Every April, on Poem in Your Pocket Day, people celebrate by selecting a poem, carrying it with them, and sharing it with others throughout the day at schools, bookstores, libraries, parks, workplaces, and on social media using the hashtag #PocketPoem.

Join us in celebrating Poem in Your Pocket Day this year!
Poem in Your Pocket Day was initiated in April 2002 by the Office of the Mayor, in partnership with the New York City Departments of Cultural Affairs and Education, as part of the city’s National Poetry Month celebration.

The Academy of American Poets, which launched National Poetry Month in 1996, took Poem in Your Pocket Day to all fifty United States in 2008, encouraging individuals across the country to join in and channel their inner bard.

The Academy of American Poets and the League of Canadian Poets, the latter of which has organized National Poetry Month in Canada since 1998, have teamed up to extend the reach of Poem in Your Pocket Day in North America.

**Ideas for Celebrating Poem in Your Pocket Day**

The beauty of Poem in Your Pocket Day is its simplicity. Individuals and institutions have generated many creative ways to share poems virtually or in-person on this special day—from having children create handmade pockets to tuck their favorite poems into, to handing out poems to commuters at transportation hubs, to distributing poem scrolls in hospitals, nursing homes, and local businesses. The ideas are endless, but here are a few to get you started. And, of course, we invite you to share poems on any day during National Poetry Month and year-round!
In Your School
• If you’re a school principal or administrator, organize a school-wide Poem in Your Pocket Day giveaway using the following curated collection of poems.
• Encourage students to choose a poem from our collection, print it out, and post it in a designated area, such as the school cafeteria, hallways, or the student lounge.
• Hold a virtual student reading of the poems they’ve selected.

In Your Classroom
• Have your students choose a poem from our collection. Ask them to write a letter to a far-away friend or relative detailing what they like about the poem and why they think the recipient would enjoy it. Send the letters and poems so they arrive on Poem in Your Pocket Day.
• Ask your students to select their favorite poem from our collection, choose their favorite lines, and add those lines to a bookmark they can decorate with drawings. Collect the bookmarks and redistribute them, letting each student pick one that’s not their own for ongoing use in class.
• Ask your students to memorize a poem and share it with the class.
• Have your students choose a poem to give away. Ask them to print out 20 copies of the poem and come up with a creative way to distribute it, such as in the form of a folded-paper animal or object (see the Appendix for instructions on how to create a folded swan), a decorated scroll, a poem tree, or a bookmark.
• Devote a class lesson to teaching your students about the haiku, a three-line poem with seventeen syllables, written in a 5/7/5 syllable count. (See the Appendix for more about the haiku.) Ask your students to write their own haikus and share them with the class by reading them aloud. Have your students decorate a copy of their haikus with drawings and stickers, then encourage them to give their poems to a family member or friend.
• Organize a class trip for students to visit a nursing home or community center and to read and share their favorite poems.
In Your Community

- Encourage local businesses to participate in Poem in Your Pocket Day by offering discounts to customers who bring in a poem, by posting poems in their establishments, or by distributing poems on bags, cups, or receipts.
- On April 1, write to your local newspaper asking them to publish a poem by a local poet on Poem in Your Pocket Day or to syndicate Poem-a-Day, a digital series available for free from the Academy of American Poets. (For more information, visit www.poets.org/poem-a-day)

In Your Workplace

- Stand outside the entrance of your place of work and distribute poems to employees and coworkers as they begin their day.
- Organize a lunch during which your employees or coworkers can take turns reading their favorite poems aloud.
- Ask your employer to encourage employees to choose their favorite poems and post them around the office.
- Place printouts of poems on people’s desk chairs before they arrive to work.
- Add a poem or link to a poem to your email signature. In addition to the poems here, you’ll find thousands more at Poets.org.
- Email a poem to employees and coworkers, encouraging them to read and share their own favorites throughout the day.
- Jot a favorite line of poetry on the back of your business cards before distributing them.
- Tape a poem to the watercooler.

Online

- Post poems, links to poems, or photos of poems on Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, or Twitter using the hashtag #PocketPoem.
- Record a video of yourself reading a poem, then share it on your favorite social media platform.
- Schedule a video chat and read a poem to your loved ones.
Poems to Share by Contemporary American Poets

O Small Sad Ecstasy of Love by Anne Carson
For Keeps by Joy Harjo
Social Distancing by Juan Felipe Herrera
Mosquito by Jane Hirshfield
Eating Together by Li-Young Lee
Instructions on Not Giving Up by Ada Limón
Making History by Marilyn Nelson
Making a Fist by Naomi Shihab Nye
In the Company of Women by January Gill O’Neil
In Brazil by Tracy K. Smith
In the High Country by David St. John
Female Rain by Laura Tohe
Kissing in Vietnamese by Ocean Vuong
This Body II by Renée Watson
Ongoing by Jenny Xie
O Small Sad Ecstasy of Love

Anne Carson

I like being with you all night with closed eyes.
What luck—here you are
coming
along the stars!
I did a road trip
all over my mind and heart
and
there you were
kneeling by the roadside
with your little toolkit
fixing something.

Give me a world, you have taken the world I was.
For Keeps

Joy Harjo

Sun makes the day new.
Tiny green plants emerge from earth.
Birds are singing the sky into place.
There is nowhere else I want to be but here.
I lean into the rhythm of your heart to see where it will take us.
We gallop into a warm, southern wind.
I link my legs to yours and we ride together,
Toward the ancient encampment of our relatives.
Where have you been? they ask.
And what has taken you so long?
That night after eating, singing, and dancing
We lay together under the stars.
We know ourselves to be part of mystery.
It is unspeakable.
It is everlasting.
It is for keeps.

MARCH 4, 2013, CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS
Social Distancing

Juan Felipe Herrera

with design by Anthony Cody

love flourishes for the first time

you crash into the toy section

grocery bags have a tendency to wobble

hair becomes and thrusts

our eyelashes and twist walks in

peace opens, rises and accelerates

Healing begins

flaring stars create another star

the basketball will dunk you up

a chile bowl will wreak havoc by itself

the power between us is misbegotten
I say I
&
a small mosquito drinks from my tongue

but many say we and hear I
say you or he and
hear I

what can we do with this problem

a bowl held in both hands
cannot be filled by its holder

x, says the blue whale
x, say the krill
solve for y, says the ocean, then multiply by existence

the feet of an ant make their own sound on the earth

ice is astonished by water

a person misreads
delirium as delphinium
and falls into
a blueness sleepy as beauty when sneezing

the pronoun dozes

From The Beauty (Knopf, 2015). Copyright © by Jane Hirshfield. Used with the permission of the author.
Eating Together

Li-Young Lee

In the steamer is the trout
seasoned with slivers of ginger,
two sprigs of green onion, and sesame oil.
We shall eat it with rice for lunch,
brothers, sister, my mother who will
taste the sweetest meat of the head,
holding it between her fingers
deftly, the way my father did
weeks ago. Then he lay down
to sleep like a snow-covered road
winding through pines older than him,
without any travelers, and lonely for no one.
More than the fuchsia funnels breaking out of the crabapple tree, more than the neighbor’s almost obscene display of cherry limbs shoving their cotton candy-colored blossoms to the slate sky of Spring rains, it’s the greening of the trees that really gets to me. When all the shock of white and taffy, the world’s baubles and trinkets, leave the pavement strewn with the confetti of aftermath, the leaves come. Patient, plodding, a green skin growing over whatever winter did to us, a return to the strange idea of continuous living despite the mess of us, the hurt, the empty. Fine then, I’ll take it, the tree seems to say, a new slick leaf unfurling like a fist to an open palm, I’ll take it all.
Making History

Marilyn Nelson

Blue and White Orlon Snowflake Sweater, Blue Snowpants, Red Galoshes
—Smoky Hill AFB, Kansas, 1955

Somebody took a picture of a class
standing in line to get polio shots,
and published it in the Weekly Reader.
We stood like that today. And it did hurt.
Mrs. Liebel said we were Making History,
but all I did was squunch up my eyes and wince.
Making History takes more than standing in line
believing little white lies about pain.
Mama says First Negroes are History:
First Negro Telephone Operator,
First Negro Opera Singer At The Met,
First Negro Pilots, First Supreme Court Judge.
That lady in Montgomery just became a First
by squunching up her eyes and sitting there.
Making a Fist

Naomi Shihab Nye

For the first time, on the road north of Tampico,
I felt the life sliding out of me,
a drum in the desert, harder and harder to hear.
I was seven, I lay in the car
watching palm trees swirl a sickening pattern past the glass.
My stomach was a melon split wide inside my skin.

"How do you know if you are going to die?"
I begged my mother.
We had been traveling for days.
With strange confidence she answered,
"When you can no longer make a fist."

Years later I smile to think of that journey,
the borders we must cross separately,
stamped with our unanswerable woes.
I who did not die, who am still living,
still lying in the backseat behind all my questions,
clenching and opening one small hand.

From Words Under the Words: Selected Poems by Naomi Shihab Nye. Published by Far Corner. Reprinted with permission of the author. Copyright © 1995 Naomi Shihab Nye
In the Company of Women

January Gill O’Neil

Make me laugh over coffee,
make it a double, make it frothy
so it seethes in our delight.
Make my cup overflow
with your small happiness.
I want to hoot and snort and cackle and chuckle.
Let your laughter fill me like a bell.
Let me listen to your ringing and singing
as Billie Holiday croons above our heads.
Sorry, the blues are nowhere to be found.
Not tonight. Not here.
No makeup. No tears.
Only contours. Only curves.
Each sip takes back a pound,
each dry-roasted swirl takes our soul.
Can I have a refill, just one more?
Let the bitterness sink to the bottom of our lives.
Let us take this joy to go.

From Misery Islands (CavanKerry Press, 2014). Copyright © 2014 by January Gill O’Neil. Used with the permission of the author.
In Brazil

Tracy K. Smith

for Adélia Prado

Poets swagger up and down the shore, I’ll bet, 
Wagging their hips in time to the raucous tide. 
They tip back their heads and life sears a path 
Down the throat. At night they dance, don’t they, 
Across tiles that might as well be glass, or ice. 
And if they don’t want to spend the evening alone, 
They don’t. And if they want to wear snow-angels 
Into the sheets of some big empty bed, that’s 
What they do, until a dark form takes shape 
On the ceiling overhead. Then they put on a robe 
And kick around looking for some slippers. 
When the poem finally arrives, it grins 
And watches back with wide credulous eyes.

From Duende. Copyright © 2007 by Tracy K. Smith. Used with the permission of Graywolf Press.
In the High Country

David St. John

Some days I am happy to be no one
The shifting grasses

In the May winds are miraculous enough
As they ripple through the meadow of lupine

The field as iridescent as a Renaissance heaven
& do you see that boy with his arms raised

Like one of Raphael’s angels held within
This hush & this pause & the sky’s lapis expanse?

That boy is my son & I am his only father
Even when I am no one
Female Rain

Laura Tohe

Female Rain
Dancing from the south
cloudy cool and gray
pregnant with rainchild

At dawn she gives birth to a gentle mist
flowers bow with wet sustenance
luminescence all around

Níłtsą Bi’áád

Níłtsą bi’áád
Shá’di’ááhdęę’ go dah naaldogo’ alzhish
k’ós hazlį
honeezk’áz
níltsą bi’áád bitázhool bijooltsą
áádóó níltsą bi’áád biyázhí bídii’na

Naaniiniilkahgo
níltsą bi’áád biyázhí hazlį
ch’il látaah hózhóón dahtoo’bee ’ałch’į’ háazhah
áádóó nihik’inizdidláád

From Songs from This Earth on Turtle’s Back: Contemporary American Indian Poetry (Greenfield Review Press, 1983). Copyright © 1983 by Laura Tohe. Used with permission of the author.
Kissing in Vietnamese

Ocean Vuong

My grandmother kisses
as if bombs are bursting in the backyard,
where mint and jasmine lace their perfumes
through the kitchen window,
as if somewhere, a body is falling apart
and flames are making their way back
through the intricacies of a young boy’s thigh,
as if to walk out the door, your torso
would dance from exit wounds.
When my grandmother kisses, there would be
no flashy smooching, no western music
of pursed lips, she kisses as if to breathe
you inside her, nose pressed to cheek
so that your scent is relearned
and your sweat pearls into drops of gold
inside her lungs, as if while she holds you
death also, is clutching your wrist.
My grandmother kisses as if history
never ended, as if somewhere
a body is still
falling apart.
This Body II

Renée Watson

My body is
perfect and
imperfect and
Black and
girl and
big and
thick hair and
short legs and
scraped knee and
healed scar and
heart beating and
hands that hold and
voice that bellows and
feet that dance and
arms that embrace and
my momma’s eyes and
my daddy’s smile and
my grandma’s hope and

my body is masterpiece and
my body is mine.

Ongoing

Jenny Xie

Never mind the distances traveled, the companion she made of herself. The threadbare twenties not to be underestimated. A wild depression that ripped from January into April. And still she sprouts an appetite. Insisting on edges and cores, when there were none. Relationships annealed through shared ambivalences. Pages that steadied her. Books that prowled her until the hard daybreak, and for months after. Separating new vows from the old, like laundry whites. Small losses jammed together so as to gather mass. Stored generations of filtered quietude. And some stubbornness. Tangles along the way the comb-teeth of the mind had to bite through, but for what. She had trained herself to look for answers at eye level, but they were lower, they were changing all the time.

From Eye Level (Graywolf Press, 2018). Copyright © 2018 by Jenny Xie. Used with the permission of Graywolf Press.
Anne Carson is the author of many books of poetry and translation, including *The Beauty of the Husband: A Fictional Essay in 29 Tangos* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), winner of the T.S. Eliot Prize for Poetry; *Autobiography of Red* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1998); and *Short Talks* (Brick Books, 1992). Her awards and honors include the Lannan Literary Award, the Pushcart Prize, the Griffin Poetry Prize, a Guggenheim fellowship, and the MacArthur Fellowship. She currently teaches in New York University’s creative writing program.

Joy Harjo is the current poet laureate of the United States. Her poetry collections include *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings* (W. W. Norton, 2015) and *How We Became Human: New and Selected Poems* (W. W. Norton, 2002). In 2015, she received the Wallace Stevens Award from the Academy of American Poets. Her other honors include the PEN Open Book Award and the American Indian Distinguished Achievement in the Arts Award. A Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, she lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Juan Felipe Herrera was the U. S. Poet Laureate from 2015 to 2017 and served as a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets from 2011 to 2016. He is the author of many collections of poetry, including *Notes on the Assemblage* (City Lights, 2015) and *Half of the World in Light: New and Selected Poems* (University of Arizona Press, 2008), a recipient of the PEN/Beyond Margins Award. He lives in Fresno, California.

Jane Hirshfield’s poetry collections include *The Beauty: Poems* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), which was nominated for the National Book Award, and *Come, Thief* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2011). In 2004, the Academy of American Poets awarded her the Academy Fellowship for distinguished poetic achievement. Her other honors include the Poetry Center Book Award and numerous fellowships. She served as a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets from 2012 to 2017, and she lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Li-Young Lee is the author of *The Undressing* (W. W. Norton, 2018); *Behind My Eyes* (W. W. Norton, 2008); *Book of My Nights* (BOA Editions, 2001), which won the 2002 William Carlos Williams Award; *The City in Which I Love You* (BOA Editions, 1990), which was the 1990 Lamont Poetry Selection; and *Rose* (BOA Editions, 1986), which won the Delmore Schwartz Memorial Poetry Award. His awards include a Lannan Literary Award, a Whiting Writer’s Award, the PEN Oakland/Josephine Miles Award, the I. B. Lavan Award, three Pushcart Prizes, a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship. He lives in Chicago, Illinois.
Ada Limón is the author of five poetry collections, including *The Carrying* (Milkweed Editions, 2018), which received the National Book Critics Circle Award, and *Bright Dead Things* (Milkweed Editions, 2015), which was a finalist for the National Book Award. The recipient of numerous honors and awards, including a grant from the New York Foundation for the Arts, Limón lives in Lexington, Kentucky, and Sonoma, California.


Naomi Shihab Nye is the author of several poetry collections, including *The Tiny Journalist* (BOA Editions, 2019), as well as several children’s books. In 1988, she received the Academy of American Poets’ Lavan Award, and in 2009, she was elected a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. She has also received awards and fellowships from the International Poetry Forum and the Guggenheim Foundation, among others. She lives in San Antonio, Texas.

January Gill O’Neil is the author of *Rewilding* (CavanKerry Press, 2018), recognized by Mass Center for the Book as a notable poetry collection for 2018; *Misery Islands* (CavanKerry Press, 2014), winner of a 2015 Paterson Award for Literary Excellence; and *Underlife* (CavanKerry Press, 2009). The recipient of fellowships from Cave Canem and the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund, O’Neil was awarded a Massachusetts Cultural Council grant. She is an associate professor of English at Salem State University and lives in Beverly, Massachusetts.

Tracy K. Smith was the U. S. Poet Laureate from 2017 to 2019. She is the author of four poetry collections, including *Wade in the Water* (Graywolf Press, 2018) and *Life on Mars* (Graywolf Press, 2011), which received the 2012 Pulitzer Prize. The recipient of numerous honors and awards, including the 2014 Academy of American Poets Fellowship, Smith is a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and lives in New Jersey.
David St. John's many books of poetry include *Study for the World’s Body: New and Selected Poems* (1994), which was nominated for the National Book Award. St. John is the recipient of many honors and awards, including National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships and a Guggenheim Fellowship. In 2016 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He is a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and currently teaches in the PhD Program in Creative Writing and Literature and is the Chair of English at the University of Southern California. He lives in Venice Beach, California.

Laura Tohe is the author of *Tseyí / Deep in the Rock* (University of Arizona Press, 2005), which received the Arizona Book Association’s Glyph Award for Best Poetry and Best Book; *No Parole Today* (West End Press, 1999), which was named Poetry Book of the Year by the Wordcraft Circle of Native American Writers and Storytellers; and *Making Friends with Water* (Nosila Press, 1986); among others. Tohe is Sleepy-Rock People clan and born for the Bitter Water People clan. A Poets Laureate fellow of the Academy of American Poets, she is the current poet laureate of the Navajo Nation.

Ocean Vuong is the author of *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* (Copper Canyon Press, 2016), which received the T. S. Eliot Prize. Vuong, who was born in Saigon, Vietnam, is the recipient of a Lannan Literary Fellowship, a Ruth Lully and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellowship, and a Whiting Award, among other honors. He teaches at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and lives in Massachusetts.

Renée Watson is the author of *Piecing Me Together* (Bloomsbury, 2017), which received a Coretta Scott King Award and Newbery Honor, and *Harlem’s Little Blackbird: The Story of Florence Mills* (Random House Books for Young Readers, 2012), which received an NAACP Image Award nomination in children’s literature. Watson founded I, Too Arts Collective, a nonprofit that was housed in the home of Langston Hughes from 2016-2019. She lives in New York.

Jenny Xie is the author of *Eye Level* (Graywolf Press, 2018), the winner of the 2017 Walt Whitman Award and finalist for the National Book Award. Xie was born in Hefei, China, and raised in New Jersey. She holds degrees from Princeton University and New York University, and has received fellowships and support from Kundiman, the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, the Elizabeth George Foundation, the New York Foundation for the Arts, and Poets & Writers. In 2020, she received a Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Literature. Xie teaches at New York University and lives in New York City.
Poems to Share by Contemporary Canadian Poets

Phyllis Webb: The Spit by Stephen Bett
What You Want Doesn’t Matter by Moni Brar
Sometimes by Rae Crossman
Beekeeping by Kim Fahner
At Dusk as Desire by Dagne Forrest
IF TINY CRYSTALS FORM CLOSE TO THE EARTH’S SURFACE THEY FORM DIAMOND DUST by Catherine Graham
The Why of It by Louisa Howerow
Spider by Laboni Islam
Gravities by Laurie Koensgen
Elegy for Opportunity by Natalie Lim
Pavane for a Dead Letter by Marion Lougheed
Emily and I by Pamela Porter
Skin by Eleonore Schönmaier
The Walk by Margo Wheaton
Phyllis Webb: The Spit

Stephen Bett

And spit
give me water for spit.
Then give me
a face.

— Phyllis Webb, “Solitary Confinement”

And spit
broken glass
for shards
to speak

give me water for spit.
Gloss this mal du
doute ... never
was spat out

Then give me
ash in time
to witness
its burn

a face.
To spite
itself
still

What You Want Doesn’t Matter

Moni Brar

When you ask me
where are you from?
do you want me to say
I’m from
a crushed clove
the husk of a coconut
coriander dust
the swell of the water buffalo’s belly
the ocean’s lust for the moon?

When you ask me again
I won’t answer
instead, I’ll say
I have
a peacock in my pocket
tucked among old stories
nesting in lint
feeding on crumbs and little lies
I gently push down its throat.

Sometimes

Rae Crossman

Rushing into our early morning bedroom
with her
under-the-pillow discovery.

My daughter’s
toothless grin.

Sometimes poetry is like that:
all tooth fairy
no incisors.

Sometimes
it’s wolf canines
and snap of bone.

Beekeeping

Kim Fahner

At the centre of the hive, a bright sun
with planets that orbit it, this bee that
gathers others to her, this little winged thing,
the one that hums, shakes,
throbs, and dances.

Lean in, hinge from your hips,
let your heart lead:
in Latin, heart is cor
and agere is to lead.

They dance diagonal
with one another, end up
writing letters home in cursive,
write ‘cross my heart and hope to die,’
whispering ardent promises, but then
forget to lick and seal the envelope.

Lean in, beekeeper.

They say, if you close your eyes
and breathe in deeply—if you lead
with your heart—you will take in
the scent of lemongrass.
This is the essence of the queen,
the one that hums, shakes,
throbs, and dances.

Lean in, beekeeper. Hinge from your hips.
Lead with your heart.

Courage, my love.
Courage.

Winner of the League of Canadian Poets' 2021 National Broadsheet Contest.
At Dusk

Dagne Forrest

At dusk the woods shift closer,
shadows melt across
my shoulders.

Here, the nose puckering scent
of rotten apples
sharp, ascends.

Unseen roosting birds decry
my presence. Flustered,
tensing sky-

ward—dark wings undone,
one by one.

IF TINY CRYSTALS FORM
CLOSE TO THE EARTH’S
SURFACE THEY FORM
DIAMOND DUST

Catherine Graham

My antler heart grows hooves.
I follow the lead from the pack.
Find shelter in a drunken forest—

what species isn’t at risk.
Insulating properties of snow
keep me warm—

trapped air between each flake.
With body heat and earth-transfer heat
my home becomes a snowbank.

It’s not the hare’s scream
that haunts,
it’s the antecedent silence.
The Why of It

Louisa Howerow

You know before you start you won’t succeed
in creating the ideal pain français, not the crackly kind
you’d buy from a village boulangerie, not even if

you follow Julia Child’s instructions and advice,
accompanied by drawings. Twenty pages worth.
You don’t have the right flour with its precise

gluten strength. You don’t have a baker’s oven
with a fire-brick floor. You still haven’t mastered
how to form the dough into the shape you want,

but you will go at it again and again, because
you want your muscles doing, keeping busy,
taking you away for seven hours, plus

three for cooling down. You like the elastic feel
of the dough, its smoothness. The kneading,
the scraping, the lifting and the slapping down.

Repeat, repeat. Yes! Moving fast, creating
a rhythm. No matter how the table shakes,
you work that dough, until you’re spent. If

there was a river, you could beat your wash
on rocks, or a carpet to bang out on a fence,
but you don’t have river or a carpet or fence.

All you have are muscles making good,
doing something they’re learning to do,
believing they can keep death at bay.

First published in Fresh Voices 20.
Spider
Laboni Islam

Praise your fluency
in silk — spinning
what is hidden within
the way you float a line out on the wind
& let it latch.

Praise your small & diligent body
the way it pulls & fastens
till a single spoke
sings
of a whole geometry.

Praise your eight-legged patience.

Can you teach me to be still?

To welcome what disturbs the web
& what to do with it?
Gravities

Laurie Koensgen

When we were fast planets
orbiting the schoolyard

the fringes of our scarves
encircled us like moons

and sometimes we collided.

Lava erupted in angry scabs
on our scorched knees.

Our mouths were gaping seas
learning what tides mean.

my sister cried when she heard.
on a planet far away,
all reddish rock and dust storm,
Opportunity lies still –
this robot who just turned fifteen,
who never knew what a birthday was,
who will never understand
that there are people on earth
grieving her cold metal frame.
there is something so cruel,
so human, about mourning
a being we programmed
and exiled to space
with no means of returning.

we knew she would die one day,
alone in a sea of rust,
but we are tender even
in our cruelty, so we
grieve. we write poems in her name.
our last message to her was a song,
did you know that?
a song.
there is nothing lonelier
than the little Mars rover,
no longer chirping back to base
about earth and rocks and maybe-life,
nothing lonelier than us,
creating things we know
we will sing to sleep one day, nothing lonelier
than thinking of that robot,
sitting still and silent now,
being worn slowly away
by the winds of a planet
we promised she could call home.
Pavane for a Dead Letter

Marion Lougheed

every thought is a wartime letter
struck through with black
words and news that can’t be shared

in the depths a torpedo
hits its mark

a cargo of letters
waltzes
slowly
to the ocean floor
Emily and I

Pamela Porter

Together in her drafty attic
we write our letters to the world.
Her lamp sputters, the light poor.

In the frame of her window the sun’s last spreads over
Amherst’s houses.

She let me in when I bragged I was nobody
and now sends me downstairs
to scrounge more paper –
envelopes, she insists – envelopes.

I creep down the creaky stairs.
Try to silence the swinging kitchen door.

Everyone’s out but her pipe-smoking father
who won’t spend a penny on paper.
He doesn’t see my hand lift the wooden box
where he tosses the trash.

I sift out all the envelopes.
Take them up to Emily
and our fevered unfolding begins.

How she cringes when I make the tiniest tear.
This part takes time – the careful unhinging,
the smoothing.

She hands me a pen, an ink pot.
We go to work.

What I’ll remember most
is her shadow on the wall –
her hand, and the pen large, swift,

and her hair -- not pulled tight,
but down, free -- almost, I would say, wild.

First published in Likely Stories (Ronsdale Press, 2019)
Skin

Eleonore Schönmaier

a man’s frosted exhalation
in the pitch interior

of a car’s trunk
is white against black

like chalk on the board
easily erased, but

not easily forgotten
the sound of tires on snow

heard from inside
the trunk of a cop car

The Walk

Margo Wheaton

(For my father)

After the worst of it, after the days of the black nets that entangled you, that wrapped themselves around your will as you lay in the starched anonymity of the new bed in the seniors home,

I see you at the end of the hall, just reaching it—the white vinyl—plastic window that gazed directly into the woods,

filling with wild green light.

You were bent and curved like a fish’s mouth, down-turned, ferning into yourself as you gripped the sides of the hated walker, hanging like an empty shirt.

I know you won’t succeed in this, but there’s something in the measured gait, the shuck forward, as if you could escape the swelling sky of circumstance if you just kept walking.

Like a man who’s overdosed and mustn’t sleep, you swim your ruined body forward, each glittering step a sand-shoal holding back the sea.

First published in The Fiddlehead, 75th Anniversary Issue.
Poems to Share from the Public Domain

Moonrise by H.D.

To Make a Prairie by Emily Dickinson

Life by Paul Laurence Dunbar

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening by Robert Frost

Tanka (I) by Sadakichi Hartmann

When I Rise Up by Georgia Douglas Johnson

The New Colossus by Emma Lazarus

The Tropics of New York by Claude McKay

Wild Swans by Edna St. Vincent Millay

Assured by Alexander Posey

Fog by Carl Sandburg

Faults by Sara Teasdale

The Eagle by Alfred Lord Tennyson

Storm Ending by Jean Toomer

Song of the Open Road, 1 by Walt Whitman

For biographies of these poets, visit www.poets.org.
Moonrise

H.D.

Will you glimmer on the sea?
Will you fling your spear-head
On the shore?
What note shall we pitch?

We have a song,
On the bank we share our arrows—
The loosed string tells our note:

O flight,
Bring her swiftly to our song.
She is great,
We measure her by the pine-trees.
To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,—
One clover, and a bee,
And revery.
The revery alone will do
If bees are few.
A crust of bread and a corner to sleep in,
A minute to smile and an hour to weep in,
A pint of joy to a peck of trouble,
And never a laugh but the moans come double;
And that is life!

A crust and a corner that love makes precious,
With a smile to warm and the tears to refresh us;
And joy seems sweeter when cares come after,
And a moan is the finest of foils for laughter;
And that is life!

This poem is in the public domain. For more poems visit poets.org
Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound’s the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.
Winter? Spring? Who knows?
White buds from the plumtrees wing
And mingle with the snows.
No blue skies these flowers bring,
Yet their fragrance augurs Spring.
When I rise up above the earth,
And look down on the things that fetter me,
I beat my wings upon the air,
Or tranquil lie,
Surge after surge of potent strength
Like incense comes to me
When I rise up above the earth
And look down upon the things that fetter me.

This poem is in the public domain. For more poems visit poets.org
The New Colossus

Emma Lazarus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Grows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”
The Tropics of New York

Claude McKay

Bananas ripe and green, and ginger root
  Cocoa in pods and alligator pears,
And tangerines and mangoes and grape fruit,
  Fit for the highest prize at parish fairs,

Sat in the window, bringing memories
  of fruit-trees laden by low-singing rills,
And dewy dawns, and mystical skies
  In benediction over nun-like hills.

My eyes grow dim, and I could no more gaze;
  A wave of longing through my body swept,
And, hungry for the old, familiar ways
  I turned aside and bowed my head and wept.
I looked in my heart while the wild swans went over.
And what did I see I had not seen before?
Only a question less or a question more;
Nothing to match the flight of wild birds flying.
Tiresome heart, forever living and dying,
House without air, I leave you and lock your door.
Wild swans, come over the town, come over
The town again, trailing your legs and crying!
Assured

Alexander Posey

Be it dark; be it bright;
    Be it pain; be it rest;
Be it wrong; be it right—
    It must be for the best.

Some good must somewhere wait,
    And sometime joy and pain
Must cease to alternate,
    Or else we live in vain.
Fog

Carl Sandburg

The fog comes
on little cat feet.

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

This poem is in the public domain. For more poems visit poets.org
They came to tell your faults to me,
They named them over one by one;
I laughed aloud when they were done,
I knew them all so well before,—
Oh, they were blind, too blind to see
Your faults had made me love you more.
The Eagle

Alfred Lord Tennyson

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.
Thunder blossoms gorgeously above our heads,
Great, hollow, bell-like flowers,
Rumbling in the wind,
Stretching clappers to strike our ears . . .
Full-lipped flowers
Bitten by the sun
Bleeding rain
Dripping rain like golden honey—
And the sweet earth flying from the thunder.

Storm Ending

Jean Toomer

This poem is in the public domain. For more poems visit poets.org
Song of the Open Road, 1

Walt Whitman

Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.

Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am good-fortune,
Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,
Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms,
Strong and content I travel the open road.

The earth, that is sufficient,
I do not want the constellations any nearer,
I know they are very well where they are,
I know they suffice for those who belong to them.

(Still here I carry my old delicious burdens,
I carry them, men and women, I carry them with me wherever I go,
I swear it is impossible for me to get rid of them,
I am fill’d with them, and I will fill them in return.)
Haiku

A traditional Japanese haiku is a three-line poem with seventeen syllables, written in a 5/7/5 syllable count. Often focusing on images from nature, haiku emphasizes simplicity, intensity, and directness of expression.

Haiku began in thirteenth-century Japan as the opening phrase of renga, an oral poem, generally 100 stanzas long, which was also composed syllabically. The much shorter haiku broke away from renga in the sixteenth-century, and was mastered a century later by Matsuo Basho, who wrote this classic haiku:

*An old pond!*
*A frog jumps in—*
*the sound of water.*

Haiku was traditionally written in the present tense and focused on associations between images. There was a pause at the end of the first or second line, and a “season word,” or kigo, specified the time of year.

As the form has evolved, many of these rules—including the 5/7/5 practice—have been routinely broken. However, the philosophy of haiku has been preserved: the focus on a brief moment in time; a use of provocative, colorful images; an ability to be read in one breath; and a sense of sudden enlightenment and illumination.

To read more examples of poems written in the haiku form, visit www.poets.org/haiku.

To read about other poetic forms, such as the acrostic, the cinquain, and the sonnet, visit www.poets.org.
How to Create a Folded Swan
Other Resources

Poem-a-Day
Poem-a-Day is the original and only daily digital poetry series featuring over 200 new, previously unpublished poems by today’s talented poets each year. On weekdays, poems are accompanied by exclusive commentary by the poets. The series highlights classic poems on weekends. For more information, visit www.poets.org/poemsorg/poem-day.

Teach This Poem
Produced for K-12 educators, Teach This Poem features one poem a week from our online poetry collection, accompanied by interdisciplinary resources and activities designed to help teachers quickly and easily bring poetry into the classroom. The series is curated by our Educator in Residence, Dr. Madeleine Fuchs Holzer, and is available for free via email. For more information, visit www.poets.org/poetsorg/teach-poem.

Poetry Lesson Plans
The Academy of American Poets presents lesson plans, most of which align with Common Core State Standards, and all of which have been reviewed by our Educator in Residence with an eye toward developing skills of perception and imagination. We hope they will inspire the educators in our community to bring even more poems into your classrooms! For more information, visit www.poets.org/poetsorg/lesson-plans.

National Poetry Month
National Poetry Month is the largest literary celebration in the world, with tens of millions of readers, students, K-12 teachers, librarians, booksellers, literary events curators, publishers, bloggers, and, of course, poets marking poetry’s important place in our culture and our lives.

While we celebrate poets and poetry year-round, the Academy of American Poets was inspired by the successful celebrations of Black History Month (February) and Women’s History Month (March), and founded National Poetry Month in April 1996 with an aim to:

- highlight the extraordinary legacy and ongoing achievement of American poets,
- encourage the reading of poems,
- assist teachers in bringing poetry into their classrooms,
- increase the attention paid to poetry by national and local media,
- encourage increased publication and distribution of poetry books, and
- encourage support for poets and poetry.

For more information, visit www.poets.org/npm.
The Academy of American Poets
The Academy of American Poets is the largest membership-based nonprofit organization fostering an appreciation for contemporary poetry and supporting American poets. For over three generations, the organization has connected millions of people to great poetry through programs such as National Poetry Month, the largest literary celebration in the world; Poets.org, one of the leading poetry sites online; American Poets, a biannual magazine; an annual series of poetry readings and special events; and its education programs.

The League of Canadian Poets
The League of Canadian Poets is the professional organization for established and emerging Canadian poets. Founded in 1966 to nurture the advancement of poetry in Canada, and the promotion of the interests of poets, it now comprises over 700 members. The League serves the poetry community and promotes a high level of professional achievement through events, networking, projects, publications, mentoring and awards. It administers programs and funds for governments and private donors and encourages an appreciative readership and audience for poetry through educational partnerships and presentations to diverse groups. As the recognized voice of Canadian poets, it represents their concerns to governments, publishers, and society at large, and maintains connections with similar organizations at home and abroad. The League strives to promote equal opportunities for poets from every literary tradition and cultural and demographic background.