



Poetry Rocks!

Take your dreams seriously...play with them.®

Tool 8

The Recipe

WHAT IS POETRY MADE OF?

CONTENT

Geography

Chronology

Furniture

PURPOSE

To deepen what you've learned about Geography, Chronology, and Furniture as necessary content ingredients and to keep practicing weaving them into your work. This tool can be used in ANY genre to strengthen your writing.

WHAT TO DO

Create a poem inspired by a visual image by gathering words that suggest Geography (details of place), Chronology (details of time), and Furniture (sensory details) to use as ingredients in cooking up your work.

1. Select a visual image. Anything will work—a painting, a post card, a greeting card image, a picture in a magazine, or a photograph.
2. Study it for a few moments. Let the image speak to you.
3. As you gaze at the image, write down twelve words that it brings to mind, one for each category below. This is a right brain/left brain activity; trust whatever your right brain comes up with even if it doesn't make sense. The words don't have to be present in your image, and you don't need to understand the connection between the image and the words. Choose words that are beautiful to you for

both their sound and meaning. Be specific (sassafras, not tree). I've given you examples, but any word that comes to mind for you in each category will work.

- A "who" word: boy, mother, Maxwell, etc.
- An object: chair, ball, ring, etc.
- A color word: amethyst, grey, aquamarine, etc.
- A "sound" word: whistle, lullaby, melodic, etc.
- A "smell" word: vanilla, ocean, pungent, etc.
- A "taste" word: raspberry, sweet, succulent, etc.
- A "touch" word: kitten, prickly, cotton, etc.
- A "where" word: thicket, Schenectady, home, etc.
- A "when" word: evening, yesterday, April, etc.
- A verb of motion: glisten, canter, lope, etc.
- A way a person can be: worried, persnickety, audacious, etc.
- An abstraction (anything you can't see, smell, taste, hear, or touch): forgiveness, hope, lonely, etc.

4. Now, "assemble" your poem or other piece of writing, weaving in these words in any way you like. Use all of them, but feel free to take them out during the editing process.

EXAMPLE

This poem I wrote with this tool captured my experience of losing my mother. I used a magazine image of a man walking down a city street at night. I didn't know what I would write about when I started—my words gave me my subject.

- A "who" word: mother
- An object: snowplow
- A color word: grimy
- A "sound" word: saxophone
- A "smell" word: pistachios
- A "taste" word: bitter
- A "touch" word: body
- A "where" word: hallway
- A "when" word: May
- A verb of motion: glitter
- A way a person can be: lonely
- An abstraction: blessed

Yes, The Birds Sang

Infinity glittered its bright wings
the night my mother died.
A saxophone sounded somewhere,
I'm sure of it, even as one of my brothers
drove circles through the city in silence
after our phone call, couldn't quite explain
the time it took him

to walk back in the door
a motherless man, the same
door he'd walked out
only hours before, world
still intact, familiar.
He'd said goodbye. We all had.
He passed around pistachios.

Some of us ate them, sitting there
in the hallway outside her room
waiting for the undertaker to come.
I'd thought her body
would be frightening
without her. It wasn't, only
lonely, an echo. Yes,

the birds were singing
the world awake
as cheerily as ever, even at four
that May morning when I finally
went to bed. I dreamed of butterflies
opening: one, then another. Winter
had yielded to

cherry blossoms, the snow
had melted, even the last dregs of the
piles the plows leave, those grimy sentinels
one thinks will never
lose their grip, but the wind,
the blessed wind knew enough
to blow bitter, bringing rain.

REFLECTION

You probably noticed that The Recipe is quite similar to Tool 7, The Envisioning. Did you find listing twelve specific words more or less useful to you than listing words and phrases in the three general areas of Geography, Chronology, and Furniture in Tool 7?

Our brains don't all work in the same way, after all, which is why learning a number of different approaches to writing is important. What tools have you most enjoyed—and found most valuable—so far?

HONE YOUR CRAFT

Take note of how poets you admire include “furniture” in the content of their poems. And be sure to include “furniture” in your own poems.

Yep, yet again, grab a highlighter and a great poem, and highlight every word or phrase that contributes sensory information, or is, in other words, an *image*. And be sure to keep noticing the Geography and Chronology words too. Go ahead, go all out and get yourself a pack of multi-colored highlighters and note all three. This will help you become a more aware and thoughtful reader of poetry and hence, a better writer.

Be sure to include a good healthy dose of, to quote Billy Collins, “the plentiful imagery of the world” in your own poems.

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