

STUDENT HANDOUT · UNIT II · POETRY



Session 5

Image & the Poetic Line

Sunday, June 14, 2026 · 4:00–5:30 PM · The Community Room

Readings · main points · in-class practice · discussion questions · homework · worksheet

The Art of Telling

A free creative-writing salon for residents of 2601

Led by James F. Mulhern · Silver Current Press

Welcome

Welcome to the Session 5 companion handout for *Image & the Poetic Line*. This handout gathers everything from today's session page in one place: the readings, the main points of the lesson, the in-class practice, the discussion questions for our conversation, this week's homework, and the Image & Line Worksheet for your own private notebook. Keep it with you during the session and take it home afterward — and if you would like to revisit any of it, the companion site, companion.art-of-telling.com, holds the same materials for you to review after each Sunday.

Main Points

Main points of the lesson

Poetry is not prose with line breaks — it is a different way of making meaning. Where prose narrates, poetry distills.

The *image* is the basic unit of poetic meaning — a concrete sensory detail that carries emotional or intellectual weight beyond itself.

In prose, the sentence is the basic unit of rhythm. In poetry, the *line* is.

The line break is the most powerful piece of punctuation a poet has. It decides what the eye lingers on, where the breath rests, where the meaning turns.

A diagnostic: circle every concrete noun in a draft. Concrete nouns are how poems mean.

Readings for Class

- Elizabeth Bishop, *One Art* — Poetry Foundation
- Robert Frost, *Birches* — Poetry Foundation
- William Carlos Williams, *The Red Wheelbarrow* — Poetry Foundation
- Mary Oliver, *The Summer Day* — Library of Congress · Poetry 180

Critical Reception (after our discussion)

- [William Carlos Williams on “The Red Wheelbarrow” \(Poetry Foundation\)](#) — a short essay on how the poem works line by line.
- [Mary Oliver — Poet Page \(Poetry Foundation\)](#) — biography, themes, and selected poems.
- [Robert Frost — Poet Page \(Poetry Foundation\)](#) — biography and craft notes.

In-Class Practice

From the live site

Right here, in your notebook, write three sentences of plain prose — about anything (the room, what you ate this morning, a memory from this week). Then break those sentences into lines. Read aloud. Notice what the line breaks add — and what they take away.

What happens with this: stays in your notebook. The reading aloud is the point of the exercise — you read your own version to your partner or to the room. Nothing collected.

Discussion Questions

The four questions below are exactly as they appear on the Session 5 page. Use the space beneath each one to jot down your own thoughts before or during our conversation.

1. In Bishop's One Art, what is the work that the list of images does that argument could not?

2. Read Williams's The Red Wheelbarrow aloud. What happens at each line break?

3. Choose a single line from any poem we read today. Why does it end where it ends?

4. In a poem you are drafting, circle every concrete noun. What do you notice?

Homework

The read

Read the three poems for Session 6: Seamus Heaney's *Digging* — [Poetry Foundation](#); Jane Kenyon's *Otherwise* — [Academy of American Poets \(poets.org\)](#); and Lucille Clifton's *won't you celebrate with me* — [Poetry Foundation](#). Each one is short. Read aloud at least once.

The optional exercise

Take three sentences of any prose — yours or anyone's — and break them into lines. Notice what changes.

Before Next Sunday — Session 6

Voice & the Lyric "I." We look at how the "I" of a poem is a constructed voice, not the poet, and how that choice changes everything. We will hear three very different poetic "I"s — Heaney's plainspoken son, Kenyon's quiet survivor, Clifton's defiant celebrant.

Image & Line Worksheet — for your private notebook

From the live site

Copy into a Word document. Try the exercise on any prose paragraph. This stays in your private notebook — never collected, never read aloud unless you choose.

1. Write or paste three sentences of plain prose — about anything — here.
2. Break each sentence into lines. Write each version.
3. Mark with a star (★) the line break that surprised you most.
4. Circle every concrete noun in your favorite version.
5. Cross out every adjective that explains what the noun already shows.
6. Read aloud. Write one sentence about what you heard. _____

Closing Note

Because there wasn't time to tell everything, the companion site — companion.art-of-telling.com — gathers session materials, reading companions, and course updates so residents can follow along and review after each Sunday.