

# CREATIVE WRITING

## Ekphrastic Poetry

Ages 8–14

What is an ekphrastic poem?

Based on the Greek word for description, an ekphrastic poem describes a work of art and sometimes explores underlying meanings that the poet may discover by looking at the artwork more closely. This kind

of poetry has been used for a very long time. The oldest example is a description of Achilles' shield in Homer's *Iliad*, which was written over 2,000 years ago!

How do you write an ekphrastic poem? There is no right or wrong way to write an ekphrastic poem. Just follow these basic instructions and you will be a poet in no time.

### Get started

1. Choose an artwork and study it closely. On the left side of your paper, list nouns found in the artwork. Don't forget to include colors and textures. On the right side of your paper, list verbs that are seen or implied in the artwork. Make sure you use present-tense only. Don't use "ing" verbs.
2. Combine the nouns and verbs to create at least 6 sentences. Don't worry about it making sense. Play around with the sentences to see what sounds best.
3. Revise your sentences. Add at least one alliteration. More advanced learners can add similes or metaphors.
4. Arrange your best 4 or 5 sentences in the order you like.
5. Give your poem a title!



James Riddel (Scottish, 1857–1928), *An Audience Fit Tho' Few: A Reading of the Story of Robinson Crusoe*, 1890, Oil on canvas, Gift of the Norfolk Foundation, 2000.7.2

### Helpful Vocabulary:

**Noun:** a word used to identify people, places, or things

**Verb:** a word used to represent an action or state of being

**Alliteration:** the repetition of initial consonant sounds of nearby words

**Metaphor:** a figure of speech that is used to make a comparison between two things that aren't alike but have something in common

**Simile:** a figure of speech that compares similar things, with help from the words "like" or "as"

## Example

Based on *Woods of Ashokan* by  
Thomas Worthington Whittredge

### The Forest

Red leaves fall.  
A small bird calls  
to his friends near the stream.  
The autumn breeze gives a  
soft sigh as the sun sets,  
and the forest quiets again.

You can also create a more complex poem,  
imagining that you are inside the artwork.

### The Hike

Softly, softly I step  
on the dried, dead leaves,  
crunching and crinkling beneath my feet.  
A bird call cuts through  
the rustling of the trees  
and the trickle of a stream.  
I want to stay here,  
breathing in the damp earth  
and bathed in golden, October light.



Thomas Worthington Whittredge (American, 1820–1910), *Woods of Ashokan*, 1868, Oil on canvas, Gift of Mr. Edward J. Brickhouse, 81.109

Let your imagination run wild! Use the resources listed below  
to read more ekphrastic poetry and get inspired.

The Miss Rumphius Effect, a teacher blog on poetry:  
<http://missrumphiuseffect.blogspot.com>

List of famous ekphrastic poems by Emory University:  
<http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/titlepage.html>