



Anne
Carson
Short
Talks

with a new introduction
by Margaret Christakos

TEACHER GUIDE

BRICK BOOKS CLASSICS I BRICK BOOKS

Brick Books has produced this Teacher Guide as an aid in discussing and studying the titles from its Brick Books Classics poetry series in secondary and post-secondary classrooms.

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INTRODUCTION TO POETRY

WHAT MAKES POETRY, POETRY?

Begin with some of your assumptions and preconceptions about poetry by answering the following questions as true or false. If you believe the statement to be false, you may indicate why with a brief explanation to the right of the statement. The final question invites you, in your own notebook, to write whatever else you believe to be true (or false) about poetry. Quiz someone close to you with your own suppositions.

1. T/F **Poetry has a beat.**

2. T/F **Poetry rhymes.**

3. T/F **Poetry does not run margin to margin, as prose does, but has line breaks.**

4. T/F **Poetry deals with imagery (allegory, symbol, metaphor, simile, etc.).**

5. T/F **Poetry is difficult.**

6. T/F **Poetry has stanzas.**

7. T/F **Poetry has verses.**

8. T/F **There is no difference between a stanza and a verse.**

9. T/F **Songs that have words are poetry.**

10. T/F **Poems, unlike short fiction, don't tell a story.**

11. T/F **Free verse has no rules.**

12. T/F **Blank verse has no rules.**

13. T/F **All poems have a regular metre or cadence.**

14. T/F **Poems have one valid interpretation.**

15. T/F **All poets are extremely well-educated.**

16. T/F **Rap is poetry.**

17. T/F **Poetry is/isn't...**

HOW DO POETS TALK ABOUT POETRY?

Read some of the quotations below to discover what published poets say about their own craft. In the box below their statements, create your own statement about poetry.

“Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity.”

—**William Wordsworth**

“Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”

—**Percy Bysshe Shelley**

“Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.”

—**T. S. Eliot**

“Poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive, and widely effective mode of saying things, and hence its importance.”

—**Matthew Arnold**

“The poet is the priest of the invisible.”

—**Wallace Stevens**

“If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?”

—**Emily Dickinson**

“Poems come out of wonder, not out of knowing.”

—**Lucille Clifton**

“Poetry isn’t a profession; it’s a way of life. It’s an empty basket; you put your life into it and make something out of that.”

—**Mary Oliver**

“When an angel carries away my soul / all shrouded in fog, folded in flames / I have no body, no tears to weep / just a bag in my heart, full of poems.”

—**Elena Svarts**

I think that poetry is ...

TEACHER GUIDE TO SHORT TALKS: BRICK BOOKS CLASSICS 1

by ANNE CARSON

For each of the selections, before you respond to the questions, keep in mind the following important considerations for each piece:

- a) Imagine the identity of the speaker.
- b) Imagine an audience for the address.
- c) What imagery (sensory detail, metaphors, similes, symbols, etc.) does the poet use?
- d) What technical elements are in play (structure, rhythm or its lack, rhyme or its lack)?
- e) What allusions does the poet make to ideas/people/places (historical figures, works of art, scientific terms, etc.) that have a life outside the poem?
- f) Are there elements of the poet's biography (family life, profession, relationships, etc.) that inform the work? If so, how do they inform the poetry?

Introduction: *Glass, Slag: Short Talk on Anne Carson's Hewn Flow*, by Margaret Christakos (page 11)

- ▶ Based on your reading of the introduction by Christakos, what can you surmise about the poetry that you are about to read?
- ▶ Christakos, in her introduction to *Short Talks*, describes the volume of poetry as "45 small taut rectangles of poetic address," "a book of indirect addresses from a chorus of individualized voices gesturing personae," a "series of inventively brief prose poems," and "a unique form of slag-like poetic address." Which of these descriptions do you find most intriguing? Why?
- ▶ Why do you suppose Christakos formulated her introduction in such an unorthodox manner? Give more than one reason for your supposition(s).

Introduction (page 23)

- ▶ Why do you suppose Carson creates an introduction to her own work? Can you think of other poets who have done something similar?
- ▶ In what ways does this particular introduction have a biblical quality to it?
- ▶ Choose one of the following allusions and estimate its significance to Carson's introduction:
 - a) Aristotle
 - b) violets
 - c) fascicles
 - d) poison dragons.

Short Talk on *Homo sapiens* (page 27)

- ▶ Cro-Magnon man emerged about 45 000 years ago. What does the author know of this evolutionary form of our species? What doesn't she know?
- ▶ Why would the male record the phases of the moon and think about "her"?
- ▶ Why mention "Animals. Horizon. Face in a pan of water"?

Short Talk on *Hopes* (page 28)

- ▶ The speaker mentions a friend who had his hands melted off "during the war." What connection do you form between sentences one and two and that sentence?
- ▶ Which of the poet's tools are in use in the sentence "Learning is the same colour as life"?
- ▶ Why is the piece entitled "Short Talk on Hopes"?

Short Talk on *Chromo-luminarism* (page 29)

- ▶ Define ***Chromo-luminarism*** and find the Seurat painting mentioned in the poem by any method you wish (book on Impressionist art, article on pointillism, internet blurb from Wikipedia, etc.). What mood does the painting evoke in you as the viewer? Is it consistent with the mood created by the speakers in the poem?
- ▶ The speakers identify as first-person plural, **we**. Why?
- ▶ The speakers say that Seurat caught them "like adulterers" and that the river was "opening and closing its lips. The river was pressing Seurat to its lips." What is the difference, according to the speakers, between Seurat's relationship with the river and the speakers' own relationship?

Short Talk on Geisha (page 30)

- ▶ What is a geisha? The poet uses the history of the geisha as a vehicle to talk about something else. What do you think that subject is? Why?
- ▶ Identify the nouns used in this piece. List them in your own notebook. Which of these nouns are abstract? Which are concrete? Why such an even division between abstract thought and concrete reality?
- ▶ Find out what the Japanese characters for *geisha* are. Reproduce them and illustrate them with some original artwork.

Short Talk on Gertrude Stein About 9:30 p.m. (page 31)

- ▶ Anne Carson teaches ancient Greek. Much of the poetry that had survived from that period survives in fragments. In what way does this piece reflect fragmentation?
- ▶ Hazard a few guesses about the subject matter of this short talk. Is Carson using Stein's voice, her own, and/or someone else's? Give reasons for your response.
- ▶ Who is the audience for this short talk, do you think? It seems to be a response to a comment or question. What might that comment or question have been? Who might make such a comment or ask such a question?

Short Talk on His Draughtsmanship (page 32)

- ▶ According to the speaker, how does this artist draw the speaker, his model?
- ▶ The sentences "A thin arm makes a face sadder" and "Describing shadows he grew small, rascally" imply that certain lines or shapes have an emotional effect on the subject being drawn. Is there anything in the syntax or structure of this piece that conveys an emotional quality?
- ▶ Compare and contrast this piece with "Short Talk on *Chromo-luminarism*."

Short Talk on Housing (page 33)

- ▶ Symbols point outside the poem, to non-literal interpretations (*rabbits* for example are associated with fertility, Easter, and magic). What do you feel could be the symbolic value of:
 - a) houses
 - b) hats
 - c) clothing
 - d) Tio Pedro?
- ▶ Prepositions identify relationships of space, time, method, manner, reason, purpose, possession, direction, or motion. Which prepositions has this speaker used? Which relationship(s) is/are delineated? One of these prepositions is in

Latin. Which one? What meaning does it convey in the context of the sentence in which it is used?

- ▶ The speaker gives instruction on what to do if homeless. What does this indicate about the speaker's own situation? Is the point of view expressed by the speaker empathetic? Support your opinion.

Short Talk on Disappointments in Music (page 34)

- ▶ Prokofiev's music was composed under interesting conditions. What were those conditions?
- ▶ How does your answer above explain why Prokofiev didn't play his own First Piano Sonata?
- ▶ Why would he have had to listen to it on the telephone?

Short Talk on Where to Travel (page 35)

- ▶ Identify the speaker's mood (passionate, excited, bored, confused, etc.). Which details support your conclusion?
- ▶ "Three gates standing ajar" and "a fence that broke off" remain in an unspecified "wreck of a place" that "crashed." What are some symbolic interpretations of **gates**, **fences**, **wrecks**, and **crashes**?
- ▶ What effect does the statement "A place came there and crashed" have on the reader? Why do you think the author chose the passive voice for that sentence? How can a place crash?
- ▶ Find an image of Picasso's *Guernica* (in an art book or online). Can you see any connection between the painting and the notion of a place crashing?

Short Talk on Why Some People Find Trains Exciting (page 36)

- ▶ There is a capital at the beginning of this piece and a period at the end. After reading the piece, and researching the names of the train lines, attempt to explain why.
- ▶ Define the words **noctilucal**, **cheek-wary**, and **racketing** in the context of this piece.
- ▶ Translate the French phrases **je ne sais plus lequel** and **qui sait même qui sait**. Give several reasons for the use of French in this context.

Short Talk on Trout (page 37)

- ▶ How do the stages of a trout's life parallel those of human life? Of poets?

Short Talk on Ovid (page 38)

- ▶ Show how Anne Carson blurs distinctions of time and place in this short piece.
- ▶ Research Ovid's exile by Augustus and provide two plausible reasons for his banishment.
- ▶ Why would Ovid, who composed in Greek, be writing an epic poem in Getic?

Short Talk on Autism (page 39)

- ▶ Describe the setting in this prose poem.
- ▶ Do a bit of research on Autism Spectrum Disorder. In what ways does this piece reflect the mind of someone on the autism spectrum?
- ▶ What are the properties of the graphite in a pencil? How does this information make the sentence "*what does it eat, light?*" make sense?

Short Talk on Parmenides (page 40)

- ▶ What would happen to your perception of Italy if you changed the name from Italy to Brzoy? Why?
- ▶ The speaker says that Andreas travels the world "like the wandering moon with her borrowed light." What is the speaker suggesting about Andreas's travels?
- ▶ Who is Parmenides? When the speaker says, "I fear we failed to understand what he was saying or his reasons," is the reference to Andreas or to Parmenides? Why?

Short Talk on Defloration (page 41)

- ▶ What is defloration? Why is it an appropriate title for the piece?
- ▶ What is the Bridge of Sighs? Why is it an effective image for the subject matter?
- ▶ When the speaker suggests that dishonour caused her vocal cords to swell, what is she suggesting about her experience?

Short Talk on Major and Minor (page 42)

- ▶ Does the speaker's list of major versus minor things coincide with or differ from your own?
- ▶ Who is Elektra?
- ▶ "Wire mesh lined with glass" is an interesting image. Why did the poet use it?

Short Talk on the Rules of Perspective (page 43)

- ▶ Who is Braque?
- ▶ According to the speaker, what was Braque's argument for choosing to paint still life, *nature morte*, rather than landscapes?

- ▶ Reading Anne Carson requires a wide knowledge of art, philosophy, science, and other branches of learning. Does this wide-ranging referential quality of her work bring you closer to liking her poetry, or does it distance you from it? Why?

Short Talk on *Le Bonheur d’Être Bien Aimée* (page 44)

- ▶ Who is Pedro Calderón? What is his connection to this piece?
- ▶ What is synaesthesia? Have you ever experienced synaesthesia? If you have, describe your experience.
- ▶ How are “the cries of birds on the air” like “jewels”?

Short Talk on Brigitte Bardot (page 45)

- ▶ Who is Brigitte Bardot?
- ▶ Examine the use of the word **slave** in this piece and identify its master in the slave-master relationship.
- ▶ To what idea(s) do the words **La folie** refer?

Short Talk on Rectification (page 46)

- ▶ By doing a little research on Kafka, outline the times that Kafka and his fiancée, Felice Bauer, were actually in one another’s company. Why is this fact unusual?
- ▶ What is the antecedent of the pronoun “one” in the second last line? How do the commas clarify its use?
- ▶ Rectification means “setting it right.” What else is **set right** in this piece besides Kafka’s watch?

Short Talk on Van Gogh (page 47)

- ▶ What do you imagine “the nails that attach colours to things” might be referring to?
- ▶ Nails generally inflict pain but in this case Van Gogh saw that “the nails were in pain.” Why is Carson using the technique of personification here?

Short Talk on Sleep Stones (page 48)

- ▶ What kind of restrictions would have been placed on Claudel as a woman in the late 19th century and why is her descent into madness potentially a debatable part of her history, especially since it was her brother who had her committed to an asylum?
- ▶ Why is it significant in the context of this poem that Claudel often was charged with the work of the hands and/or feet of a sculpture when working as Rodin’s assistant?

- ▶ Claudel destroyed a large number of her own works and, in this piece, the speaker contends that she destroyed the sleep stones given to calm her in the evening. What do you think prompted this destructive tendency?

Short Talk on Walking Backwards (page 49)

- ▶ Comment on the tone of the speaker's voice in this piece.
- ▶ What are some common superstitions that might be handed down to a child through his/her/their parent?
- ▶ In what sense(s) might the dead be "victims of love"?

Short Talk on Waterproofing (page 50)

- ▶ The Nuremberg Laws were instituted in Germany in 1935. What political event would cause them to come to Bohemia-Moravia in the 1940s and why would Joseph David, a jurist, have no legal right to protest their imposition on him and his wife?
- ▶ The Nazis running concentration camps at Auschwitz used Zyklon B for their extermination gas. What two methods activated it?
- ▶ Why is the title of this piece particularly poignant?

Short Talk on the Mona Lisa (page 51)

- ▶ What question would Leonardo da Vinci have been asking his model?
- ▶ To what extent is the poem a comment on the length of time needed to complete a portrait?
- ▶ What is the link between the last poem and this one?

Short Talk on the End (page 52)

- ▶ What metaphor has the poet used in the second last line and how is it related to the title?
- ▶ The word **stumble** indicates a kind of imbalance in the composition. Identify this imbalance of light and its purpose in the print *The Three Crosses* (which you can find online or in a library).

Short Talk on Sylvia Plath (page 53)

- ▶ Do some thinking about the phrase "plain, burned things." Why those words? What does each word connote and why do they work well together?
- ▶ Why does the speaker comment on what Sylvia Plath's mother did **not** say? Would a continued comment upon what she **did** say be more effective? Why or why not?

- ▶ What do the terms **self-government** and **end of the road** have to do with Sylvia Plath?

Short Talk on Reading (page 54)

- ▶ Make a list of the sensual imagery used to describe the Rocky Mountains. How does the imagery relate to Flaubert's novel?
- ▶ How does the speaker's reading of *Madame Bovary* become incorporated into his/her/their experience of the world?
- ▶ Choose two disparate activities (other than reading and going on trips) that tend to separate families, and write a poem depicting a scene in which the same two activities are dealt with in a confined space (other than a car).

Short Talk on Rain (page 55)

- ▶ The speaker is leaving, in the rain, "past the palaces, oddly joyful." What do these facts tell us about the speaker's situation?
- ▶ When considering who first thought of counting raindrops, why does Carson use the pronoun "he"?
- ▶ What is implied when the speaker mentions that out on the sea the rain "beats on no one"?

Short Talk on Vicuñas (page 56)

- ▶ What is a vicuña? Why would the speaker consider it to be mythical?
- ▶ Who is Milton and why would he be thundering down "at his daughters"?
- ▶ The speaker says, "When you take up your axe, listen." Who is the speaker's audience?

Short Talk on the Total Collection (page 57)

- ▶ What is the rhetorical device that Noah uses when he denies "lack, oblivion or even the likelihood of a missing piece"? Why is it useful to him?
- ▶ Why do phylum classifications (such as Noah might have used to collect the specimens for his ark) operate on the basis of the shape of a triangle?
- ▶ How can "others" drown in classification?

Short Talk on Charlotte (page 58)

- ▶ When did the Brontë sisters do the majority of their work?
- ▶ Which of them instigated the publication of the sisters' work?
- ▶ When the speaker's "heart aches to hear Miss Brontë walking," how is walking used as a metaphor?

Short Talk on Sunday Dinner with Father (page 59)

- ▶ What technique is the speaker using to force his children into obedience?
- ▶ Explain the metaphor of the woodpecker scalp.
- ▶ Translate *Dimanche Éternel* and explain why it brings the poem full-circle.

Short Talk on the Youth at Night (page 60)

- ▶ When the speaker recounts that the youth “would have himself driven around,” what does this detail indicate about his status?
- ▶ Under what conditions might the words *scream*, *rosepools of flesh*, and *terrific lava* occur simultaneously?
- ▶ What does the fact that the youth “would ride and stare” indicate about his attitude toward this experience?

Short Talk on *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Deyman* (page 61)

- ▶ Several clues in the prose poem lead you to a specific city in the Netherlands. What is that city?
- ▶ This prose poem functions very much like an essay. It has an introduction, several points supporting its thesis, and a conclusion. Identify the thesis of this mini-essay.
- ▶ What is the literary term used to describe writing that has art as its subject?

Short Talk on Orchids (page 62)

- ▶ The letter discussed in this prose poem was actually written in 1881 but in 1883 what boy did go away from Emily Dickinson’s life? What boy went away from Carson’s life in a similar way?
- ▶ How do orchids grow? Why is this metaphor apt considering Dickinson’s loss above?
- ▶ How might the expression “But the fragrance is undying” be an expression of mourning?

Short Talk on Penal Servitude (page 63)

- ▶ Dostoevsky spent some years in prison. Why?
- ▶ What is a *brigand* and why is it an apt term to apply to prison inmates?
- ▶ If Dostoevsky “went in,” what does that say about the man who left?

Short Talk on the Truth to Be Had from Dreams (page 64)

- ▶ In what way is the attempt to recapture a dream similar to the experience of attempting to write a poem?

- ▶ How does the etymology of the word ***gripe*** in this prose poem unify the ideas of “seized by,” “rope,” and “towns, cities and habitations”?
- ▶ In the context of this poem, what do you imagine to be “male and female soul murder”?

Short Talk on Hölderlin’s World Night Wound (page 65)

- ▶ Who is King Oedipus and what happened to his eyes?
- ▶ How does this prose poem, like the one before it, touch on the theme of fusion of opposites with its allusion to Hölderlin?
- ▶ Hölderlin spent a large amount of his life sequestered in tower rooms given to him by a fan when his career was in decline. Upon climbing to the top, what notion is suggested by Hölderlin’s observation that “[a]bove the tree line is as blank as the inside of a wrist”?

Short Talk on the Sensation of Aeroplane Takeoff (page 66)

- ▶ Attempt to describe an aeroplane takeoff as literally as you can. (If you have never boarded a plane, you will have to use your imagination.)
- ▶ Comment on the use of the above sensation as a metaphor for love.
- ▶ Why do the elements in italics bring humour to the piece?

Short Talk on My Task (page 67)

- ▶ What, in your opinion, is the poet’s task? Is this speaker a poet?
- ▶ Does anything in this piece coincide with or directly oppose your point of view?
- ▶ The speaker identifies with the horse and says that it “can restore red hearts to red.” What are the associations with the colour red that make this statement meaningful? Consider symbolic associations as well as sound associations.

Short Talk on Hedonism (page 68)

- ▶ If you are a hedonist, what is your philosophy of life?
- ▶ Is the speaker a hedonist? How do you know?
- ▶ Going back through other poems that you have read thus far in this volume, can you find other examples of cumulative metaphors or evidence of excess?

Short Talk on the King and His Courage (page 69)

- ▶ Explain how the metaphor of “the bed where the grindstone lay” works. How can a grindstone be in a bed?
- ▶ Explain the metaphor of the world as “the most famous experimental prison of its time.” Who would be the criminals? Who would be the guards? Who would be the warden?

- ▶ Examine the sentence “Beyond the torture stakes he could see, nothing.” What is the function of the comma? How does it alter the meaning that you make from the words?

Short Talk on Shelter (page 70)

- ▶ Comment on the image of glowing in the piece. Why is it used?
- ▶ What is the antecedent of the pronoun **that** in sentence 3? What about in sentence 6? Defend your responses.
- ▶ Why does sentence 5 use the word **replace** rather than **close**?

Short Talk on Who You Are (page 71)

- ▶ The reference to “a voice calling in the wilderness” is an echo of Isaiah 40:3 in the Old Testament, John 1:23 in the New Testament, and Mark 1:3 in the New Testament: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” How does this idea resonate within the piece?
- ▶ The speaker talks of waiting. Waiting for what?

Author’s Afterword: Short Talk on Afterwords (page 75)

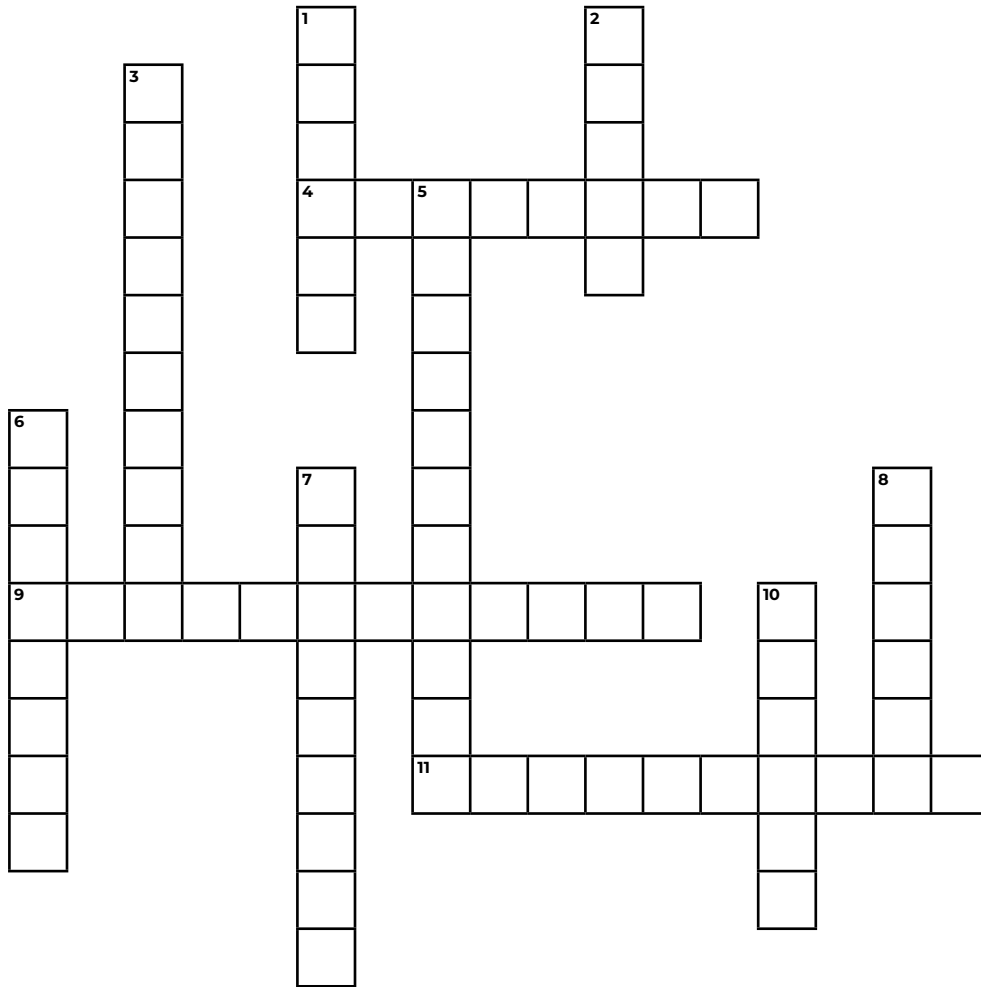
- ▶ Christopher Johnson wrote a book called *Microstyle: the Art of Writing Little*. In the introduction he writes, “Some of the most important verbal messages we craft are also the shortest: headlines, titles, sound bites, brand names, domain names, slogans, taglines, company mantras, bullet points, tweets, Facebook status updates. These miniature messages depend not on the elements of style but the *atoms* of style. They require *microstyle*.” Write a 1 000-word essay on Anne Carson as a master of microstyle.
- ▶ Condense the above essay into 250 words.
- ▶ Convert your essay to prose poetry.

What other questions would you like to discuss that were not asked above?

USE YOUR WORDS...

ANNE CARSON CROSSWORD

Complete the crossword below using your knowledge of the vocabulary of Anne Carson.



ACROSS

- 4. something for which poets mistake violets
- 9. right up there with wind, evil and a good fighting horse
- 11. areas lit by overhead train lights

DOWN

- 1. Prokofiev listened to his first on the telephone
- 2. language of an epic poem that no one will ever read

- 3. something that lay in the bed
- 5. it causes the vocal cords to swell
- 6. one material from which sleep stones are made
- 7. what the speaker had stolen, crated, and locked away
- 8. the first of these were men
- 10. fares well in the volcanic regions of northern Peru

GLOSSARY OF POETIC TERMS

For a more comprehensive list of literary terms related to poetry, consider the online Oxford or Abrams glossaries.

Alliteration

Repeated consonant sounds in close proximity.
ex: *Bugsy borrows bouncing baby buggies.*

Allusion

A reference to a person, place, or event outside the text.
ex: *"There is no need to become Woody Allen." Gwyneth Paltrow, Sliding Doors.*

Analogy

A comparison between unlike things to show an underlying similarity.
ex: *"And the night is clear and empty / as a lake of acid rain." Bruce Cockburn, Don't Feel Your Touch.*

Anecdote

A funny little story.
ex: *Any story that begins "When I was your age..."*

Antagonist

The obstacle to the protagonist (the character with whom the reader sympathizes).
ex: *The shark in Jaws.*

Archetype

A type of character universally recognized across many cultures.
ex: *"Follow the dreamer, the fool and the sage / back to the days of the Innocent Age." Dan Fogelberg, The Innocent Age.*

Argument

Any writing which attempts to convince or sway the reader.

ex: *Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own, which outlines the needs of the female writer.*

Ballad

A lengthy poem, often in song form, having many stanzas and a refrain.

ex: *Gordon Lightfoot's The Canadian Railroad Trilogy.*

Character

A person or animal in a story.

- *Static Character*: like a piece of furniture, just there.
- *Dynamic Character*: changes or develops as the story unfolds.
- *Flat*: like cardboard, having only two dimensions, not well-developed.
- *Round*: an interesting and complex character whom the reader gets to know well.

Characterization

4 ways to develop characters:

- By what they say.
- By what they do.
- By what others in the text say.
- By what the speaker/narrator/author says.

Chronological Order

Events arranged in the time order in which they occurred.

ex: *Lists of Canadian Prime Ministers from first to last.*

Cliché

An overused expression that has lost its effectiveness over time.

ex: *"Avoid clichés like the plague."*

Conflict

Forces in opposition.

- *External*: another character, society, nature (*Person vs. Person, Person vs. Society, Person vs. Nature*).
- *Internal*: within a character; a choice or decision (*Person vs. Self*).

Description

Writing meant to conjure up a person, place, thing, event, or experience for the reader using adjectives or imagery. Pays close attention to sensory details.

Dialect

Way of speaking characteristic of a geography or a people.

ex: *"I's the b'y that builds the boat."* Newfoundland folk song.

Dialogue

Conversation between or among characters.

ex: *"Dude, where's my car?" "Where's your car, dude?"*

Diction

Choice of wording.

ex: *"Jen and I were accustomed to our father's last-will-and-testament diction, and were at times free to interrupt Atticus for a translation when it was beyond our understanding."* Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Drama

Writing meant to be performed on stage.

ex: *Any play by Shakespeare.*

Essay

Nonfiction writing that is arguable, provable, worth proving, with a limited scope.

- *Subjective*: from the essayist's point of view.
- *Objective*: an attempt to remove bias from the subject.
- *Argument/Persuasive*: the focus is swaying or convincing the reader.

Exposition

Writing that informs.

ex: *An article about how to improve your golf swing.*

Part of the plot of a narrative in which characters and setting are established. (see also **PLOT**)

ex: *Once upon a time, there were three little pigs and the time came for them to leave home and seek their fortunes.*

Euphemism

The exchange of an offensive or embarrassing term for a more polite one.

ex: *"XYZ!" for Examine your zipper; your fly is down!*

Fable

A story with a widely applicable life story. It often conveys a moral.

ex: *The Tortoise and The Hare tells the story of how slow and steady tends to win the race more often than speed.*

Fiction

Stories created from the imagination.

ex: *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial.*

Figure of Speech

An idiomatic expression which, when taken literally, does not make sense.

ex: *"Hit the road, Jack!" is not an instruction for someone named Jack to go outside and slap the road.*

Flashback

Insertion of an event prior to the actions currently happening.

ex: *The film Forrest Gump begins with Forrest waiting for a bus. As he waits, he goes backward in time to tell stories of his life that happened before that moment.*

Foreshadowing

Hints that suggest future events.

ex: *In Jurassic Park, Dr. Grant, during a moment of turbulence in a helicopter, hastily ties two female ends of a seat belt together. Her action foreshadows the female dinosaurs who will later reproduce regardless of the lack of male dinosaurs.*

Free Verse

Poetry with rhythm but without a regular metre or rhyme scheme.

ex: *"For all this sea-hoard of deciduous things, / Strange woods half sodden, and new brighter stuff: / In the slow float of differing light and deep, / No! there is nothing! In the whole and all, / Nothing that's quite your own. / Yet this is you." Ezra Pound, "Portrait D'Une Femme."*

Historical Fiction

A created story set in a real historical time period.

ex: *Braveheart or Shakespeare in Love.*

Humour

Something funny or amusing.

ex: *Anything published by the Onion.*

Hyperbole

An exaggeration.

ex: *We've heard this story a million times!*

Idiom

An expression not meant to be taken literally.

ex: *Don't get your knickers in a twist.*

Imagery

Descriptive words and phrases that appeal to the senses (sight, taste, smell, hearing, touch); often uses figurative language.

ex: *"I wandered lonely as a cloud." William Wordsworth.*

Inference

A deduction about the text based on evidence.

ex: *Someone slams a door and you infer that the person must be upset or angry.*

Irony

A contrast between expectation and reality.

- *Verbal*: the gap between what appears to be true and what is actually true in spoken word.
- *Situational*: an expected outcome differs greatly from the actual outcome.
- *Dramatic*: the audience knows something which the character(s) on stage or in the work do not.

Legend

A story passed down culturally with historical roots but without authentication.

ex: *Sasquatch, The Loch Ness Monster.*

Limerick

A five-line poem with an AABBA rhyme scheme meant to be funny.

ex: *There once was a lady from York / who had an aversion to pork. / When piglets were born / with face all forlorn, / she hid both her knife and her fork.*

Literal Language

Language that has no interpretation other than the intended meaning.

ex: *“Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.”* Bitzer’s definition of a horse, given to his literally-minded teacher, Mr. Gradgrind.

Lyric Poem

A poem that expresses feelings, originally accompanied by a lyre.

ex: *Catullus’s “Odi et Amo” (I hate and I love) is an excellent example.*

Metamorphosis

A complete shift in physical form.

ex: *The overnight change of Gregor Samsa in Kafka’s Metamorphosis from human to insect. A caterpillar becomes a butterfly.*

Metaphor

An identification of two unlike things to suggest a commonality.

ex: *Simon and Garfunkel’s “I Am a Rock.”*

Mood

The emotions evoked in the reader by an author’s words.

ex: *The often-used opening “It was a dark and stormy night” is clearly an establisher of mood.*

Motif

Any object or idea repeating itself throughout a literary work.

ex: *The scars in J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter repeatedly point to both destiny and love.*

Myth

A story that typically explains the creation of the world and/or why it is the way it is. Generally involves gods or supernatural forces.

ex: *Sisyphus, Hercules, Romulus and Remus.*

Narrative

Writing that tells a story.

ex: *“Boy meets girl. Boy loses girl. Boy sucks thumb.”* Dennis Lee.

Narrative Poem

A poem that tells a story.

ex: *"The Highwayman"* by Alfred Noyes.

Narrator

The person telling the story.

ex: *The entire story of The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald is told through the character Nick Carraway.

Onomatopoeia

Words that imitate or resemble the sounds they describe.

ex: *Bang, plop, fizzle, hiss, ding.* "The moan of doves in immemorial elms, / And murmuring of innumerable bees." Tennyson, "Come down, O Maid."

Oxymoron

A juxtaposed contradictory term.

ex: *Just war, adult child, loose tights, paid volunteer.* "I like a smuggler. He is the only honest thief." Charles Lamb.

Personification

The attribution of human feelings, thoughts, behaviours, or attitudes to the non-human.

ex: *Justice is blind.*

Playwright

The author of a play.

ex: *Norm Foster.*

Plot

The series of events that make up a story.

- *Exposition (Introduction):* introduces conflict, characters, and setting.
- *Initial Incident:* the first action that happens in the story.
- *Rising Action:* the events which increase the conflict and the suspense.
- *Climax:* the most emotional moment in the story.
- *Crisis:* the turning point of the story. (Sometimes crisis and climax occur at the same time.)
- *Falling Action:* events which decrease the conflict and the suspense.
- *Resolution/Denouement:* conflicts are resolved, and mysteries are unravelled.

Point of View

The eyes or lens through which a story is told:

- *First Person*: we only know, see, and feel what the narrator knows, sees, and feels.
- *Second Person*: the narrator addresses “you”—who might be another character in the work, or the reader, or even the narrator him/herself. Often “I” as the teller of the story is implied.
- *Third Person Limited*: the reader is told the story through the eyes of only one character.
- *Third Person Omniscient*: the reader learns everything about all the characters through an all-seeing, god-like narrator.

Protagonist

The character with whom our sympathy most lies. The conflict revolves around the protagonist. The protagonist is opposed by the antagonist.

ex: *Christ or Satan in Milton’s Paradise Lost (depending on your point of view).*

Proverb

A pithy saying that states an obvious truth.

ex: *Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.*

Pun

A word with multiple, often humorous interpretations.

ex: *When you work in a calendar factory, it’s hard to take a day off.*

Rhyme Scheme

A coding of the rhymes in a poem with letters from the alphabet, beginning with ‘A.’ Each differing rhyme is labelled with the next letter and so on.

ex: *ABAB, AABB, ABBA, ABCB, etc.*

Setting

Where and when the story takes place.

ex: *Star Wars opening credits: “It is a period of civil war. Rebel spaceships, striking from a hidden base, have won their first victory against the evil Galactic Empire. During the battle, Rebel forces managed to steal secret plans to the Empire’s ultimate weapon, the Death Star, an armoured space station with enough power to destroy an entire planet.”*

Simile

A comparison between two unlike things using the words *like* or *as*.

ex: *“Loneliness in a woman is like hunger in a dog.”* Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace*.

Stanza

A group of lines in a poem that form a unit, sometimes with a regular metric and rhyme pattern; similar to paragraphs in prose.

ex: *“True wit is nature to advantage dress’d; / What oft was thought, but ne’er so well express’d.”* Alexander Pope, *“An Essay on Criticism.”*

Stereotype

Assigning qualities to an individual based on membership in a group.

ex: *All Canadians are nice and constantly apologize.*

Suspense

Withholding information from the reader to create anxiety or anticipation for what may come next.

ex: *The situation in Stephanie Meyer’s Twilight is a constant state of suspense: we know that Bella is in danger of being killed or turned into a vampire at some point by SOMEBODY but we don’t know who and we don’t know when.*

Symbol

Something with a universality about its meaning shared by many cultures.

ex: *Colours can have meaning almost universally understood: red can signify passion, anger, and love.*

Syntax

The accepted order in which words are commonly placed in a given language.

ex: *“Much to learn you still have.”* Yoda, *Star Wars, Episode II: Attack of the Clones*. *His syntax, rather than subject-verb-object, is object-subject-verb. To English speakers, the syntax sounds alien.*

Tall Tale

An exaggerated, implausible story told as though it should be believed.

ex: *Paul Bunyan or Johnny Appleseed.*

Text Structure

How a piece of writing is constructed, in terms of how each part is placed.

ex: In Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, the chapters alternate between day and night to create a rhythm that accentuates the emphasis on female cycles and rhythms.

Theme

A theme is a recurrent idea that is threaded throughout a work of literature. In larger works there may be several themes.

ex: In The Princess Bride, the themes are explicitly stated: "Are you kidding? Fencing. Fighting. Torture. Revenge. Giants. Monsters. Chases. Escapes. True love. Miracles." William Goldman, The Princess Bride script.

Tone

The point of view is the lens through which the narrator sees the events, people, and places in the text; the tone is the attitude the narrator holds about those experiences.

ex: An approach to a subject can be formal, informal, humorous, satirical, jaunty, serious, emotional, objective. There are as many tones as there are emotions. If you can identify what the narrator is feeling about what is happening, you can usually identify the tone. For example, "Those who reside in vitreous domiciles should refrain from hurling geological objects." Essentially, it's the same thing as "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." However, the tone is much more formal and the diction more precise and scientific.

Tragedy

A tragedy happens when, at the crisis, the fortunes of the protagonist take a negative turn and do not recover.

ex: Great tragedies often involve irony: Romeo dies thinking Juliet is dead; she revives, finds Romeo dead, and kills herself. Lear, seeking signs of love and devotion from his daughter, divides his kingdom too early and loses her. Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman cannot make a success of anything in his life except his death, which leaves his wife "free and clear" with the insurance money but without the only thing that was ever important to her: Willy.

Understatement

The opposite of hyperbole.

ex: "Houston, we have a problem." Jim Lovell's summation of the situation in response to an exploded oxygen tank, 200 000 miles away from Earth on the Apollo 13 space mission.