

THE “TRIAD” IS A FORM that depends on figurative language. Most commonly, three abstractions are defined. Here is an example from the American poet who invented the cinquain, though likely she didn’t realize she was intentionally writing this in the tritina form:

THESE BE

Three silent things:
The falling snow . . . the hour
Before the dawn . . . the mouth of one
Just dead.

Adelaide Crapsey, 1878-1914

And here are a pair of student-generated responses:

THREE SILENCES

A feather from the belly of a swan.
A field after the hay’s been taken in.
An arrowhead chipped from black stone.

THREE EMPTY THINGS

A beggar’s bowl in the morning.
A brass bell, when the sound quits.
The promise of a liar.

It’s a beautifully simple form that is nothing more than a list, so it’s an easy poem to write. What isn’t so easy is thinking up appropriate examples that aren’t obvious.

Begin the assignment by discussing abstract words in general. What is silence? Is it relative? Can we be sure that when three people ask for silence that they all mean the same thing? Is there a difference between the silence during meditation, and the silence in a funeral home, or a classroom during a test?

Pass out a sheet with the three samples, and read them through. Talk about how each “example” works to define the abstraction. Then ask students to write their own poems.

THREE SILENCES

A feather from the belly of a swan.

A field after the hay's been taken in.

An arrowhead chipped from black stone.

THREE EMPTY THINGS

A beggar's bowl in the morning.

A brass bell, when the sound quits.

The promise of a liar.

THREE QUIET THINGS

A bear cub hibernating with her mother.

A leaf on a day with no wind.

The heartbeat of a doll.

—Anna Bramson, 5th grade