**Poetry Responses**

The nature of poetry has always been problematic or mysterious, leading poets, readers, critics, and scholars to fashion their own solutions and definitions. Emily Dickinson wrote, "If I read a book ' [and] it makes-my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me I know *that* is poetry." Yvor Winters wrote, “A poem is a statement in language about a human experience." The essence of poetry remains elusive and open to a range of definitions.

Our goal this year is not to remove the mystery of poetry; instead, our goal is for you to discover the pleasures and values of poetry even if, or even though, poetry itself is inexplicable. This year we will *approach* or "come nearer to "poetry in two ways. We will study poetry through a formal or structured study in class; we will also study poetry informally through poetry responses. The goal of both methods will be for you to "come nearer to" poetry.

Each week you should choose one poem from a list of poems I give you and write a response to that poem. The response should be typed and one page in length. You will type it into your ongoing google document.

What should you write for a poetry response? You have several options: an analysis of the poem, relating what you think the theme is; an examination of the theme; a narration of a personal experience, relating the poem to yourself What you write is up to you as long as you say something besides how you have no idea what this poem is about. I will hand out some samples to give you some ideas. '

Read all the poems from the list every week. Although you only respond to one poem each week, you will become familiar with each of the poems on the list. Here are some guidelines for reading poetry:

* Remember to listen to the poem.
* Read slowly. Take your time. A poem isn’t meant for speed reading any more than you would speed listen to your favorite CD.
* Read straight through the first time, getting a feel for the poem, without worrying about what you do not know.
* Read the poem several times, just as you listen to as song several times, getting to know it, feeling the life within it, each time discovering something new in it.
* Notice the title. Titles are not labels. They can sometimes offer an entry point, can be a part of the poem. They can set a tone or atmosphere, create tension, even interact with the poem itself.
* Work through the sentences, if the poem uses them, to get the subjects, verbs, objects, and other elements straight.
* Read the poem aloud at least once. Because sounds and rhythms are crucial parts of poetry, it helps to hear poems, not just “say them in your mind.” Sometimes the sounds and rhythms bring out aspects you will not notice in silent reading. And you’ll be enticed to slow down and may feel the words and rhythms, even the life in the poem, in your mouth.
* **Poems for first-quarter poetry responses:**

• [“Ask Me,” William Stafford](http://www.poemhunter.com/best-poems/william-stafford/ask-me/)

• [“Embrace,” Billy Collins](http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/embrace-16/)

• [“Hawk Roosting,” Ted Hughes](http://allpoetry.com/Hawk-Roosting)

• [“Richard Cory,”Edwin Arlington Robinson](http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/richard-cory/)

• [“Funeral Blues,” W.H. Auden](http://allpoetry.com/Funeral-Blues)

• [“I Stop Writing the Poem,” Tess Gallagher](http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/index.php?date=2001/09/04)

• [“Dessert Places,” Robert Frost](http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/desert-places/)

• [“The Bean Eaters,” Gwendolyn Brooks](http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/bean-eaters)

• [“We Real Cool,” Gwendolyn Brooks](http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/bean-eaters)

• [“Fire and Ice,” Robert Frost](http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/fire-and-ice)

• [“Resumé,” Dorothy Parker](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174101)

• [“Love Calls Us to the Things of This World,” Richard Wilbur](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/171793)

• [“When I Was One-and-Twenty,” A.E. Housman](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/237110)