



Dear Teacher:

I've always thought of each of my anthologies as a collection of delicious goodies, like one of those ice-cream stores with a long list of mouth-watering flavors—so many flavors, in fact, that you don't know which to choose. (I've found that sometimes it helps me to pick two flavors . . . or three!)

Each of the collections included on this poster is like that, although each is slightly different from the others.

A Poke in the I is a collection of concrete poems, poems that you cannot usually read the same way you read a traditional poem. Some of these poems contain only one word!

A Kick in the Head is the perfect guide for you if you want to explore poetic forms, such as haiku, limericks, and/or sonnets.

A Foot in the Mouth is a book of poems to read aloud, but in various ways. For example, some of the poems you can read by yourself. Others you can read with a partner or with several partners.

These three collections have one thing in common: each offers lots of good examples of poems *you* can write. Before you begin to explore one of these anthologies, looking for a type of poem to write, let me offer some general suggestions about writing poetry:

- When you start writing your poem—jotting notes, making lists, trying a first draft, revising your work—remember that there is no need to rush to finish your poem. Take your time.
- When you've written a draft that you are happy with, tuck it away and let it rest for a few days. Then take a look at it with fresh eyes. You may like your poem a lot, even though you may see spots that can use some more work. That's fine.
- Don't expect your poem to be perfect when it falls out of your head onto the page. It will need more work. That's how the writing process works, for me and for every writer I know. Take the time to write a good poem.
- Remember: Imagination rules! Don't be afraid to try something different. You may be pleasantly surprised by your poem.
- One last thing: Have fun!



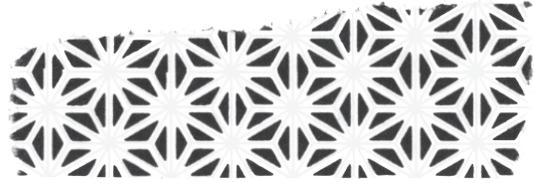
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www.candlewick.com

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CONCRETE POETRY

A Poke in the I



What Is Concrete Poetry?

The concrete poems in *A Poke in the I* are wild! You can't read them the same way you read a "regular" poem. Sometimes, they can't be read aloud at all. Good concrete poetry is almost like a painting—only instead of watercolors or oils, the arrangement of words, letters, and space catches your eye. At times a concrete poem may look like a collage of words, but the poet designed the placement of each word, and even the font, color, and size of each letter, to emphasize the meaning of the poem.

How Can I Write a Concrete Poem?

Grab a pencil and a few sheets of paper, and you're ready. A simple concrete poem alters one word to illustrate the word's meaning, as Robert Carola does with "Stowaway" (page 9). A shape concrete poem forms pictures by varying the length of the lines of the poem, as in "Balloon" by Colleen Thibaudeau (page 27).

Writing a Single-Word Concrete Poem

How could the word *explode* look more interesting? Change the size and shape of the letters, or play with space and color. Good words for concrete poetry might be dramatic words in nature, like *lightning*, or everyday things, like *electricity*, or action words, like *soar* or *sink*. When you find a good word, turn it into a concrete poem.

Exploring a Shape Concrete Poem

List objects with simple or distinctive shapes, like *baseball bat* or *umbrella*. Then sketch the object you'd like to write about. Next, list its characteristics and consider what it does or how it is used. Finally, list things you associate with the object. A baseball bat, for example, might make you think of a game you saw with a friend. Look at your lists and, without thinking too hard, circle the ones you like best. Write these words alongside your sketch. For example, if you are writing a poem about a rainstorm, you might write *puddles*, *wet feet*, and *downpour* at an angle to imitate driving rain. More words might come to mind.

Look at your concrete poem. How can you make it better? Maybe share it with a friend. Does it catch his or her eye? When you revise your poem, think about the size and style of the type, the color and shape of the letters, and the space in and around the shape.



POETIC FORMS

A Kick in the Head



What Do You Mean by “Poetic Form”?

A poetic form is a type of poem that follows a pattern. The pattern might include rhyme, but it doesn't have to. The haiku, for example, doesn't rhyme; but it's a three-line poem of seventeen syllables divided into three lines containing five, seven, and five syllables.

What Poetic Forms Are In This Book?

The book's subtitle is *An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms*, and I have tried to include many different forms. You're probably familiar with some of them, like the haiku, cinquain, and acrostic poem. Others—like the roundel, aubade, and pantoum—may offer new poetic territory for you to explore.

How Do I Pick a Poetic Form to Write?

Try reading *A Kick in the Head* until you come to a poem that you like. Read it over a couple of times and see if you can discover what makes the poem “tick.” How many lines does it have? Do any of the lines rhyme? Read it out loud and see if you notice any rhythm or repeating patterns in it. Read the mini-description of the form at the bottom of the page. Settle on a form that you want to try.

Writing an Opposite

If you want to write an opposite (page 32), start by making lists of things that have opposites, like *clean*, *kind*, *happy*, or even *dog*. Jot down some ideas, then select one item and write a list of things that are the opposite of your topic. For example, if you've chosen *big*, your list of opposites might include things like *small*, *tiny*, *crumb*, *ant*, *dot*, *comma*. When you have a creative and varied list, try to see if you can work some of those ideas into a poem. Don't forget that your opposite is written in couplets, or pairs of rhyming lines.

For example, when I think of things that are the opposite of *dog*, the first thing that comes to my mind is *cat*, so I might write this for a first line: *The opposite of dog is cat*. I need to make sure that my second line rhymes with *cat*. *Hmmm*. Suppose I write: *No debate at all about that*. So my two-line opposite would be:

The opposite of dog is cat.

No debate at all about that.

Your opposite might be longer than this one, of course. If it is, you need to make sure that the details you include in other lines show what is truly the opposite of *dog*.

READING POEMS OUT LOUD

A Foot in the Mouth

Why Is it Important to Read Poems Out Loud?

Most poetry is written to be read aloud. When you read poetry aloud, either your own poems or those in a book, you can really *hear* the wonder of language. Concrete poems, however, cannot generally be read aloud because they are more dependent on the look of the poem.



Are There Different Ways to Read a Poem Out Loud?

Sure. Just as there are different types of poems, there are different ways you can read a poem aloud. Most poems are written for a single voice. But, as you'll see (and hear) in *A Foot in the Mouth*, there are also poems written for two voices. There are even poems that are best read by a group in a single voice or in parts. You'll find many poems in the book that can be read in different ways.

How Do I Read a Poem Out Loud?

I have given you some help with this concern in the table of contents of *A Foot in the Mouth*. You'll find, for example, eight poems written for two voices. There are a couple of poems written for three voices, and three poems written for a group. There are also bilingual poems.

However, my groupings in the table of contents are meant only as a suggestion for how to read the poems. Don't be afraid to experiment when you want to read a poem aloud. For example, you might take "One Tooth, Two Tooth, White Tooth, Looth Tooth" by Allan Wolf (pages 48–49) and divide it among four readers, the way it appears in the book. Or you might want to make it a poem for two voices, with one voice reading all the lines with numbers in them—such as *One tooth Two teeth*—and the other reading the rest of the lines. You might even try having one person read the whole poem except for the word *teeth*, which can be read by a partner or even by an audience. Wouldn't *that* be fun!



You might come up with a way to present a poem that I didn't think of. Try it. Whether you are writing a poem or reading a poem aloud, don't be afraid to take a chance and try something different. If you do, you may surprise yourself with your own creativity.