

Ode to Ordinary Things

An **ode** is a kind of poem, usually praising something or someone. Dating back to ancient Greece, ode poems were performed publicly to celebrate things like athletic victories. Centuries later, this poetic form was popular among English romantic poets, who used odes to express their thoughts and emotions using rich, descriptive language. Today, we use the term “ode” to describe an outpouring of praise, and modern ode poems have evolved to include many different styles.

The great Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda, was a master of the ode. He believed in the poetry of ordinary things: artichokes, socks, scissors, onions.

In this activity, you can read some of Neruda’s odes, and then create your own poem, celebrating an everyday object.



A portrait of Pablo Neruda

You can find selections from Neruda’s *Odes to Common Things* at the links below:

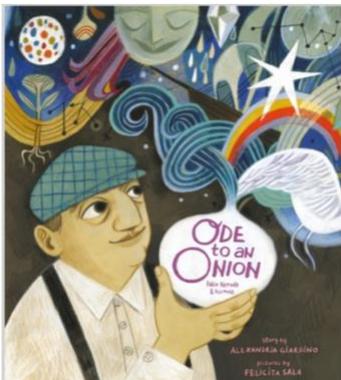
[*Ode to My Socks*](#) (or, [see an animated version of this poem here](#))

[*Ode to The Onion*](#)

[Listen to Poet Philip Levine read from his translation of Neruda's *Ode to Salt*.](#)

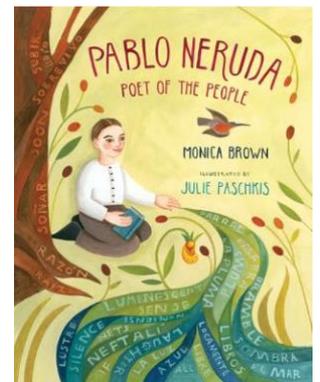
How do these poems make you feel? What phrases or descriptions stand out to you?
Can you imagine writing a poem to your socks? Your shoes? What might you say?
What makes these objects special?

You can learn more about Pablo Neruda’s life and work with these picture books:



Ode to an Onion: Pablo Neruda and His Muse
Alexandria Giardino, Felicita Sala

Pablo Neruda, Poet of the People
Monica Brown, Julie Paschkis



Write Your Own Ode

Think about the details of your day. What objects are part of your daily ritual? From your comfiest pajamas, to your favorite ice cream bowl, where do you look for beauty, joy, strength, or wonder?

Once you've chosen one object that's important to you, it's time to brainstorm! Here are some ideas to get you going: *Try to use all five senses (touch, taste, smell, sight, sound) to describe your object. Why did you choose this object? What is your favorite thing about it? Where did it come from, what has it experienced? Does it remind you of anything or spark a special memory? What does it mean to you?*

Now it's time to write your Ode!

Sometimes it's hard to begin a poem, so try using this as a guide.

Oh _____! (put your object in the blank space)

You are like _____. (finish these lines with your own words)

You _____.

Oh _____.

Without you _____.

Here's an example, with the spaces filled in:

Oh slippers!

You are like two woolly sheep, who have been sleeping in the sun, warm on the inside and out.

You wait in the dark of the closet, next to the dust bunnies who swirl and dance when the door opens...

Oh slippers, my dear friends.

Without you, my naked feet are cold and lonely.

When you're finished, draw a picture of your special object.

[Click here to see some examples of finished odes on our website.](#)

We'd love to see what you've done! [You can share your poem with us here.](#)