

THE POETRY JOURNAL: A Baker's Dozen of Assignments

Poetry Journals: You are to select poems as directed by your teacher – from your class anthology, from the works of a particular writer, or from any book of poetry.

- ✓ Copy each poem neatly on notebook paper. Demonstrate your best penmanship, or write in calligraphy. (Use common sense about number and length of poems. Obviously, copying one long poem would be equal to copying several shorter ones.)
- ✓ Use your imagination to illustrate each poem creatively. These illustrations may be concrete or abstract, original drawings or pictures cut out of magazines.
- ✓ On a separate sheet of paper, write your personal response to the poem. You may like it or hate it, stick to the poem or fly off on a tangent, paraphrase it or summarize it, model your own poem after it or use one of its lines as a springboard to an original poem. But you must, in some way, indicate YOUR response – directly or indirectly.
- ✓ Keep your poetry journal in a notebook. Design a cover and title page for that notebook. Include a table of contents, dedication, introduction, and indices by author, title, and first line.

Poetry Assignments: Use the poems you have copied for the assignments that follow:

1. Select a poem that has given you greater insight into your life or the world around you, and explain why this poem has affected you.
2. Imagine that you are the editor of a literature anthology and that you must choose three poems that are related in some way. Review the poems you have been reading and choose three that are somehow connected to each other. Explain this relationship, giving clear reasons for your choices. Be sure that your reader knows what unites the three poems and how the poems relate to each other.
3. 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 or film, or consider several advertisements or posters that you have studied. Make a connection between the medium 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 on film, videotape, television, or the stage.

4. Many of the poems you have been reading can be contrasted or compared with each other. Choose two poems which demonstrate either similarities or differences in some way and show how they compare or contrast in a clear, supported paragraph. (You may choose two poems which have both similarities and differences. If so, be sure to discuss both aspects.)
5. Choose the poem which you think best demonstrates “poetic” language. Justify your choice in a paragraph which makes specific references to the poem and its exact use of poetic language.
6. Using a separate sheet of paper, write a one-sentence summary of theme or message for every poem in your poetry journal. Be sure to include the title of the poem in your sentence. Do not merely retell what happens in the poem. Tell what the poem MEANS. Make a conscious effort to vary your sentence structure, paying particular attention to sentence openings and punctuation.
7. Choose at least two poems, basing your choice upon the importance of the title to a full understanding of the poem. Explain your choices carefully in a thoroughly supported paragraph.
8. Select one of the poems in your poetry journal to expand to a full-size poster. Obviously, you should select a poem which will fit on a poster and which lends itself to illustration.
9. Create a “hodge-podge” poem by piecing together words, phrases, and lines from the poems in your poetry journal to create an original poem.
10. Make up an essay test on the poems in your poetry journal. This test should include one “thought question” for each poem. Write your test items on index cards, clearly labelling each card with the title and author of the poem.
11. Why study poetry? Write your response in a fully developed essay of at least five paragraphs. Include a thesis sentence and a topic sentence for each developing paragraph. Be careful to start with a catchy opening and to end with a clincher.
12. Pick one poem in your poetry journal to present to your classmates. Your presentation should include the following:

A readable copy of the poem for every student in class.

An essay of at least five paragraphs on your poem. Your essay should demonstrate your understanding of the poem’s theme, structure, imagery, symbolism, and poetic techniques, such as rhyme, rhythm, simile, metaphor, personification, onomatopoeia, alliteration, etc. Of course, it should also include your personal response to the poem.

A readable copy of your essay for every student in the class.

An initial oral interpretation of your poem. Be sure that you know how to pronounce every word, that you pause appropriately, and that you read with some “feeling.”

13. Make up your own assignment and submit it to your teacher for approval. Once the assignment is approved, write it neatly on an index card, turn the card in, and do the assignment.