

Writing and sharing poems gives students an opportunity to express their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in creative and artistic ways. You can do this activity in combination with Adopt a Tree, to allow students to explore their adopted tree through poetry. You may also adapt the activity to explore parts of the environment other than trees and forests, such as art or architecture.

POET-TREE



SUBJECTS

Science, English Language Arts,
Social Studies

PLT CONCEPTS

1.8, 1.10, 3.8

STEM SKILLS

Communication, Creativity,
Nature-based Design

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Cooperative Learning, Higher-
order Thinking, Literacy Skills,
Personal Connections

MATERIALS

Paper; pens or pencils;
clipboards, pieces of cardboard
and paperclips, journals, or
tablets that students can use to
write outdoors. Optional: Large
pieces of chart paper.

TIME CONSIDERATIONS

Preparation: 15 minutes

Activity: Two 50-minute periods

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OBJECTIVES

Students will

- Express their environmental perspectives using various forms of poetry.
- Analyze their own and the poetry of others to discover meaning.
- Share their poetry with others.

BACKGROUND

Poetry is a great way for students to express their ideas about the environment. Giving students a specific poetic form helps them structure abstract ideas. Here are some sample poetic forms that work well, but you may use other forms if you wish. The poems provided were written by students and educators who completed this activity.

HAIKU

This Japanese form of poetry consists of three lines: the first line has five syllables, the second line has seven, and the third line has five again. The third line often contains a surprising or tension element.

EXAMPLE

Snails

*Makes a slimy path
Sticking on the long thick grass
Hides from predators*

By Leslie Heisler
Grade 3
Star of the Sea School
Virginia Beach, VA



CINQUAIN

This poetic style consists of five lines. Each line has a specific purpose and fixed number of syllables: (1) the title, in two syllables, (2) a description of the title, in four syllables, (3) a description of action, in six syllables, (4) a description of a feeling, in eight syllables, and (5) another word for the title, in two syllables.



EXAMPLE

Earth Worms
Squiggly squirmers
Aerating our topsoil
Happily helping our garden
Crawlers

By Lee Barnett, Amber Urban, and Margaret Meadows
 Northside Elementary School teachers
 Angleton Independent School District, TX

ACROSTIC

In acrostic poetry, the first letter in each line, when read vertically, spells out the name of something or conveys some other kind of message.

EXAMPLE

Towering
Reaching
Extending
Embracing the sky.

DIAMANTE

These poems are diamond shaped and consist of seven lines that have the following pattern:

Noun
adjective adjective
participle participle participle
noun noun noun noun
participle participle participle
adjective adjective
noun

EXAMPLE

tree
tall, sturdy
standing, towering, observing
branches, trunk, anchor, shelter
nurturing, swaying, caring
proud, happy
tree

By Jennifer Mammel
 Grade 7
 St. Paul Lutheran Church and School
 Lakeland, FL



WINDSPARK

These poems have five lines with the following pattern: (1) "I dreamed," (2) "I was..." (something or someone), (3) where, (4) an action, and (5) how.

EXAMPLE

*I dreamed
I was a tree
On a hillside
Playing with the wind
Joyfully.*

FLUXUS

This poetry aims to elevate everyday objects and events to the level of fine art. To give it a try, write down nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs on small strips of paper that are related to a chosen poem topic (for this activity, consider nature, trees, or the outdoors). Fold each strip in half, mix them, then randomly pull the strips from a pile and write the words in the order that you chose them, adding punctuation at will.

EXAMPLE

*Green, refreshing, quiet, leaves.
Calmness... chirping... excitement!*

SHAPE POETRY

The arrangement of words in this type of poetry (also called concrete poetry) form a picture of the poem's topic or what is happening in the poem.

EXAMPLE

*branches
shade rubber
fruit clothes
paper wind barrier fuel
furniture resource nuts
treehouses maple syrup parks
multiple uses seeds oxygen
lumber habitat energy
building materials
baseball bats leaves
photosynthesis
roots
gum
cork
books
paint
cocoa
sponge*



FREE VERSE

This type of poetry follows no set formula or style.

EXAMPLE

*I am the tree that overcomes all.
I laugh at the wind.
I am one with the wilderness.*

GETTING READY

- Decide which poetic form is most appropriate for your group to try. You do not need to teach all the forms. Make copies of the corresponding student page or relevant parts of it.
- Plan to take students outdoors to observe one or more trees at your site or in a nearby yard, park, or forest area. If possible, choose a location that has several different trees for students to observe.
- For each student team, prepare a sheet chart of paper with the name of one of the senses: Touch, Smell, Sight, or Sound. (If students have journals or tablets, they may use them instead.)
- Plan to have students share their poetic works. For example, students might create a literary magazine by making copies of their poems and stapling them together, produce an electronic book using word processing software, or host a poetry reading or open-mic event. Be sure to get students' permission to share their work beyond the group.

DOING THE ACTIVITY

1



PERSONAL CONNECTIONS Ask students to name some of the benefits they derive from trees and forests. Invite them to share their experiences, asking:

- What do you think about or how do you feel when you stand next to a tree or enter a forest?
- Do you have any favorite neighborhood trees?
- Are there any special wooded places you like to visit?
- Do you have any favorite stories about trees or forests?
- Are there any forest issues that you are worried about?

2

Use their responses to come up with a group list of characteristics and attributes of trees or forests. Explain that you will create a book of poetry together, expressing their ideas and attitudes about trees, forests, and the environment.




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FOREST FACT


Edward Thomas wrote the poem “Aspens” in July 1915 and sent it to his friend and mentor, the American poet Robert Frost. While the poem describes the way aspen trees sway day and night, whatever the weather, the trees’ continuous movement also represents a metaphor for human endeavors: like the aspens, we persevere.




3  **LITERACY SKILLS** Review the major parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, participles, etc.) that the students will need for the poetic form(s) they will be using. Write these parts of speech where the whole group can see them, and have students generate a short list of examples for each part of speech.

4 Present the poetic form(s) you have selected and give examples. Explain to students that there are many other types as well. Distribute copies of the student page Poet-Tree Forms or parts of it.

5 Take the students to visit nearby trees to gather “tree impressions.” (This can be done indoors by looking through windows, if necessary.) Have them sit quietly under one or more trees for at least 10 minutes. Direct students to write descriptive words about how the tree looks, smells, and feels; what sounds they hear; what living things they see on the tree; and any other observations they make while sitting under the tree.

6  **COOPERATIVE LEARNING** Divide students into teams and give each team a sheet of chart paper with the name of a sense written on it (see Getting Ready). Have teams use their designated sense to generate words or pictures describing the tree. Ask a reporter from each team to share their words with the full group.

7 While you are outside or once you have returned inside, have students create poems about trees and forests. Encourage them to try more than one poetic form, using the student page as a guide. Then let the students share their poems with the rest of the group. Have them explain which poetic form they used and why they chose it.

8  **HIGHER-ORDER THINKING** Lead a group discussion, pointing out that people see trees and forests differently. Ask:

- Does your poem mention the influence people have on trees or forests?
- Does it mention the importance of trees or forest products to people?
- Does your poem refer to people’s place in nature? How?
- Does the poem recognize different cultural connections to the forest?
- What other themes do our poems represent?

9 Have students review the poems they wrote and choose one they like best. Assemble everyone’s favorite poems to share as planned (see Getting Ready).

TAKE IT OUTSIDE



Invite students to find a comfortable spot: it might be resting against a tree, lying in the grass, swaying in a hammock, or sitting on a bench. Let students know to be careful around trees, to avoid damaging the bark or compacting soil around the roots. Point out that spending time in a new place can help you make new observations, and tell your students that they will use this new position to make a sound map. Hand each student a 3” x 5” card and a pencil. Tell them to draw a small mark in the center of the blank (unlined) side to represent themselves. Explain that they should make a mark on their card for any sound they hear, showing the direction they hear it. The mark can be a word, a squiggle, a picture, or whatever helps them remember the different sounds. Suggest that they also close their eyes. Make an owl call or other sound signal to begin the sound mapping, and again after three minutes to end. You might also read or tell a story while you have students’ quiet attention. Afterward, ask them to share what they heard.

VARIATION: GRADES 6-8

- 1** Invite each student to choose a nearby tree. Have students spend time with their tree, sitting against it, lying underneath it, walking around it, and observing it from various perspectives. During this time, they should write down words, ideas, and impressions that come to mind.
- 2** Guide students to convert their thoughts into a free verse poem. When the poem is finished, they should think of a word or phrase that sums up the “character” of their tree to serve as the title.
- 3** Have students take a photo of their tree that visually captures the essence of their poem. Encourage them to use creative perspective, lighting, photo filters, or other effects to produce visually striking images!
- 4** Invite the group to create a physical or virtual gallery, as appropriate, to share their work.





ACADEMIC STANDARDS

SCIENCE	ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS	SOCIAL STUDIES
Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constructing explanations and designing solutions Concepts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earth materials and systems Systems and system models 	Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing: production and distribution of writing Concepts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing: text types and purpose 	Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applying disciplinary concepts Concepts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Geography: human—environment interactions

ASSESSMENT

Ask students to

- Save early drafts and multiple renditions of their work before it reaches the final product. Later, have students arrange these raw materials in a portfolio that shows the development of their poem, and submit the portfolio along with the final product.
- Write about a favorite family member, pet, or book using the same poetry forms from the activity.

ENRICHMENT

- Help students identify and contact appropriate local, regional, and national organizations that might publish students' poems, and encourage students to submit their work. For example, PLT's online newsletter, *The Branch* (plt.org/newsletter), often publishes "poet-tree."
- Through group discussion, make a list of environmental issues (local, regional, national, or global) that students are concerned about. Divide the group into teams of four, and have each team choose one of the issues to discuss. Team members should share their points of view with each other, making sure that each person gets a chance to talk. After about 10 minutes, individuals should write a short poem in any form that reflects their perceptions or opinions on the issue discussed. Afterward, discuss poetry's value for clarifying thoughts or perspectives. How might poems distort or energize an issue?
- Invite students to find poems about trees and forests to share with the group. Possibilities include "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost, "Trees" by Joyce Kilmer, and "The Trees" by Philip Larkin.
- Have students imagine a world without trees. Encourage them to write a poem describing that world or how they would feel in a world without trees.
- Have students create a list of descriptive words showing pleasant feelings and thoughts about the world around them and name some of the places those words could describe.



POEM BY: (your name) _____

HAIKU

Form	Your poem
1ST LINE: Five syllables	
2ND LINE: Seven syllables	
3RD LINE: Five syllables (with something surprising or unexpected)	



POEM BY: (your name) _____

CINQUAIN

Form	Your poem
1ST LINE: Title in two syllables	
2ND LINE: Description of title in four syllables	
3RD LINE: Description of an action in six syllables	
4TH LINE: Description of a feeling in eight syllables	
5TH LINE: Another word for the title in two syllables	



NAME _____ DATE _____

ACROSTIC

Choose a word related to trees and forests and write each letter of the word in the boxes below. (The boxes should spell out your word when you read down.) For each line, write a word or phrase that starts with that letter.

Your Poem:



POEM BY: (your name) _____

DIAMANTE

Form	Your poem
1ST LINE: Noun (title)	_____
2ND LINE: Two adjectives	_____
3RD LINE: Three participles	_____
4TH LINE: Four nouns	_____
5TH LINE: Three participles	_____
6TH LINE: Two adjectives	_____
7TH LINE: Noun	_____



POEM BY: (your name) _____

WINDSPARK

Form	Your poem
1ST LINE: "I dreamed"	
2ND LINE: "I was ..." (something or someone)	
3RD LINE: Where	
4TH LINE: An action	
5TH LINE: How	



NAME _____ DATE _____

FLUXUS

1. On small strips of paper, write down nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs related to a chosen poem topic (like nature, trees, or the outdoors).
2. Fold the strips and mix them, then randomly pull the strips from a pile.
3. Write the words in the order they are chosen, adding punctuation where you would like.

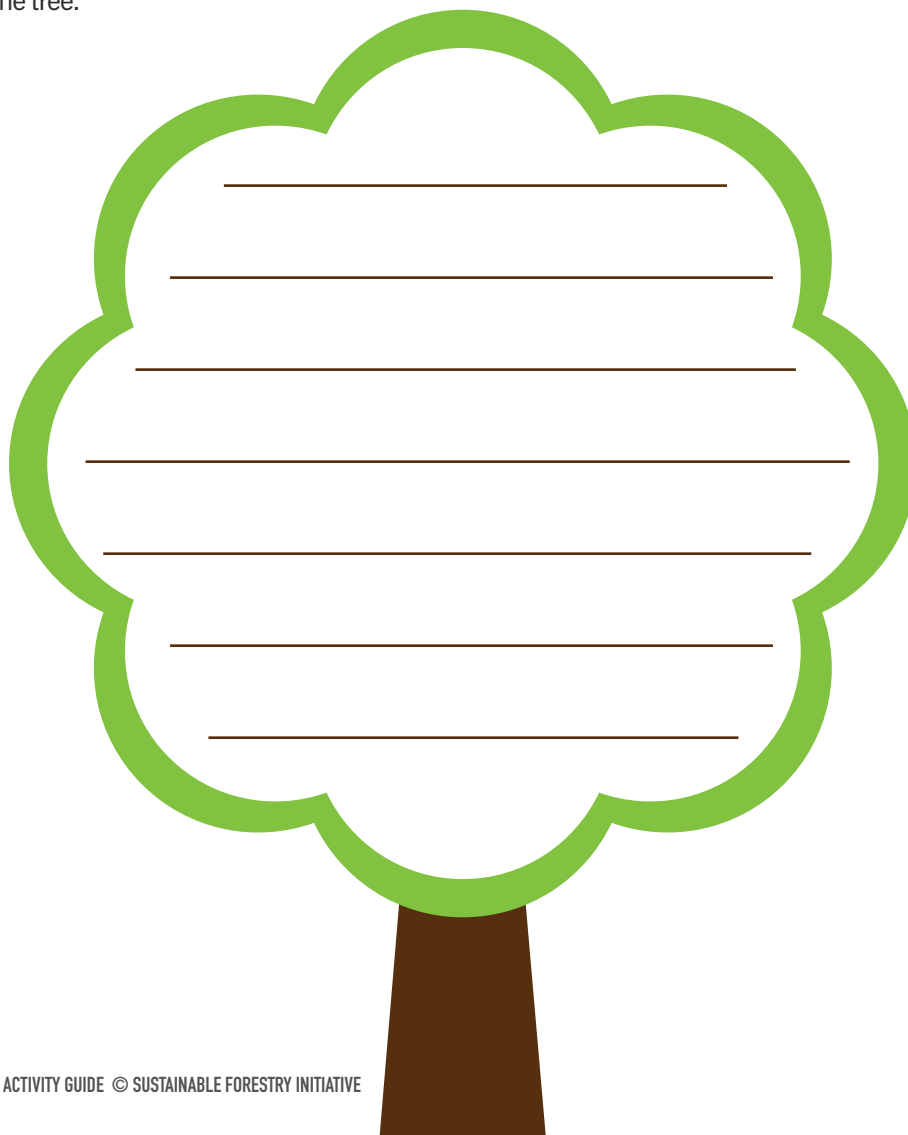
Your poem: _____



POEM BY: (your name) _____

SHAPE POEM

Write a poem inside the tree.



NAME _____ DATE _____

FREE VERSE

This type of poem doesn't follow a set form or style.

Your poem:

I LOVE MY
GREEN JOB

CAREER CORNER

POETS use words, metaphors, and rhyming patterns to express feelings or to describe objects or events. Poets help people see experiences more deeply. They may write poetry books, songs, or advertising jingles.

