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## Healing With Poetry

For years poetry was dreaded by millions. Either it meant crushingly long epics that went on and on, putting vast numbers of classrooms to sleep. Or it was so filled with hidden meaning that only lofty professors and a few graduate students could understand it.

Poetry has become more personal, and therefore more popular. It has also become a powerful tool in helping people make lasting changes in their lives.

Language can influence us deeply—not just what we say, read or write—but also what we think. When we put our thoughts on paper and examine them, it's a first step in finding out what we want. And when we know what we want—whether it's in our relationships, jobs, financial dealings or life goals—that's when we are most effective at making change.

Poetry is particularly effective because it's short and sweet, and gets to the point quickly. It has become such a simple and natural everyday form that even those who don't consider themselves writers can use it. But it doesn't have to be written to be effective; reading other people's poetry can also be a way to shift the way we see our problems and perhaps come up with a different solution. Reading poetry has become so popular that it's on buses in London and several Canadian and U.S. cities.

Poet Mary Oliver says that this simpler form of poetry is like a “coiled spring, waiting to release its energy in a few clear phrases.”

Poetry can be used as meditation, prayer and relaxation, and many understand its potential to entertain, heal and impart wisdom in everyday language. In fact, poetry was one of many treatments used at the Pennsylvania Hospital, founded in 1751 by Benjamin Franklin.

Poetry is accessible to anyone—to entertain, to understand more deeply, to see life in a different

light. It has the power to connect us to ourselves and to others so that we know we are not alone. It can result in an “aha!” moment that shifts the direction of our lives.

Take Oliver's poem “The Journey.” This poem is about re-birth and finding the path in life that truly works for us. It's about making a decision, regardless of what others say. It doesn't have to be an earth-shaking decision; reading and writing poetry can help with any decision, no matter how small. Every shift has a ripple effect throughout the rest of our lives.

### The Journey

by Mary Oliver

*One day you finally knew  
what you had to do, and began,  
though the voices around you  
kept shouting  
their bad advice—  
though the whole house  
began to tremble  
and you felt the old tug  
at your ankles.  
“Mend my life!”  
each voice cried.  
But little by little,  
as you left their voices behind,  
the stars began to burn  
through the sheets of clouds,  
and there was a new voice  
which you slowly  
recognized as your own,  
that kept you company  
as you strode deeper and deeper  
into the world,  
determined to do  
the only thing you could do—  
determined to save  
the only life you could save.*

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