

Note: this is meant to be used as is, or tinkered with to meet your own needs. The ideal time allotment would be two hours (over one or two class sessions). For the sake of the competition, poems must draw from a poem in the Golden Shovel Anthology.



Step 1:

Look at “A Sunset of the City” by Gwendolyn Brooks (found on p. xlvii in *The Golden Shovel Anthology* or at www.poetryfoundation.org).

*Note “striking lines” (lines that make you go “wow”)

*Write down one word that best summarizes the “tone” of the poem (examples include: aging, loneliness, uselessness)

*Briefly discuss in small groups before discussing as a class

Give some background about Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000). She was known for being both extremely generous and fierce.

Biographical highlights:

*Was the first Black person to win the prestigious Pulitzer Prize

*Was what’s now called Poet Laureate of the United States

*Was Poet Laureate of the state of Illinois for the last 32 years of her life.



Step 2:

Read Langston Kerman's "This Feels Permanent" (also found on p. 176 in *The Golden Shovel Anthology*)

*Note striking lines

*Write down a sentence as to what you think this poem is about.

*Thinking metaphorically, who is the lumberjack and who is the tree. (The narrator is the tree and his ex-girlfriend is the lumberjack).

*Discuss, including different ways "I miss you like the dying miss the knife" could be interpreted.

*Then, ask students to see if they notice something that runs horizontally in "Sunset of the City," but vertically in "This Feels Permanent." Once the "aha" moment happens, make sure that all students see how "" is imbedded down the right margin in "This Feels Permanent."

Langston Kerman is a poet, comedian, actor, and teacher hailing from Oak Park, Illinois. He earned his MFA in poetry from Boston University, studying under Robert Pinsky, Louise Gluck, and David Ferry. He was a writer for Chris Rock for the 2016 Oscars and was a regular on HBO's *Insecure*. He's set to co-star with Damon Wayans, Jr. in an FX pilot co-produced by Seth Rogan. Langston resides in Brooklyn, New York, where he mostly yells silly jokes into a microphone.

This Feels Permanent by Langston Kerman *After Gwendolyn Brooks's "A Sunset of the City"*

I am hurting the way trees hurt. The
screams hollowed in some fallen philosophy. Grasses
taunt like skeletons. It's been months since you started forgetting.

This must be how trees think of their lumberjack. Yes he is their
murderer. Yes he unwound their rings in a plaid blaze.
Yes he is mostly saw and jagged and spit and

unmoved by bistro tables and hardcovers. Still he is consenting.
I miss you like the dying miss the knife. Please—be anything to
cut through this silence melting into brown.



Step 3:

Briefly explain the Golden Shovel form and that it was created by Terrance Hayes in his two-part poem, “The Golden Shovel” *after Gwendolyn Brooks*. The poem can be found on p. xliii in *The Golden Shovel Anthology* or at www.poetryfoundation.org

*Note how he runs Gwendolyn Brooks’s poem “We Real Cool” down the right margin of his poem in each part of his poem. Also note how he “plays” with the form in the second part of his poem.

*Note: The Golden Shovel is the name of the pool hall where “We Real Cool” is set.

*Additional suggestion: play the video of “We Real Cool” created by Manual Cinema in association with Crescendo Literary, with story by Eve Ewing and Nate Marshall and music by Jamila Woods and Ayanna Woods. Students might know Nate Marshall from the documentary, *Louder Than a Bomb* and Jamila Woods for her work singing with Chance the Rapper. The video can be found on the Poetry Foundation website:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/video/142394/we-real-cool>

Biographical highlights for Terrance Hayes:

*Winner of the prestigious National Book Award in Poetry

*Recipient of the MacArthur Foundation “genius” grant.

*Poetry Editor at The New York Times.

Step 4:

Read Hannah Srajer's "Third Infidelity" (also found on p. 162 in *The Golden Shovel Anthology*)

*Define "infidelity" for context.

*Note striking lines

*Discuss the metaphor for marriage and the specific moment of her mother in the bathroom, metaphorically compared to a castle with no moat.

*Note how Hannah plays with some of her end words.

Hannah Srajer received her undergraduate degree from Princeton University, where she majored in History and minored in Creative writing. She was co-president of Ellipses, Princeton's first and oldest slam poetry group. She is the recipient of the Laurence Hutton Prize in History, Outstanding Achievement in Creative Writing, the Leonard L. Milberg '53 Poetry Prize, and a member of the Phi Beta Kappa honor society. She is currently a Project 55 Fellow at the Association to Benefit Children, where she manages Early Childhood and Youth programming for families in East Harlem.

Third Infidelity by Hannah Srajer After Gwendolyn Brooks's poem "Still Do I Keep My Look, My Identity"

Mother locks herself in
the bathroom, sterile castle
with no moat. No latch or
lock or chain can conta(in)
her sensible grief, the shack
she builds with
out us. Squatter in rags
in her own home, or
his. Marriage is a dirty robe,
a cover for nakedness through
which I was born, a good
girl with nothing
but what was built f(or)
me, the stones



Step 5:

Go over the instructions/rules for creating a Golden Shovel poem for the competition:

Your Golden Shovel poem should:

***Borrow a striking line from “A Sunset of the City,” “This Feels Permanent” or “Third Infidelity.” (Or any other poem that appears in *The Golden Shovel Anthology*.)**

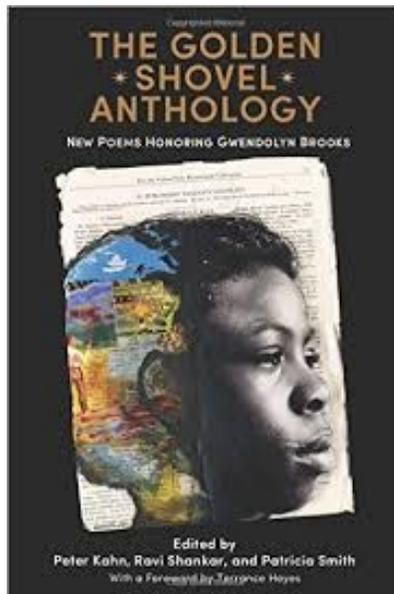
***Be 5-14 lines in length (*in other words, you’ll BORROW 5-14 CONSECUTIVE words to run vertically down the right margin of your new poem*).**

Recommended steps:

1. Choose 5-14 consecutive words from a striking line, with the **FIRST** word being “strong” (“marbles” or “lurk” as opposed to “and,” “the,” “I” or “a.”)
2. Run those words **vertically** down the **right margin** of your page.
3. See where your imagination/creativity takes you. It’s up to you whether to take inspiration from the topic of the poem you borrow from.

When revising:

Try for equal line lengths so that your poem is symmetrical and pleasing to the eye.



Step 6:

Go over examples:

“How I would’ve fought back, but never did.”

By Adam Levin *after Langston Kerman, after Gwendolyn Brooks*
(Using the line, “I miss you like the dying miss the knife”)

A hundred different times, I’ve dreamed of **this**
as a possibility: a solid right hook sailing toward the **must**
of Matt’s breath, his two front teeth **be-**
coming twin Tic-Tac pellets clacking against **the**
overcast-gray sidewalk, ducking **way-**
side from his flailing hands, **trees**
applauding the grace of his fall, while I **think**
about how my parents will shake their heads onbeat, **of**
them telling me to fight back with silence, **their**
advice melting under a bully wielding an insult like a **lumberjack**.

“Proposal” by Peter Kahn, 1st Draft

after Hannah Srajer, after Gwendolyn Brooks
(Using the line, “Marriage is a dirty robe.”)

When asked about **marriage**
I wonder how it **is**
that my parents are **a**
52-year-old cruise ship, while I’m a **dirty**
little dingy wearing a solo **robe**.

“Proposal” (a revision) By Peter Kahn

after Hannah Srajer, after Gwendolyn Brooks
(Using the line, “Marriage is a dirty robe. A cover”)

Last week, my friend Marlene asks about any prospects for **marriage**.
I close my eyes, thoughts dipping and diving, wondering how it **is**
that my parents have managed for fifty-two years to be **a**
cruise ship bouncing through tidal waves, and calm, while I’m a **dirty**
little dingy, solo, sometimes bobbing about, sometimes sinking, **robe-**
d in bachelorhood. My one-kneed proposal plan to Naomi, **a**
sunk submarine, for twenty years drowned under a sandy **cover**.

Additional considerations for your Golden Shovel poem:

- A. You may do what Hannah Srajer did and play with the words (“or” from the borrowed line become “(f)or” in Hannah’s poem).
- B. You may also add borrowed words to add lines to your poem like Peter Kahn does in the second of his poems (adding “a cover.”).
- C. You can break words up at the ends of the lines to make them work, like Terrance Hayes and Adam Levin do (“be-coming” and “way-side”).
- D. Try to make your line lengths as similar as possible so the poem *looks* nice on the page.