



# FIRST GRADE TEACHERS PLEASE READ!!!



Poems begin with word pictures. If you can write word pictures, you are already writing poetry. And the world needs poets and songsters.

What is a word picture? Everyone has heard Carl Sandburg's "The fog come on little cat feet." And Emily Dickinson's "The moon was but a chin of gold." And Shakespeare's "She hangs upon the cheek of the night like a rich jewel in the Ethiop's ear." These are word pictures.

"The fog comes in quietly." This is not a word picture. "The moon was waning." "She was beautiful girl." These are not word pictures.

A word picture, through the use of words alone, gives you a mental image, makes you smell and taste and feel. The poet looks at something common and sees it as something unusual.

"A face as gray and wrinkled as the lining of an old trunk." Most of us would have said, "An elderly person." In writing word pictures, compare two things. Use the words like and as to get started. "The old man had a rim of white hair like the snow line on a mountain."

Try combining words: The air was reeky-smoky. A jumped-up tulip. Pussy-pad-soft feet.

You can even create words: Puddling in the water. Dimmy light. Her face was puffish. He was mad and umphed his way along.

Or, just be imaginative: Leaves dusted with sunspecks. Clouds pillowed together in careless piles. He was hot with a fever thirst.

Another type of word picture compares something tangible to something intangible. The haze hung over the hill like a shred of leftover dream. The dry leaves crunched underfoot like malicious whisperings.

The best word pictures (and poems) are those using ordinary words in a unique way, or using curious words of only one or two syllables.



There is beauty in simplicity. In one book of beginning poetry for small children the following difficult words were used: Scorned, larder, dabbling, Airedale, muzzle, digestion, exposed, constructed, marigold, bestraddle, unicorn, gait, decline, arrant, hemisphere, milliner. And would you have known that “paddock” was the obsolete archaic Scottish word for “frog?” I didn’t! All this in a book which hopes to interest and introduce the youngest ones to poetry!

Shakespeare is called the master of the English language, yet there is scarcely a word of his sonnets or plays that is not an everyday, usable word whose meaning is well known. The wounds of Caesar, “which, like dumb mouths, do ope their ruby lips,” is a word picture. And, “sleep that knits up the ravell’d sleeve of care.”

Job 41:31 is a double word picture of sharp contrast: “He maketh the deep to boil like a pot: he maketh the sea like a pot of ointment.” The ocean can be either raging or bland.

Revelation 6:14: “And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together.”

Proverbs 18:10: “The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.”

Psalms 45:1: “My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.”

Habakkuk 2:14: “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

Hosea 7:8: “Ephraim is a cake not turned.” (Half-baked) “Ephraim also like a silly dove.” (Wishy-washy, shallow)

Daniel 12:3 “They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.”

Proverbs 16:31: “The hoary head is a crown of glory.”

Proverbs 17:22: “A merry heart doeth good like medicine.”

Proverbs 6:23: “The commandment is a lamp; and the law is light.”

Psalms 144:12: “Our sons may be as plants grown up;...our daughters...as corner stones, polished.”

Psalms 127:4: “As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.”

Proverbs 15:4: “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life.”

Psalms 119:176: “I have gone astray like a lost sheep.”

Job 7:6: “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle.”

Of the Lord Jesus many word pictures are used. For example, He is Bread, the Light, the Door, the Vine, the Lamb, the Shepherd, (and in the O. T.) the Branch, the Sun, the Lion, and many more.

One of the best sources of word pictures is Emily Dickinson, especially her poems on nature. Many of them are childlike and quaint, though suddenly you may turn a corner and nearly go down in confusion in the depths of her ideas and unconventional words.

One dreary winter when I was snowed in, in a little house miles from nowhere, I read the dictionary through. Then I read Emily Dickinson through with the dictionary in my lap, looking up words I did not know: caucus, vellum, Mazarin, pinnacle, hock, and emolument.

Of course she has given us many lovely, simple word pictures such as “Split the lark and you’ll find the music,” and “The mushroom is the elf of plants, and “Bring me the sunset in a cup.”

You will find this poet has passed the stage of mere comparison and stepped into a world where all of nature is personified. “Nature was in her beryl apron, mixing fresher air.” What color is beryl? Look it up; you’ll see how well it describes the outdoors.

“A snake is summer’s treason.” She goes on to say she never sees of the reptile family without “A tighter breathing and zero at the bone.” And only she could write a poem of twenty lines describing snow without once mentioning the word.

“We like March, his shoes are purple.” Hints of a shadowed month but with promise of April. She calls the sunset, “a dominie in gray” who “put gently up the evening bars and led the flock away.”



Other poets, of course, use word pictures, and you will want to read through a good anthology and pick them out.

Then, try writing some of your own. Keep them in a notebook, and they will form the nucleus for longer poems. And make a rule for yourself right now! No rhyming allowed! Not yet.

Write about things you now best. Put your feelings into words, even if it is only, "I am angry." Develop it further, "I am angry; my eyes are narrow slits." Soon you will be able to write, "I am angry, my eyes are narrow slits, like the broken shutters of an old house." How will this affect your anger? You will find you have written it away.

In my kitchen, as I sit writing, are white curtains with red strawberries on them. When the sun shines through the curtains, it makes the strawberries seem alive and plump and glowing. There is an idea for a word picture. You will not have to look far for ideas.

What does the wind sound like? "Like some old story-teller on a ship at sea?" How does the rain taste? Did you ever feel moss against your cheek? What does an apple smell like? Can you see the thunder shake the sky?

Write even when you are sad. Most poems are not written in cold blood; they spring from feeling.

One morning I found in my mailbox this enchanting poem by a neighbor child which combined rhythm, rhyme, and the mysterious quality of frost.

### FROST

It comes, it goes,  
 Like winter snows.  
 It's bright and clear,  
 Like a diamond glows.  
 What is this funny  
 Thing I explain?  
 It has no ears,  
 No toes, no mane.  
 Never it jumps,  
 Never it grows;  
 It just sinks into  
 The ground, and goes.

In another poem she used the line, "The maples' hair of gold," a nice word picture.

Always be adding new words to your vocabulary so that you will have tools to work with. Go easy on television programs and reading fiction. Word pictures will come alive on an early morning walk, or in a time of solitude in your room.

In this age of speed and shallowness we will lose completely all finer feeling and become educated machines unless we take time to read poetry—and write it.

And poems begin with word pictures.



### A WORD PICTURE

I stood against a churlish tree and saw  
ill-tempered rain  
Pound down. The earth rolled back  
Rough, surly lips and gulped a flow of  
mire.  
Thunder ripped through the wind; and  
past the barn  
One writhing finger of flame curled  
downward  
And webbed out in pale gold etchings  
Along the inky sky.

### THE IDEALIST

I saw a friend the other day  
And stopped to nod to him;  
His hat was lightly flecked with mud  
And stars seeped through the brim

### WHO?

What changeling or kobold,  
Bent on merry jest,  
Prances 'round my footsteps  
With such spritely zest?  
What brownie, elf, or kelpie,  
What gnome undisciplined,  
Makes me want to frisk and caper?  
Just the March wind?

Lois Dick – Adapted  
These Times, January, 1972

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### A SEPTEMBER WALK

I went for a walk down a country road  
When September began to bring  
The first lovely colors of Autumn  
To every wayside thing.





Rich gold were the yellow daisies  
With their gentle sway and nod.  
No brighter yellow anywhere, than  
The fronds of the goldenrod.

The delicate blue of the chicory blooms  
Added dainty wildflower grace.  
More gold was in the butter fly,  
That lit on the Queen Anne's lace.

We took a walk down a country road,  
September and I, together  
Scarlet had touches the sumac leaves,  
And I found a blue jay's feather!

- Virginia Dial

Many things are learned best when one is in direct contact with them. Walt Whitman expresses this beautifully in the following poem:

“There was a child went forth every day;  
And the first object he looked upon,  
That object he became;

And that object became part of him  
For the day, or a certain part of the day,  
Or for many years, or stretching  
Cycles of years.”