punctuation and spellings and stanzas. It will need a title. You can choose from a variety of poetical devices, or use none at all.

13 Your assignment is to create a free verse poem from your earliest childhood memory. For this exercise you will need at least two clean sheets of paper.

14 First, write a paragraph in prose describing your earliest memory. Reach as far back into your past as you can and relive that memory. Don't worry about grammar and spelling. Just get your story on paper.

15 Next, go back and look at the words you chose. Are they powerful? Do they evoke images or emotions? Are there synonyms that will work better? Work on the words. Are there any weak or unnecessary words? Mark those out.

16 Now you are going to distance yourself from the poem. Wherever you used first person words—like “I,” “me,” “my,” “myself,” or “mine”—change them to third person. You may choose to use pronouns like “he” or “she,” or you might refer to yourself as “the child” or “the little, wide-eyed girl” or something else—the choice is yours.

¹⁷ It's time to start shaping your memory into poetic form. Look at the paragraph. Where would you like your line breaks to be? Draw light lines in those places. Use thick lines to separate stanzas.

¹⁸ Go to another sheet of paper and write the new version of your poem. Follow your plan for line and stanza breaks. Then, revise the lines until they look, feel, and sound (in your mind anyway) like free verse.

¹⁹ Here is an example of prose turned into poetry. It is brief; feel free to include more details in your own work!

Prose:

I remember feeling jealous about all the attention my baby brother got. I felt invisible!

Poetry:

Jealousy
Hidden behind the door, watching
the baby fall asleep, the little girl
took its half-empty bottle
and drained it.

Poetry: Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*

Song of Myself

1
I CELEBRATE myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.
My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.
Creeds and schools in abeyance,
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten,
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,
Nature without check with original energy.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is this poem called "Song of Myself?"

***Washed Away* by Katherine Foreman**

Nothing's changed except me and the facts
And the sadness I didn't mean to start.
But it feels different now you've said
It's wrong, and I still can't see your point.
And I think as water runs over my hands that
That's really all there is or can be.
The gold is wearing off the infamous ring
And something wears away from around my heart.

1. How do you think the poet feels while writing this?

On the lines below, compose your own free verse poem on celebrating self-understanding or identity about who you think you are as a person or about someone you admire. Try to model your poem similarly to Walt Whitman's style (not Adrian Mole's).

Consonance: using the same final consonant sound. (smoke – folk)

Assonance: using identical vowel sounds. (like – fright)

Onomatopoeia: using words that are like sound effects. (whoosh, pop)

Alliteration: using the same initial consonant sound. (picked pink poppies)

TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSIONS

Similarity: also, in the same way, just as ... so too, likewise, similarly

Exception/Contrast: but, however, in spite of, on the one hand ... on the other hand, nevertheless, nonetheless, notwithstanding, in contrast, on the contrary, still, yet

Sequence/Order: first, second, third, ... next, then, finally

Time: after, afterward, at last, before, currently, during, earlier, immediately, later, meanwhile, now, recently, simultaneously, subsequently, then

Example: for example, for instance, namely, specifically, to illustrate

Emphasis: even, indeed, in fact, of course, truly

Place/Position: above, adjacent, below, beyond, here, in front, in back, nearby, there

Cause and Effect: accordingly, consequently, hence, so, therefore, thus

Additional Support or Evidence: additionally, again, also, and, as well, besides, equally important, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, then

Conclusion/Summary: finally, in a word, in brief, briefly, in conclusion, in the end, in the final analysis, on the whole, thus, to conclude, to summarize, in sum, to sum up, in summary.

Link the following sentences with one of the following link words: As, since, that's why, consequently, so, in order to...or use a word from the list above. (Don't use *because*)

1) John bought a second car. He didn't want his wife to walk to work.

2) I phoned the doctor last night. The baby had a very high fever.

3) Lucy will be fined. She drove over the speed limit.

4) Peter stole the old woman's bag. The judge will condemn him.

5) We'll hurry up. We want to catch the train.

6) I haven't heard from him for a long time. I'll call him tonight.

7) Jim and I went to the restaurant. We wanted to celebrate our wedding anniversary.

Ordering information

I treasure my candle not for its beauty, its sentimental value, or even its usefulness, but for its simple, stark ugliness.

The rest of the paragraph appears below. However, the sentences have been rearranged so that the descriptions appear in no logical order. Reorder the sentences to create a clear, well-organized paragraph.

___ 1. Rising crookedly out of the cup is the candle, a pitifully short, stubby object.

___ 2. Abandoned by a previous occupant of my room, the candle squats on the window sill, anchored by cobwebs and surrounded by dead flies.

___ 3. This ugly little memorial consists of three parts: the base, the reflector, and the candle itself.

___ 4. This aluminum flower is actually a wrinkled old Christmas light collar.

___ 5. The base is a white, coffee-stained Styrofoam cup, its wide mouth pressed to the sill.

___ 6. And by lighting the wick, any time I choose, I can melt this ugly candle away.

___ 7. From the bottom of the cup (which is the top of the base) sprouts a space-age daisy: red, green, and silver petals intended to collect wax and reflect candle light.

___ 8. The candle is about the same size and color as a man's thumb, beaded with little warts of wax down the sides and topped by a tiny bent wick.

A Dangerous Cook (Which sentences do not fit in the paragraph below?)

(1) When my friend Tom sets to work in the kitchen, disaster often results. (2) Once he tried to make toasted cheese sandwiches for us by putting slices of cheese in the toaster along with the bread; he ruined the toaster. (3) Unfortunately, the toaster was a fairly new one that I had just bought for him three weeks before, on his birthday. (4) On another occasion, he had cut up some fresh beans and put them in a pot to steam. (5) I was really looking forward to the beans, for I eat nothing but canned vegetables in my dormitory. (6) I, frankly, am not much of a cook either. (7) The water in the Teflon pan steamed away while Tom was on the telephone, and both the beans and the Teflon coating in the pan were ruined. (8) Finally, another time Tom made spaghetti for us, and the noodles stuck so tightly together that we had to cut off slices with a knife and fork. (9) In addition, The meatballs were burned on the outside but almost raw on the inside. (10) The tomato sauce, on the other hand, turned out well. (11) For some reason, Tom is very good at making meat and vegetables sauces. (12) Because of Tom's kitchen mishaps, I never eat at his place without an Alka-Seltzer in my pocket, or without money in case we have to go out to eat.

The numbers of the irrelevant sentences are ____

*The next book: Jules Verne: Around the World in Eighty Days
You will need it in two weeks. It's online for free.*