

# 1st Meeting Assignment

## *How Poetry Works*

MIT High School Studies Program  
Spring, 2009

**DIRECTIONS:** Please answer the questions on this sheet and bring them with you to discuss at our first class meeting on March 14, 2009.

### 1. What are the differences between poetry and prose?

Take a look at a poem and a prose version of it on page 3 of this document. Use these two versions to identify some of the differences between poetry and prose. Write your thoughts below.

- Differences between poetry and prose:

POETRY

PROSE

### 2. Keeping in mind the differences you noted in #1 above, try to write a definition of "poetry."

(Keep going; there is one more question on page 2.)

**"How Poetry Works" - MIT HSSP/Spring, 2009**

**1st Meeting Assignment Sheet**

**Page 2**

**3. What do the following groups of words have in common?**

(Hint: Try saying them out loud.)

A. apply  
decry

K. grease  
seen

B. apply  
decry  
upon

L. truth  
cool

C. yonder  
window

M. look  
spook

D. yonder  
window  
office

E. vanity  
sanity

F. vanity  
sanity  
elephant

G. afternoon  
underneath

H. sable  
circle

I. laughter  
laminated

J. open  
overture

## TEXTS FOR USE WITH QUESTION #1:

### *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*

by Robert Frost

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

### *Watching the Snow Fall*

I'm not sure, but I think I know who owns this area. The man lives in the village, so he won't see me here watching the snow fall on his property. My horse probably thinks it's strange that I've stopped here between the lake and the woods. There aren't any houses around, and it's the darkest night of the year. The horse shakes his head as if to ask why, and his harness bells jingle; the only other sounds are the wind and the snow falling. It's really pleasant to stand here in the quiet darkness, but I have to move on because I have other things to do and a long way to go before bedtime.

**Syllabus**  
for  
*How Poetry Works*

**Week 1 - What Is Poetry, Anyway? (March 14)**

What is the difference between poetry and prose? How do you define poetry? Basics of rhythm and rhyme.

**Week 2 - Go Figure! (March 21)**

Figures of speech: simile, metaphor, allusion. Imagery.

**\* \* \* \* \* NO CLASS on MARCH 28 \* \* \* \* \***

**Week 3 - Out of Line (April 4)**

Blank verse and free verse.

**Week 4 - Xtreme Poetry (April 11)**

Poets who experiment radically with language and form: Whitman, Ginsburg, cummings, Stein, others.

**Week 5 - Finding the Right Words (April 18)**

How poets re-work or revise their poems (Yeats, others); issues of editing and creating a standard text (Dickinson); translations from other languages to English (Marot, Borges, Rilke, others).

**Week 6 - When Poems Go Bad (April 25)**

What makes a "good" poem? What makes a "bad" poem?

**Week 7 - Dancing in Chains, Part 1 (May 2)**

Limericks, triolets, villanelles, sestinas.

**Week 8 - Dancing in Chains, Part 2 (May 9)**

The sonnet.