



# the purpose of poetry

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When most college students think of poetry, their minds jump to the Robert Frost poem they memorized in middle school or a Rupi Kaur poem they reposted on Instagram. Attitudes of surface-level introspection and selective interest have allowed stereotypes — of angsty teenagers or moody baristas bashing exes and loathing life — to flourish. Des Moines poets Will Bortz, Greg Rudolph and Sabrina Carper challenge these notions in their writing by offering authenticity and a deeper approach to the art.

A lexical definition of poetry offered by Oxford Dictionary is “literary work in which special intensity is given to the expression of feelings and ideas by the use of distinctive style and rhythm.”

There are specific structures that are used in poetry to create a pattern and rhythm that’s attractive to readers. English classes focus on teaching these poetic structures. Structure must first be understood in order to be broken. Unfortunately, a stumbling block that can arise from this is the idea that poetry must follow structure in order to be considered ‘good.’ Often, instead of being a resource and guide to creativity, these structures confine words to templates and modern clichés.

“That’s what was considered art back in the day,” said Greg Rudolph, a graphic designer and self-published poet. “You had to follow these structures in order for it to be considered high art. But nowadays, the way it’s developed is that you don’t need to have these formulas. You don’t need to be rhyming ABABAC.”

Rudolph has been writing since he was young and uses poetry as a way to process his thoughts and the things he’s going through.

“Put your thoughts onto a page, and make it sound elegant, and maybe even don’t make it sound elegant,” he said.

Art and specifically poetry should be something that feels good to the person writing it, not necessarily something to appeal to the audience or to follow certain structures.”

Rudolph said that when it comes to poetry, there are no strict rules, and people can often become stuck by thinking that there are.

There are a number of stereotypes surrounding poetry in our society; that it’s only for angst-ridden teenagers or deep-thinking hipsters. Sabrina Carper, a studio art major at GV, specifically struggles with the idea that poetry is ‘immature.’

“I think poetry is an art form that can be heightened in the

same way that art can be heightened, you know, galleries, high end, whatever,” Carper said. “And I feel like a lot of the time people don’t look at it like that. They look at it as something that’s sort of like ‘anybody can do it. If you pour enough into it, it can be really great, and it can really speak to people.”

Growing up in school, many of us learned the anatomy of poetry; about line lengths, stanzas and rhyme schemes. Modern poets are navigating away from these themes in poetry and instead offer an introspective starting point to poetic structure and authenticity: ‘Why do you write?’

William Bortz, editor at Waterbury Publications and a self-published poet, believes that the purpose of poetry is to help us channel our responses to what’s happening around us.

“There’s just a bigger conversation that’s always kind of going on, and poetry can always be a door for people to get in that conversation,” Bortz said.

Carper writes to facilitate human connection and tap into peoples’ ‘emotional core.’ Her goal when writing is to communicate all the chaos in her brain to somebody else’s brain in a way that makes sense.

The purpose of poetry cannot be defined in one single statement or unanimously agreed upon, but one thing that poetry does is leave room for discussion afterward and spark conversation.

“Things are charged, to say the least, and I think it’s important that people be able to express discomforts with the way the world is in a constructive way and not a destructive way,” Rudolph said. “And I think that being able to make a statement about the way something is in a way that can be appreciated as art allows for a more constructive space to have that discussion.”

Bortz sees power in poetry.

“I think that poetry gives a voice to people who don’t know their own, and I think it’s always done that,” Bortz said. “I think especially now, the kind of the climate we’re in, there are a lot of people who don’t have a voice or aren’t even listened to. And I think that poetry is kind of allowed and has been able to give people that voice,” Bortz said.

Poetry is a healthy way for people to sit down and process through their thoughts. To get things out of their minds and onto paper, where they can take form and start to make sense. To open doors to bigger conversations and approach the problems in our life and society head on, in a way that can be loud and vibrant or timid and beautiful.