



Formal History of Poetry

Mrs. Alison Grace Johansen
Spring Semester 2024
M/Th 2 p.m. EST



ELIGIBLE STUDENTS

GRADES 8-12, including advanced 7th graders. This course is designed for students who want to delve deeper into poetry by learning to read closely, interpreting poems in a group setting, writing, looking at historical perspectives and poet case studies, and doing hands-on activities that will help students capture the beauty of this art form and hopefully draw from its well throughout their whole lives. The textbook's explications of each chapter's poems lay a strong foundation that will guide classes and promote understanding while fostering students' own creativity. Students should be able to read at or above an eighth-grade level, and should feel comfortable while composing paragraphs and basic essays with confidence. Students should be able to listen, take notes, engage in group discussions, and possess basic computer skills that include browsing, accessing assignments, scanning, emailing, and managing files without significant help from parents. ***Please note: Students completing this course will earn a one-half elective high-school course credit.***

COURSE SCHEDULE

ORIENTATION & CLASS SESSION DATES: Our student/parent orientation will be held the week before classes begin on Monday, January 22, 2024, at 2 p.m. EST. Our classes will be held on Mondays and Thursdays at 2 - 3:15 p.m. EST.

OFFICE HOURS: I am always available to meet with you upon request. Please email me to request a Zoom meeting in EST (ajohansen.scholeacademy@gmail.com).

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS

- *Introduction to the Art of Poetry*, which is available through Classical Academic Press (www.ClassicalAcademicPress.com)
- Two writing notebooks that include one writing journal and one poetry notebook
- Highlighters and pencils that will be used to annotate poems and take class notes



FORMAL HISTORY OF POETRY COURSE MAP

QUARTER 3

Chapter 9: History of Form, Movements, Genres

Students will take an in-depth look at the formal history and evolution of poetry through poetic form, movements, and genres. Students will study the historical forms that shape a poem, from the ode to open verse. An important part of this exploration is looking at the major poetic movements in English-language history, as well as historic genres that include lyric, narrative, and dramatic poetry. Christine Perrin includes a “Learning to Read Closely” section in every chapter, showing how the best poems are able to reach across the limitations of time, space, and imagination.

Chapter 10: Verse Forms

Students will study several verse forms and how their structures have evolved within specific cultural contexts. This historical look at poetry will help students learn how each verse came to be while learning its structure. Students also will see how old verse forms can be used in their own voice. These forms include the villanelle, the sestina, the sonnets, the ballad, and blank verse. Students will learn how these forms and traditions can inspire new life and creativity, rather than restricting it.

Chapter 11: Shaping Forms

Students will explore how shaping forms are prescribed forms defined by subject and theme instead of meter and rhyme with no set line or length. Shaping forms are communal poems that were devised from human need and have evolved over time. For example, the ode was originally a solemn song or lyric created to honor someone great. Students will look closely at five odes, including *To Autumn* by John Keats. Students also will look at the elegy, which is typically a mourning for someone who has passed; and the pastoral poem, which has historically celebrated the virtues of rural life. While the formal guidelines for shaping forms are not as rigid as those for verse forms, students will explore how language, sounds, rhythms, and rhyme schemes reinforce their meaning.

Chapter 12: Emily Dickinson — A Case Study in Form

Perrin shares a fascinating study of Emily Dickinson, also known as the matriarch of American poetry. Students will see how her use of common or hymn meter became the signature rhythm for her poems. Her innovative deviations from hymn meter also made her poems unique. As students sift through seven of her beloved poems, they’ll see how they’re the perfect body of work for learning the art of poetic interpretation. As students wrestle with the many possible meanings behind Dickinson’s words and form, her poetic brilliance will shine through. Students also will learn an important part of interpretation: how far a reader can make a case for meaning and where that interpretation ends.

QUARTER 4

Chapter 13: Open Verse

Students will learn that while open or “free” verse has no set meter, it is somewhat of a misnomer because art always has a structure. Open verse is poetry made with lines that don’t conform to a set pattern with syllables, stress, or length. However, students will explore how open verse still creates a structure with lines, stanzas, and rhythms that hold up its subject. They also will study specific devices used in open verse, two of which are anaphora, which offers repetition of a word or phrase that becomes a structure for the poem; and parallelism, which repeats the way a phrase or sentence is structured. Students will explore how the psalms are like open verse poems, looking closely at *Psalms 100* as well as eight others.

Chapter 14: Walt Whitman — A Case Study in Open Verse

Students will study Walt Whitman, the so-called grandfather of American poetry, and his revolutionary role in the history of poetry. Part of this study will delve into the many differences between Whitman and Dickinson, who lived during the same era and both incorporated their experiences with biblical verse, but also led distinctly different lives that were reflected in distinctly different poetics. One notable distinction is that Whitman wrote in open verse, drawing heavily on the psalm structure for his poems. While he wasn’t the first to write in free verse, he was the first poet to really set the stage and carve his niche. Five of Whitman’s poems will be studied, including his elegy for Abraham Lincoln *When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom’d*, *O Captain! My Captain!* and *Song of Myself*.

Chapter 15: Narrative Poems — An Anthology

Our historical exploration will culminate with an anthology of narrative, or epic poems, and what makes them unique. Students will discuss how the narrative poem is a sequence that tells a story similar to prose, but it is rhythmic and finely tuned to sound. Instead, narrative poems use the line and stanza, along with all of the poetic elements. Students also will consider one of the most important questions you can ask about a poem: What has this poem achieved that prose couldn’t achieve? Five narrative poems will be explicated, including Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Raven*, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *Paul Revere’s Ride*.

Chapter 16: Tone — Growing Your Interest

This final chapter encourages and supports students in their exploration of poetry both inside and outside of the classroom. This last chapter ties everything together to help students continue to grow their interests and apply what they’ve learned to their studies going forward as well as their lives. Perrin suggests several activities and offers a long list of recommended authors and their works, reinforcing the idea that reading and practice are the best ways to learn.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Our *Formal History of Poetry* course is the equivalent of a one-half elective high school credit. This spring semester course will study the last eight chapters of Christine Perrin's curriculum in *The Art of Poetry*, covering half of the 39 poems therein. The first eight chapters will be studied in our *Introduction to the Art of Poetry* fall semester course. The spring semester course complements the fall semester, taking a more in-depth look at the formal history of poetry. Throughout these final eight chapters, the poetic elements studied in the fall will be referenced and applied as they naturally present themselves in the new poems studied.

The spring semester class also will complete two chapters per month, supplemented by poet biographies, a glossary, and a detailed timeline in the back of the book. Poems truly capture the senses and are the perfect way to express and read about what is true, good, and beautiful in God's world. This curriculum should dovetail nicely with rhetoric and writing units as well as literature classes as students learn how to interpret language and write both analytically and figuratively.

Perrin offers an insightful and layered approach to studying poetry. Students will delve deeper into poetry with a formal history that studies poetic form, movement, and genre. These forms include verse form, shaping form, and open verse. Students will look back at the many verse forms that have evolved within specific cultural contexts, including the villanelle, the sestina, the sonnet, the ballad, and blank verse.

Two of these chapters include fascinating case studies of the so-called grandparents of American poetry: Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman. A case study in form will take an in-depth look into Dickinson's life and how her unique experiences shaped her writing. Another case study will explore open verse and the life of Whitman. Our historical exploration will culminate with an anthology of narrative poems, and what makes them unique.

Throughout the chapters, students will reference the poet biographies and timeline in the back of the book, weaving this additional historical background into each chapter's lesson. This poetry timeline shows the different periods of poetry, including each period's forms and genres, writers, literary value, and historical context.

Students also will use the practical, hands-on activities shared throughout the textbook to supplement class studies and assist in developing and writing their own poetry. Students will interact with the textbook and each other in several ways to experience the full reach of poetry. Throughout these activities, students will learn to interpret others' poems and write their own poems through a natural progression of steps:

1. **Read Aloud.** Poetry needs to be read aloud so, as Perrin says, you can feel it in your mouth and hear it in your ears. We will begin every class by reading poems aloud, at least twice. The sound, rhythm, and tone of a poem becomes interlaced with its meaning. Students also will be asked to record themselves saying poems. When speaking and then lis-

tening to ourselves speak, we can pick up subtle meanings that we may not have heard or understood otherwise.

2. **Memorization.** Memorizing poems helps students internalize and understand the work from the inside out, learning about and feeling the specific lines and joints of a poem. Reciting poems creates sounds and rhythm, internalizing the music of a poem. Students will learn how to memorize with the aid of hand motions, songs, images, sounds, lines, and sentences. Students will be asked to memorize at least one poem from every chapter.
3. **Socratic Discussion.** People often interpret poems differently. Classes will revolve around the good, hearty discussion that leads to greater understanding. Students will be encouraged to share their interpretations with support from the poem and the history surrounding it. There will be healthy debate as students agree and disagree. The class will review how concrete images can inspire abstract interpretation — along with how to know where comparisons should begin and end. We will explore how to know when an interpretation is unsupported and therefore taken too far.
4. **Free-writing.** During some classes, students will be invited to “free write” for a short period of time. Free-writing involves writing down whatever comes to mind without pausing to mull it over. This practice can inspire great inspiration and creativity. Topics might include writing about a favorite image or symbol, or writing thoughts inspired by one of the poems in the textbook.
5. **Journal Work.** Students will keep a writer’s journal of their own poems and favorite poems. They also will have a poetry notebook that will include ideas for poems and the poetic elements; studies of different poets, images, and time periods; and a timeline of the poems and poets studied.
6. **Poetry Open House.** At the end of our semester together, students will be invited to share their favorite poems (both their own and/or another poet’s work) as a group. Families will be invited!
7. **Chapter and Vocabulary Quizzes.** Quizzes will be given at the end of every chapter. These quizzes will incorporate the vocabulary words listed in every chapter as well.
8. **Hands-on Activities.** Each chapter shares several in-class activities and homework assignments to help students work through and understand the poetic elements, along with the history surrounding the poems and their creators. Here are some of these activities:
 - Look at a painting and make a poem to describe it by the sounds of words and their arrangement in lines.
 - As a class, choose five pairs of rhymes and write poems with them.
 - Play a word association game as a class to inspire your writing on a certain theme.
 - Listen to a few songs and tap out the drumbeat. Now read several poems aloud and do the same thing. Note how it may have changed your understanding of the poems.
 - Take one of your favorite poems in the textbook and set it to music.
 - Take a poem and change where the lines begin and end. Talk about how this new arrangement might change the meaning of a poem.
 - Talk about what in your life is ode-worthy, elegy-worthy, and pastoral-worthy. Then make lists of these findings and discuss why you’d want to memorialize them in poems.

- Contrast the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman. Make two lists that describe their differences. Pretend you're one of them and have a conversation together. What would you say to each other?
- Draw the poem *I dwell in Possibility*. According to Dickinson's words, what would the house of poetry look like as a sketch?

Christine Perrin's explications of the chapter poems lay a strong foundation that will guide classes and promote understanding while fostering students' own creativity. Her invitations to delve deeper into poetry through historical perspectives, poet case studies, and hands-on activities will help students capture the beauty of this art form and hopefully draw from its well throughout their whole lives.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS

Students enrolling in Scholé Academy's Poetry Program will be expected to show development of Executive Function Skills throughout the semester. Executive Function Skills speak to a set of qualities and skill sets students can develop and hone to better approach the courses, lectures, readings and teachers they will face in their future academic coursework.

Scholé Academy commends several important skills that should be observed by students.

1. An Engaged Student: One who is willing to participate in class discussion, ask questions, supply answers, generate the internal dialogue necessary to determine if what's being discussed is important and necessary.

2. Note Taking: A student who, during and after being engaged with the class, has been trained to note important and relevant content in an organized fashion. Her notes would then be consulted, independently, for application in assignments and assessments.

3. Attention to Detail & Preparedness: These students are ones who consistently adhere to deadlines and submission requirements, adhere to style guides and codes, confirm technology is working prior to the start of class, are responsible for determining how to proceed after an absence, and are responsible for consulting the course syllabus and adjusting as the class proceeds, etc.

4. Apply Critiques: These students are ones who receive feedback to one of their submissions, and then are sure to apply that feedback to future assignments rather than repeating mistakes. These students also glean information from the live class critiques of fellow students and note mistakes to avoid by learning from others.

5. Initiative/Maturity: This student would hear the teacher comments and be able to assess whether or not the teacher was describing her work, and then take the initiative to schedule office hours with her teacher if necessary.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS IN ACTION

Students will follow the sequence of study contained in the last eight chapters of Christine Perrin's *The Art of Poetry*. The ultimate goal for the student will be to gain the poetic knowledge that is achieved with a comprehensive understanding of poetry and its history, which includes studying poetic form, movement, and genre. This exploration will include in-depth case studies of the so-called grandparents of American poetry: Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman. The hope is that students will learn how to interpret poems and then take this expanded knowledge to apply in their own poetry.

As Perrin says, poems can become like old friends that we turn to during hard times, giving us comfort in their use of concrete and relatable images and comparisons to help us express abstract concepts like hope. Upper-level students are at a wonderful point in their lives to take on this more in-depth exploration — and carry it with them once our study is done.

Students will study half of the 39 poems shared in the full text, memorizing at least one poem from every chapter. They will complete assignments and a quiz at the end of each chapter, and participate in regular classroom discussion of the chapter poems. Students will be asked to keep a writer's journal of their own poems and their favorite poems, along with a poetry notebook that will include ideas for poems and the poetic elements; studies of different poets, images, and time periods; and a timeline of the poems and poets studied.

In this class, students will be expected to listen attentively, and participate actively in class discussions and practices. Students are expected to arrive to class on time and with all assigned material completed. The instructor will facilitate learning for the student, but the responsibility for staying up-to-date with classwork and assignments ultimately falls to the student.

STUDENT EVALUATION: ATTENDANCE

Students are expected to attend class regularly and on time, following the Scholé Academy standard, which allows a maximum of 3 absences for a one-semester class. Written work is due on the assigned deadline. Should a student be absent, work is still due on the assigned deadline, unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor. All assignments will be due in the appropriate Canvas assignment folder on their assigned due date. Students turning in late work will earn a late penalty. Students will submit their work by scanning their homework pages as a right-side up, single-file PDF and uploading it into the Schoology assignment window. *Photographs of completed assignments will not be accepted as they are incredibly difficult to read.*

STUDENT EVALUATION: GRADING

While pursuing the *Formal History of Poetry* through Scholé Academy will be “restful” (and a lot of fun), we also recognize the need to provide grades for students. It's a delicate balance to achieve both restful learning and excellent academic performance. Earning a specific grade should not overshadow achievement goals for mastery of this discipline. The following grades will be assigned to your student's level of achievement: *magna cum laude* (with great praise); *cum laude* (with praise); *satis* (sufficient, satisfactory) and *non satis* (not suf-

ficient). Ideally, every average student working diligently should do praiseworthy work (cum laude). Those who excel beyond this expectation will be the magna cum laude students. Students who do adequate but not praiseworthy work will be designated satis. Non satis means lacking sufficiency or adequacy. Students and their parents will receive regular feedback in the form of a quarterly update. If students need to complete a high school transcript with a numeric grade, please notify me at the beginning of our course so I can provide that grade accordingly upon request at the end of the course.

STUDENT EVALUATION: MASTERY PORTRAIT

Students who are prepared to take this class are typically mid- to late teens, high-schoolers approaching young-adulthood. This developmental stage is an inspirational one, brimming with lots of new characteristics. It's imperative, then, that this course not only will provide the academic components necessary to achieve mastery of the content of the class and skills associated with poetic knowledge, but also will help engage the student in development of moral virtues. These three aspects of the course would comprise the learning target.

- At the completion of this course *cum laude* students will be able to explicate the 19 poems studied in the first eight chapters of *The Art of Poetry*, laying a strong foundation that will guide them and promote understanding while fostering their own poetic knowledge and creativity.
- Additionally, they will have attained the knowledge necessary to identify and interpret the poetic elements in those poems. Similarly, this study will lay the foundation for students to craft their own poems.
- Students will also be guided in the development of virtues. Poems may be the perfect way to read about and express what is true, good, and beautiful in the world our God has created. After all, poetry is the art of naming our inner and outer experiences by using figurative language in a way that hopefully connects with and uplifts others. Students will learn not only how poetry offers a meaningful way to praise God's creations, but also how to interpret language, the study of which can serve as a guide for students in all future studies.

STUDENT EVALUATION: ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Students will take quizzes privately at home. Students are on their honor to abide by [Scholé Academy's Learning Philosophy](#) which assumes the personal cultivation of Student-Virtues described in the Student-Parent Handbook. Additionally, plagiarism is a serious offense. Proper citation of all sources is essential to the academic endeavor. Remember to cite any source if the information is not common knowledge or is an opinion obtained through any source. A plagiarized assignment will result in a failing grade. Students should consult their chosen style manual for specific direction on obtaining, quoting, and paraphrasing sources.

THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM:

We will use the free online "virtual classroom" software provided by Zoom. The live, interactive nature of our courses is foundational; ***we require cameras to be on during all class***

sessions. If you are sick, I always recommend resting and asking for the recording; cameras must remain on during our classes. (Please see our Student Parent Handbook to review this rule and others.) Our virtual classroom will provide students with interactive audio and an interactive whiteboard in which texts, diagrams, video, and other media can be displayed and analyzed. We will provide students with a link (via email) that will enable students to join the virtual classroom. Courses will be managed through our learning management system, Canvas. Specific information regarding the technology used by Scholé Academy (including required technology) can be found by visiting the [Technology in the Classroom](#) section of the Student Parent Handbook. Students will submit documents by scanning and uploading them to their personal computer or device, then attaching right-side up, single-file .PDFs. They will submit their work to the *Formal History of Poetry* Canvas assignment page (access granted after enrollment is secured).

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

Alison Grace Johansen is teaching *Introduction to the Art of Poetry*, *Formal History of Poetry*, *Writing & Rhetoric Level 4*, and *Well-Ordered Language Level 1*. She earned her Juris Doctor from the Dickinson School of Law in Carlisle, Pa., and her Bachelor of Arts in political science from the University of Richmond in Virginia. She worked as a journalist in Washington, D.C., for over 13 years before pursuing writing and editing in all forms of media. She hopes to help inspire her students to discover the many ways they can use their own words to express themselves with truth, goodness, and beauty. Alison lives in Virginia with her husband and two children. Her dedication to her faith and children influences every part of her life, from teaching Sunday school and writing a children's picture book, to exploring the beauty of God's world with her family. If they aren't birdwatching and enjoying a walk outside, you might find them reading together or playing their favorite instruments: the piano, flute, guitar, ukulele, and drums!

Please note: While this syllabus addresses details specific to this course, it is not extensive. Parents should also read the Student Parent Handbook located on scholeacademy.com and be familiar with the ideas, policies, and procedures outlined therein.