

Free Verse Poetry

Free verse poetry is a poem that is written without a regular rhyme scheme, meter or form. Poets use free verse poetry, not because it is easier to write, but because they want to use the natural rhythm of ordinary language to emphasize the simple beauty of everyday speech.

Free verse may look simple to write, but it isn't. Free verse is one of the most complex types of poetry written because the poet has to pay so much attention to language. There is no formal rhyme, rhythm or form so the emphasis is on each word and line. Look at the examples below. Tell what "feels" like poetry in each of the examples.

Mother to Son

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinter,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I've been a-climbin' on
And reachin' landin's
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So, boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I've still goin', honey,
I've still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
-Langston Hughes

Hughes, Langston. "Mother to Son." Daybook. Fran Claggett, et. all, eds. Wilmington: Great Source Publishing Group, 1999. 75.

To a Homeless Man on Easter Sunday

I saw you this morning
sitting on a bench by the marina
with your green and black bag
tucked under you crusty, dirty arm
and the hole in your sleeve
revealing a small tattoo
shaped like a cross.
You reeked of sweat and filth,
and time now past.
Your wrinkled brow and matted hair
convey years beyond your age.
I listened as you hummed
a song I did not know,
and clapped your hands
to a beat I could not hear,
and swayed your body
to a rhythm I could not feel.
And I wonder, as I sit
on a wooden pew
with a Bible tucked under my arm
where you have been;
what I have seen;
what we will become.

-Elisabeth D. Babin

Babin, Elisabeth D. "To a Homeless Man on Easter Sunday." Pentangle Magazine. Spring 1997. 49.

Tell how the two examples use the following:

- Sensory language

- Metaphor (direct comparison between two objects)

- Layers of meaning

- Ambivalent feelings (2 or more feelings in the same poem)

Look through the poetry books in our classroom library. Find a free verse poem that you connect to.

Copy the poem (and author) here. Then in a FAT paragraph explain how the author uses sensory language, metaphor, layers of meaning, and ambivalent feelings in the poem.

Writing Free Verse Poetry

Since free verse really uses sensory language, ambivalent feelings, metaphor, and layers in a poem, think about two objects you could put together in a poem that would create layering and multiple emotions. What experiences have you had in your life that has more than one emotion? Elation on the last day of school, but sad to miss all your friends? Pure panic and joy at the up hill climb on a rollercoaster?

List 5 other events in your life that had such pulled feelings:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Choose one of these events, and list all of the images that you had during the experience. Try to use your sensory language.

Does the event have larger significance in your life? What kind of layering was involved?

Now, craft the lines of your poem using the details you have described. Remember to give your poem a title to add to the meaning of your poem.