

THE CLARK CONNECTS

WELL VERSED

INTRODUCTION

Poetry and art make a perfect pair. Words and images may capture the human experience in different ways, but both poets and artists appeal to our imaginations and emotions with their creations. Some of the works in the Clark's collection connect directly to both the poetic and visual arts: Joseph Mallord William Turner often wrote poetry to accompany his paintings, while some of Katsushika Hokusai's woodcut prints and Édouard Manet's lithographs illustrated poems popular when these artists were working. Whatever order they come in, both language and visuals can inspire people to reflect, dream, and express themselves in new ways!



Katsushika Hokusai, *Moonflowers in Snow*. From a *Kyōka Poetry Album*, 1817. Woodcut on paper. Gift of Dr. David Bierenbaum, 1997, 1997.14.3.

HOW TO PLAY



Art-inspired poems are often associated with the ancient Greek concept of *ekphrasis*, or the practice of using words to create a vivid description of a particular image. Beyond crafting descriptions, there are many different ways to respond to art through poetry. Get to know some popular poetic forms—limericks, concrete poetry, and tautograms—as you explore these portraits, still lifes, and genre paintings. You can always turn to the Clark's [digital collection](#) to spark your verse-writing ventures.

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Limericks

A limerick is a clever, funny, or teasing five-line poem. Typically, the first, second, and fifth lines of a limerick rhyme and share the same number of syllables, while the third and fourth lines take the form of a short couplet.

Because most limericks recount ridiculous anecdotes about particular people, portraits can provide a great source of inspiration for playful poems. What silly scenarios can you imagine for these figures?

Choose a painting that speaks to your heart

And your limerick's easy to start.

Then write two lines that match,

for a short second batch,

And an end rhyming with the first part.



Thomas Gainsborough, *Elizabeth and Thomas Linley*, c. 1768. Oil on canvas. Acquired by Sterling and Francine Clark, 1943.

What rhymes with Linley? This brother and sister were both skilled musicians. Thomas even struck up a friendship with young Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.



Guillaume Bodinier, *Théodore Jubin*, 1826. Oil on canvas. Acquired by the Clark, 1985, 1985.12.

There once was a tourist in Naples . . .
The artist likely painted this portrait when Theodore Jubin visited him in Italy.

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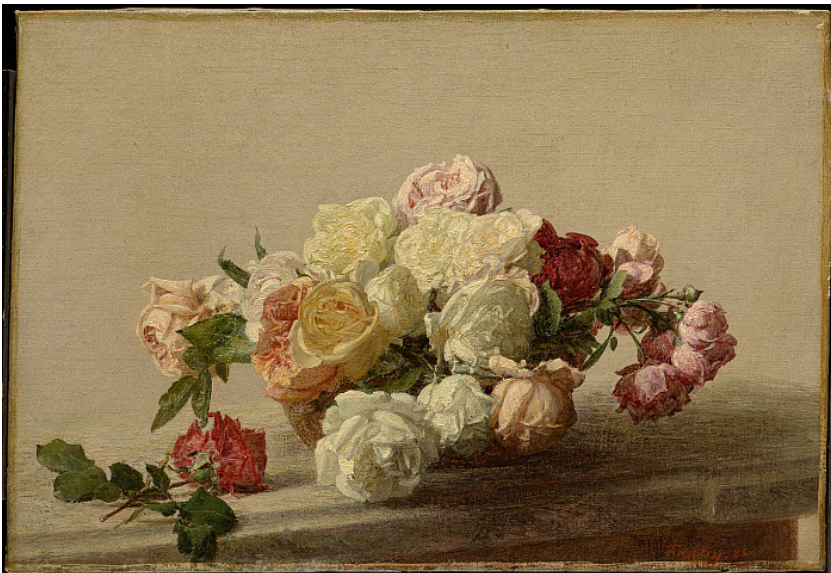
Concrete Poetry

Concrete poetry involves arranging words on a page to create an image that relates to the subject of the poem. It's like drawing with letters! These two still life paintings feature objects with distinctive shapes that are perfect for concrete poems. Start writing by thinking of phrases that best describe your object, and then enjoy experimenting with the colors and spacing of the text to make your poetic picture come to life.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Onions*, 1881. Oil on canvas. Acquired by Sterling and Francine Clark, 1922, 1955.588.

Sterling
Clark
said
this painting
of onions and garlic
was his favorite work by
Pierre-Auguste Renoir.
Which piece of produce
in this tabletop pile
catches your eye?



Henry Fantin-Latour, *Bowl of Roses on a Marble Table*, 1885. Acquired by Sterling and Francine Clark, 1936, 1955.920.

In just over thirty years,
Henry Fantin-Latour
created more than
five hundred
flower
paintings,
including
the
one
that
you
see
here.

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Tautograms

A tautogram is a short, alliterative poem in which every word begins with the same letter.

Pick a painting with a one-word title, and let that word guide your tautogram. How will you describe what's happening in the painting using only words that start with that letter?

Transforming
titles to tautograms—
totally thrilling. Too tempting
to try.



Francis William Edmonds, *Sparking*, 1839. Oil on canvas. Acquired by Sterling and Francine Clark, 1943, 1955.916.



Charles-Émile Jacque, *Poultry*, c. 1855-60. Oil on canvas. Acquired by Sterling and Francine Clark, 1940, 1955.779.

“S” IS FOR
SPARKING.

As a steady fire sets the space aglow, this suitor feels stirred to “spark” a conversation with his special someone. This scene’s sweet sensibility seems suitable for inspiring a sentimental poem.

“P” IS FOR
POULTRY.

In addition to painting and providing for his plethora of poultry, Charles-Émile Jacque also produced a 350-page publication about them. Perhaps he might have prized your poultry poetry too?

OTHER WAYS TO PLAY

Now that you've sampled some specific poetic styles, why not finish by experimenting with poems that explore particular themes? These three genres of poetry can be written in whatever form seems right to you. Rhyming, free verse, shaped, or a little bit of everything . . . the choice is yours!



Pastoral Poetry

Pastoral poetry celebrates rural, natural areas and the people who live, work, and play there. Choose a landscape painting set in the countryside and pen a pastoral poem of your own. How can you use your words to create a sense of place like the artist does?

George Inness, *A Pastoral*, c. 1882-85. Oil on canvas. Gift of Frank and Katherine Martucci, 2013, 2013.1.3.



Epic Poetry

Epic poetry immortalizes the experiences and deeds of heroic figures. Pick an image of a real or imaginary person and write an epic poem imagining their adventures, big or small. What did they dream about? What were their greatest triumphs? Most epic poems are spectacularly long, so write as much as you'd like.

Utagawa Kunisada, *A Samurai of Great Quality Honored By Other Samurai* (detail), color woodcut on paper. Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Jasmine Saunders, 1984, 1984.101.



Found Poetry

Like making a collage with words, creating "found poetry" usually involves finding unexpectedly beautiful, humorous, or memorable phrases in text that someone else wrote. Select several works of art by the same artist, and try to combine the titles into a poem. What meaning can you create by connecting these phrases together? What words will you add? What words will you leave out?

Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Rockets and Blue Lights (Close at Hand) To Warn Steamboats of Shoal Water*, 1840. Oil on canvas. Acquired by Sterling and Francine Clark, 1932, 1955.37.

Poetry is made to be shared and spoken! Compile your finished poems into a printed or handwritten book, stage a virtual poetry reading, or email us your writing at education@clarkart.edu.

WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FOM YOU!