

The Pantoum (pan-TOOM) Part of the pleasure of the pantoum is the way its recurring lines gently and hypnotically twine in and out of one another, and the way they surprise us when they fit together in unexpected ways and sound really cool.

Pantoum is the Western word for the Malayan pantun, a poetic form that first appeared in the fifteenth century, in Malayan literature. It existed orally before then. Making up pantoums was highly popular, and Malaysians knew the famous ones by heart. The Western version is a poem of indefinite length made up of stanzas whose four lines are repeated in a pattern: lines 2 and 4 of each stanza are repeated as lines 1 and 3 of the next stanza and so on as shown below :

_____ line 1
_____ line 2
_____ line 3
_____ line 4

_____ line 5 (same as line 2 above)
_____ line 6
_____ line 7 (same as line 4 above)
_____ line 8

_____ line 9 (same as line 6 above)
_____ line 10
_____ line 11 (same as line 8 above)
_____ line 12

And so on...

Every line in the poem is hopefully used twice, and the first line of the poem is the same as the last. Rhyme is optional. It all sounds complicated, but if you look at the example below, you'll see that the pantoum form is easy enough for you to accomplish. Make yourself a line pattern as the one above to follow for the first draft. I've color-coded the first few stages to help clarify...

Because birds are gliding across my brain
I rise into the shadows
And the mist is rolling in
Because my breath is rolling out.

I rise into the shadows
Like a pond that sleeps
Because my breath is rolling out
I hear doorbells in the woods.

Like a pond that sleeps
And wakes inside a dream,
I hear doorbells in the woods
Though the woods are in the dream

And wakes inside a dream
Although the air is filled with clouds
Though the woods are in the dream
A good idea can smell like pine.



Although the air is filled with clouds
I am filled with ideas about dreams.
A good idea can smell like pine
And a dream can grow like a cloud.

I am filled with ideas about dreams
The stars don't know what they mean
And a dream can grow like a cloud
I can't explain this bigness.

The stars don't know what they mean
And the mist is rolling in.
I can't explain this bigness
Because birds are gliding across my brain.

*Although that previous poem was cool in a weird way,
here are a couple of student samples that may make
more sense to you. You will also notice the varied lengths.*

An Angel's Duty by Beida Chen '06

An angel descends from the heavens
Floating down to earth
Helping those who have begun their journey
Aiding those who feel as if walls are closing in

Floating down to earth
The angel watches over us
Aiding those who feel as if walls are closing in
To assist by nudging happiness seekers in the right
direction

The angel watches over us
To wish for the happiness of humans, wanting nothing
in return
To assist by nudging happiness seekers in the right
direction
To walk along with angels who watch over us.



Sunshine Surfing by Ben Williams '06

I surf on the waves of sunshine
Riding them all through space
I swoop and spin through the galaxy
Leaving the stars in their place

Riding them all through space
I flip towards Saturn's rings
Leaving the stars in their place
Doing some aerial things

I flip towards Saturn's rings
Grinding near the end
Doing some aerial things
I reach the beginning again

Grinding near the end
Close to the abyss
I reach the beginning again
But something is amiss

Close to the abyss
More sunshine rays run by
But something is amiss
I'm heading toward the sky

More sunshine rays run by
I swoop and spin through the galaxy
I'm heading toward the sky
I surf on the waves of sunshine

