

POETRY

WRITING

TIPS

DEAR EDUCATORS AND LIBRARIANS,

Poetry and novels-in-verse are a great way to engage the next writer or poet. We hope these tips from award-winning and classroom-favorite authors and poets can encourage the young poets in your class or library.

several different forms. I've written cinquain, list, and acrostic poems for publication so far, but I tested out other types first. Remember to use all the senses and keep passive verbs to a with where you want the reader to pause, speed up, or slow

FOR

YOUNG

READERS

Penguin Young Readers

I love reading poetry as much as I love writing it. The way writing, use of white space, images created, and emotions evoked have kept me returning to poetry since I first heard it as a child.

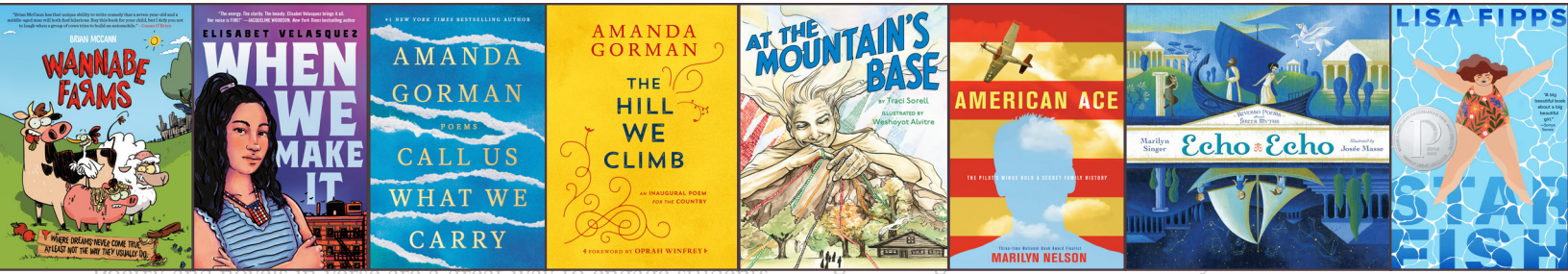
All poetry doesn't have to rhyme

Tips from bestselling & award-winning poets for every age

In poetry, you don't have to write in full sentences. Experiment with where to break a line and see how the poem changes with one word on a line, versus



brainstorm and begin drafting to get my mind focused on what I need to do. Experiment. With so many types of poems



“Poetry is your heart on paper.”

—LISA FIPPS, AUTHOR OF STARFISH

“Poetry is meant to be heard.”

—TRACI SORELL, AUTHOR OF AT THE MOUNTAIN'S BASE

DEAR EDUCATORS AND LIBRARIANS,

Poetry and novels-in-verse are a great way to engage students with reading. The use of blank space combined with the carefully crafted word choice can grab readers' attentions and emotions. The right book can inspire the next writer or poet. We hope these tips from award-winning and classroom-favorite authors and poets can encourage the young poets in your class or library.

Please feel free to download and share this with your colleagues and, most importantly, your students. If you're interested in setting up writing workshops, in person or virtually, please go to PenguinClassroom.com/Request-an-Author-Visit and fill out the form.

Thank you so much for all you do to share books and writing with young readers. We hope you and your students find this brochure helpful. We'd love to hear from you, so please get in touch via social media (our social media handles are on this brochure), contact us via our site, or email us at schoolandlibrary@prh.com.

Penguin Young Readers School & Library Team

“Inspiration is not some rare Pokémon.”

—ELISABET VELASQUEZ, AUTHOR OF WHEN WE MAKE IT

“The beauty of poetry is showing how simple, everyday things are actually full of wonder if we look close enough.”

—RENÉE WATSON CO-AUTHOR OF BORN ON THE WATER



Poetry Writing Tips from Celebrated Poet and Author **AMANDA GORMAN**



Photo by Danny Williams

READ!

- * Read other poets and other authors to see what is out there.

REREREAD!

- * I read a lot of things three times:
 - * once for fun
 - * a second time to understand the style
 - * and a third time to think about how I would write it differently

WRITE!

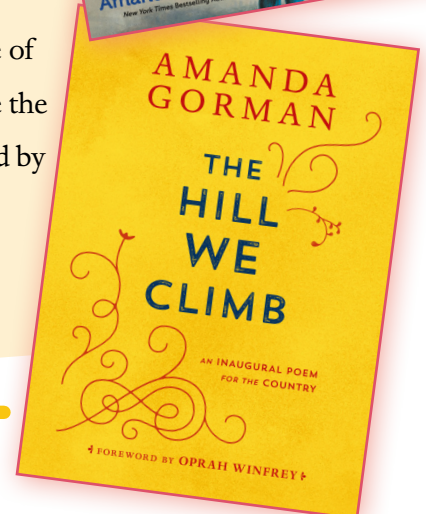
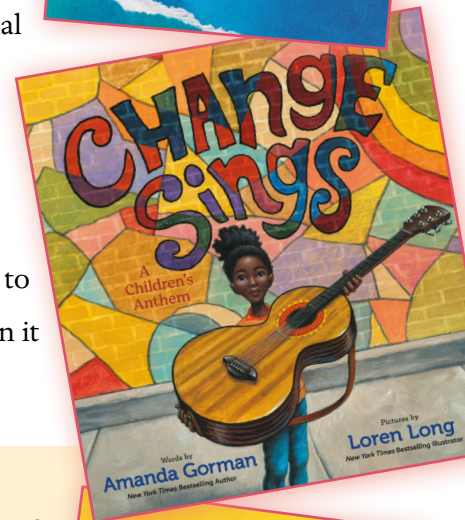
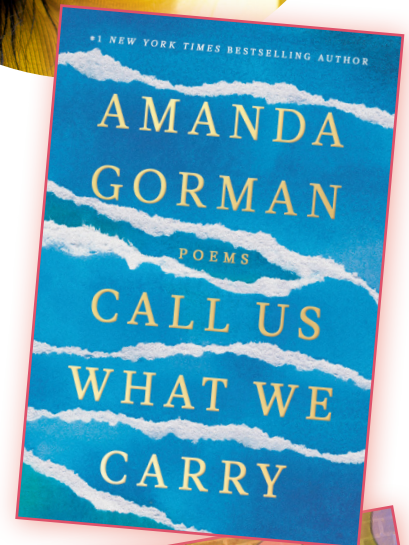
- * In lifting your pen, you dare to defy presumption, to participate in the social potential behind poetry, and to reveal the power within yourself. Write, and don't stop, no matter how hard it is!

PATIENCE!

- * Rarely does a good idea come right when you want it to. Instead you have to wait lovingly, preparing a place for inspiration to strike in your life, so when it does, it can thrive.

MAKE YOUR POETRY YOUR OWN!

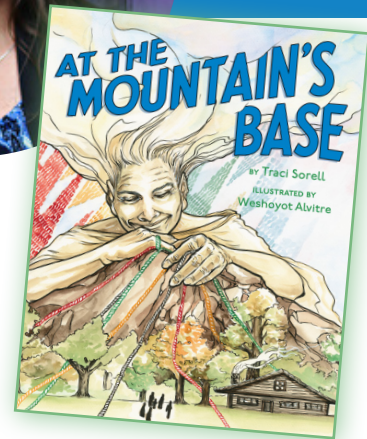
- * Culturally we run into trouble by often looking through such a tight pinhole of what poems can be. Specifically, we're looking at dead white men. Those are the poems that are taught in school and referred to as classics. Poetry isn't owned by anyone and is for everyone, so embrace what makes your voice unique.



TRACI SORELL



I love reading poetry as much as I love writing it. The tight writing, use of white space, images created, and emotions evoked have kept me returning to poetry since I first heard it as a child.



- 1. READ POETRY.** In order to write something, it helps to be familiar with it. I always read the format I'm writing in before I brainstorm and begin drafting to get my mind focused on what I need to do.
- 2. EXPERIMENT.** With so many types of poems to choose from, try writing your idea, feeling, or topic in several different forms. I've written cinquain, list, and acrostic poems for publication so far, but I tested out other types first.
- 3. REMEMBER TO USE ALL THE SENSES AND KEEP PASSIVE VERBS TO A MINIMUM.** Part of poetry's appeal is its rich use of language as well as space on the page.
- 4. READ WHAT YOU WRITE OUT LOUD.** Do the line breaks correspond with where you want the reader to pause, speed up, or slow down? What words need to be italicized, extended, or left out to capture what you want to convey? Poetry is meant to be heard, so reading it aloud helps you polish your piece before sharing with others.

MARGARITA ENGLE



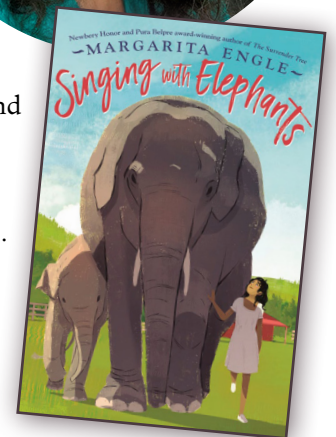
Photo by Marshall W. Johnson

READ A LOT OF POETRY, THEN SCRIBBLE JUST FOR FUN. Don't expect your first draft to be perfect. Let the beautiful words and musical rhythms flow. You can make corrections later.

CHOOSE A QUIET PLACE TO WRITE. Return to that place every day at the same time. Use a pen and paper, so the ink will flow directly from your mind to the page.

EXPERIMENT. With end rhymes, internal rhymes, vowel rhymes, and no rhymes. Experiment with line length, line breaks, open space, and emotions.

EXPLORE. Travel on the page. Time travel. You don't have to write in your own voice. You can write as a plant, animal, superhero, alien . . . Anything is possible on that page. It belongs to you. It is your refuge. Feel free and safe. No one is judging you. (Teachers, please help me make this true.)



RENÉE WATSON



Photo © Shawnte Sims

1. MAKE THE ORDINARY EXTRAORDINARY.

A poem can be about anyone, anything, any place. No topic is off-limits. If you're ever out of ideas when writing, think of a favorite season, a place where you feel safe, or a person you love, and write a poem about that. Paint a picture with your words by using vivid images and descriptive words. The beauty of poetry is showing how simple, everyday things are actually full of wonder if we look close enough.

2. USE A REPEATING PHRASE.

All poetry doesn't have to rhyme, but all poetry should have rhythm. One way to create rhythm is to choose a word or phrase to repeat throughout your poem to give it a pulse.

3. BREAK THE LINE IN UNIQUE PLACES.

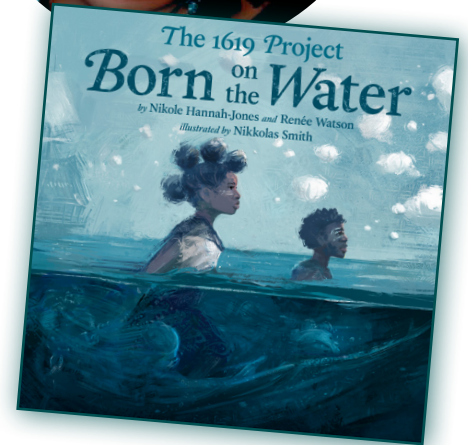
In poetry, you don't have to write in full sentences. Experiment with where to break a line and see how the poem changes with one word on a line, versus three or four.

4. READ IT OUT LOUD.

Try out different tempos, find the right cadence, and practice reading your work aloud. After you practice, be bold and brave and share it with a loved one.

5. READ POETRY.

You'll get better at writing poetry the more you read poetry. Here are a few poems that will hopefully inspire to you write your own: "Knoxville, Tennessee" by Nikki Giovanni, "Ode to Pablo's Tennis Shoes" by Gary Soto, "What For" by Garrett Hongo, and "My Grandmother is Waiting for Me to Come Home" by Gwendolyn Books.



ASIA CALCAGNO, CONTRIBUTOR TO *RESPECT THE MIC*



YOUR BEST WORK WILL COME FROM SOME OF YOUR MOST DIFFICULT FEELINGS.

Whenever you write the hard truths, explore the topics that scare you, write yourself out of your anger, or pen through your grief, the most powerful versions of your work will be born. Your pages don't always have to be pretty—in fact, you don't owe the world any of your pretty words.

ELLEN HOPKINS



Photo by Sonya Sones

POETRY IS PERSONAL TO THE POET.

It's how they view the world, and it tends to be interior. But readers want to be invited into that space. Try writing in the third person or third-person omniscient, which offer a more universal view than first person.

IMAGERY IS EVERYTHING.

Create bold, unique images. Here's one I used in a poem to describe the "far edge of the rainbow" (red): "A single splash of October dawning, sun's magenta cheek rests against a belly of storm."

Try not to rely on end rhymes, which can force unnatural sentence construction and destroy meter. If rhyme is important to you, experiment with internal rhyme (rhyming words inserted within sentences) or slant rhyme, which isn't as obvious. In this piece of my poem "Rain," you get the "song, long" rhyme internally.

Rain,

rain, silence
your song, your pewter

dirge against my windows.
My patience for puddles

has long since gone,
melted into the ether

of childhood, like contrails
into a bite of blue.

Like all writing, poetry demands revision. Try to eliminate repetitive words and often unnecessary words like *the* or *and*, which can often be replaced with a comma.

On that note, my late poetry mentor asked members of our poetry group to look at first stanzas specifically. Often, they are "scaffolding," or looking for the way into what your poem is truly about. See if starting with a later stanza makes sense and puts you into the heart of your poem sooner.



LISA FIPPS

POETRY IS YOUR HEART ON PAPER. It's being honest with yourself about how you think and feel and why. The more you understand yourself, the more you understand others and the world. And when you share your poems, readers understand you, themselves, and the world. *That* is the power of poetry.



HERE ARE FIVE FAST TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED.

1. Learn the various forms of poetry, such as haiku, tanka, and concrete poems, and understand the terminology, such as meter, enjambment, and assonance. Poetry forms and terminology are the tools a poet needs to build a poem, just like a carpenter needs a hammer and nails to build.
2. Use your words to create images in readers' minds. Consider how Carl Sandburg said, basically, "It's foggy."
3. Write as if no one will ever read what you're writing. That frees you to say what you want to say, how you want to say it. No filters. No second-guessing. No self-editing.
4. Focus on saying it, not on saying it "right." You can always change words and fix grammar later.
5. Experiment. Once you're done, rewrite the poem in another form. For example, if it's a haiku, rewrite it so it's a concrete poem. Change the meter. Change the rhyming pattern, if there is one. Finding the best form for a poem is like trying on shoes. Sometimes you have to slip your words into several forms before you find the right fit.



FOG

The fog comes
on little cat feet.
It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

MARILYN NELSON

READ.

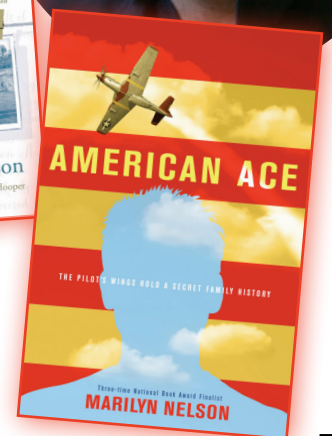
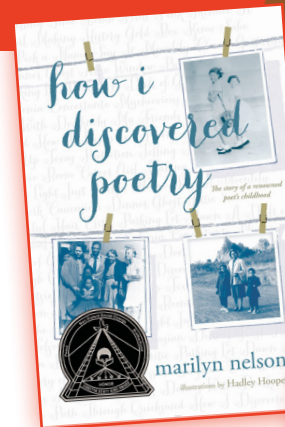
- * The more you read, the better you'll write.

READ OUT LOUD!

- * Reading out loud can help teach the skill of how to read expressively, like an actor, so the words show a character, a mood, an emotion.

WRITE.

- * Writing well can be hard work. It requires practice. But keep at it.



ELISABET VELASQUEZ

* THE MOST COMMON PIECE OF WRITING ADVICE I'VE GOTTEN IS: WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW.

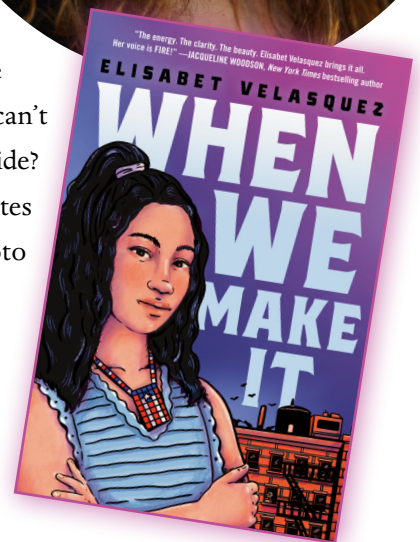
[W]hich can be helpful advice, except if you feel that you don't know anything, not about writing or life or your dreams. This feeling of not knowing where to start used to leave my page blank. Until I decided to start writing about what I don't know. I use questions to explore what I don't know, what I'd like to know, and later what I have learned. A good writing exercise is to examine a picture that you are familiar with, maybe of you, your friends/family, a house or room you've lived in or visited, anything. Write down all the things you know about the picture just by looking at it. "I was wearing a white dress." "The room has two french doors." Then write down all of the things you can't know simply by looking at the photo. What was the temperature in the room/outside? When was the house built? Who was hungry right before taking the picture? Who hates taking pictures? Explore all of the emotional, ideological possibilities that the photo holds. Start with questions and then imagine the answers.

* ALWAYS, ALWAYS CARRY SOMETHING TO WRITE DOWN THE STORIES THAT ARE WAITING FOR YOU TO FIND THEM.

Everything in and around your life has a really interesting story if you listen closely enough. Pay attention to all of the poems that already exist around you.

* CREATE INSPIRATION.

The moment I stopped waiting for inspiration was the moment I started to write more. Inspiration is not some rare Pokémon that can only be caught by the best trainer. Inspiration is the music in the morning birds, car honks, sirens, and street construction. What are the life rhythms around you? What do they make you feel? That's an inspiration you created. Inspiration is certain smells that remind us of people, places, and experiences. Take a deep breath. Where does the scent transport you? What does the smell of nothing smell like to you? That's an inspiration you created. Someone is speaking really loudly on the bus. Borrow a line from their conversation and make it the first sentence in a new story. That's an inspiration you created. Don't wait for inspiration to find you. Inspiration is waiting for you to create it.



MARILYN SINGER



For me, a poem can begin with a form, an idea, an image, a dream, a question I need to answer, or something else. My process of writing reverso poems begins with form. A reverso is a poem in two parts. The second part reverses the lines from the first part, with changes only in punctuation and capitalization, and it has to say something different from the first part. *Mirror Mirror* and *Follow Follow* are my collections of reversos based on fairy tales; *Echo Echo* is based on Greek myths. When I decide to create a reverso, I have to:

1. Find a narrative that will fit that form.
2. Look for two sides to a story—that could mean one character at two points in time, a character with two points of view, or two characters, usually with different points of view.
3. Find lines that can be flipped so that the meaning changes. I often write poems by hand on paper, but I have to write the reversos on a computer in order to shift around lines more easily and see what makes sense.

**WRITING REVERSOS IS A GREAT WORD GAME!
TRY IT AND HAVE FUN!**



BRIAN MCCANN

HAVE FUN AND PLAY!

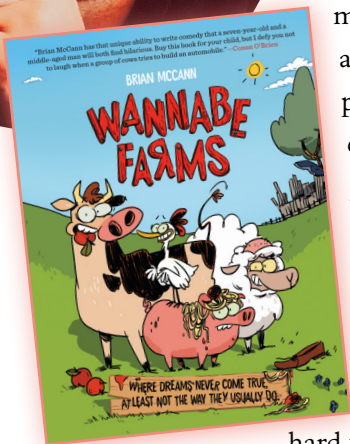
I love playing with words and language when writing, especially when making poetry funny, because things are funnier when they rhyme. I'll prove it to you. Let's say you have a dog, and your dog is sick because it just ate a cake that you worked hard on all day. It was a cake you made as a gift for your grandmother on her eightieth birthday. It was very important to you, and now your heart is broken because your

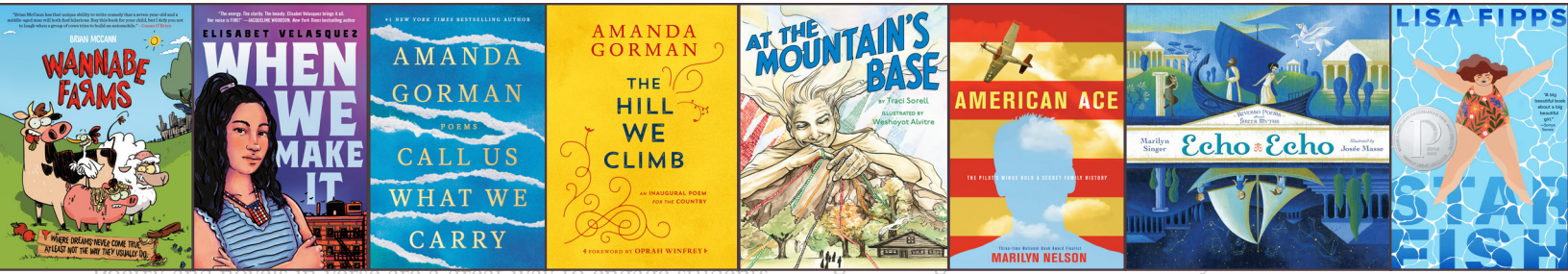
hard work is destroyed. It's a sad story, because not only are you emotionally crushed, but your poor grandmother has no cake for her birthday, and your dog is in pain.

But let's look at that same information when you make it rhyme...

Sorry, dear Grandma,
Your cake is no more.
It's inside the stomach
Of my black Labrador.
It was clearly delicious
He loved it, that's true.
But now he's moaning and stinky,
And there's no gift for you.

Boom! You get all the information delivered quickly and in detail. The reader is engaged and wants to see how it ends. You slip in a little joke about your dog passing gas. AND you let sweet Grandma know that she's out of luck and not getting a gift. It's a win-win-win-win-win! So next time you get writer's block, try making your poem funny with rhyme!





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—LISA FIPPS,
AUTHOR OF STARFISH

“Poetry is meant to be heard.”

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CLICK HERE TO DISCOVER MORE POETRY!

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AUTHOR OF WHEN WE MAKE IT

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