

Course description

If you take a poetry course like this one, you can expect to spend time reading some thoughts you've already had on your own (such as, "I love you") and some other thoughts you'd probably rather not have (such as, "I love you, but it's painful"). We won't even be reading those thoughts for any practical value, either ("The moral is, See your dentist regularly!"). No; we'll just be listening to the way those thoughts sound when they're uttered.

But when we read that way, by listening, we'll begin hearing something important about the language we think in. We could learn the same thing by listening to prose, but the veins of knowledge are richer in poetry. Prose communicates through grammar and definition, but poetry communicates through grammar, definition, *and* the musical properties of words. That makes poetry a more efficient kind of language than prose: a kind that works simultaneously on the rational and the irrational parts of our minds.

So we'll use this course to study what happens to words when they enter into verse structures and the work of poetry begins. We'll do this in three steps. First we'll read some poems and learn the technical nomenclature that will help us talk about their language in detail; then each of you will memorize a sonnet (one kind of short poem) and spend a few minutes teaching it to the rest of us; and finally, after you have sonnet sound securely implanted in your inner ear, you'll write a sonnet of your own. Aside from the sonnet you'll write and the mini-class you'll teach, there will be two exams, a five-page paper, and a final. Text: *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*.