

# POETRY THERAPY SEMINAR GUIDE

*CONQUERING ADVERSITY THROUGH VERSE*



A LESSON PLAN  
CREATED BY  
TODD FRIES

# **WHAT IS POETRY THERAPY?**

**Poetry therapy is an interactive process with three essential components: the literature, the trained facilitator, and the client(s). A trained facilitator selects a poem or other form of written or spoken media to serve as a catalyst and evoke feeling responses for discussion. The interactive process helps the individual to develop on emotional, cognitive, and social levels. The focus is on the person's reaction to the literature, never losing sight of the primary objective-the psychological health and well-being of the client. Through reading and responding to classic and contemporary poems, participants in the healing process of poetry therapy deepen into paradox, possibility and potential. Writing original poems that at once speak to the unique and the universal is also part of the healing power of poetry and poetry therapy.**

**The poetry therapist creates a gentle, non-threatening atmosphere where people feel safe and are invited to share feelings openly and honestly. The facilitator chooses literature that will be effective therapeutically; this requires training, knowledge of literature, and clinical skills. Poetry Therapy groups are run by writers, writer facilitators, psychological therapists, health professionals such as occupational therapists or nurses, social workers and teachers.**

**Poetry Therapy has a broad range of applications with people of all ages and is used for health and maintenance, as well as with individuals requiring treatment for various illnesses and conditions. Examples of these are veterans, substance abusers, adolescents, the learning disabled, families with problems, prisoners in rehabilitation, the frail elderly, the physically challenged, and survivors of violence, abuse and incest. The literature and case studies provide evidence that poetry therapy is an effective and powerful tool with many different populations.**

**-Adapted from the *National Coalition of Creative Arts Therapies Association* website <http://www.nccata.org/index.htm>**

# **GOALS OF POETRY THERAPY**

**The goals of poetry therapy are:**

- To develop accuracy and understanding in perceiving self and others;**
- To develop creativity, self-expression, and greater self-esteem;**
- To strengthen interpersonal skills and communication skills;**
- To ventilate overpowering emotions and release tension;**
- To find new meaning through new ideas, insights, and information; and**
- To promote change and increase coping skills and adaptive functions.**

# **ROOTS OF POETRY THERAPY**

Poetry Therapy, or poetry which is used for healing and personal growth, may be traced back to primitive man, who used religious rites in which shamans and witchdoctors chanted poetry for the well-being of the tribe or individual. It is documented that as far back as the fourth millennium B.C.E. in ancient Egypt, words were written on papyrus and then dissolved into a solution so that the words could be physically ingested by the patient and take effect as quickly as possible. It is also recorded that around 1030 B.C.E., the music of a shepherd boy named David soothed the "savage breast" of King Saul.

Historically, the first Poetry Therapist on record was a Roman physician by the name of Soranus in the first century A.D., who prescribed tragedy for his manic patients and comedy for those who were depressed. It is not surprising that Apollo is the god of poetry, as well as medicine, since medicine and the arts were historically entwined.

For many centuries the link between poetry and medicine remained obscure. It is of interest to note that Pennsylvania Hospital, the first hospital in the United States, which was founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1751, employed many ancillary treatments for their mental patients, including reading, writing and publishing of their writings. Dr. Benjamin Rush, called the "Father of American Psychiatry", introduced music and literature as effective ancillary treatments. Poemwriting was an activity of the patients, who published their work in *The Illuminator*, their own newspaper.

In 1928, Eli Greifer, an inspired poet who was a lawyer and pharmacist by profession, began a campaign to show that a poem's didactic message has healing power. Poetry was Eli's passion, and he gave his time and energy to this life-long interest. In the 1950's Greifer started a "poemtherapy" group at Creedmore State Hospital. In 1959, Greifer facilitated a poetry therapy group at Cumberland Hospital with two supervising psychiatrists, Dr. Jack J. Leedy and Dr. Sam Spector. Although Greifer died in 1966, this remarkable humanitarian played a key role in the development of what we now call "Poetry Therapy".

Dr. Leedy published the first definitive book on poetry therapy in 1969, *Poetry Therapy*, which includes essays by many of the early pioneers in the field. About this time more and more people in the helping professions began to use poetry integrated with group process. Among them was Arthur Lerner, Ph.D. of Los Angeles who founded the Poetry Therapy Institute in the 1970's on the west coast and in 1976 authored *Poetry in the Therapeutic Experience*. Finally, in 1980, a meeting was called to bring together those active in the field working all over the country to formulate guidelines for training and certification in poetry therapy and form what is now called the National Association for Poetry Therapy.

-History adapted from the National Association of Poetry Therapy website <http://www.poetrytherapy.org>

# **THREE MODELS/METHODS OF POETRY THERAPY**

## **1. Receptive/prescriptive component involving the introduction of literature, poetry and song into therapy**

*One of the most common techniques used in poetry therapy is reading a poem or playing a song for a group and inviting reactions. The introduction of a poem or song to a group could be connected with the content of the session or simply to allow group members to make an emotional connection to the work. Poems and songs often serve as a catalyst for group members to reveal their own goals, emotions and ideals. Copies of the poem or song lyrics should be disseminated to the group for visual reference.*

## **2. Expressive/creative component involving the use of creative writing in therapy**

*The use of creative writing is another technique commonly employed by poetry therapy facilitators. Creative writing provides the client a means to express feelings and gain a sense of stability and self-awareness. Poetry therapy facilitators can use free-writing assignments or pre-structured writing forms.*

## **3. Symbolic/ceremonial component involving the use of metaphors, rituals, and storytelling in therapy**

*Metaphors both in preexisting literature and creative writing are often used in therapeutic capacities. In its most basic form, a metaphor is something that stands for something else; metaphors may stand for emotions, actions and beliefs. Poetry therapy facilitators commonly employ metaphors to help clients express and understand the connection between internal conflict and external reality.*

**-Method descriptions adapted from *Poetry Therapy: Theory and Practice*, Nicholas Mazza (2003)**

# POETRY THERAPY SEMINAR

The use of poetry in groups is extensive. Research shows that poetry therapy, through the use of pre-existing works and creative writing, helps group members develop sensitivity to group function and serves as a catalyst for advancing group process.

The following is a basic structure of a poetry therapy seminar which uses a mixture of: 1) receptive/prescriptive exercises, 2) expressive/creative exercises and 3) symbolic/ceremonial exercises (as discussed above). The seven week/session format is based on a poetry therapy group model developed by Nicholas Mazza, Ph.D., R.P.T. (Registered Poetry Therapist). This basic poetry seminar structure is designed to be used in conjunction with most psychological practice models. The seminar and activities are outlined for the group facilitator with the caution that timing, appropriateness and consistency with clinical purpose must be considered in its implementation.

The poetry therapy seminar schedule and activities should be set-up as follows:

The group should convene for one session a week, for seven weeks. The group facilitator should ideally allow 1 – 2 hours for each session. Each session follows an identical structure:

- 1) the session begins with a **warm-up activity**, 2) followed by a **reflection activity** and 3) concludes with a **group activity**

Warm-up activities consist of different forms and methods of creative writing to get group members' minds thinking, imaginations working and emotions flowing. Reflection activities employ pre-existing poems or pop music to be used by the group leader to facilitate discussion. Finally, group activities are comprised of collaborative poems, whereby the group creates a poem with each member having the opportunity to contribute lines. Copies of the collaborative poem should be disseminated to the group and may be used for discussion at the beginning of the following session.

Each week is broken into its own color-coded section. Every section starts with a form to be used by the facilitator/therapist for outlining goals of the upcoming session. The activities for the week and directions for the activities follow. Each section concludes with a leader report form which facilitators can use to chart group members' progress and make notes about the session's outcome and the session plan for the next week.









# WEEK ONE

## POETRY THERAPY - LEADER REPORT FORM

**LEADER:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **GROUP:** \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTES ABOUT GROUP MEMBERS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**WARM-UP ACTIVITY NOTES:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PRE-EXISTING POEM USED (TITLE):** \_\_\_\_\_

**WHY?:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**GENERAL IMPRESSIONS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PLAN FOR NEXT WEEK (TOPICS, QUESTIONS, ETC.):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**MISCELLANEOUS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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# WEEK TWO

## WARM-UP ACTIVITY: SENTENCE STEMS

“Sentence Stems” are a useful tool to facilitate self-expression, identify problems and clarify situations. Sentence stem completion exercises are very simple, and will only take a few minutes to do. Facilitators should provide the group with a list of sentence stems and ask individual group members to write an ending to the sentence as they see fit. Group members should try and complete the sentences with the first thought that comes into their mind. Facilitators may choose to use the same sentence many times and ask group members to finish the sentence stems in different ways or the facilitator may give group members a list of different sentence stems. Either way, sentence stems allow group members to explore feelings while providing structure and a positive direction. Common generic sentence stems include:

If you knew me...	I am most happy when...	I believe...	When I am alone...
Today, I am...	Tomorrow, I...	Love is...	Happiness is...
If you said yes...	I am most sad when...	Fear is...	I am hurt when...
Despair is...	I keep on because...	I stand for...	I wish...
If you said no...	Yesterday, I was...	Anger is...	I am afraid of...

Facilitators should allow 15 minutes for the exercise. When finished, group members should be encouraged to share their work with the group. The exercise should conclude with a 25 minute group discussion about the exercise.

-Activity adapted from *Wishes, Lies and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry*, K. Koch (1970)

### NOTES:

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# WEEK TWO

## GROUP ACTIVITY: ACROSTIC

Another activity that lends itself to collaborative form is the “Acrostic.” The acrostic is similar to the alpha poem, only with the acrostic, the vertical letters written on the chalkboard should spell out a word. The facilitator should choose a word that is relevant to the session. For example, an acrostic using the word “optimism” may be set up as follows:

O...  
P...  
T...  
I...  
M...  
I...  
S...  
M...

The facilitator may use more than one word in a large group. Each group member should then take a turn writing a line of the poem, using the letter to create the first word in each line. The facilitator should write the lines on the board as the group members recite them. Once the alpha poem is finished, the group should title the poem. The facilitator should allow 30 minutes for a discussion of the group process and feelings expressed by group members in the poem. The facilitator should make copies of the poem and distribute the poem to the group at the beginning of the next week’s session.

- Activity adapted from *Therapeutic Art Directives*, Susan Makin, Cathy Machiodi (2000)

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# WEEK TWO

## POETRY THERAPY - LEADER REPORT FORM

**LEADER:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **GROUP:** \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTES ABOUT GROUP MEMBERS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**WARM-UP ACTIVITY NOTES:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PRE-EXISTING POEM USED (TITLE):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PLAN FOR NEXT WEEK (TOPICS, QUESTIONS, ETC.):** \_\_\_\_\_

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# WEEK THREE

## GROUP ACTIVITY: CUTTING STRIPS

Every now and then a trip away from the classroom can stimulate thought and inspire the group. “Cutting Strips” is an activity which begins with a field trip outside of the classroom to a designated location. Facilitators should choose a locale within a short distance from the classroom as the activity concludes with some classroom work. Any location will work, from a park to a parking lot. Ask the group to find a spot to sit and observe (observe includes hearing, seeing and feeling) their surroundings for 5 minutes. When the observation period ends, ask them to write 3 things they observed. For example a group member could write “someone down there is chopping wood” or “the valley hides under a gray blanket.” After the group members have finished writing their observations, everyone should return to the classroom. The facilitator should then pass out 3 strips of paper to each group member. The group members are to write one observation on each strip. The facilitator then collects the strips and reads the contents of each strip to the group. The strips should then be placed faced up in the center of the group and are to be collectively ordered to create a group poem. People may volunteer suggestions as to how the lines should be ordered or the facilitator can instruct the group to take turns. Often, having one’s line chosen by another when ordering the poem gives group members a sense of satisfaction and reassurance. When all the lines have been placed, the facilitator should read the completed poem aloud and the group should title the poem. A discussion of the poem and process should follow. The facilitator should allow 45 minutes to 1 hour for this activity.

- Activity adapted from *Poetry Activities – a Five Senses Approach*,  
<http://curriculalessons.suite101.com>, James Parsons (2009)

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# WEEK THREE

## POETRY THERAPY - LEADER REPORT FORM

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**NOTES ABOUT GROUP MEMBERS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**WARM-UP ACTIVITY NOTES:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PRE-EXISTING POEM USED (TITLE):** \_\_\_\_\_

**WHY?:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PLAN FOR NEXT WEEK (TOPICS, QUESTIONS, ETC.):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**MISCELLANEOUS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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# WEEK FOUR

## GROUP ACTIVITY: GOAL CLARIFICATION EXERCISE

The “Goal Clarification Exercise” asks group members to write about goals they have and what has gotten in their way of achieving their goals. The facilitator should make sure group members can include environmental or situational impediments, as well as distortions in their. The facilitator should give group members 15 minutes to list their goals and impediments. When group members have created a comprehensive list they will be asked to write a group poem in which they imagine ways they can overcome these obstacles. Often, members in specialized groups will have similar goals (eg. staying sober, overcoming abuse, overcoming depression, etc.) or similar impediments (eg. harmful outside influences, self-esteem, etc.). The facilitator may offer an opening line to get the group poem started. Taking turns, group members are to contribute dyads (2 lines) to the poem, one line about their goals and one about their impediments. The group poem setting provides members different ways to view their obstacles and impediments and possible ways to achieve their goals. When everyone has contributed to the poem, the poem should be read aloud and titled. A discussion regarding goals, impediments and methods to help group members achieve their goals would be beneficial. A general discussion of the poem and the group process would also be appropriate. Facilitators should allow 45 minutes to 1 hour for this activity.

- Activity adapted from *Poetry as a tool of cognitively based practice*, The Arts and Psychotherapy, Volume 33, Issue 3 (2006)

### NOTES:

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# WEEK FOUR

## POETRY THERAPY - LEADER REPORT FORM

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**NOTES ABOUT GROUP MEMBERS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**WARM-UP ACTIVITY NOTES:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PRE-EXISTING POEM USED (TITLE):** \_\_\_\_\_

**WHY?:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**GENERAL IMPRESSIONS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PLAN FOR NEXT WEEK (TOPICS, QUESTIONS, ETC.):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**MISCELLANEOUS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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# WEEK FIVE

## WARM-UP ACTIVITY: TALISMANS

Writing from an object's perspective can be a useful tool in therapeutic writing. Using objects can help stimulate writing and help people dive deep into areas of memory and experience. The "Talisman" activity aids group members in connecting with their senses. Many find writing through objects to be an easy and enjoyable task because it is not the author speaking, but the object. Facilitators should instruct group members to bring a talisman or small object with them to the session. The facilitator should instruct group members to write down what the object would have to say about its own inner strength. The writing need not take any particular form or structure. For example, if one's talisman is a ceramic figurine, it might say:

When I went into the kiln and was seared by the heat  
My copper became green and purple  
Like hard crystal rock.

I am strong, hardened in the fire  
With the age old green of the sea  
And the black and purple of the earth

There are more like me  
But we are all different  
Guarding our colors and strengths.

The activity helps illustrate how group members can project aspects of themselves onto objects. Facilitators should allot 40 to 45 minutes for the writing activity, sharing of poems and discussion to follow.

- Sample poem provided by and activity adapted from Angela Stoner in *Writing Works*, Gillie Bolton, Victoria Field, Kate Thompson (2006)

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# WEEK FIVE

## GROUP ACTIVITY: EXAGGERATED IRRATIONAL BELIEFS POEM

In the “Irrational Beliefs Poem,” group members are asked to write a poem that greatly exaggerates the force, intensity, and nature of irrational beliefs. First, the facilitator should ask group members to think about the event in his or her life that is causing them the most distress and create a list if necessary. Then, the facilitator should ask group members to consider the thoughts that are associated with this event and create a second list if necessary. Lastly, the facilitator should ask group members to imagine they actually *are* the belief. They have them imagine what it must be like, and what these beliefs would *say* if they were alive. Facilitators should allow 15 to 20 minutes for group members to create their lists. The objective is to have the group write a poem from the perspective of the beliefs in the most forceful, exaggerated manner possible. Each group member should offer a dyad (two lines) or more if they wish. The facilitator may offer the first two lines to get the group started. When the poem is completed, it should be read aloud, titled and can serve as an effective catalyst for a discussion about the content of the beliefs. Often, by writing from this exaggerated perspective, clients will start to question the veracity of their beliefs. Further, the irrational beliefs poem activity helps group members challenge their problems by looking at them in a more detached, objective manner.

- Activity adapted from *Extending the Conversation*, Family Therapy Networker, D. Epston (1994)

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# WEEK FIVE

## POETRY THERAPY - LEADER REPORT FORM

**LEADER:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **GROUP:** \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTES ABOUT GROUP MEMBERS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**WARM-UP ACTIVITY NOTES:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PRE-EXISTING POEM USED (TITLE):** \_\_\_\_\_

**WHY?:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**GENERAL IMPRESSIONS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PLAN FOR NEXT WEEK (TOPICS, QUESTIONS, ETC.):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**MISCELLANEOUS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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# WEEK SIX

## WARM-UP ACTIVITY: PANTOUM

“Pantoums” are an over 500 year old Malayan form of poetry with Persian and Chinese influence. Pantoums are composed of four verses of four line stanzas (quatrains). However, a pantoum only requires the writer to create eight different lines and thus contains refrains (repeated lines). Because a pantoum gradually builds on itself, a poem develops uncensored and before the writer even realizes it. The lines of a pantoum are repeated as follows: the second and fourth lines of the first stanza are repeated in their entirety as the first and third lines of the second stanza. Then the second and fourth lines of the second stanza are repeated as the first and third lines of the second stanza. This pattern repeats until the end of the poem. The way each line is used twice makes the poem wrap itself around in a circle, beginning and ending with the same line. Allow 45 minutes for writing, sharing and discussion. A pantoum looks like following:

### Venus Escapes

Venus escapes  
From shimmering stars  
And the moon’s silver cape  
Beneath the glimmer of Mars

From shimmering stars  
The wind swirls and weaves  
Beneath the glimmer of Mars  
Chasing the leaves

The wind swirls and weaves  
Around Saturn’s rings  
Chasing the leaves  
Settled upon butterfly wings

Around Saturn’s rings  
And the moon’s silver cape  
Settled upon butterfly wings  
Venus escapes

### **Stanza 1**

Line 1  
Line 2  
Line 3  
Line 4

### **Stanza 2**

Line 5 (repeat line 2 in stanza 1)  
Line 6 (new line)  
Line 7 (repeat line 4 in stanza 1)  
Line 8 (new line)

### **Stanza 3**

Line 9 (repeat line 2 in stanza 2)  
Line 10 (new line)  
Line 11 (repeat line 4 in stanza 2)  
Line 12 (new line)

### **Final Stanza**

Line 13 (repeat line 2 in stanza 3)  
Line 14 (repeat line 3 in stanza 1)  
Line 15 (repeat line 4 in stanza 3)  
Line 16 (repeat line 1 in stanza 1)

- Sample pantoum from <http://www.writespot.org>

- Activity adapted from *Write from the Heart*, Leslea Newman (2003)

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# WEEK SIX

## POETRY THERAPY - LEADER REPORT FORM

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**NOTES ABOUT GROUP MEMBERS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**WARM-UP ACTIVITY NOTES:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PRE-EXISTING POEM USED (TITLE):** \_\_\_\_\_

**WHY?:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**GENERAL IMPRESSIONS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PLAN FOR NEXT WEEK (TOPICS, QUESTIONS, ETC.):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**MISCELLANEOUS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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# WEEK SEVEN

## WARM-UP ACTIVITY: HAIKU

“Haiku” is a traditional Japanese form from the eighth century that can serve therapeutic purposes today. The aim of the Haiku is to absorb oneself into nature and create a ‘haiku moment,’ a moment of absolute intensity in which the poet’s grasp of his intuition is complete and the image he describes lives its own life. A haiku moment occurs when, for example, we happen to see a beautiful sunset or lovely flowers and are so delighted that we merely stand still. The haiku focuses on what is occurring in the present and prevents worrying about the past or dreading the future. A haiku consists of seventeen syllables: 5 in the first line, 7 in the second line and 5 in the third line. A traditional Haiku looks like:

A single petal	5 syllables
Of the cherry blossom falls	7 syllables
Loud mountain silence	5 syllables

When group members have completed their haiku, facilitators should have group members pass their work to another group member. Each group member is to read the new haiku and construct a second haiku building on the first. When group members are finished writing their second haiku, they should be encouraged to share their works with the group. Facilitators should allow 45 minutes for writing, sharing and discussion.

- Activity adapted from *West meets East: Processes and Outcomes of Psychotherapy and Haiku/ Senryu Poetry*, Robert Deluty, *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, Vol. 15, 4, Summer (2002)

### NOTES:

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# WEEK SEVEN

## GROUP ACTIVITY: KNOWING AND BELIEVING

The seminar's concluding exercise should leave the group inspired, hopeful and ready to take on life's challenges. It is important for group members to truly believe their newfound or developing rational beliefs. A group member may believe something to be true theoretically or intellectually, but may not believe it to be true on an emotional level. Thus, the "Knowing and Believing" poem can be useful in this regard, as emotionally evocative language can help group members develop a deeper sense of belief. The facilitator should ask the group to write a poem in which they work hard at convincing themselves as to the veracity of their new beliefs. The facilitator should tell the members they are writing to an important group of people, such as congress, family, a probation officer or whichever body or figure may be relevant to the group. Visualizing that their fate depends upon the degree to which they are convincing helps the group work towards developing a sense of trust and true belief about newly adopted cognitions. Taking turns, Group members should contribute dyads using as much emotion and passion as possible. When everyone has contributed to the poem, the poem should be read aloud and titled. A discussion regarding group members' new beliefs and realizations should follow. The facilitator should make copies of the poem before the seminar concludes as a means of helping group members integrate their new beliefs and as a reminder of what group members should continue to work toward. A general discussion of the poem and the group process would also be appropriate. Facilitators should allow 1 hour for this activity.

- Activity adapted from *Poetry as a tool of cognitively based practice*, The Arts and Psychotherapy, Volume 33, Issue 3 (2006)

**NOTES:** \_\_\_\_\_

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# WEEK SEVEN

## POETRY THERAPY - LEADER REPORT FORM

**LEADER:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **GROUP:** \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTES ABOUT GROUP MEMBERS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**WARM-UP ACTIVITY NOTES:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PRE-EXISTING POEM USED (TITLE):** \_\_\_\_\_

**WHY?:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**COMMENTS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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# **SUGGESTED POEMS FOR REFLECTION ACTIVITIES**

## **22 POEMS MOST OFTEN USED IN PRACTICE**

- 1. “The Journey” by Mary Oliver**
- 2. “Autobiography in Five Short Chapters” by Portia Nelson**
- 3. “The Armful” by Robert Frost**
- 4. “The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam”**
- 5. “If I Should Cast Off This Tattered Coat” by Stephen Crane**
- 6. “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost**
- 7. “Self-improvement Program” by Judith Viorst**
- 8. “Variation on a Theme” by Denise Levertov**
- 9. “The Man in the Glass” by Elton Evans**
- 10. “I Knew This Kid” by James Kavanaugh**
- 11. “Marks” by Linda Pastan**
- 12. “The Truth in 1963” by Edgar Allen Imhoff**
- 13. “Talking to Grief” by Denise Levertov**
- 14. “Message” by Carol Bernstein**
- 15. “This Is Just to Say” By William Carlos Williams**
- 16. “Impasse” by Langston Hughes**
- 17. “I Can’t Go On” by Dory Previn**
- 18. “One Art” by Elizabeth Bishop**
- 19. “Swineherd” by Eilean N. Chuilleanin**
- 20. “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” by William Wordsworth**
- 21. “A Ballad of Dreamland by Algemon” by Charles Swineburne**
- 22. “The Summer Day” by Mary Oliver**

Poem list from *Poetry Therapy: Interface of the Arts and Psychology*,

**Nicholas Mazza (2002)**

### The Journey

One day you finally knew  
what you had to do, and began,  
though the voices around you  
kept shouting  
their bad advice –  
though the whole house  
began to tremble  
and you felt the old tug  
at your ankles.  
"Mend my life!"  
each voice cried.  
But you didn't stop.  
You knew what you had to do,  
though the wind pried  
with its stiff fingers  
at the very foundations,  
though their melancholy  
was terrible.  
It was already late  
enough, and a wild night,  
and the road full of fallen  
branches and stones.  
But little by little,  
as you left their voices behind,  
the stars began to burn  
through the sheets of clouds,  
and there was a new voice  
which you slowly  
recognized as your own,  
that kept you company  
as you strode deeper and deeper  
into the world,  
determined to do  
the only thing you could do –  
determined to save  
the only life you could save.

- Mary Oliver -

### The Armful

For every parcel I stoop down to seize  
I lose some other off my arms and knees,  
And the whole pile is slipping, bottles, buns,  
Extremes too hard to comprehend at once  
Yet nothing I should care to leave behind.  
With all I have to hold with~ hand and mind  
And heart, if need be, I will do my best.  
To keep their building balanced at my breast.  
I crouch down to prevent them as they fall;  
Then sit down in the middle of them all.  
I had to drop the armful in the road  
And try to stack them in a better load.

- Robert Frost -

### Autobiography in Five Short Chapters

I  
I walk down the street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk  
I fall in.  
I am lost ... I am helpless.  
It isn't my fault.  
It takes me forever to find a way out.

II  
I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I pretend I don't see it.  
I fall in again.  
I can't believe I am in the same place  
but, it isn't my fault.  
It still takes a long time to get out.

III  
I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I see it is there.  
I still fall in ... it's a habit.  
my eyes are open  
I know where I am.  
It is my fault.  
I get out immediately.

IV  
I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I walk around it.

V  
I walk down another street.

- Portia Nelson -

### If I Should Cast Off This Tattered Coat

If I should cast off this tattered coat,  
And go free into the mighty sky;  
If I should find nothing there  
But a vast blue,  
Echoless, ignorant –  
What then?

- Stephen Crane -

### The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;  
Then took the other, as just as fair  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that, the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,  
And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.  
I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
two roads diverged in a wood, and I –  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

- Robert Frost -

### Talking to Grief

Ah, Grief, I should not treat you  
like a homeless dog  
who comes to the back door  
for a crust, for a meatless bone.  
I should trust you.

I should coax you  
into the house and give you  
your own corner,  
a worn mat to lie on,  
your own water dish.

You think I don't know you've been living  
under my porch.  
You long for your real place to be readied  
before winter comes. You need  
your name,  
your collar and tag. You need  
the right to warn off intruders,  
to consider  
my house your own  
and me your person  
and yourself  
my own dog.

- Denise Levertov -

### The Summer Day

Who made the world?  
Who made the swan, and the black bear?  
Who made the grasshopper?  
This grasshopper, I mean—  
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,  
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,  
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down,  
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.  
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.  
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?

- Mary Oliver -

### One Art

The art of losing isn't hard to master;  
so many things seem filled with the intent  
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster  
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:  
places, and names, and where it was you meant  
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or  
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,  
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.  
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture  
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident  
the art of losing's not too hard to master  
though it may look like (*Wrice* it!) like disaster.

- Elizabeth Bishop -

### Swineherd

When all this is over, said the swineherd,  
I mean to retire, where  
Nobody conversation is mainly about the weather.  
I intend to learn how to make coffee, at least as well  
As the Portuguese lay-sister in the kitchen  
And polish the brass fenders everyday.  
I want to lie awake at night  
Listening to Cream Crawling to the top of the jug  
And the water laying soft in the cistern.  
I want to see an orchard where the trees grow in straight lines  
And the yellow fox finds shelter between the navy-blue trunks,  
Where it gets dark early in summer  
And the apple-blossom is allowed to wither on the bough.

- Eilean Ni Chuilleanain -

### I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.  
  
Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the milky way,  
They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay:  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.  
  
The waves beside them danced; but they  
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:  
A poet could not but be gay,  
In such a jocund company:  
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.

- William Wordsworth -

### Marks

My husband gives me an A  
for last night's supper,  
an incomplete for my ironing,  
a B plus in bed.  
My son says I am average,  
an average mother, but if  
I put my mind to it  
I could improve.  
My daughter believes  
in Pass/Fail and tells me  
I pass. Wait 'til they learn  
I'm dropping out.

- Linda Pastan -

### A Ballad of Dreamland by Algemon

I hid my heart in a nest of roses,  
Out of the sun's way, hidden apart;  
In a softer bed than the soft whiteness is,  
Under the roses I hid my heart.  
Why would it sleep not? why should it start,  
When never a leaf of the rose-tree stirred?  
What made sleep flutter his wings and part?  
Only the song of a secret bird.  
  
Lie still, I said, for the wind's wing closes,  
And mild leaves muffle the keen sun's dart;  
Lie still, for the wind on the warm seas dozes,  
And the wind is unquieter yet than thou art.  
Does a thought in thee still as a thorn's wound smart?  
Does the fang still fret thee of hope deferred?  
What bids the lips of thy sleep dispart?  
Only the song of a secret bird.  
  
The green land's name that a charm encloses,  
It never was writ in the traveller's chart,  
And sweet on its trees as the fruit that grows is,  
It never was sold in the merchant's mart.  
The swallows of dreams through its dim fields dart,  
And sleep's are the tunes in its tree-tops heard;  
No hound's note wakens the wildwood hart,  
Only the song of a secret bird.

- Charles Swineburne -

# SUGGESTED SONGS FOR REFLECTION ACTIVITIES

## Abuse/Sexual Abuse:

**The Little Girl** by John Michael Montgomery: “In this song the artist sings about a little girl who has a very abusive father who ends up killing himself and the girl's mother. This song paints a very intense picture of abuse which results in the girl getting "new parents" who love and care for her.”

**Luka** by Suzanne Vega: “In this song the artist sings about a little girl who is in a very abusive situation. The song focuses on how those around the girl have no idea of the horrors she faces every day.”

## Domestic Violence:

**Family Portrait** by Pink: “In this song the artist sings about a family that on the outside, seems as though things are perfect, but the reality is that the family is falling apart. Very emotional, sung from a child's view.” (This song is also good for teen issues in general.)

**Betterman** by Pearl Jam: “In this song the writer, Eddie Vedder, sings about his mother who he feels "settled" for a man who treated her terribly, fearing she would not find someone else.”

## Anger Management:

**St. Anger** by Metallica: “In this popular song Metallica delivers a very aggressive message through an incredibly aggressive song. The lyrics convey an interesting concept that "st. anger" is something hung around the singer's neck which is controlling his feelings, just like anger controls us sometimes. Watch out for explicit lyrics!”

**You Oughta Know** by Alanis Morissette: “In this song the artist sings about a personal experience of feeling angry at an ex-boyfriend for what he did to her. Very liberating, good example of someone getting their feelings out!”

## Grief & Loss

**Padriac My Prince** by Bright Eyes: “This very emotional song tells the tale of someone who lost his young baby brother by him drowning in a bathtub. This song paints a very personal and powerful picture of someone who is really struggling with the loss of someone. Incredible.”

**Fight** by The Cure: “In this encouraging song, the artist encourages that you fight, fight, fight to overcome the many unfair challenges of life. This song has provided many with inspiration.”

### Behavior Management:

**Just by Radiohead:** “In this song the artist sings about how we cannot blame our mistakes on other people, we must live with the consequences. We must accept responsibility for our actions.”

**Red by Chevelle:** “In this song, the artist sings about how terrible things happen when a person sees "red". This song can be used to discuss the value of managing your feelings before you yourself see red, and act out.”

### Depression:

**Misery by Soul Asylum:** “This is an interesting song about someone who seems to be surrounded by misery. He or she is so overwhelmed by it that he or she could "start a company...frustrated incorporated".”

**Fight by The Cure:** “In this encouraging song, the artist encourages that you fight, fight, fight to overcome the many unfair challenges of life. This song has provided many with inspiration.”

### Addiction/Alcoholism/Drug Use:

**Under the Bridge by the Red Hot Chili Peppers:** “In this popular song Anthony Kiedis sings about how when he was younger he would go "under the bridge" to meet with a drug dealer. In interviews he has talked about this being the lowest point of his life.”

**River of Deceit by Mad Season:** “In this song Layne Staley sings about his personal struggles with drug addiction.”

### Eating Disorders:

**Ana's Song by Silverchair:** “In this song the artist sings about a family that on the outside, seems as though things are perfect, but the reality is that the family is falling apart. Very emotional, sung from a child's view.”

**Paper Bag by Fiona Apple:** “In this song the artist sings "hunger hurts, but starving works", discussing how her situation led to an eating disorder.”

### Self Esteem

**Self-Esteem by The Offspring:** “In this song the artist sings about not having much self-confidence and being taken advantage of in a relationship. The narrator wishes things were different.”

**Believe in You by Amanda Marshall:** “In this song the artist sings words of encouragement, asking the listener to believe in themselves.”

Song list provided by <http://www.enterthefreudianslip.com>

# **REFLECTION ACTIVITY DISCUSSION PROMPTS**

- What does the poem mean to you?**
- Who is the speaker of the poem?**
- What circumstances gave rise to the poem?**
- What situation is presented?**
- Who or what is the audience?**
- What is the tone or mood of the poem?**
- What form, if any, does the poem take?**
- What is the meter of the poem? Does the poem have a rhyme scheme?**
- What is the argument, thesis or subject of the poem?**
- What tense(s) does the narrator employ?**
- How is form related to content?**
- How does the poem make use of setting?**
- What is the structure of the poem?**
- Are there key statements or conflicts in the poem that appear to be central to its meaning?**
- Can you see any ways in which the poem refers to, uses or relies on previous writing?**
- Is sound an important, active element of the poem?**
- Does the poem spring from an identifiable historical moment?**
- Does the poem speak from a specific culture?**
- Does the poem have its own vernacular?**
- Does the poem use imagery to achieve a particular effect?**
- Does the poem contain characters besides the narrator and explicit audience?**
- What kind of figurative language (similes, metaphors, personification), if any, does the poem use?**
- Where is the climax of the poem? Is there a climax?**
- If the poem is a question, what is the answer?**
- If the poem is an answer, what is the question?**
- What does the title suggest?**
- Does the poem use unusual words or use words in an unusual way?**
- What is the purpose of the poem? Persuasion? Catharsis?**
- What does the poem reveal about the narrator/author/audience?**

**Selected questions from *Modern American Poetry*, The Great Books Foundation (2002)**

# **GROUP ACTIVITY DISCUSSION PROMPTS**

**What should the poem be titled?**

**What emotions or feeling does the poem address?**

**Who is the speaker of the poem?**

**Who is the audience of the poem?**

**What do you think is the strongest line in the poem? Why?**

**What aspect of the poem are you still unhappy with? Why?**

**What surprised you most about the group poem poem?**

**What do you think is the one thing a reader is most apt to take away from the poem?**

**What is most memorable?**

**What do you believe is the heart of the poem?**

**Talk about the “group process.”**

**What worked and what didn't?**

**What are the positive and negative aspects of collaborating with a group rather than working on your own?**

**What was your greatest strength in the group? What lines did you contribute to the group poem? Why did you contribute those lines?**

**What imagery or metaphor was used in the poem?**

# RESOURCES

**National Association of Poetry Therapy (NAPT) –**  
<http://www.poetrytherapy.org>

**Lapidus – The Association for Literary Arts in Personal development –**  
<http://www.lapidus.org.uk>

**National Coalition of Arts Therapies Associations –**  
<http://www.ncata.com>

**The Center of Journal Therapy –**  
<http://www.journaltherapy.com>

**Literature, Arts and Medicine Database –**  
<http://endeavor.med.nyu.edu/lit-med-db/topview.html>

**Internet Poetry Archive –**  
<http://metlab.unc.edu/dykki/poetry>

**Poetry Society of America –**  
<http://www.poetrysociety.org>

**National Association for Literature Development –**  
<http://www.nald.org>

**Poetic Medicine –**  
<http://www.poeticmedicine.com>

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The first poem I ever wrote was an assignment from my second grade teacher Mrs. Mahoney, “A line can be a stair, A line can be the seat of a chair.” The assignment, a rhyming two-line poem describing what a line could be, was a drill designed to challenge its students to think abstractly and use their imaginations. I struggled with the assignment for a couple of days, straining my eyes and mind as I examined the world around me. From my juvenile viewpoint, I had a hard time conceptualizing a line as anything other than a simple mark on a page.

After laboring with the project for almost a week, and the due date approaching, I decided to ask Mrs. Mahoney for advice. She reached into her desk and pulled out a book of connect-the-dot exercises. I felt my intellectual capacity beyond that of connect-the-dot books, but she insisted that I take the book home and complete a few pages. As I connected the dots on page one, a scenic picture of a house with a patio developed. With each dot I connected and each subsequent line I drew, my perception began to change. It became clear that a line was more than simply a scrawl on a page, but an integral component to an elaborate illustration. I looked closely at the picture in front of me and could see lines everywhere: lines in the chair on the patio, lines on the steps of the house, lines all over! I turned in my poem the next day with a renewed outlook on perspective.

Mrs. Mahoney’s lessons in poetry and perspective have stuck with me to this day, twenty years removed from second grade. Having written more than two hundred poems in my personal journals, a second grade assignment has turned into my passion. I can still recite the numerous Shel Silverstein poems I memorized throughout my childhood, as if I were yet a student at Mountain Park Elementary School. *Where the Sidewalk Ends* and *A Light in the Attic* sit between *Leaves of Grass* and *The Wasteland* on my bookshelf. Using voices other than his own, Silverstein relates his life experience and lessons via a child’s eyes, imparting adult principles in ways that even a toddler can understand. Emulating his example, I too write from viewpoints other than my own, from a child in “The Stone” to a bird in “Spiro the Sparrow,” and even a scarecrow in “A Scarecrow Who’s Afraid of Crows.” (Original works available at Poetry.com) Writing from an alternate standpoint continually challenges me to empathize and anticipate others’ feelings. The practice of putting oneself in another’s shoes is just as relevant to writing effective poetry as it is to a lawyer representing a client.

My frame of reference has forever been expanded, not only in the way I write my own poetry, but also in the way I analyze. My ability to see other angles did not come without failure. I’ll never forget the sea of red pen that donned my essay on Poe’s “The Raven” as a UCLA freshman. I quickly learned that much of poetry cannot be interpreted at face value. Devices such as metaphor, imagery, and double entendre make poetry a complicated and unrestricted medium. Yet even with indefinite boundaries, a poem must use

word precision and ordered meter to convey its messages. There is a contradictory element to a poem's construction, boundless with exactness. In the margin of my essay, my professor suggested that I look beyond the literal definition of a raven toward a more profound meaning. I soon realized, just as there is more to a word than merely a grouping of letters, there is more to a bird than feathers and wings.

There are many reasons I write poetry. Primarily, I write poetry as a means to leave a mark so that I might one day pass my life lessons on to future generations. Much of what I write is designed to evoke emotion in others: A poetic eulogy for my grandmother, a poem to console my grieving grandfather, a Valentine's poem for my girlfriend or a Father's Day poem to say I love you. Writing has had a therapeutic effect upon my soul, a means by which to relieve and reveal my deepest sentiments. My final step in crafting a poem is presenting it to the inspirational party. I derive just as much satisfaction sharing my poems with others as I do writing them. I aspire to one day publish a book of my collected works, an anthology that contains as many elements of other people as it does myself. There is a spot reserved on my bookshelf, right in between *A Light in the Attic* and *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. In my fanciful moments, I imagine there's a spot for a few law books as well.

My friends and associates often point out the dichotomy between form and function of poetry as compared to that of written law. They wonder why I would want to pursue a legal career when law and poetry seem to be built on conflicting principles. Poetry is of the heart and imagination while law is of reason and logic. I always counter by providing relevant historic examples. Thomas Jefferson, founding father and poet-lawyer, used prose like poetry when he authored the Declaration of Independence. Francis Scott Key, creator of our national anthem and lawyer-poet, demonstrated his poetic skill when he composed the "Star Spangled Banner." Imagine if the affinity for poetry had deterred poet-lawyer Abraham Lincoln from a career in law and politics. Doesn't the heart of a poet beat throughout the Gettysburg address? I believe, as these men have proven, the analytic and linguistic skills acquired through writing poetry to be applicable and complementary to the practice of law.

I often look back to the first poem I ever wrote: "A line can be a stair, A line can be the seat of a chair." When I re-analyze my poem twenty years later, the two lines take on a new significance. Metaphorically, a line can represent a chair, a classic symbol of stagnancy and inactivity. Conversely, a line can represent a stair, a symbol of progression to a new level. As I begin to draw a line and move from point *a* to point *b*, I have found, much like I did in second grade, that a line can be whatever I perceive it to be. All I have to do is connect the dots.

-By Todd Fries

**PUBLIC INTEREST & SOCIAL JUSTICE - SPRING 2009**  
**PROFESSORS ERIC & NANCY WRIGHT**

Take Care

You are about to enter a danger zone  
Wear protective clothing around your heart  
Take off your shoes

Writing can seriously damage your sadness  
Writing can seriously damage your nightmares  
You are in danger of achieving your dreams

Once started, you won't be able to stop  
Nor will you want to  
And others might catch it too

You are in serious danger of learning you're alive  
You are in serious danger of laughing out loud  
You are in serious danger of loving yourself

If it gets in your eyes, consult your loved ones  
If it gets in your mind, cancel your therapist  
If it gets in your heart, hold on tight

- Poem by Gillie Bolton -

