

Reading and Writing  
**POETRY**  
With **TEENAGERS**

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WALCH**  
PUBLISHER  
PORTLAND, MAINE

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# Nature and the Environment

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## Introduction

Nature is universal to the collective human experience. Poets have always found a rich source of images in their surroundings: the earth, the sea, the rivers, the weather, the heavens. In fact, Rainer Maria Rilke said nature was "infested with poetry." Good nature poems try to make use of all five senses, evoke a place by using specific details pertaining to smell, sound, texture, color, light, and taste. Poets often connect images to each other, or an image to a human experience or feeling through the use of simile and metaphor. These techniques help make the message of the feeling in the poem more concrete.

Poet Sherrod Santos says, "Rather than the poet *closing* his eyes and turning inward, the poet must *open* and turn inward." Nature images provide a centered quality to a poem, whether it is celebratory, meditative, or violent. Images from nature seem to be a kind of common reference point for much of humanity. Storms, wildflowers, and constellations are familiar enough to allow a reader to connect easily to these poems.

The poems included for discussion in Chapter 1, "Nature and the Environment," all draw on nature, using vivid sense imagery. Several poems were chosen for the way nature imagery symbolizes human experience and feeling.

## Reading Aloud

Poetry comes from an oral tradition as old as language itself. The Reading Aloud sections found here and in the next chapter, "Animals," serve as an introduction to this oral tradition.

The following Reading Aloud poems were selected for the variety of voices that can be used to read them. "Moon Tiger" contains very vivid and visual imagery that appeals to students. It evokes both fantasy and mystery in the young listener. Ask your students to imagine snow falling in Emily Dickinson's poem "Snow" and to let their imaginations drift with the snowdrifts. "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" was nearly sung by William Butler

Yeats. The repeated "I" phrases have a sing-song chantlike quality. The respectful tone implicit in the Native American poem "The Shining Mountain" allows students to hear how poetry harmonizes with nature. "Mending Wall" is rich in conversation and narration in the context of rural New Hampshire Yankee. The voice in each poem presents its own unique cadence, a music and rhythm that emerges from the choice and arrangement of words.

Reading these poems aloud repeatedly will help students to hear internal and slant rhyme, alliteration, and assonance (repeated vowel sounds). Recognizing these techniques enhances the pleasure and appreciation of poetry.

Have your students read these poems many times, experimenting with different effects, imagining they are reading to various audiences, or arranging the poem for more than one reader.

## Moon Tiger

The moon tiger.  
In the room, here.  
It came in, it is  
prowling sleekly  
under and over  
the twin beds.  
See its small head,  
silver smooth,  
hear the pad of its  
large feet. Look,  
its white stripes  
in the light that slid  
through the jealousies.  
It is sniffing our  
clothes, its cold nose  
nudges our bodies.  
The beds are narrow,  
but I'm coming in with you.

—Denise Levertov

### Snow

It sifts from leaden sieves,  
It powders all the wood,  
It fills with alabaster wool  
The wrinkles of the road.  
It makes an even face  
Of mountain and of plain, —  
Unbroken forehead from the east  
Unto the east again.

It reaches to the fence,  
It wraps it, rail by rail,  
Till it is lost in fleeces;  
It flings a crystal veil  
On stump and stack and stem, —  
The summer's empty room,  
Acres of seams where harvests were,  
Recordless, but for them.

It ruffles wrists of posts  
As ankles of a queen, —  
Then stills its artisans like ghosts,  
Denying they have been.

— Emily Dickinson

### The Shining Mountain

Let us go together  
up the shining mountain  
let us sit and watch  
the sun go down in beauty  
Nanibonsak, the Moon  
the Night Traveler  
will climb into the skyland  
The Awatawesu,  
those far-off beings overhead,  
the small stars will follow  
now we hear  
the drums of Thunder  
now sparks fly from  
the pipe of the Lightning  
now Great Owl sings  
all must sleep  
the Awatawesu and their chief  
are in flight across the sky  
we sit together in beauty  
upon the shining mountain.

— Western Abenaki  
translated by Joseph Bruchac

### The Lake Isle of Innisfree

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:  
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;  
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear the lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,  
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

— William Butler Yeats