

# Poetry Project #1

## Luminous Object, Luminous Memory Working with Detail

7 pts.



**Draft and final due dates will be listed on schedule.**

**Even after it has been graded, your poem may still be edited to fit your chapbook as well as possible.**

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*Not ideas about the thing but the thing itself* — Wallace Stevens

*No ideas but in things.* — W.C. Williams

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This first assignment is all about **DETAIL**. Lots and lots of real, concrete, sensory, specific detail. Stuff you can *touch, see, hear, taste, smell*. Examples. Particulars. Specifics. The nitty gritty of the gritty nits. Bumpy, billowy, scratchy, screechy, dirty, flirty LIFE. Close up.

Avoid generalities, abstraction, and clichés in this project like the plague !!!

**Aprx. length: minimum 40 lines.** I do not count words or pages. Just make a good poem at least 40 lines long, single-spaced, at least for your initial drafts. You can edit and shorten, if needed, for the very last version that will appear in your chapbook.

**Option 1: Luminous Memory**

Write a free verse poem about some significant, puzzling, terrifying, or otherwise intriguing event, person, or place in your past. Rely almost exclusively on sensuous, *concrete* language and images, letting the details speak for themselves. Do not editorialize about your subject or explain it; simply describe or reenact it as accurately and as vividly as you can, using your senses. Try to EMBODY the memory. Or re-embody it in memory.

If necessary, review/look up definitions of "concrete," "specific," "abstract," and "general." These words are used in a specific way when applied to literary writing.

Be sure especially to avoid sentimentality: writing which evokes predictable, obvious, and pre-digested emotion; writing which is trite, cheesy, or cute; writing in which emotion is "unearned" or "in excess of its object." Write a poem instead which discovers NEW feelings and surprises your reader (*and yourself*).

## Option 2: Luminous Object

*At the risk of appearing foolish, a writer sometimes needs to be able to just stand and gape at this or that thing—a sunset or an old shoe—in absolute and simple amazement.*

(Ray Carver, "On Writing.")

Write a free verse poem about an object you recall. Describe it with as much *specific, intense, concrete detail* as possible, using all of your senses. Keep reflection and explanations to a minimum. Simply make the object vivid and present and expressive through language, respecting its thingness. Help your reader (and yourself) see "the thing itself."

It might be interesting (but isn't mandatory) to imagine your chosen object from the point of view of an alien.

Another tip: pick an object which intrigues you or puzzles you or even bugs you in some way. DO NOT pick something whose meanings to you are obvious.

OR: combine Options 1 and 2 *write a poem about an object from your personal past.*

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Grading scale:

**Outstanding = A = 7 pts.** Meets all of the stated criteria and instructions exceptionally well. Excels in inventiveness, originality, and energy, relative to work produced generally in 229. Well-edited and proofed.

**Very Good = B = 5.5 pts.** Meets all of the stated criteria and instructions, or meets several of them exceptionally well, despite a weak performance with others.. May be especially striking in spots, despite noticeable flaws. Very competent, but may lack originality or inventiveness, relative to work produced generally in 229. Good attention to style and mechanics. Clear attention to assignment.

**Fair = C = 4 pts.** Meets some of the stated criteria, or meets all of them only partially. Uninspired but minimally competent; or very inspired but lacking competence in key areas.. May show some inattention to, or misunderstanding of, instructions. Weak proofreading and editing.

**Poor = D = 2.5 pts.** Meets few of the criteria. May not heed or understand instructions. May be sloppy, unproofed, unedited, and/or very perfunctory and uninspired.. An unsatisfying poem, saved by at least minimal attention to at least one facet of the piece.

**Unacceptable = F = 0** Poem either fails to meet any of the stated criteria, or demonstrates severe oversights or weaknesses in significant areas.