

Royal Spring Middle School  
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## **Writing the Persona Poem**

**Definition of a Persona Poem: A poem written from the point of view of the object or person being written about.**

In persona poems, poets basically ‘become’ the object about which they are writing. Hence, persona poems are often called “mask” poems because the poet is wearing the mask of the object or person about whom they are writing. Writing these poems means the poet must know the subject of the persona poem very intimately. When writing an historical persona poem, the poet needs to carefully research the person so they will know what details to include in the poem to allow the reader to connect to this person’s personality, actions, and desires. You want the reader to *understand* your character’s desires, motivations, and actions.

When writing Buffalo Dance: The Journey of York, Frank X Walker researched the Lewis and Clark journals for years to find out all there was to know about the slave, York who accompanied them on the journey. Only in this way was Frank X Walker able to authenticate the voice, or persona, of York, and to allow his readers to empathize with York’s thoughts and emotions.

## **Your Writing Task**

- Choose a historical figure from US or world history. This person may not be an actor, actress, sports figure, or singer unless I give you permission. Choose a person who deeply interests you – someone whose personhood you feel as though you could become, or someone to whom you could give voice.
- Write a persona poem of 20 – 25 lines from the point of view of your historical character. This poem should be Free Verse.
- Make sure to include the following in your poem where most appropriate:
  - ✓ Personification
  - ✓ Metaphors and/or Similes
  - ✓ Symbolism
  - ✓ Hyperbole and/or Understatement
  - ✓ Sound Devices (alliteration, slant rhyme, rhythm, etc.)
- Begin at least three lines with a preposition (this tends to lift the poem off the page into the area of transcendence).
- Include a picture of your “person” on a separate piece of paper.

- Begin your poem with an epigram – a quote actually written by them, or about them. Look for the way Frank X Walker uses epigrams to introduce his persona poems. This will help give the reader a cultural/historical setting for your poem.
- Be sure to include enough historical references to make it obvious to the reader who your person is. Be imaginative, creative, and sophisticated when choosing words. Allow us to actually see, hear, and empathize with your character.
- **DO NOT JUST WRITE AN OUTLINE OF HIS / HER LIFE.** Choose an important event, or a meaningful moment of his / her life to dramatize through the words of your poem, just like Frank X Walker has done in his persona poems about York. Think of a **slice** of this person’s life that you are going to highlight.
- Look at the models of Persona poems written by 7<sup>th</sup> grade students:

“Our Nation’s Pride” about the persona of Betsy Ross (as legend goes)  
 “Little Miss Sure Shot – An Allusion to Annie Oakley”

- Please use the three Poetry Handouts (or web attachments) to help guide your poetic writing. Remember, the best poems exhibit the following, in some form or fashion:

**Music** – Sound Devices – pleasing to the ear

**Emotion** – Sense-linked Imagery; Evokes a Tone, or Mood

**Imagery** – Precise and Vivid Word Choice – Figurative language (metaphor, simile, personification, symbol, hyperbole, understatement)

**Journey** – Takes the reader to a new place of knowing, seeing, or understanding;  
 Theme; Resonance.

**Form** – Free Verse or Classical Form; End lines, Enjambment, Stanzas, White Space, Repetition

**\* Please read the following on the internet to inform yourself about Frank X Walker and his belief in creativity:**

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5298083>  
 “Creative Solutions to Life’s Challenges” by Frank X Walker  
 September 19, 2005  
 Unleashing the Power of Creativity

We will discuss this article in class, so be prepared to inform and enlighten our time.