

Tetactrys Poetry

Poetry for the formula minded poet.

This is a description of this enjoyable style of poetry as well as suggestions for idea generation for these tricky little poems.

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Tetactrys Poetry

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Note: This poetry packet can be used in the classroom or as a stand alone project for home use. It was created with both educational arenas in mind.

Tetactrys Poetry

What is it?

Tetactrys poetry is poetry where each line of the poem is dictated by the number of syllables in it. The pattern consists of a mathematically pleasing set of syllables where the number of syllables in the first four lines add up to the number of syllables in the fifth line, with each line having more syllables than the one before it. This also can create a pyramid looking poem so that it is pleasing to the eye as well as to the part of the brain which is figuring out how the math mingles with the poetry.

The first line of each of these poems starts with just one syllable. The second line has two syllables. The third line has three syllables. The fourth line has four syllables and the fifth line has a grand total of ten syllables. That is all you need to create one of these poems.

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How do you count syllables?

The first thing to remember is how to determine how many syllables are in each line of poetry. Clapping has always worked for me, since it was how I was taught to do it in elementary school. The word syllable has three claps in it, or three syllables. The word truck has only one clap or one syllable. The word slipper has two claps, so it has two syllables. Try clapping to the words to understand how to count the syllables. For the musically inclined people, think of the claps/syllables as beats in the music.

Once the clapping is understood, then the poetry can begin. For this poetry is not quite what it should be unless the number of syllables is correct. Getting the syllables wrong is like a literary train wreck.

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Examples

The following are examples of poetry using this technique. Each line has the number of syllables in parentheses at the end of the line. The title is not part of the actual poem, so it is listed in bold.

Forest

Green (1)

Tall trees (2)

Bushy ferns (3)

Winding pathways (4)

The domicile to many animals (10)

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Examples (continued)

Luck

Coins (1)

Fountain (2)

Wishing well (3)

Blowing candles (4)

The pot of gold is nothing without you (10)

Mountain Snow

White (1)

Fluffy (2)

Fun to throw (3)

Snowmen in hats (4)

Sledding, sliding, boarding, skating, skiing (10)

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Examples (continued)

Quilting Love

Quilt (1)

Pretty (2)

Colorful (3)

Warm and lovely (4)

An object of beauty to share with you (10)

Scrap Quilt

Scraps (1)

Pieces (2)

Of fabric (3)

Sewn in rhythm (4)

Making joy and mirth for my loving friend (10)

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Examples (continued)

Young Love

Smiles (1)

Kiss kiss (2)

Tickles, too (3)

Hugs and wrestling (4)

Roll in the hay and enjoy the good life (10)

Poetry

Write (1)

Poems (2)

Flowing ink (3)

Filling pages (4)

Writing feelings and thoughts to share with you (10)

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The Poetry Process

I will share with you how I created the Mountain Snow poem listed previously. There was a contest in ByLine magazine asking for a poem about winter or snow. My first thought was to write down all the words that came to mind for this topic. This is what I wrote:

Snow

Sled

Ice

Ice skates

Crystals

Skis

Flakes

Snowboards

Hail

Snowmobile

Snow balls

Icicles

Snowman

Sleet

Shovel

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The Poetry Process (continued)

As you can see, these words don't convey much action. They are a list of nouns that came to mind when I thought of winter or snow. Since it was winter at the time and I lived in the mountains where there was snow on the ground, some of the ideas were pretty simple. Although the word shovel might not fit with this poem, it brought vivid memories, since I was the one in charge of shoveling the snow to get in or out of the driveway each day. It was a heavy winter.

The next step was to get these thoughts into the correct form. The first two lines (White and Fluffy) came easily. The next line had two alternatives. I had Cold snowballs or Fun to throw to use. These actually play off of each other,

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The Poetry Process (continued)

so my notes on how to make this poem can be a jump off to another poem altogether. As you can tell, I chose to use Fun to throw in the poem, since it didn't have to be in a ball to have fun throwing it.

The fourth line also had a choice for me to make. I had either Snowmen in hats or Snowballs are cold. I decided that Snowmen in hats reminded me of the Christmas special cartoons I saw when I was little, so I liked that one better than describing the previous line. It also added to the whole concept that snow doesn't need to be in a ball to have fun to throw it.

The fifth line had me thinking of all the different things someone could do in the snow for sport or fun. I had

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The Poetry Process (continued)

students who were in the competition sport category, so they were a source of ideas in themselves. It also occurred to me as I wrote out the words, that most of the words that came to mind started with the letter s. I had to put the word boarding in there in honor of the snowboarders out there. So I decided that boarding would be in the center of the line of two syllable words describing winter sports.

Mountain Snow

White (1)

Fluffy (2)

Fun to throw (3)

Snowmen in hats (4)

Sledding, sliding, boarding, skating, skiing (10)

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Make Your Own Poem

Now it is your turn to make a poem of your own. Start with a clean sheet of paper and face your fear of the blank page. Next decide what mood you're in, are you in the mood to do a spider graph of ideas, a list of ideas or are you in the mood to put each idea on a separate 3 x 5 card to shuffle, sort and lay out all over the floor or ground?

Keep in mind that the 3 x 5 card method can include an extra step of jotting down notes based on the different arrangements of the cards to later form ideas for the final poem. These same 3 x 5 cards can then be mixed in with other 3 x 5 cards for future idea generation for other writing projects. These other projects don't need to be limited to poetry. They can also be ideas for prose writing as well.

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Make Your Own Poem (continued)

Now where do you get the idea for what to write about on your blank piece of paper? You can get ideas from writing contests as I did for the Winter Snow poem, or you could get ideas from magazines, newspapers, overheard conversations, movies or even by watching the news on tv.

Here are some words I found by opening my dictionary to random pages:

Bump

Gelatin

Carve

Hornswoggle

Corrupt

Kitchen

Debt

Mesmerize

Exaggerate

Powerboat

Flesh wound

Smash

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Templates

Here are a couple of templates for use in poem creation.

Title: _____

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

(10) _____

Title: _____

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

(10) _____