

# Poetry



# What is Poetry?

Almost anything can be poetry. For example, Muhammad Ali's "Me, We" is considered a poem.

Poetry is very different from other forms of literature. It takes time to read a poem and understanding of the words within the poem to truly get it. The best poems, however, carry lots of meaning to the reader and have beautiful words convey it.

They may be published in a collection or as a single piece of work.

# Quick History

Poetry is perhaps the oldest form of literature as it predates written history.

Poetry was often sung or recited as another form of oral history. This explains why ancient works (*The Odyssey* and *Vedas*) have a poetic form to them.

The earliest written poem is debated to either be *Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor* (2500 B.C.E) or *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. With the earliest epic poetry (besides *The Epic of Gilgamesh*) are the Indian Sanskrit Epics (*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*) and the Greek Epics (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*)

The history of poetry is a long one. Many questions still stand like: how can we define a poem? What makes a poem different from other forms of literature?

Though one definition could be: something that arouses strong emotions due to its beauty

# Prominent Figures

- Maya Angelou: American poet and novelist - *On the pulse of Morning*, and *We Had Him*
- Emily Dickinson: American poet - *Because I Could Not Stop for Death*, and “*Hope is the Thing with Feathers*”
- Pablo Neruda: Chilean poet - *Oda al Gato*, and *If You Forget Me*
- Oscar Wilde: Irish playwright and novelist: *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, and *The Garden of Eros*
- Li Bai: Chinese poet - *Quiet Night Thought*, and *The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter*

## Some Recommendations

- **“Crush” by Richard Siken** - A compilation of poetry defined by obsession and love. His poetry is confessional, gay, savage, and charged with violent eroticism.
- **“The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde” by Audre Lorde** - A compilation of poetry that tells of Audre Lorde’s best work. As Publisher’s Weekly puts it: “The first declaration of a black, lesbian feminist identity took place in these poems, and set the terms—beautifully, forcefully—for contemporary multicultural and pluralist debate.”
- **“Song of Simple Truth: The Complete Poems of Julia de Burgos” by Julia de Burgos** - A compilation of poetry which uses beautiful and romantic language to share her feminist insights.
- **“Poems” by Langston Hughes** - A compilation of poetry includes all the poems of Langston Hughes. This book gives an insight into his life as an African-American in the early 1900s to the early 1960s.
- **“If Not, Winter” by Sappho, translated by Anne Carson** - A compilation of poetry told in fragments. Here is the surviving Sappho poems all in one book. Her poems tell of life as a lesbian woman in Ancient Greece.