

What is poetry? This is a question that continues to preoccupy both scholars and poets. For the open book quiz on Tuesday, please choose and print two poems from the website below and be prepared to explain how they define poetry and the poet. What made you choose these particular poems? Based on your reading and your own personal perspective, you will also be expected to come up with your own unique two-three sentence definition of poetry. You will be permitted to bring the poems you have chosen to class for the quiz. I am most interested in your ability to critically interpret the poem and compare/contrast the poets' definitions of poetry to your own perspective on the art form.

<http://www.tnellen.com/cybereng/poetry/>

## WHAT IS POETRY?

### 1. SAMUEL JOHNSON (from *Preface to Shakespeare*):

“The end of writing is to instruct; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing.”

### 2. WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (from *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*):

“Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.”

### 3. Adrienne Rich

“Poems are like dreams; in them you put what you don’t know you know.”

### 4. Pablo Neruda

“I have always maintained that the writer’s task has nothing to do with mystery or magic, and that the poet’s, at least, must be a personal effort for the benefit of all. The closest thing to poetry is a loaf of bread or a ceramic dish or a piece of wood lovingly carved, even if by clumsy hands”

### 5. ROBERT FROST

"A poem begins with a lump in the throat, a home-sickness or a love-sickness. It is a reaching-out toward expression; an effort to find fulfillment. A complete poem is one where the emotion has found its thought and the thought has found the words."

## **6. ROBERT PINSKY**

"Poetry...is an ancient art or technology: older than the computer, older than print, older than writing and indeed, though some may find this surprising, much older than prose. I presume that the technology of poetry, using the human body as its medium, evolved for specific uses; to hold things in memory, both within and beyond the individual life span; to achieve intensity and sensuous appeal; to express feelings and ideas rapidly and memorably. To share those feelings and ideas with companions, and also with the dead and with those to come after us."

## **9. ARCHIBALD MacLEISH** *From "Ars Poetica"*

A poem should not mean.

But be.

**10. Rainer Maria Rilke**"For poems are not, as people think, simply emotions (one has emotions early enough)—they are experiences."