

## Sample Poetry Prompts

1. Rita' Dove's "Your Mother's Kitchen": Write a poem about your mother's kitchen. (It helps if you actually draw the kitchen first, with crayons!) Put the oven in it, and also something green, and something dead. You are not in this poem, but some female relation—aunt, sister, close friend—must walk into the kitchen during the course of the poem.
2. From Kelli Russell Agodon: Write a poem that is a love letter to an old flame. Your poem can be written in verse (with line breaks) or you could try writing a prose poem (without line breaks, see our textbook, *Creating Poetry* for definitions.) To make sure your poem doesn't become cheesy or sappy, you will use at least two of the following words in the poem: dung beetle, politician, nuclear, exoskeleton, oceanography, pompadour, toilet.
3. "Cleave and Cleave," after a poem (of this name) by Brenda Hillman. Write a poem using two words that are homonyms, but mean different things, e.g. lie and lie, stone and stone, bear and bear, write and right, etc. Think of an emotional situation in memory that these homonyms might speak to, then imagine yourself encountering each of these words separately, in concrete examples--e.g., you are "writing" your name on a blackboard as a child, over and over; the sun is spilling in the window, fading the slate as you write. You start to think about your "right" to be yourself, you look at yourself, the clothes you're wearing, your hands, etc. Then you bring both worlds together in the poem's conclusion, like Hillman, who dramatized the words' opposite meanings by ending with two strong sentences. You might say "I will write my name over and over on the glass." Then "I will disappear: my right." This exercise forces you to make a big leap, to create a bridge between two dissimilar things (sound familiar? hello, metaphor!) But the connection between the words should be interesting, and your poem might arrive at some philosophic conclusion. This exercise develops imaginative and analytical "muscle." It might not be easy, but I think you're up for the challenge.
4. "Last Line/First Line" from *Poets & Writers* "The Time is Now"  
Go to your bookshelf and pick out one of your favorite books. It doesn't have to be a poetry collection—any book will do. Write down the first line and the last line of the book. Use the last line of the book as the first line of your poem. Then, write until the first line of the book makes sense to use as the end of your poem. Use the lines as guides for a start and finish, but give your poem a unique theme, different from the original book.