

# LAURA PURDIE SALAS

*small writes for brighter days*

## 15 WORDS OR LESS POEMS

For quite a few years, I hosted 15 Words or Less Thursdays on my blog. I shared an image and a poem first draft that was—you guessed it—15 words or less. That's the only rule. The title of the poem is not included in the word count. This is a super simple activity that kids really respond to because it's not intimidating, and I love that.

**Grade level:** All

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

## HERE ARE THE STEPS

1. Display an image
2. Talk through a few thoughts you have upon seeing the image.
  - a. What's in the image?
  - b. What might be happening?
  - c. Does it remind you of anything from your own life or experiences?
3. Depending on students' age, pass out index cards or sticky notes...something small
4. Set a timer for 3-5 minutes (sometimes even only 2 minutes!)
5. Write
6. Share and encourage each other

Remind students that:

- the poem doesn't have to actually describe the image
- this is just a first draft
- no rhyme is needed
- the limit is 15 words (not counting the title)

### 15 Words or Less Poems

#### Library Bike Rack

Park my bike  
Park my words  
Park myself

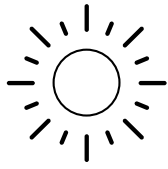
Here, I can hear  
and be heard

--Laura Purdie Salas, all rights reserved

**a weekly 1st-draft exercise**

[laurasalas.com/blog](http://laurasalas.com/blog)

As a visiting author, I've done this exercise with many students. The first time, some of them are shocked at the short deadline. But they quickly learn how freeing it is. When you're writing that fast, you don't have time to judge. You just write. I adore that when I start the timer and say, "Go!" the only sound I hear is pens and pencils scratching on paper. There's no better sound in the world!



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## EXAMPLES

You can see all **my archived 15 Words or Less posts** here:  
<https://www.laurasalas.com/cat-page-15-words-or-less-poems/>

And here's a set of examples I sometimes share with students. These show a variety of moods and approaches.



Rumbling on, rolling through  
A small chipmunk stops to view  
His favorite friend

--Amelia

### Royal Steel

Majestic engine chuffs.  
Steel veil trails behind.  
Amber waves of grain bow in her wake.

--Jean James

### Good-Bye

Clickety-clack  
Rickety-rack  
Riding all day  
With my back-pack  
Slickety-slack  
Trickety-track  
Leaving today  
Ain't comin' back!

--Donna JT Smith

### 15 Words or Less Poems

#### Passing Through

Trains rumbled through his childhood,  
endless and rolling,  
all the places he would never go

--Laura Purdie Salas, all rights reserved

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### Books

Trains with paper engines  
Alphabets of wills  
Words snaking  
Paper tack pulling  
Paper cubs  
Distention unknown  
--Jessica Bigi

But you can find plenty of other examples by going to the archived posts. You're free to share my images or to find your own to inspire your students. Have fun with this!