

This little gem, courtesy of Mrs. Schwimmer, is very helpful at encouraging poets to "SHOW, DON'T TELL." The descriptive poem makes you describe your subject in terms of your senses and the results can be quite beautiful. The basic structure is simple:



Line One: 1 word -- the thing you're going to describe

Line Two: What colour is it?

Line Three: What does it sound like?

Line Four: What does it taste like?

Line Five: What does it smell like?

Line Six: What does it look like?

Line Seven: How does it make you feel?

Armed with this knowledge, I wrote my first descriptive poem at the age of eleven.

Humour.

Humour is hot pink and bright red.

It rings with laughter,

And tastes like a cool glass of lemonade.

It smells like popcorn and cotton candy,

And looks like a pinball machine lit up.

Most of all, it feels like Savlon on a skinned knee.

The trick is to pick a topic that really requires thought. You don't want to write a poem about something so concrete that the answers to all of those questions are obvious. Instead you want to pick a topic that is more abstract, that requires real thought if you are going to describe it in terms of your senses. Like this:

Pink.

Pink, the colour of roses and little girls' dresses.

It sounds like blowing bubbles through a straw or a note struck on a xylophone.

It tastes like strawberries and vanilla icing

And smells like bubblegum and penny sweets.

It looks like cold noses and healthy cheeks.

Pink is a spark of life -- one defiant flower in the grey-green hedge.

Books

With their spines of many colours,

Speak with the quiet rustle of leaves,

And have a flavour for every pallet.

They smell of dust and old leather

And look like soldiers standing all in a row.

They put into my hands, the world.

The dock at Sheriff's Point --

Sun-bleached wood and green water

And the hollow clap of waves.

The smell of wet earth and fish,

And I feel again the rod in my hands and the sharp, decisive tug on the line.

It is, and always will be, summer to me.

Autumn --

Red and gold --

Whispers in the rustle of feet through fallen leaves.

The taste of nutmeg and cinnamon,

The smell of mulling wine and apple pie

And the yellow glow of nature's last word before dying --

Before winter sweeps the colour away in a flurry of white.

Of course, a descriptive poem does not have to adhere to this formula. Stick to the pattern for a bit of practice, then you can slam-dunk the rule book into the bin and write your own style of descriptive poetry. As a child I wrote this...

Blue

Blue is as deep as the deep blue sky

When the sun is shining bright.

It is the ocean tumbling

Over waves capped foamy white.

It is the feeling that I get

When everything goes wrong.

It is the happy blue bird, too,

Singing his little song.

It's the wind when it's blowing

And the taste of blueberry pie.

It's a cool breeze on hot summer days

Like a deep and contented sigh.

It would appear that I'm not the only one with the idea of describing colours in a poem. Take this far superior example by Mary O'Neill:

What is Brown?

Brown is the colour of a country road

Back of a turtle

Back of a toad.

Brown is cinnamon

And morning toast

And the good smell of

The Sunday roast.

Brown is the colour of work

And the sound of a river,

Brown is bronze and a bow

And a quiver.

Brown is the house

On the edge of the town

Where wind is tearing

The shingles down.

Brown is a freckle

Brown is a mole

Brown is the earth

When you dig a hole.

Brown is the hair

On many a head

Brown is chocolate

And gingerbread.

Brown is a feeling

You get inside

When wondering makes

Your mind grow wide.

Brown is a leather shoe

And a good glove --

Brown is as comfortable

As love.

Focusing on colours is very good practice. After all, you are

attempting to describe something that is often used to describe other things. And so, you have to be a bit more imaginative. Let's try a few...

Black

Black are the depths of the ocean blue
Black is a starless, moonless night,
Black is the shadow following you
And the world of those deprived of sight.
Black is coffee, strong and bitter
Treacle, marmite, burning toast
Beetles snug in the oak leaf litter
The heart of a villain, the eyes of a ghost.
Black is the colour of the odd-one-out sheep,
Black is the berry I bake in my pies,
And black is oblivion found in deep sleep
When at last you lie down and close your eyes.

Purple

Humble violets, meek in their beds
The robes of kings with crowns on their heads
Blackcurrant squash in a small child's cup,
Far away mountains where the brave venture up.
Lavender sachets tucked into drawers
The lines on some seashells I found at the shore.
Grape jam on toast and lilac's sweet flowers,
And the last colour seen in the dim twilight hours.

And to try describing another big and abstract idea...

Motherhood

Is a downy-soft blanket

In pastel pink, yellow and blue.
It's the hungry cry and lullaby
And days that revolve around you.
It is mashed banana and apple juice
And baby powder and powdered milk.
Its big eyelashes and tiny toes
And a cheek as smooth as silk.
Its mittens and hats and paddling pools
And books on fairy tale lands.
Who would have guessed that I'd hold my whole world
Right here, in the palms of my hands.

Now it's your turn. What not give it go?