



## IS THIS A POEM?

Ever since Socrates, philosophers have tried to define terms clearly and exhaustively. This has resulted in a good deal of rigour and precision. Philosophers often speak of 'necessary and sufficient conditions', or, what I call 'what's needed and what's enough'. The problem is: it's not easy to do. For instance, just try - as the 20th century philosopher Wittgenstein challenged us to do - to define, precisely, what a game is. It's not easy. There always seems to be an example of a game that escapes whatever definition you can come up with. Try it by yourself, with your colleagues/friends in the pub and with your class. Poetry and philosophy are two of the worst offenders when it comes to eluding clear and precise definitions.

A 'Thoughting' is a new kind of poetry for something that is not quite poetry and not quite philosophy whilst, at the same time, being both poetry and philosophy for the classroom. They are light-hearted exercises for the brain, or, etudes for the mind, (mostly) in verse.

Here is a Thoughting for you to use with your class for National Poetry Day.

First of all, an exercise for any age group with the slippery task of defining poetry. Read (or show) your class the following 'Thoughting':

## IS THIS A POEM?

“

Is  
This  
A  
Poem?

”

### Task Questions:

- Is 'Is This a Poem?' a poem or not?
- If so, why? If not, why not?
- What is a poem?
- What if it was called (and read) 'This Is a Poem' - would it be a poem then?
- And what if it was called (and read) 'This Is Not a Poem' - would it be a poem then or not?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Another example that inhabits the netherworld that straddles prose, poetry and philosophy is the short story (if it is a short story!) **The Sudden Walk** by Franz Kafka. As an extension activity see if you can get hold of the Kafka story for use with your class (Year 7 and up).

[http://franzkafkastories.com/shortStories.php?story\\_id=kafka\\_the\\_sudden\\_walk](http://franzkafkastories.com/shortStories.php?story_id=kafka_the_sudden_walk) ([http://franzkafkastories.com/shortStories.php?story\\_id=kafka\\_the\\_sudden\\_walk](http://franzkafkastories.com/shortStories.php?story_id=kafka_the_sudden_walk))

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