

Suggested Poetry Assignments

An Extended Metaphor Poem

We rage against the cliché in order to use words like *nobody* else—to take risks in our poems and craft *extraordinary* experiences of *ordinary* things. Because metaphor allows us to create a direct connection between seemingly different things, we are able to experience **both** subjects in a new way. In Pablo Neruda's poem "[Ode to an Artichoke](#)," we are not only shown the unusual beauty of a peculiar vegetable, but we may also consider how any guarded or armored person is still, at the centre, soft. Examining an ordinary object (artichoke) leads us to a startling revelation about human nature.

Choose a common object—something that does not already have conventional symbolic significance (like a rose or a dove). Then, as Neruda does, develop an *extended metaphor*, where you compare the object to something else for the entire duration of the poem.

A "Thirteen Ways" Poem

Another way to exercise your command of imagery and figures of speech is to write a poem that compares one thing to *many* different things. "[A Kite is a Victim](#)" by Leonard Cohen is an example of this, as is Wallace Stevens' "[Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird](#)." For this assignment, mimic Steven's form and write a "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a _____" of your own. See a selection of examples here: <https://grandcentercreativewriting.wordpress.com/2017/01/25/thirteen-ways-of-looking-at/>

An Ode

An [Ode](#) is a poem of praise. While historically odes followed rigid parameters and adhered to common themes, in his *Elemental Odes*, Pablo Neruda celebrates ordinary objects or items and elevates their value, such as "[Ode to a Large Tuna in a Market](#)" or "[Ode to my Socks](#)." Choose an ordinary, simple item, and write a poem praising it in such a way your reader may regard the object anew. (Alternatively, you may choose a subject typically regarded with scorn, and flip this common assumption by offering your praise. An example: "[Ode to Browsing the Web](#)")

A Complaint

A [Complaint](#) poem is a poem of lament, whereby the speaker rails against an injustice or perceived ill. Complaint poems may also be poems of protest (See "[What I Will](#)" by Suheir Hammad), while some contemporary complaint poems take a humorous tone on an everyday inconvenience or embarrassment. Emily Rosko writes, "Because the complaint relies on the use of "negative affect" (i.e. those negative feelings, such as jealousy, shame, anger, resentfulness, vulnerability, suspiciousness), the mode encourages the development of a strong voice and tonal dexterity in order to capture the subtleties of the poems' specific emotion."

To begin, write a list of things that you have cause to complain about: your list may range from significant sources of frustration to relatively trivial ones. Review your list and ask which "complaint" you could sustain, explore, and express in a new way.

Additional examples: "[Self Employed](#)" by David Ignatow, "[Complaint](#)" by William Carlos Williams, "[The Woman at the Washington Zoo](#)" by Randall Jarrell.

A "How to" Poem

A "how to" poem describes an activity step-by-step, or reads as a recipe. Adam Sol writes that a "how to" poem is "often a fruitful exercise because it forces us to pay close attention to detail and invites us to think metaphorically about something mundane ([How to Tie a Knot](#), [How to Draw a Perfect Circle](#)'), or to think concretely about something more metaphoric or abstract ([How to Judge](#), [Arson: A Recipe](#)'). Read Sol's discussion of two "how to" poems [here](#) (How to Make Pemmican) and [here](#) (Recipe from the Abbasid), and then write your own.