

Rhyme Time

The quickest way to indicate to a reader that you consider what you are writing to be a poem is to use rhyme. Every poet knows that, even if they—like me—don't write in rhyme all the time. Rhymes delight humans, both physically and mentally. Why else would we squeal when we rhyme accidentally?

Freestyle rappers are so quick-witted they can think of what they want to say (call that A1) and something that rhymes with it (call that A2) at almost the same time. Then, most impressive of all, before they've even said anything, they *switch the order* so that A2 comes *before* A1. Why do they do that? Because the first rhyme sets the tone for the song. Any rhymes in the middle need only follow along and not be distracting (that's how many go wrong). Then comes the last rhyme, which hits hard and strong. In other words, they begin with the filler and end with the killer. Save the best for last.

When you're in the drafting stage of a rhyming poem, all kinds of words will show up at your mind's doorstep as if to say, "Pick me! I'm the best! I'm full of zest! I'll pass any test! I'm doubly blessed! I'm not a pest! I brush my teeth with Crest! I sleep in a nest, and get lots of rest!" But it's totally okay to reorder or even refuse them, *because the order in which the words arrive is not how you have to use them.*

Sometimes in the middle, you'll want to switch it up,
with slick tricks for kicks just to mix it up.
Like you blow your house down (then you fix it up).

Rhymes are like muscles connected with sinews,
but sometimes the sentence with the rhyme in it continues
on past the rhyme and stops somewhere else
(like you were looking for someone but it turned out to be yourself).

That's called *enjambment*, when the end of the line
is not the end of the thought, and it's totally fine
to keep on the run long after the rest of the rhyme's done,
son. Here endeth the lesson, and the battle. I won.

Directions

Using the poem below as a model¹, write about the thoughts, memories, fears, joys, and mostly OBJECTS that generally fill your head each day. Take the reader on a guided tour of your particular mental neighborhood in Crazy Town (because we're all a little crazy, aren't we?).

Take a Look Inside My Mind

Take a look inside my mind but take care;
There's no telling what you might find in there.
It's filled like a secondhand store full of junk:
old suitcases scuffed and bumped from the trunk,
a memory of my mother laughing in the rain,
the billiard-ball handle of my grandfather's cane,
some chances I took, but even more that I missed
like girl friends (not girlfriends) I so wish I'd kissed,
sad nights I tried to sleep through my tears,
a letter from my father that I've kept for years
in which he says he loves me and is proud of me, too,
a piece of sea glass, old, scratched smooth, once blue,
a vacation plane ticket between the pages of a book,
an old ivory chess set that's missing one rook,
a brass key for winding a grandfather clock,
a hope chest that won't open unless you jiggle the lock.

I have fashioned a window out of this poem.
If you've seen something you like, take it home.

The majority of images in this poem come from real memories of mine, and that's part of what makes them memorable. Also, it's filled with actual stuff! It's not about "my thoughts and emotions are like the seven oceans, filled with tears that I cried deep inside in grief that fly through the air like a leaf from a tree that's inside of me like my heart in my chest or my art that's best left in a box of old socks (with two locks)." That's funny, but dumb. Simply give us a list of some of the things in your head today (like old toys, old injuries, big fights, musical instruments, songs your mother sang to you when you were little, silly thoughts, dirty clothes, pens that don't write, missing mittens, dead pets' old collars, etc.).

¹ In fact, you may copy the first rhyming couplet and use it as the first couplet of your own poem