

# Activity Idea

## Ekphrastic: Transform Paintings to Poetry

*Recommended for Adults*

An ekphrastic poem is based on a piece of art, engaging with a painting, drawing, sculpture, or even music and dance. An ekphrastic poem can use details to describe something visual and turn it into something written and verbal, or can dive deeper and reflect or expand on the meanings in a visual art work.

The term ekphrastic originates from the Greek meaning “out” and “speak”, and “to proclaim or call an inanimate object by name”. In ancient times, epic poets used ekphrasis so that audiences could visualize legendary battles through “word paintings”. One of the most known examples of ekphrasis during that time was Homer’s description of the Shield of Achilles in *The Iliad*. Today, ekphrasis poetry can be any literary response to a non-literary artwork, exploring symbols, inventing stories about the subject in the artwork, or providing a vivid description of what is happening in the moment. Poems can be about an actual art work, or an imagined one, such as one that has been lost or is far away, and can be in any form of poetry.

### eBooks & Audiobooks

- *A Study Guide For John Keats's Ode On A Grecian Urn* on Hoopla [tinyurl.com/StudyGrecianUrn](http://tinyurl.com/StudyGrecianUrn)
- *An Eye for Art: Focusing on Great Artists and Their Work* on Hoopla [tinyurl.com/EyeForArt](http://tinyurl.com/EyeForArt)
- *The Iliad* on Hoopla [tinyurl.com/IliadHomer](http://tinyurl.com/IliadHomer)
- *How A Poem Moves* by Adam Sol on Hoopla [tinyurl.com/HowAPoemMoves](http://tinyurl.com/HowAPoemMoves)
- Poetry Booklist for All Ages [tinyurl.com/LACBooklist](http://tinyurl.com/LACBooklist)
- Poetry In Your Pocket Collection on Biblioboard [tinyurl.com/PoetryInYourPocket](http://tinyurl.com/PoetryInYourPocket)

### Online Learning

Poetry Writing 101 on Universal Class [tinyurl.com/UniversalClassPoetry](http://tinyurl.com/UniversalClassPoetry)

### Video & Audio

- *Poetry In America, Ep. 7: Musee des Beaux Arts* on Hoopla [tinyurl.com/PoetryInAmericaS1](http://tinyurl.com/PoetryInAmericaS1)
- *Poetry Please* on Hoopla [tinyurl.com/PoetryPleaseBBC](http://tinyurl.com/PoetryPleaseBBC)
- *Poetry In Motion* on Kanopy [tinyurl.com/PoetryInMotionFilm](http://tinyurl.com/PoetryInMotionFilm)

### Online Resources

- Samples of Ekphrastic Poetry from Emory University [tinyurl.com/PoetArtEmory](http://tinyurl.com/PoetArtEmory)
- Samples of Ekphrastic Poetry from Poetry Teatime [tinyurl.com/PoetryTeaTime](http://tinyurl.com/PoetryTeaTime)



- Visible Poetry Series that presents poems as short films [tinyurl.com/VisiblePoetry](https://tinyurl.com/VisiblePoetry)
- Poem A Day (Poets.org) – [poets.org/poem-a-day](https://poets.org/poem-a-day)

### **Activity**

Create your own ekphrastic poetry by first choosing a piece of artwork from the museum collections listed below, or just think of an artwork that inspires you. It can even be a piece of art around you right now—an illustration on a book cover, the graphic design on a t-shirt, or something you saw on Instagram! Find something that catches your eye!

#### **Museum Collections**

- Los Angeles County Museum of Art - [tinyurl.com/LACMAHighlights](https://tinyurl.com/LACMAHighlights)
- The Autry Museum of the American West - [tinyurl.com/AutryMasters](https://tinyurl.com/AutryMasters)
- The Getty Center - [tinyurl.com/GettyMichelangelo](https://tinyurl.com/GettyMichelangelo)
- Museum of Latin American Art - [tinyurl.com/MOLAAArpilleras](https://tinyurl.com/MOLAAArpilleras)
- Hammer Museum - [tinyurl.com/HammerArchive](https://tinyurl.com/HammerArchive)
- California African American Museum - [tinyurl.com/CAAMMillet](https://tinyurl.com/CAAMMillet)

Then observe your chosen art piece closely, and write down what you see:

1. Write down the first words that pop into your head when you look at the piece.
2. Describe the subject. Use the five senses to describe the elements of the piece.
3. What is happening? What actions are taking place, if any? What happened right before or right after the moment of this art piece?
4. What is the artist trying to say? What are questions you have for the artist about the artwork? What is your interpretation of the symbols in the piece?
5. How does it make you feel? What are the emotions you feel when looking at the piece?

Once you have your observations, you can use what you wrote down to piece together a poem in any form or structure you like. When you're done, read your poem out loud to see if you like it and it resonates with artwork you chose.