

LOOKING TO WRITE GRADES 6-12

Writing Odes Inspired by Everyday Objects



Clarence Hinkle, *Persimmons*, 1944. Oil on Masonite. SBMA, Gift of Mabel Bain Hinkle, 1961.25.

INTRODUCTION: Using An Ancient Form To Write Today

An ode is a kind of poem, usually praising something or someone. Dating back to ancient Greece, odes were performed publicly to celebrate athletic or military victories, or sing the praises of heroes. Today, we still use the term “ode” to describe an outpouring of praise, but now that praise might be directed to the simplest of things. The great Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda, for example, was a master of the ode. He believed in the poetry of ordinary things: onions, tomatoes, socks, scissors. On the next page, read a sample of Neruda’s *Ode to Socks*.

READ: Pablo Neruda's *Ode to Socks*

Mara Mori brought me
a pair of socks
which she knitted herself
with her shepherd's hands,
two socks as soft as rabbits.
I slipped my feet into them
as if they were two cases
knitted with threads of twilight and
goatskin,
Violent socks,
my feet were two fish made of wool,
two long sharks
sea blue, shot through
by one golden thread,
two immense blackbirds,
two cannons,
my feet were honored in this way
by these heavenly socks.
They were so handsome for the first time
my feet seemed to me unacceptable
like two decrepit firemen,
firemen unworthy of that woven fire,
of those glowing socks.

Nevertheless, I resisted the sharp
temptation
to save them somewhere as schoolboys
keep fireflies,
as learned men collect
sacred texts,
I resisted the mad impulse to put them
in a golden cage and each day give them
birdseed and pieces of pink melon.
Like explorers in the jungle
who hand over the very rare green deer
to the spit and eat it with remorse,
I stretched out my feet and pulled on
the magnificent socks and then my shoes.

The moral of my ode is this:
beauty is twice beauty
and what is good is doubly good
when it is a matter of two socks
made of wool in winter.

—Pablo Neruda

ACTIVITY: Write Your Own Ode

In these past several months as we have been spending more time at home, the objects of our daily routine have become more important to us. From our comfiest pajamas, to the mug that holds our tea, to our favorite fuzzy sweater, to a freshly sharpened pencil, we can find beauty, joy, strength, even wonder in the objects that help us navigate the day.

Much like an artist might select an apple, or glass, or simple vase as the subject for a still life, this activity invites you to choose an everyday object to elevate with a poem. Select one object that's important to you and write an ode in praise of it. Try to use all five senses (touch, taste, smell, sight, sound) to describe your object. Think about why you chose this object. What is your favorite thing about it? Where did it come from, what has it experienced? Does it remind you of anything or spark a specific memory? This can be lighthearted or serious. Add a touch of the absurd or the poignancy of the real. There is no one right way to do this!

NOW, Draw!

Once you have written your ode to an everyday object, try documenting it by drawing, painting, or photographing it. Simple things take on power when we stop and pay attention to them. We do this when we draw or write.