

POETRY PRO-AM
a collaboration between our students and our poets

My People

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.

The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.

Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people

Langston Hughes

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Write a poem with the same lines and words, except replace “night”, “stars”, and “sun” with words of your own.
2. Write a poem with the same lines and words, except replace “faces”, “eyes”, and “souls” with words of your own.
3. Keep all the second lines of each stanza, but write your own new first lines.
4. Keep all the first lines and write your own new second lines.
5. Write your own poem in praise of your people.
6. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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This Is Just to Say

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

William Carlos Williams

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Write a poem with the exact same lines and words, except replace “plums”, “breakfast”, “delicious”, and “sweet” with something different.
2. Write a poem that replaces all the nouns and adjectives with words of your own.
3. Write a note that the owner of the plums might write back to the thief.
4. Write your own note that you might leave on the refrigerator for someone in your family.
5. Write your own note asking forgiveness for some small thing.
6. Write a poem that uses simple sentences broken up into very short lines like this one does.
7. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Poem

I loved my friend.
He went away from me.
There's nothing more to say.
The poem ends,
Soft as it began –
I loved my friend.

Langston Hughes

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Replace just the second line with a line of your own.
2. Replace just the second and fifth lines.
3. Keep just the first and last lines, and write a new middle.
4. Write a short poem that begins and ends with the same line.
5. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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When California is split in two
The Northern part will be called
The Republic of Jambalaya
The Southern part will be called
Summer Camp

Ishmael Reed

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Replace lines 3 and 5 with lines of your own.
2. Write a poem about some other state or group being split in two, and what the two halves would be called. (For example, “When this class is split in two / The boys will be called...”, or “When the United States is split in two...”)
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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After Bashō

Tentatively, you
slip onstage this evening,
pallid famous moon.

Carolyn Kizer

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Replace the first word of each line with words of your own.
2. Replace the second line of this poem with a line of your own.
3. Replace the third line of this poem with a line of your own.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Fields

Fields, grasses
growing things
I will never be the same
I have become one of you
I have become like you.

Susan Griffin

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Replace “fields”, “grasses”, and “growing things” with words of your own.
2. Replace “one of you” and “like you” with phrases of your own.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Sleep

I love to lie down weary
under the stalk of sleep
growing slowly out of
my head,
the dark leaves meshing.

Wendell Berry

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Replace all the nouns (“stalk”, “sleep”, “head”, “leaves”) with words of your own choosing
2. Add to the existing poem, describing the dreams you might have or how you might wake. (Perhaps the stanza about dreams could begin, “I love to dream...” and the one about waking, “I love to wake...”)
3. Write your own new poem where sleep is described in some other way than as a leafy plant growing out of your head.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Birth

Oh, fields of wonder
Out of which
Stars are born,
And moon and sun
And me as well,
Like stroke
Of lightning
In the night,
Some mark
To make,
Some word
To tell.

Langston Hughes

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Replace the stars, moon, sun, and the stroke of lightning with words of your own.
2. Replace the final four lines of the poem with lines of your own.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Distress

What would our mother say?
Where is our mother?
Does she know?
Does she know what is happening to us here?
What will she do?
Will she save us?
Will she come for us?
Does she know what happens to us here?
Is it happening to her?
To her, to her, too?

Susan Griffin

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Add some questions of your own to the list.
2. Add some questions of your own to the list, change some of the questions that are there, and delete some of the questions.
3. Change the mother to some other person. (For example, our teacher, our father, our president, etc.)
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Winter

Frogs burrow the mud
snails bury themselves
and I air my quilts
preparing for the cold

Dogs grow more hair
mothers make oatmeal
and little boys and girls
take Father John's Medicine

Bears store fat
chipmunks gather nuts
and I collect books
For the coming winter.

Nikki Giovanni

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Add your own stanza of things that you or others or other animals do to prepare for winter.
2. Add your own lines, or modify some existing lines, or delete other lines about things done in preparation for winter.
3. Write a poem about preparing for some other time of the year.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Charades

Willows in the wind act out, “afraid.”
Rocks make the sound for “nothing.”
Both of those I am as a person.

My father served for the concept, “Gone.”
My mother was perfect for “Whine.”
And their son, that’s me, “Defiant.”

Willow, rock, mother, father,
behold what you made, “Maybe.”

William Stafford

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Substitute your own words for all the words in quotes.
2. Substitute your own words for all the words in quotes, as well as “father” and “mother”.
3. Change the willows and the rocks to something else.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Abundant Heart

Because the pelicans circle and dive, the fish

Because the cows are fat, the rains

Because the tree is heavy with fruit, the earth

Because the woman grows thin, the heart

Jane Hirshfield

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Substitute your own nouns for the last word in each line
2. Complete each line by turning the words at the end of each line (“the fish”, “the rains”, “the earth” and “the heart”) into complete sentences. (e.g. “the fish dive deep”.
3. Write your own poem that follows the same structure
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Clouds

I want to swim with hippos
jump with salmon
fly with geese
land with robins
walk with turtles
sleep with possum
dress with penguins
preen with peacocks
fish with grizzlies
hunt with lions
forage with pigs for truffles
eat nuts with the squirrels
plant seeds with the wind
and ride on off with the clouds
at the end

Nikki Giovanni

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Replace the last word of every line except the last line.
2. Replace the action in every line.
3. Write your own poem listing things you want to do.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Dawn on the Mountain

Peach flowers turn the dew crimson.
Green willows melt in the mist,
The servant will not sweep up the fallen petals.
 And the nightingales
Persist in their singing.

Ezra Pound

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Add your own line or lines about what happens on the mountain at dawn.
2. Change what the flowers and/or the willows and/or the servant and/or the nightingales do.
3. Write a new poem about sunset, or Spring, or snow, or something else on the mountain.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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At Blackwater Pond

At Blackwater Pond the tossed waters have settled
after a night of rain.
I dip my cupped hands. I drink
a long time. It tastes
like stone, leaves, fire. It falls cold
into my body, waking the bones. I hear them
deep inside me, whispering
*oh what is the beautiful thing
that just happened?*

Mary Oliver

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep the entire poem, except replace either “stone, leaves, fire” or the last two lines, or both, with your own words.
2. Keep the entire poem, except replace the sentence that begins, “It falls cold...” with your own.
3. Write your own similar poem about drinking water in some other setting.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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*

friend

tonight in the rain

I am afraid to hear

your songs

Diane di Prima

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Write a poem in which you replace just one line of this poem with one of your own.
2. Replace more than one line of this poem.
3. Add one new line to this poem anywhere.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Ezra Pound

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep the first line, but write a new second line that compares the faces in the crowd with something other than flower petals.
2. Keep the second line, and write a new first line that presents something else that looks like petals on a wet, black bough.
3. Write two new lines of your own that compare one thing to another in the same way.
4. Write a two line poem that also doesn't have any verbs.
5. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Ode #2

Three Michaelmas daisies
on an ashtray;
one abets love,
one droops and woos;

one stiffens her petals
remembering
the root, the sap,
and the bees' play.

Basil Bunting

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Change the three lines that begin with “one” to describe different actions.
2. Change the three words at the end (“root”, “sap”, “bees' play”) to something different. (It might be especially interesting to do #1 and #2 together.)
3. Keep the first two lines, but continue the poem in your own way, describing the three daisies.
4. Write a similar poem about three objects of some other type.
5. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Telemachus' Detachment

When I was a child looking
at my parents' lives, you know
what I thought? I thought
heartbreaking. Now I think
heartbreaking, but also
insane. Also
very funny.

Louise Glück

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Replace “heartbreaking”, “insane”, and “very funny” with words of your own.
2. Change “my parents' lives” to something else. (For example, “my teachers”, “bus drivers”, “airplanes”, etc.) Then replace “heartbreaking”, “insane”, and “very funny” with words that match the new thing you chose.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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I'm Not The River

I'm not the river
that powerful presence.
And I'm not the black oak tree
which is patience personified.
And I'm not redbird
who is a brief life hearted enjoyed.
Nor am I mud nor rock nor sand
which is holding everything together.
No, I am none of these things. Not yet.

Mary Oliver

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep all the odd numbered lines (1, 3, 5, 7, and 9) and replace all the even numbered lines (2, 4, 6, and 8) with lines of your own.
2. Add a pair of lines (or more) of your own that have the same structure. (The first line says what you're not, and the second line says something about the thing you're not.)
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Epitaph for a Pair of Old Shoes

Humble, born to the earth,
They knew where they stood.

When they moved,
It was because they must.

Anger moved them,
And the desire to be elsewhere,

Or something in them
Responding to music.

They knew also
What waiting can be.

Side by side, they mastered it,
Like an old married couple.

Donald Justice

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep all the first lines of each couplet, and replace all the second lines with lines of your own.
2. Write an epitaph for some other old or worn out item.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Verities

Into every life a little ax must fall.
Every dog has its choke chain.
Every cloud has a shadow.
Better dead than fed.
He who laughs, will not last.
Sticks and stones will break you,
and then the names of things will be changed.
A stitch in time saves no one.
The darkest hour comes.

Kim Addonizio

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. This poem is based on altering well known sayings. (Such as “Into every life a little rain must fall” and “Every dog has its day.”) Alter each saying in the poem in your own way. (For example, “Into every room a little rain must leak” or “Every dog has to pee.”)
2. Write your own poem made up of other sayings.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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To a Poor Old Woman

munching a plum on
the street a paper bag
of them in her hand

They taste good to her
They taste good
to her. They taste
good to her

You can see it by
the way she gives herself
to the one half
sucked out in her hand

Comforted
a solace of ripe plums
seeming to fill the air
They taste good to her

William Carlos Williams

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Replace “They taste good to her” with a line of your own.
2. Keep the lines “They taste good to her” wherever they show up, but write your own new poem around them.
3. Have the woman doing something other than eating plums.
4. Write your own poem about a sight you see on the street.
5. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Purifying the Language of the Tribe

Walking away means
"Goodbye."
Pointing a knife at your stomach means
"Please don't say that again."
Leaning toward you means
"I love you."
Raising a finger means
"I enthusiastically agree."
"Maybe" means
"No."
"Yes" means
"Maybe."
Looking like this at you means
"You had your chance."

William Stafford

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Write a poem with the same actions but different meanings. For example:

Walking away means
"You don't exist"

2. Write a poem with different actions but the same meanings. For example:

Turning my back means
"Goodbye"

3. Write a completely new poem that presents other behaviors and their meanings.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Changing Light

Clouds move over the mountain,
methodical as ancient
scholars.

Sun comes out
in the high pasture where
cows feel heat
between their shoulder blades.

Jane Kenyon

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Replace the second the third lines with lines of your own. (In other words, replace the scholars.)
2. Replace the last two lines of the poem with lines of your own. (In other words, replace the cows.)
3. Replace both the scholars and the cows.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Yes

It could happen any time, tornado,
earthquake, Armageddon. It could happen.
Or sunshine, love, salvation.

It could, you know. That's why we wake
and look out – no guarantees
in this life.

But some bonuses, like morning,
like right now, like noon,
like evening.

William Stafford

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Replace all the nouns in the first and third stanzas with words of your own.
2. Change the title to “No”, keep the first two stanzas, and write your own final stanza.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Debussy

My shadow glides in silence
over the watercourse.

On account of my shadow
the frogs are deprived of stars.

The shadow sends my body
reflections of quiet things.

My shadow moves like a huge
violet-colored mosquito.

A hundred crickets are trying
to gild the glow of the reeds.

A glow arises in my breast,
the one mirrored in the water.

Federico Garcia Lorca

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep the first line of each couplet, but change all the second lines.
2. Change the shadow to some other aspect of your self (your heart? your soul? your eyes?) and adapt the rest of the poem to work with your new subject.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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As For Poets

As for poets
The Earth Poets
Who write small poems,
Need help from no man.

The Air Poets
Play out the swiftest gales
And sometimes loll in the eddies.
Poem after poem,
Curling back on the same thrust.

At fifty below
Fuel oil won't flow
And propane stays in the tank.
Fire Poets
Burn at absolute zero
Fossil love pumped back up.

The first
Water Poet
Stayed down six years.
He was covered with seaweed.
The life in his poem
Left millions of tiny
Different tracks
Criss-crossing through the mud.

With the Sun and the Moon
In his belly,
The Space Poet
Sleeps.
No end to the sky –
But his poems,
Like wild geese,
Fly off the edge.

A Mind Poet
Stays in the house.
The house is empty
And it has no walls.
The poem
Is seen from all sides,
Everywhere,
At once.

Gary Snyder

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. For each stanza, replace as many of the existing lines as you like with your own.
2. Insert two new stanzas into the middle of the poem somewhere, each stanza about another type of poet. (For example: the Tree Poet, the Moon Poet, the Sky Poet, etc.)
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Sometimes

sometimes
when i wake up
in the morning
and see all the faces
i just can't
breathe

Nikki Giovanni

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Replace the last two lines of the poem with lines of your own.
2. Replace the fourth line with a line of your own.
3. Change the waking up in the morning to something else (for example, going outside after a big rain, or attending your favorite class, or hanging out with your friends, etc.) and then replace the last three lines of the poem with lines of your own that describe what happens with the new thing.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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This poem came at me
like a flash flood
If I had paused to count meter
I would have been drowned

Ishmael Reed

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep the first and third lines, and replace the second and fourth lines with lines of your own.
2. Write your own poem that begins, "This poem came at me".
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Red Scarf

The red scarf
still hangs over the chairback.
In its folds,
like a perfume
that cannot be quite remembered,
inconceivable before.

Jane Hirshfield

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Replace the first three lines with lines of your own that describe some object other than a red scarf.
2. Replace the last three lines with lines of your own that describe the effect of the red scarf on the speaker.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Wash

All day the blanket snapped and swelled
on the line, roused by a hot spring wind...
From there it witnessed the first sparrow,
early flies lifting their sticky feet,
and a green haze on the south-sloping hills.
Clouds rode over the mountain...At dusk
I took the blanket in, and we slept,
restless, under its fragrant weight.

Jane Kenyon

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep the first two lines and the end of this poem (beginning with “At dusk”) and write your own lines to go in the middle describing what the blanket sees while outside.
2. Write a similar poem, but instead of a blanket, pick some other object that starts off outdoors and ends up inside.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Pine Tree Tops

In the blue night
frost haze, the sky glows
with the moon
pine tree tops
bend snow-blue, fade
into sky, frost, starlight.
The creak of boots.
Rabbit tracks, deer tracks,
what do we know.

Gary Snyder

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Add your own items to the list of things in the blue night.
2. Add some items of your own, delete some that are there, and modify others.
3. Keep just the first and last lines, and write a new middle.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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The Dream Keeper

Bring me all of your dreams,
You dreamers,
Bring me all your
Heart melodies
That I may wrap them
In a blue cloud-cloth
Away from the too-rough fingers
Of the world.

Langston Hughes

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Replace the fourth and sixth lines with lines of your own.
2. Keep the first four lines of the poem and replace the last four lines with lines of your own.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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The Eclipse

I stood out in the open cold
To see the essence of the eclipse
Which was its perfect darkness.

I stood in the cold on the porch
And could not think of anything so perfect
As man's hope of light in the face of darkness.

Richard Eberhart

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Write your own poem that's exactly the same except for the last line.
2. Keep the second stanza, but replace the first stanza with one of your own.
3. Write a poem about viewing some other night scene and drawing some kind of conclusion or comparison from it.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Elegy

In the May breeze
 the water-lily sways
 on a wave of water.

In the May breeze
 my heart sways
 on a wave of ardor.

In the May breeze
 my branch of jasmine,
 you went to sleep.

In the May breeze
 under the earth
 just a year ago.

M. Safdar Mir (translated by Carolyn Kizer)

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep the first line refrain of each stanza, and replace the second and third lines of each stanza with lines of your own.
2. Write a new poem that's structured like this one, except the first line refrain of each stanza is a different line. (For example, "In the winter rains", or "In the summer heat", etc.)
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Pleasure

When I was a very young man
I liked falling in love:
no two loves were alike.

Later, in the mountains
I loved building fires for my children:
no two fires were alike.

And at last, a meditator
I glimpse the delight of breathing:
no two breaths are alike.

Peter Dale Scott

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep the final lines of each stanza, and write your own first two lines of each stanza.
2. Write your own poem that touches on three other things rather than loves, fires, and breaths in the same way.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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**If You Could Write One Great Poem,
What Would You Want It To Be About?**

*(Asked of four student poets at the Illinois Schools
for the Deaf and Visually Impaired)*

Fire: because it is quick, and can destroy.
Music: place where anger has its place.
Romantic Love -- the cold or stupid ask why.
Sign: that it is a language, full of grace,

That it is visible, invisible, dark and clear,
That it is loud and noiseless and is contained
Inside a body and explodes in air
Out of a body to conquer from the mind.

Robert Pinsky

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Write a poem with your own descriptions of Fire, Music, and Romantic Love.
2. Keep the first three lines, but write your own fourth line about something other than Sign. Optionally add your own second stanza.
3. Write four different subjects of your own, one line per subject just as in the poem above, and then optionally expand on the final one in a second stanza.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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The Well Rising

The well rising without sound,
the spring on a hillside,
the plowshare brimming through deep ground
everywhere in the field –

The sharp swallows in their swerve
flaring and hesitating
hunting for the final curve
coming closer and closer –

The swallow heart from wing beat to wing beat
counseling decision, decision:
thunderous examples. I place my feet
with care in such a world.

William Stafford

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep the second and third stanzas, but write your own new first stanza with a different list of examples.
2. Keep everything but the final sentence. Write your own final sentence.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Earth Verse

Wide enough to keep you looking

Open enough to keep you moving

Dry enough to keep you honest

Prickly enough to make you tough

Green enough to go on living

Old enough to give you dreams

Gary Snyder

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep the first part of every line (the part up to “to”) and write your own endings (after the “to”)
2. Keep the ends of each line (the parts after “to”) and write your own beginnings (up to the “to”)
3. Write a poem about something else that uses the same structure. (“[something] enough to [do something]”)
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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A Poet's Household

The stout poet tiptoes
On the lawn. Surprisingly limber
In his thick sweater
Like a middle-age burglar.
Is the young robin injured?

She bends to feed the geese
Revealing the neck's white curve
Below her curled hair.
Her husband seems not to watch,
But she shimmers in his poem.

A hush is on the house,
The only noise, a fern,
Rustling in a vase.
On the porch, the fierce poet
Is chanting words to himself.

Carolyn Kizer

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep the first sentence of each stanza and complete each stanza with lines of your own.
2. Instead of a poet, make it the household of some other type of person (a politician? a teacher? a blind person?) and complete a new poem about that person's household.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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The Light By The Barn

The light by the barn that shines all night
pales at dawn when a little breeze comes.

A little breeze comes breathing the fields
from their sleep and waking the slow windmill.

The slow windmill sings the long day
about anguish and loss to the chickens at work.

The little breeze follows the slow windmill
and the chickens at work till the sun goes down--

Then the light by the barn again.

William Stafford

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Replace “that shines all night”, “breathing the fields from their sleep”, and “about anguish and loss” with phrases of your own.
2. Pick one of the things that this poem cycles through (the light or the breeze or the windmill or the chickens) and replace it with something of your own, and then rewrite the rest of the poem around that.
3. Write your own poem that moves from thing to thing and then comes back to the beginning.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Pithos

Climb
into a jar
and live
for a while.

Chill earth.
No stars
in this stone
sky.

You have ceased
to ache.

Your spine is
a flower.

Rita Dove

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Add one more stanza or line about what it might be like to live in a jar.
2. Change the final line to a line of your own.
3. Change the jar into something else (for example: a car, a cave, a bird's nest, etc.) and then complete a new poem about what it might be like to live there.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Pathways

Understand, I'll slip quietly
away from the noisy crowd
when I see the pale
stars rising, blooming, over the oaks.

I'll pursue solitary pathways
through the pale twilit meadows,
with only this one dream:
You come too.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep the first two lines of this poem, but go on from there on your own. What scene would you slip away to? Where would you pursue it? Would you ask the reader to come, too?
2. Write your own poem that begins, "Understand,..." and ends "You come too."
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Sayings of the Blind

Feeling is believing.

Mountains don't exist. But their slopes do.

Little people have low voices.

All things, even the rocks, make a little noise.

The silence back of all sound is called "the sky."

There is a big stranger in town called the sun.
He doesn't speak to us but puts out a hand.

Night opens a door into a cellar ~
you can smell it coming.

On Sundays everyone stands farther apart.

Velvet feels black.

Meeting cement is never easy.

What do they mean when they say night is gloomy?

Edison didn't invent much.

Whenever you wake up it's morning.

Names have a flavor.

William Stafford

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Add your own sayings of the blind to the list in this poem.
2. Keep the subjects of each line ("Feeling...", "Mountains...", "Little people...", etc.) but complete each line your own way.
3. Write a new poem that lists sayings of the deaf, or some other group.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

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Chronology

I loved you in October
when you hid behind your hair
and rode your shadows
in the corner of the house

and in November you invaded
filling the air
above my bed with dreams
cries for some kind of help
on my inner ear

in December I held your hands
on afternoon; the light failed
it came back on
in a dawn on the Scottish coast
you singing us ashore

now it is January, you are fading
into your double
jewels on his cape, your shadow on the snow,
you slide away on wind, the crystal air
carries your new songs in snatches thru the windows
of our sad, high, pretty rooms

Diane di Prima

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep the first line of each stanza and complete each stanza on your own
2. Keep the first line of each stanza, but don't throw out the rest. Instead, replace just the nouns and verbs with your own words.
3. Add stanzas for other months.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Godiva County, Montana

She's a big country. Her undulations
roll and flower in the sun. Those flanks
quiver when the wind caresses the grass.
Who turns away when so generous a body
offers to play hide-and-seek all summer?
One shoulder leans bare all the way up
the mountain; limbs range and plunge
wildly into the river. We risk our eyes
every day; they celebrate' they dance
and flirt over this offered treasure.
“Be alive, “ the land says. “Listen—
this is your time, your world, your pleasure.”

William Stafford

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. This poem describes a landscape as if it were a human body. Pick a spot somewhere in the middle of this poem and add a few lines of your own to go along with the rest of it, perhaps adding a part of the body not covered by the poem, or perhaps rewriting the poem's lines about flanks, shoulders, or limbs.
2. Write your own new poem that compares a landscape to a body.
3. Write a poem that tries to do this with a cityscape.
4. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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As Usual

After we have parted, the boats
will continue to leave the harbor at dawn.
The salmon will struggle up to the pools,
one month following the other on the wall.

The magnolia will flower,
and the bee, the noble bee—
I saw one earlier on my walk—
will shoulder his way into the bud.

Billy Collins

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep just the first clause (“After we have parted”) and replace the rest of the poem with your own list of things that will keep on happening.
2. Change “we have parted” to something else (for example, “after we have met”, “after we have died”, “after we have graduated”, etc.) and complete a new poem about what happens after that.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Roses

You love the roses - so do I. I wish
The sky would rain down roses, as they rain
From off the shaken bush. Why will it not?
Then all the valley would be pink and white
And soft to tread on. They would fall as light
As feathers, smelling sweet; and it would be
Like sleeping and like waking, all at once!

George Eliot

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Write a similar poem about something other than roses.
2. Write a poem about not liking roses, while staying as close to the lines and words of this one as possible but flipping them all around. (e.g. "You hate the roses...")
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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the earth is a living thing

is a black shambling bear
ruffling its wild back and tossing
mountains into the sea

is a black hawk circling
the burying ground circling the bones
picked clean and discarded

is a fish black blind in the belly of water
is a diamond blind in the black belly of coal

is a black and living thing
is a favorite child
of the universe
feel her rolling her hand
in its kinky hair
feel her brushing it clean

Lucille Clifton

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Add a new line to two lines in the third stanza that follows the same pattern. (“is a [something] blind in the [something]”)
2. Add a new stanza after the first two that compares the Earth to something else.
3. Replace the last three lines of the poem with lines of your own that picture the Earth doing something a child would do.
4. Write your own poem whose title begins, “The earth is...”
5. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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First Things

Still Dark.

Still. Dark. Far out over the black
water, the foghorns low like cattle. The cable leaps awake,
knocking, clattering in its slot. The first bird calls,
a single song twining in the still air. Then
another, and another wakes and calls, until
a cloud of sound rises over the backyards.

Now the far-off rumble of the first cable car,
laboring up the hill like a heavy cargo ship
carrying the morning. Here is my life:
the slanted streets, the growing light,
the excited birds.

Carolyn Miller

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep the first four words, and go on to describe your own mornings, including the phrase, "Here is my life:" somewhere near the end.
2. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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The Jewel

There is this cave
In the air behind my body
That nobody is going to touch:
A cloister, a silence
Closing around a blossom of fire.
When I stand upright in the wind,
My bones turn to dark emeralds.

James Wright

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep lines 1, 4, and 6 as they are, and rewrite lines 2, 3, 5, and 7.
2. Write a poem in which the mysterious force or space within the poet is not a cave, but some other thing. (A tree? A river? A moon?)
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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my lost father

see where he moves
he leaves a wake of tears
see in the path of his going
the banners of regret
see just above him the cloud
of welcome see him rise
see him enter the company
of husbands fathers sons

Lucille Clifton

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep all the odd numbered lines (1, 3, 5, and 7) and replace the even numbered lines (2, 4, 6, 8) with lines of your own.
2. Write a poem of your own about your father.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Tuesday, 9 A.M.

A cold morning, gray skies
and winter coming, and I'm running
down the sidewalk to my rusted Honda,
its faded paint job streaked
with rivulets of rain and urban grit,
in a quavery city of wooden houses
begrimed with pollution and astral dust
and scarred with human failure,
me with someplace to go
and not running late, my car
not yet leaking from the winter rains,
the Gypsy Kings on the tape deck and a poem
coming into my head, I think:
I love my life.

Carolyn Miller

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Describe a scene from your own life that you can end with the line, "I love my life."
2. Describe a scene you might end with a different line.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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My Sandwich

So many things
you'd not have thought of
until they were given.

Even the simple—
a cottage cheese sandwich,
a heron's contractable neck.

You eat. You look.
Then you look back and it's over.

This life. This flood—
unbargained for as lasting love was—
of lasting oddness.

Jane Hirschfeld

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Keep the first and last stanzas, and replace the middle of the poem with your own stanzas describing two other things besides a sandwich and a heron.
2. Replace the final stanza with a stanza of your own that sums things up your own way.
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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Encounter

We were riding through frozen fields in a wagon at dawn.
A red wing rose in the darkness.

And suddenly a hare ran across the road.
One of us pointed to it with his hand.

That was long ago. Today neither of them is alive,
Not the hare, nor the man who made the gesture.

O my love, where are they, where are they going
The flash of a hand, streak of movement, rustle of pebbles.
I ask not out of sorrow, but in wonder.

Czeslaw Milosz

Translated by Czeslaw Milosz and Lillian Vallee

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Write a new poem, replacing everything except the first, fifth, and seventh lines of this one.
2. Describe a scene from your past involving people or creatures that are no longer around. (Not necessarily because they are no longer alive, as in this poem.)
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.

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A Bitterness

I believe you did not have a happy life.
I believe you were cheated.
I believe your best friends were loneliness and misery,
I believe your busiest enemies were anger and depression.
I believe joy was a game you could never play without stumbling.
I believe comfort, though you craved it, was forever a stranger.
I believe music had to be melancholy or not at all.
I believe no trinket, no precious metal, shone so bright as your bitterness.
I believe you lay down at last in your coffin none the wiser and unassuaged.
Oh, cold and dreamless under the wild, amoral, reckless, peaceful flowers of the hillsides.

Mary Oliver

Write your own poem that imitates this poem in some way. If you finish early, write another one!

Some suggestions:

1. Write your own poem about someone in which every line begins with “I believe” and the last line begins, “Oh...”
2. Write a poem not necessarily about a person in which every line begins with “I believe” and the last line begins, “Oh...”
3. Write a poem that imitates this one in some other way.

Write out your whole poem (or poems) by hand, even if you're only changing one word from the original poem.