

The Art of Poetry



About This Course

Poetry lives in any reader's voice: in the "mind's voice" as well as in actual breath: imagining a poem as something to say. That central idea of "The Art of Poetry" is well demonstrated by the videos at favoritepoem.org: the photographer saying Sylvia Plath's "Nick and the Candlestick"; the school custodian saying Theodore Roethke's "The Waking"; the high school student saying Langston Hughes' "Minstrel Man." These readers base their comments about each poem upon their experience of speaking it.

The course is demanding, and based on a certain kind of intense, exigent reading, requiring prolonged—in fact, repeated—attention to specific poems.

The readings will include historical poems, as well as contemporary work. The focus will be on elements of the art such as: techniques of sound in free verse; form as a quality distinct from forms; poetry's historical relation to courtship; poetry's relation to music; the nature of greatness—with only incidental attention to schools of poetry, categories and trends.

Students are encouraged to think truly, carefully and passionately about the poem's meaning, along with how the poem feels in one's own, actual or imagined voice. As Robert Pinsky says in the Preface to *Singing School*: "this anthology will succeed if it encourages the reader to emulate it by replacing it . . . create your own anthology." In a similar way, "The Art of Poetry," with its requirement that each student compile a personal anthology, hopes to inspire and enhance a lifelong study of poetry.

Discussion Forum Guidelines

The discussion forums are a vital part of "The Art of Poetry"—the place for you to express your responses to the questions posed by the chapters. Staff members will be monitoring the discussion forums to address questions and concerns as they arise.

Candid, partisan debates about poetry are of course encouraged, but please be courteous to your fellow participants and keep the conversation relevant. The discussion board monitors will delete posts that are rude, inappropriate or off-topic. This course is about the art of poetry, and should be useful to writers, but it is not a creative writing course: please refrain from posting your own poetry on the forums.

Additionally, there is a feature in the discussion forums that allows you to select from two post types, which are Question and Discussion. When posting to the discussion board, please bear in mind that the Question type is meant for specific issues with the platform or with content, while the Discussion type is meant to share ideas and start conversation.

Office Hours

Office hours will be held in weeks II, III, and VI within the discussion forum. These are opportunities for learners to ask questions in a live-chat format, while course TAs are online to offer guidance in real time. Specific days and times for office hours will be announced in the forum. TAs will be monitoring the forum and answering questions for the duration of the course.

Reminders

A note about time references: Time will be reported by course staff as Eastern Daylight Time, North America (EDT) or Eastern Standard Time, North America (EST). Any times listed by edX, such as due dates listed on the course site, will be reported in Coordinated Universal Time (UTC). The course staff will make every effort to make times and time zones as clear as possible. There are various Time Zone converters on the web; one good one is <http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/converter.html>.

Please review the edX Terms of Service (TOS, <https://www.edx.org/edx-terms-service>) especially the Honor Code, which we reproduce for you here:

COLLABORATION POLICY

By enrolling in a course on edX, you are joining a special worldwide community of learners who have agreed to the Honor Code below.

EDX HONOR CODE PLEDGE

By enrolling in an edX course, you have agreed to:

- Complete all mid-terms and final exams with your own work and only your own work. You will not submit the work of any other person.
- Maintain only one user account and not let anyone else use your username and/or password.
- Not engage in any activity that would dishonestly improve your results, or improve or hurt the results of others.
- Not post answers to problems that are being used to assess student performance.

Unless otherwise indicated, learners on edX are encouraged to:

- Collaborate with others on the course videos, exercises, homework and labs.
- Discuss general concepts and materials in each course with others.
- Present ideas and written work to fellow edX learners or others for comment or criticism.

Grading

Below is the grade breakdown for your assignments.

50% — **Anthology Assignments**

50% — **Content Check Questions**

Anthology assignments occur in Weeks I, III, and VI. These are self-graded assignments.

In order to receive your certificate of completion, you must submit all coursework by 12:00 p.m. EDT on Tuesday, May 10th. The passing grade for this course is 70%.

Note that all assignments will remain open for the duration of the course, and students will have access to all material.

Chapter Summaries with Poems Discussed in Each Chapter

Note: Many of these poems are available in the anthologies *Singing School*, *Americans' Favorite Poems*, *An Invitation to Poetry*, *The Sounds of Poetry*, on the Poetry Foundation website (poetryfoundation.org), or on the Favorite Poem Project website (favoritepoem.org). Poems in *Singing School* are marked with an asterisk (*). Poems that appear with text and video online as part of The Favorite Poem Project will be noted with a plus sign (+).

Week I. Introduction: Difficulty and Pleasure

Chapter Launches: March 29th, 2016 at 12 p.m. EDT.

The idea of poetry *as an art* suggests that it gives pleasure and that it requires mastery. As with music and sports, the more you know, the more you can enjoy it, as participant and as audience. And in any art, there is always, infinitely, more to know: The greatest experts keep striving to improve. On the other hand, there is no absolute requirement, no single path to mastery, no prerequisite: Toddlers, even infants, enjoy music, dance and poetry. The craving for art is in us. And we can cultivate it.

Poems:

- Nicky Beer, "Octopus vulgaris"
- Elizabeth Bishop, "Arrival at Santos"
- Michelangelo Buonarroti, "Michelangelo: To Giovanni da Pistoia When the Author Was Painting the Vault of the Sistine Chapel," trans. by Gail Mazur*
- Countee Cullen, "Yet I Do Marvel"+
- Robert Hayden, "Those Winter Sundays"
- Langston Hughes, "Minstrel Man"+
- Jill McDonough, "Husky Boys' Dickies"
- Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress" and "The Mower the Glow-Worms"
- Marianne Moore, "The Steeple-Jack" and "Silence"*

- Frank O’Hara, “Why I Am Not a Painter”*
- Sylvia Plath, “Nick and the Candlestick”+*
- William Carlos Williams, “To a Poor Old Woman”
- William Carlos Williams, “To Waken an Old Lady”*
- William Butler Yeats, “The Fascination of What’s Difficult”

Week II. Freedom and Meaning

Chapter Launches: April 5th, 2016 at 12 p.m. EDT.

Art can give a feeling of liberation from what is predictable or quotidian, yet memorable art can transform the ordinary, sometimes by resisting the tyrannies of expectation of fashion.

Poems:

- Anonymous, “The Old Cloak”*
- Gwendolyn Brooks, “We Real Cool”*+
- Thomas Campion, “Now Winter Nights Enlarge”*
- Constantine Cavafy, “The God Abandons Antony”
- Marilyn Chin, “How I Got That Name”
- Alan Dugan, “How We Heard the Name”*
- Mark Halliday, “The Students”
- Langston Hughes, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”
- Antonio Machado, “Caminante, no hay camino” / “Traveler, There Is No Road” (trans. by Mary G. Berg and Dennis Maloney)+
- Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur”*
- Naomi Shihab Nye, “Arabic”
- Frank O’Hara, “Poem (Lana Turner has Collapsed)”*
- Elise Partridge, “Chemo Side Effects: Memory”*
- Carl Phillips, “The Hustler Speaks of Places”
- William Carlos Williams, “By the Road to the Contagious Hospital”

Week III. Form as a Quality

Chapter Launches: April 12th, 2016 at 12 p.m. EDT.

Art aspires to the quality of *form*, which can be attained by what T.S. Eliot refers to as “so-called free verse” as well as by following a fixed recipe for *a form* like the sonnet or sestina. Form is distinct from “forms” and more essential. Form, in this important sense, inheres in a poem’s unique arrangement of energy and rhythm.

Poems:

- Rita Dove, “Dusting”
- Fulke Greville, “You That Seek What in Life Is Death”*
- H.D., “Sea Rose”*
- Ben Jonson, “His Excuse for Loving”*

- Robert Lowell, “The Old Flame”
- John Milton, from *Paradise Lost*, Book Three
- Pablo Neruda, “Soneto XVII”+
- Sara Peters, “Abortion”
- Katie Peterson, “Enough”
- Edwin Arlington Robinson, “Eros Turannos”*
- May Swenson, “Question”*

Week IV. Teasing, Flirting, and Courting

Chapter Launches: April 19th, 2016 at 12 p.m. EDT.

Alertness to tones of voice, sensing the quality of a remark or a situation, understanding a facial expression or a gesture: these social skills are part of life. Our ability to read other people can be useful in reading a poem. Sonnets provide a good example of that resemblance between life manners and poetic manners—with their aggression and mock-aggression, their showy cleverness, self-mockery and self-pity, their teasing, hyperbolic form of courtship.

Poems:

- Sandra Beasley, “Unit of Measure”
- Samuel Daniel, “Read in my face, a volume of despairs!”
- Michael Drayton, “Three sorts of serpents do resemble thee.”
- John Davies, “The hardness of her heart and truth of mine”
- Louise Labé, “Sonnet 18,” tr. by Laura Marris,
- Heather McHugh, “What He Thought”
- Edna St. Vincent Millay, “I Shall Forget You Presently, My Dear”
- Mary Whortley Montagu, “The Lover”
- Philip Sidney, “Oh grammar rules, oh now your virtues show”
- William Shakespeare, “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun”
- William Shakespeare, “Th’ expense of spirit in a waste of shame”
- A. E. Stallings, “Fishing”
- Walt Whitman, from “Song of Myself”*+
- William Carlos Williams, “Sonnet in Search of an Author”

V. Kidding and Tribute

Chapter Launches: April 26th, 2016 at 12 p.m. EDT.

Parody at its best is a form of homage. The sonnet tradition includes aggression toward the beloved—and toward the reader, and toward the sonnet tradition itself—in a kind of elevated, ardent form of kidding. In a comparable way, parodies that expose the peculiarities of a poem or a way of writing or a writer can express admiration. As in love life and family life, kidding and celebrating, in different proportions and with different effects, may be intricately braided into a single strand.

Poems:

- Elizabeth Bishop, “The Moose”
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Kubla Khan”
- T.S. Eliot, “East Coker”
- Jack Gilbert, “Horses at Midnight Without a Moon”
- Kenneth Koch, “Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams”*
- Frank O’Hara, “Poem (Lana Turner has Collapsed!)”*+
- Seamus Heaney, “Death of a Naturalist”+
- Alexander Pope, “Epistle to Miss Blount, On Her Leaving the Town, After the Coronation”
- Henry Reed, “Chard Whitlow”
- Stevie Smith, “Thoughts about the Person from Porlock”*
- George Starbuck, “Daddy Gander’s New Found Runes” from “Translations from the English”
- William Carlos Williams, “This is Just to Say”

VI. What is “Great”

Chapter Launches: May 3rd, 2016 at 12 p.m. EDT.

What do we mean by great poetry? Does fulfilling the term require a great subject, or can a work be great simply “as art”? What constitutes a great subject? Or greatness “as art”? As with all topics in *The Art of Poetry*, the student should judge ideas and propositions by paying attention to specific poems, in the course materials and in your own anthology.

Poems:

- Elizabeth Bishop, “At the Fishhouses”+
- Julia de Burgos, “Ay, ay, ay, de la Grifa Negra” / “Ay, ay, ay, of the Kinky-Haired Negress,” trans. by Jack Agüeros*+
- Emily Dickinson, “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain” (340)
- David Ferry, Tablet 1 of *Gilgamesh: A New Rendering in English Verse*
- Yusef Komunyakaa, “2527th Birthday of the Buddha”
- Pierre Reverdy, tr. by Lydia Davis, “At the Edge of Time”
- William Butler Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium”