

I Am Offering This Poem



SUMMARY

I'm giving you this poem because it's the only thing I have to give you. Think of it like a thick coat that will keep you warm you when winter inevitably arrives, or like a pair of heavy socks that will keep out the sharp cold.

I love you.

This poem is the only thing I have to give you, but it will fill you up like a pot of warm corn in winter. It will shield you from the elements like a scarf wrapped around your head that protects your hair and face.

I love you.

Keep this poem and cherish it as though you were completely lost in the daunting forest that life turns into when you grow up. Put the poem in the back of a drawer, so it's like a cabin hidden in the thick woods. When you come knocking on that cabin's door (that is, when you re-read this poem), you'll find in it my voice: I'll answer you, guide you, and let you warm up by the fire, where you can rest and feel safe.

I love you.

This poem is the only thing I have to give you, but love is the only thing anyone needs in life; it's all people need to get by when the rest of the world stops caring about what happens to you.

This poem is a reminder that I love you.

The speaker also compares love to “a pot full of yellow corn / to warm your belly.” Love doesn't just offer comfort and protection, then, but actual *sustenance*. This comparison implies that, like food, love is something people need to survive.

Finally, love is like a guiding star that offers people “direction” in the confusing, overwhelming “wilderness” of life. Without love, people would be totally “lost” and at the mercy of a world that, one day, will “no longer care[] if you live or die.”

Thus even as the speaker humbly professes that love is “all I have to give,” the poem reveals that this love is actually the most valuable thing anyone has to offer. It's “all anyone needs to live,” in fact. Whether it entails turning to a partner for advice, comfort, or affection, love is a well of strength and support to navigate an often cruel or indifferent world. This is why the speaker tells the beloved to simply “remember / I love you” in moments of despair; the world can be an extraordinarily difficult place, but, the poem insists, love makes things a little easier.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-30



THE POWER OF POETRY

The poem is primarily about the value of love, but it's also a testament to the power of language. The speaker communicates a romantic message to a loved one by “offering” up the poem itself, implicitly demonstrating the power of poetry to capture, express, and preserve emotion. The poem provides the speaker's beloved with a concrete reminder of the speaker's love, thus highlighting poetry's ability to give lasting shape and meaning to intangible feelings.

The speaker insists that love is the most valuable gift one can give, but that doesn't change the fact that people can't see or touch it. The speaker thus turns to poetry to capture this love, using a series of [similes](#) and [metaphors](#) to illustrate hazy or vague romantic feelings. For example, the speaker compares love to warm clothing, a pot of corn, and a safe cabin in the woods. All of these comparisons put the speaker's love into terms that make sense in the real world.

This invites readers—and, in turn, the speaker's lover—to think of love as a comforting thing that can provide sustenance and guidance. In other words, the use of these poetic devices makes the speaker's feelings seem less abstract. Love may be the message here, but poetry is the invaluable messenger.

The poem is something concrete that the beloved can hold onto in difficult moments, a simple reminder of how the speaker



THEMES



THE VALUE OF LOVE

“I Am Offering This Poem” presents love as something far more valuable than any material gift.

The speaker has “nothing else to give” the beloved, but the poem implies that this doesn't matter; love is a gift in itself, a kind of “treasure” that provides people with a sense of warmth, protection, and safety in the face of hardship. Love, the speaker implies, can comfort and sustain people even when times are tough or the rest of “the world outside” stops caring.

The speaker illustrates love's value by comparing it to items that provide warmth, nourishment, and guidance. For example, love is “like a warm coat” or “a pair of thick socks” that block out winter's “bit[ing]” cold. Love isn't literally a coat or socks, of course; the speaker is using a [simile](#) to present love as a form of protection from the harsher parts of life. The speaker's love is like a protective shield that a loved one can count on to make inevitable hard times more bearable.

feels. "Remember // I love you," the speaker says towards the poem's end, reflecting the idea that the purpose of the poem is to serve as long-lasting *evidence* of the speaker's love—and, in a way, that the poem is also *part* of that love itself, a gesture created through and suffused with feeling.

Writers throughout history have praised the power of poetry to immortalize their loved ones in verse; just look at Shakespeare's "[Sonnet 19](#)," for example, in which the speaker boldly declares that his lover will "ever live young" in the poem itself. The speaker is doing something similar here—but rather than attempt to capture the *beloved* in verse, the speaker turns to poetry to capture the very love they share.

The use of beautiful language and poetic devices helps the speaker do this, making it easier for the beloved to grasp the speaker's affection—which, again, implies poetry's ability to clarify and even immortalize feelings that might otherwise seem intangible and fleeting. This poem therefore creates enduring proof of their bond, implying that poetry is good not just for expressing emotion, but also for capturing and sustaining it.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-30



LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

*I am offering ...
... else to give.*

Using [apostrophe](#) to address an unnamed person, the speaker offers the poem itself as a gift of sorts. Right away, this makes the poem seem important and special, suggesting that poetry is a thing of value that one person can give another. This invites readers to not only view this specific poem as precious, but also consider poetry's power to express emotion in a meaningful way.

The gesture of "offering" the poem comes to feel even more significant when the speaker admits to having "nothing else to give." The speaker might not have any material items that would be worth giving away, but this doesn't mean the speaker is completely empty-handed; the speaker can give this very poem, which—readers will soon see—is actually more valuable than anything else.

These opening two lines feature a bit of [sibilance](#):

I am offering this poem to you,
since I have nothing else to give.

The gentle, hushed /s/ sound keep the poem's opening quiet, as

do the /f/ sound in "offering" and the /th/ sound found in "nothing." Taken together, these sounds lead to a soft and gentle quality that makes the speaker's tone sound intimate and comforting—a tone that hints at the fondness and familiarity between the speaker and the person to whom the poem is addressed.

LINES 3-7

*Keep it like ...
... I love you,*

It becomes clear here that the poem is addressed to someone the speaker's loves. Using a [simile](#), the speaker compares the poem to a "warm coat" capable of protecting this beloved from the cold during winter. The speaker then uses another simile in comparing the poem—or, rather, the love the speaker is offering—to "a pair of thick socks / the cold cannot bite through." Both this simile and the "warm coat" simile treat love as if it's a necessity in life, something that will help the speaker's beloved withstand hardship and discomfort. This introduces the central idea at play in "I Am Offering This Poem"—namely, that the speaker's love (and, in turn, the poem) is some kind of warm, protective force.

The references to cold and winter here will reappear throughout the poem, and aren't meant to be taken literally. Instead, they represent the harsher parts of life—the [metaphorical](#) "cold" or "winter" that everyone deals with from time to time. Love, the speaker insist, can help people tolerate the harshness of life.

[Alliteration](#) and [consonance](#) give these lines a strong, assertive sound. Note the sharp /k/ sound in lines 3 through 6 in particular:

Keep it like a warm coat
when winter comes to cover you,
or like a pair of thick socks
the cold cannot [...]

These sharp sounds subtly evoke the bitterness of winter cold and the way that such cold may pierce the beloved's shell—making the need for the "warmth" of the speaker's love all the more urgent.

LINES 8-10

*I have nothing ...
... belly in winter,*

The speaker uses [repetition](#) to begin the second stanza, saying, "I have nothing else to give you." The reappearance of this phrase calls attention to the fact that the speaker doesn't have any material items to bestow upon the lover.

However, the speaker has already suggested that the poem and the love it expresses will keep the beloved warm and safe. This implies that the speaker's gift is far from useless; on the

contrary, the speaker presents this poem as if it's even *more* useful than any material item. The [metaphor](#) suggesting that it's a "pot full of yellow corn" reinforces this idea, once again implying that love can provide great relief and satisfy a certain human need. It can, in other words, be a form of sustenance, something that nourishes people and keeps them alive.

The [slant rhyme](#) that appears in the phrase "a pot full of yellow corn / to warm your belly" adds musicality to this moment, making the speaker's language sound pleasant and soothing and creating a more affectionate tone. The [consonance](#) of the /l/ sound also adds a gentle playfulness to these lines, appearing in the words "else," "full," "yellow," and "belly." Simply put, the speaker's language sounds smooth and musical here, and this helps convey the speaker's fond feelings for the beloved.

LINES 11-13

*it is a ...
... I love you,*

The speaker continues to describe the value of love, this time using a [metaphor](#) to suggest that it is a "scarf" that will keep the beloved's head warm. This once more presents love as a protective force, implying that it can shield people from the harsh and unforgiving conditions of the outside world.

There is also an [extended metaphor](#) at play here, one that frames the difficulties of life as a kind of wintry coldness. The speaker has hinted at this throughout the poem by comparing love to various forms of clothing that will keep the beloved warm. The surrounding world, the poem implies, can be as overwhelming as a cold wind blowing in a person's face. The speaker, however, can give the beloved the same sense of comfort and protection that a scarf would provide against freezing winds.

When the speaker says "I love you" in line 13, the phrase becomes the poem's [refrain](#). It is a reminder that this is—first and foremost—a love poem. Although the speaker technically "offer[s]" the poem itself to the beloved, the *real* thing of value is the love that this poem *communicates*. To underline this idea, the speaker uses this simple refrain, interrupting each stanza with a single line: "I love you." This emphasizes the fact that this poem is a lasting reminder of the speaker's love—a reminder the beloved can turn to time and again for reassurance.

LINES 14-16

*Keep it, treasure ...
... becomes when mature;*

The speaker urges the beloved to "treasure" their romantic bond, a word that reiterates the inherent value of love itself (in that it's something worth being treated like a "treasure"). Their love, the speaker says, has the power to give the beloved "direction" in moments of profound distress or disorientation; whenever the beloved feels lost in life, the speaker's love will be

there to provide guidance.

The speaker uses a [metaphor](#) to suggest that adult life can often feel like a vast and confusing "wilderness." The idea that life becomes unsettling in this way when people are "mature" implies that things only get more and more complicated with time—the longer people are alive, the more likely they are to run into hardship. This makes sense, considering that the speaker has already indicated through the use of [extended metaphor](#) that life is as cruel and unforgiving as a cold winter wind. In a world that is so harsh, then, it's only a matter of time before one encounters hardship.

But the speaker's feelings for the beloved will act as a sort of map. The idea here is that love isn't only comforting and soothing, but also genuinely *useful*—it can, the speaker implies, add purpose and meaning to life in a way that makes people feel less confused or lost. This is why the beloved should "treasure" this love poem: it is like a valuable compass in an otherwise directionless world.

LINES 17-20

*and in the ...
... I will answer,*

The speaker invites the beloved to envision this very poem sitting in the back of a drawer. To build on this image, the speaker uses a [simile](#) to suggest that the poem is "tucked away like a cabin or hogan / in dense trees" (the word "hogan" refers to a traditional Navajo structure made of logs and mud). Once again, this presents the poem as a comforting, protective thing, since the speaker compares it to a place of refuge hidden away in the otherwise disorienting setting of "dense" woods.

Building on this idea, the speaker [metaphorically](#) tells the beloved to "come knocking." This presents the poem as a cabin that wayward wanderers like the beloved can seek out when they're lost. In other words, when the speaker says "come knocking," they're telling the beloved to re-read the poem.

"I will answer," the speaker then says, implying that the speaker will always be there to give the beloved guidance and protection. The speaker won't *literally* answer here, and there is again no literal knocking; the speaker means that they'll answer *through the poem*, which contains the speaker's message of love. This emphasizes the idea that this poem is a reminder of the speaker's love. The beloved should keep the poem "tucked" somewhere safe so that it's possible to return to it in times of need.

The language in this section has a noticeable musicality to it. The speaker uses a pleasing combination of [assonance](#) and [consonance](#) in line 17, repeating the assonant /o/ sound and the consonant /r/ sound:

and in the corner of **your** drawer,

This mixture of assonance and consonance creates [internal rhymes](#) between "corner," "your," and "drawer." (Of course, some people might pronounce "drawer" differently depending on their regional accent, creating an internal [slant rhyme](#) instead of a perfect internal rhyme.)

This pleasant musicality helps balance the harsher consonance that appears in these lines. The sharp /k/ sound is particularly noticeable in lines 17 through 19:

and in the corner of your drawer,
tucked away like a cabin or hogan
in dense trees, come knocking,

This sound adds a harshness to the speaker's tone, hinting at the idea that the world can be tough and overwhelming. This, it seems, is why the beloved will need to "come knocking" on the speaker's cabin while wandering in the intimidating and disorienting woods of life. The poem therefore serves a very useful purpose, giving the beloved comfort and protection in a hostile, difficult world.

LINES 20-22

*give you directions, ...
... you feel safe,*

Expanding on the [metaphor](#) of the poem as a cabin in the woods, the speaker promises to give the beloved "directions" whenever the beloved "come[s] knocking." This solidifies the idea that love can act as a source of guidance in life.

The speaker also assures the beloved that this poem (and, by that token, the speaker's love) will always be a soothing source of comfort. It will give the beloved the same kind of satisfaction and relief that a warm fire would give a wayward traveler on a cold, dark night.

This builds on the [extended metaphor](#) implied throughout the poem that presents life and the surrounding world as a cold winter's night. The speaker's love, then, will make the beloved "feel safe" in the same way that a warm cabin would give a freezing wanderer a sense of protection.

There are a number of soft [consonant](#) sounds in these lines—sounds like /s/, /f/ and /th/. Take, for example, lines 21 and 22:

[...] yourself by **this** fire,
rest by **this** fire, and make you feel safe,

All these gentle sounds create a calm, gentle tone, making it feel like the speaker is affectionately whispering these words into the beloved's ear. The sound of the language thus reflects the speaker's attempt to soothe the beloved.

LINES 23-25

I love ...

... needs to live,

The speaker repeats the poem's [refrain](#) in line 23, once more reminding the beloved of the poem's central message: "I love you." By this point, it has become clear that the main purpose of the poem is to deliver a reminder of the speaker's love, creating a lasting document of an otherwise vague or abstract feeling.

In line 24, the speaker says, "It's all I have to give," suggesting yet again that the speaker has no other material items to offer. But the poem doesn't imply that this lack of material goods is a bad thing. Rather, the speaker insists that nothing is more valuable than love, which is "all anyone needs to live." No material item, it seems, could possibly measure up to the simple but profound gift of love.

The suggestion that people *need* love in order to live also aligns with the speaker's many [similes](#) and [metaphors](#) comparing love to various forms of sustenance and protection that are necessary for survival. According to the speaker, love is as life-sustaining as a "warm coat" or a warm pot of corn—two things that can help people stay alive.

The [consonant](#) /v/ sound is prominent in these lines, appearing once in each line:

I love you,
It's all I have to give,
and all anyone needs to live,

This repeated /v/ gives the section a pleasing sound that goes nicely with the speaker's loving tone. There is also a prominent [end rhyme](#) between the words "give" and "live," adding musicality to the speaker's language.

LINES 26-30

*and to go ...
... I love you.*

The speaker has already suggested that love is the only thing "anyone needs to live." In these lines, the speaker takes this idea a step further by saying that love is also the only thing people need to "go on living inside."

This is, at first, a somewhat ambiguous statement, since it's not immediately clear what it would mean to "go on living inside." However, it seems likely that speaker means people can live "inside" love itself. This aligns with the [metaphorical](#) idea of love as a place of refuge from the harsh external world—a cabin in the "dense" woods of life.

The speaker clarifies this idea in lines 27 and 28 by suggesting that love is something people can live inside "when the world outside / no longer cares if you live or die." This implies that the surrounding world is not only harsh and challenging, but also indifferent to human suffering. In other words, the world doesn't care if the beloved gets lost in a dark forest. To make up for this, the speaker offers the beloved something of true value:

a lasting reminder that the beloved isn't alone in this cruel world.

This is why the speaker ends the poem by repeating the [refrain](#) one last time. "Remember // I love you," the speaker says, going out of the way to emphasize that the beloved should actively "remember" the speaker's love. This, after all, is the entire point of the poem—the speaker wants to give the beloved evidence of the romance that exists between them. More specifically, the speaker wants this poem to be something the beloved can turn to in times of distress, something that will reassure the beloved of the speaker's uncompromising love. This will inevitably make the beloved feel less alone in the world, which the poem implies can be an unrelentingly lonely, frightening place.

The [assonant](#) long /i/ sound in the words "inside," "outside," and "die" in lines 26 through 28 ("and to go [...] or die") gives the section a musical quality, especially since "outside" and "die" create a faint [slant rhyme](#). This intensifies the poem's language, making its conclusion sound all the more momentous.

love you." The speaker returns to these words four times, almost as if this phrase interrupts the speaker's train of thought. The insistent repetition makes it seem like the speaker must express their love so urgently that it's impossible to focus for long on anything else.

Repetition also calls attention to the fact that the speaker has "nothing else to give" the beloved—other than love, of course. To emphasize this point, the speaker repeats it in line 2, line 8 ("I have [...] give you"), line 24 ("It's all [...] to give"). These repetitions make it very clear that love is all the speaker has got to offer—a shortcoming that isn't actually a shortcoming, since the speaker also implies that nothing could compare to the gift of love anyway.

This is why the speaker repeatedly tells the beloved to "keep it" (meaning the poem and, of course, the speaker's love). "Keep it," the speaker repeats in lines 3 ("Keep it [...] warm coat") and 14 ("Keep it, [...] you would"), underscoring the idea that love is a valuable gift that ought to be "treasure[d]," something that will always give the beloved comfort. Repetition helps the speaker highlight this idea while also creating a pattern of [parallelism](#) that makes the language feel consistent and cohesive.



SYMBOLS



WINTER AND COLDNESS

The wintry cold that crops up throughout the poem [symbolizes](#) life's many difficulties. Winter often represents loneliness, despair, and isolation in literature, and can even stand for death itself. The speaker of "I Am Offering This Poem" plays with this trope by suggesting that the poem they're "offering" will keep the beloved warm. The poem will, the speaker promises, act like a "pair of thick socks / the cold cannot bite through." Because it expresses the speaker's love, the poem becomes a refuge from the freezing "wilderness" of life—a warm place by the fire, protected from the cold of life's sufferings.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-6:** "Keep it like a warm coat / when winter comes to cover you, / or like a pair of thick socks / the cold cannot bite through,"
- **Lines 10-12:** "to warm your belly in winter, / it is a scarf for your head, to wear / over your hair, to tie up around your face,"
- **Lines 21-22:** "let you warm yourself by this fire, / rest by this fire"

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "I have nothing else to give."
- **Line 3:** "Keep it"
- **Line 7:** " I love you,"
- **Line 8:** "I have nothing else to give"
- **Line 13:** " I love you,"
- **Line 14:** "Keep it"
- **Line 23:** " I love you,"
- **Line 24:** "It's all I have to give,"
- **Line 30:** " I love you."

ALLITERATION

The speaker uses bursts of [alliteration](#) to intensify the poem's language and call attention to certain words. Take, for example, the alliteration of the /k/ and /w/ sounds in lines 3 and 4:

Keep it like a warm coat
when winter comes to cover you,

The sharp /k/ sound makes the speaker's tone sound urgent, even a little abrasive. This harshness fits in both with the speaker's repeated insistence that the beloved "Keep it" (the poem) for protection, and with the bitter cold of winter. The smoother /w/ sound, on the other hand, adds balance, suggesting the poem's power to soothe and comfort the beloved in the midst of that cold. The combination of these alliterative sounds also heightens the language, reminding readers that this "offering" is not just any old love letter, but a *poem*.



POETIC DEVICES

REPETITION

"I Am Offering This Poem" is built around the speaker's [repetitions](#)—especially the repetition of the simple [refrain](#) "I

The same effects appear again in line 6 ("the cold [...] bite through"), when the speaker once more alliterates the /k/ sound in the phrase "cold cannot," and in the /w/ alliteration in line 10 ("to warm your belly in winter"). These subtle moments give the language a little rhythmic bump that adds interest and energy to the poem's sound, and draws attention to the speaker's [similes](#): here, the "cold" meets the "thick socks" of the poem and "cannot" pierce them, and a "warm" bellyful of the poem's "yellow corn" fights the chill of "winter."

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "Keep," "warm," "coat"
- **Line 4:** "when winter," "comes," "cover"
- **Line 6:** "cold cannot"
- **Line 10:** "warm," "winter"
- **Line 28:** "longer," "live"

CONSONANCE

The [consonance](#) in "I Am Offering This Poem" gives the language a dense, musical sound. The speaker layers different sounds on top of each other. For example, take a look at the way the /v/ sound pairs with the [sibilant](#) /s/ sound in line 2:

since I have nothing else to give.

The combination of the /v/ sound and the sibilant /s/ sound creates a gentle effect. This pairs nicely with the softness of the /h/ sound in "have" and the lisp quality of the /th/ sound in "nothing." The overall tone is calm and soothing, a tone that helps convey the speaker's desire to comfort the beloved. It's almost as if the speaker is whispering these words in the beloved's ear.

In lines 9 and 10, the speaker uses /l/, /r/, and /w/ sounds in a dense cluster:

so it is a pot full of yellow corn
to warm your belly in winter,

The /l/ sound calls attention to the words "full" and "yellow," inviting readers to envision a bright, heaping, steaming pot of corn. The /r/ sound spotlights the words "corn" and "warm," subtly hinting at the idea that the speaker's love is full of comforting sustenance. Lastly, the [alliterated](#) /w/ sound in the words "warm" and "winter" underlines the contrast between the cold, harsh surrounding world and the speaker's warm, protective love. Consonance thus helps the speaker not only to enhance the poem's language, but also to accentuate important themes and ideas.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "since," "have," "else," "give"
- **Line 3:** "warm," "coat"
- **Line 4:** "when winter," "comes," "cover"
- **Line 5:** "like," "thick socks"
- **Line 6:** "cold cannot"
- **Line 7:** "love"
- **Line 8:** "have," "give"
- **Line 9:** "full," "yellow," "corn"
- **Line 10:** "warm your," "belly," "winter"
- **Line 11:** "scarf," "your," "wear"
- **Line 12:** "over your hair," "around your"
- **Line 15:** "needing direction"
- **Line 16:** "wilderness," "becomes," "when," "mature"
- **Line 17:** "corner," "your drawer"
- **Line 18:** "tucked," "like," "cabin," "hogan"
- **Line 19:** "come knocking"
- **Line 21:** "warm yourself," "fire"
- **Line 22:** "rest," "this," "fire," "feel safe"
- **Line 23:** "love"
- **Line 24:** "all," "have," "give"
- **Line 25:** "all," "anyone needs," "live"
- **Line 28:** "longer cares," "or"
- **Line 29:** "remember"

ASSONANCE

A few brief moments of [assonance](#) give the poem's language a pleasing, melodic feel. This is the case in line 4, for example, when the speaker repeats the /uh/ sound:

when winter comes to cover you,

The repetition of this assonant /uh/ sound isn't overbearing or even all that noticeable, but it gives the moment a little musicality, and ties the idea of the winter that "comes" to the "cover" of [metaphorical](#) snow it brings.

The speaker also uses assonance in lines 11 and 12, which feature an /ay/ sound:

it is a scarf for your head, to wear
over your hair, to tie up around your face,

This assonance creates an [internal rhyme](#) between these two words, linking the beloved's hair to the covering they can wear over it. It also simply makes these lines sound unified and melodic.

A similarly musical and cohesive sound appears in line 22 ("rest by [...] feel safe"), when the speaker spotlights the long /a/ sound in the words "make" and "safe." This calls attention to the speaker's promise to give the beloved a sense of protection in the face of hardship.

Throughout the poem, these little moments of assonance

enhance both the poem's musicality and its meaning.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "comes," "cover"
- **Line 6:** "through"
- **Line 7:** "you"
- **Line 9:** "corn"
- **Line 10:** "warm"
- **Line 11:** "wear"
- **Line 12:** "hair"
- **Line 17:** "corner," "your drawer"
- **Line 22:** "make," "safe"
- **Line 24:** "give"
- **Line 25:** "live"
- **Line 26:** "inside"
- **Line 27:** "outside"
- **Line 28:** "die"

ENJAMBMENT

The speaker uses [enjambment](#) to vary the pace and flow of the poem. Because the majority of the poem's lines are [end-stopped](#), the handful of enjambed lines have a noticeable effect on the rhythm of the speaker's language. For example, the first two lines of the poem are end-stopped, but line 3 spills over into line 4:

Keep it like a warm coat
when winter comes to cover you,

By extending this idea over the line break, the speaker creates momentum and fluidity. This is also the case in line 5, which is enjambed with line 6:

or like a pair of thick socks
the cold cannot bite through,

This enjambment helps to make the poem's rhythm and pacing feel fresh and a little unpredictable. The fact that line 6 is end-stopped only adds to this effect, especially since the line ends somewhat abruptly before the speaker delivers the poem's short [refrain](#) in line 7: "I love you."

The speaker continues to toggle back and forth between end-stopped lines and enjambed lines in the poem's second stanza ("I have [...] your face"). The lines alternate like this:

I have [...] give you,
so it [...] yellow corn
to warm [...] in winter,
it is [...] to wear
over your [...] your face,

This combination of enjambment and end-stopped lines creates

a push-and-pull effect that brings variation to the poem, suggesting the speaker's urgent energy as they present this "offering" to their beloved.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-4:** "coat / when"
- **Lines 5-6:** "socks / the"
- **Lines 9-10:** "corn / to"
- **Lines 11-12:** "wear / over"
- **Lines 14-15:** "would / if"
- **Lines 18-19:** "hogan / in"
- **Lines 27-28:** "outside / no"

SIMILE

The speaker uses [similes](#) to express romantic feelings in a grounded, tangible way. By comparing the poem—and by extension the speaker's own love—to cozy socks, a warm coat, and a secluded cabin, the speaker vividly communicates abstract emotions.

In lines 3 and 4 ("Keep it [...] cover you"), for example, the speaker compares the poem to a "warm coat," and in lines 5 and 6 to "a pair of thick socks / the cold cannot bite through." These similes present the poem (and the love it expresses) as a protective force, and also as a practical, comforting one: this poem isn't like a silky negligee or silk stockings, but like a useful winter coat and sturdy woolly socks.

The idea of the poem as a homey refuge returns in the speaker's third and final simile, which invites the beloved to imagine the poem tucked safely into a drawer "like a cabin or hogan / in dense trees." This cozy image suggests that the poem can act as a place for the beloved to come for comfort and protection when they feel lost in the woods of life.

By using similes to express these ideas, the speaker invites readers (along with the beloved) to think about this "offering" in solid, grounded ways. Instead of speaking broadly and vaguely about romance, the speaker uses simple similes to stress the down-to-earth necessity of love and poetry.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-4:** "Keep it like a warm coat / when winter comes to cover you"
- **Lines 5-6:** "or like a pair of thick socks / the cold cannot bite through"
- **Lines 18-19:** "tucked away like a cabin or hogan / in dense trees"

METAPHOR

The [metaphors](#) in "I Am Offering This Poem" work a lot like the [similes](#), comparing the poem to practical and comforting objects that will keep the beloved warm in winter. For instance,

in the metaphor of the poem as a "pot full of yellow corn" that can "warm your belly in winter," the speaker suggests that this "offering" isn't just charming, but sustaining: the poem (and the love that it expresses) might actually help keep the beloved alive.

The speaker also casts the poem as "a scarf for your head" that will shield the beloved from the cold—which fits right in with the poem's similes about warm coats and thick socks. (See the [Simile](#) section for more on these images.)

Both of these metaphors hint at the poem's larger [extended metaphor](#), which suggests that the world is as harsh and unforgiving as a cold winter. This is why the speaker compares their "offering" to warm clothing, hot food, and even a cozy cabin. The cabin, the speaker says, is a place where the lover can come to get warm by the fire. Because the surrounding world is often frigid and difficult, the speaker wants this love poem to be a place of refuge for the beloved. These metaphors suggest both the speaker's weary sense of the "wilderness life becomes when mature" and their deep, romantic belief in the protective powers of love and art.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 9-10:** "so it is a pot full of yellow corn / to warm your belly in winter,"
- **Lines 11-12:** "it is a scarf for your head, to wear / over your hair, to tie up around your face,"
- **Lines 14-16:** "Keep it, treasure this as you would / if you were lost, needing direction, / in the wilderness life becomes when mature;"
- **Lines 19-22:** "come knocking, / and I will answer, give you directions, / and let you warm yourself by this fire, / rest by this fire, and make you feel safe,"

APOSTROPHE

The speaker uses [apostrophe](#) throughout the poem, addressing the words to an unnamed beloved. Although this person is never identified, the speaker clearly adores them—the poem's [refrain](#), after all, is "I love you."

But the poem isn't just addressed to the beloved—it's also a *gift* from the speaker. "I am offering this poem to you, / since I have nothing else to give," the speaker says in the very first lines, making it clear that the poem has a purpose beyond simply declaring the speaker's feelings. Rather, the poem is supposed to give the beloved a source of lasting reassurance, a constant reminder of the speaker's love. Whenever the beloved feels lost "in the wilderness life becomes when mature," this poem (and the love it speaks of) will be there for comfort and strength.

The poem's apostrophe to the beloved isn't just romantic, but practical! Between the speaker's assertions of love, the poem gives directions for its own use, telling the beloved to save it up

in "the corner of your drawer" like a cozy "cabin or hogan," a safe place to retreat to in hard times.

The use of apostrophe is essential to the poem: it would be impossible to "offer" these words without speaking directly to the beloved. By addressing the lover, the speaker presents the poem as a valuable and romantic gift.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-30



VOCABULARY

Hogan (Line 18) - A kind of hut made of logs and earth. Hogans are traditional Navajo structures.

Dense (Line 19) - Thick.



FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"I Am Offering This Poem" is a 30-line poem that doesn't follow a specific form. The only constant is that all of the longer stanzas are separated by the poem's refrain: "I love you." This [refrain](#) periodically reminds readers (and, in turn, the speaker's beloved) that the poem is, above all, a love poem.

Other than this refrain, the poem doesn't adhere to a set structure. For instance, the second major stanza ("I have [...] your face") is only 5 lines long, whereas the third major stanza ("Keep it, [...] feel safe") is 9 lines long. This wide-ranging, imprecise form makes the poem feel like it's unfolding casually and even a bit unpredictably.

This sense of unpredictability reflects the idea that life is full of unexpected challenges. The repetition of the refrain, though, illustrates that the speaker's beloved can always count on the speaker's affection, which—despite life's many difficulties—the beloved will always be able to turn to for comfort.

METER

"I Am Offering This Poem" is written in [free verse](#), which means it doesn't adhere to a specific [meter](#) or [rhyme scheme](#). This lack of formality creates a casual, familiar tone that reflects the speaker's close relationship with the beloved.

The lack of a set meter also allows the speaker some flexibility. Although the majority of the poem's lines are roughly the same length, the [refrain](#) is quite short. This creates a contrast between the longer stanzas and the single-line refrain. For example, consider the noticeable difference in length between line 22 and line 23:

rest by this fire, and make you feel safe,

I love you,

The contrast between the lengthiness of line 22 and the brevity of line 23 creates a push-and-pull rhythm that keeps readers engaged. It also calls attention to the simple phrase "I love you," which is arguably the poem's most important message, since the speaker hopes the poem itself will remind the beloved of this love. By using free verse, then, the speaker is able to play with the rhythm of the poem in ways that make the language sound fresh while also spotlighting important ideas.

RHYME SCHEME

The poem is written in [free verse](#), so it doesn't follow a set [rhyme scheme](#). There are, however, several rhymes throughout the poem. For example, lines 6 and 7 feature a prominent [end rhyme](#):

the cold cannot bite **through**,
I love **you**,

This helps make that first "I love you" really land, really stand out to the reader's ear. Another noticeable end rhyme appears in lines 24 and 25:

It's all I have to **give**,
and all anyone needs to **live**,

This rhyme gives this moment a unified, musical sound that elevates the speaker's language. The heightened effect also underscores the speaker's emotion, making it clear that the speaker feels very strongly for the beloved and is confident that love is a necessary thing for survival. Although the poem lacks an actual rhyme scheme, then, the speaker uses occasional rhymes to enhance the sound of a given moment and, in doing so, call attention to the ideas at play.



SPEAKER

The poem doesn't reveal much about the speaker. The only thing readers can discern is that the speaker is deeply in love with the person to whom the poem is addressed. Above all, the speaker wants to communicate this love to the unnamed lover, hoping the poem will serve as a reminder of the romantic bond they share.

Love, the speaker believes, is the most valuable gift one person can give another. By "offer[ing]" up this poem, the speaker gives the beloved something precious: a lasting reminder of the comfort, reassurance, and emotional protection that love provides. This, the speaker believes, will make it easier for the lover to move through life, which is otherwise harsh and difficult.

This speaker might be a little pessimistic about life in general.

But they also clearly believe in the power of love. Deep down, this speaker is a romantic.



SETTING

"I Am Offering This Poem" isn't set in a specific time or place. Instead, it's a timeless, universal poem—the kind of poem that can speak to people from many different walks of life. This is because the speaker only talks about life and romance *in general*, refraining from making any specific references to the speaker or the lover's environment.

However, some of the poem's [metaphors](#) do suggest environments close to the speaker's heart. When the speaker suggests that his beloved tuck his poem away "like a cabin or a hogan / in dense trees," the specificity of the word "hogan," which is a kind of Navajo hut, suggests the Southwestern landscape of Baca's birth. There's a general warmth and comfort in the image of the poem as a "pot full of yellow corn," but also a strong regional flavor: this poem speaks from the poet's own familiar world.



CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"I Am Offering This Poem" first appeared in Jimmy Santiago Baca's poetry collection *Immigrants in Our Own Land*, which was published in 1979. As a love poem, it fits into a long tradition of poetry about romance, relationships, and the power or beauty of love.

When he was first beginning to read and write poetry, Jimmy Santiago Baca studied English Romantic poets like [William Wordsworth](#), [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#), and [Lord Byron](#). The Romantic interest in beauty, love, and nature clearly influences Baca's themes and [imagery](#) in "I Am Offering This Poem."

While Baca's work draws influence from earlier traditions, its style is firmly planted in the 20th century. By the late 1970s, many poets had stopped writing in [meter](#), choosing [free verse](#) over more structured forms of poetry. "I Am Offering This Poem" reflects this shift toward free verse, as the speaker uses a casual tone that doesn't follow a set metrical pattern.

At the same time, though, Baca's work isn't quite as experimental as other postmodern poetry. Although many postmodern poets left behind conventional poetic structures to experiment with form, Baca's poetry remained straightforward. The lack of meter in "I Am Offering This Poem," for example, simply allows him to achieve a more laid-back, conversational tone.

This puts his work in conversation with the poetry of people like [Mary Oliver](#), who also used free verse and everyday language to explore themes surrounding nature and love. And

though he often wrote in metered verse, [Robert Frost](#)'s poetry also comes to mind, since many of Frost's poems feature a similar sense of exuberance and gratitude when it comes to both love and nature.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Jimmy Santiago Baca was incarcerated for five years as a young man. He taught himself how to read while in prison, studying writers like William Wordsworth in a poetry anthology he managed to steal from one of the guards. Before coming to prison, he had never seen reading as a worthwhile use of time, but he soon discovered that he found comfort and even joy in poetry.

Once he learned how to read, Baca tried his own hand at poetry, writing poems about his life in a small notebook. He eventually sent some of these poems to the magazine *Mother Jones*, where the editor (and fellow poet) [Denise Levertov](#) recognized his talent, published his work, and began corresponding with him on a regular basis. She helped him compile many of the poems in *Immigrants in Our Own Land*, which he largely wrote while incarcerated.

On a broader scale, Baca wrote "I Am Offering This Poem" during a time of tension in the United States. Having finally withdrawn from Vietnam in 1975, the country was still reeling from a bloody and highly controversial war. And the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union meant the threat of nuclear annihilation loomed over the whole world. "I Am Offering This Poem," and its meditation on love and gratitude, might indeed have felt like a refuge in the midst of this era's uncertainty, turmoil, and fear.



MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- ["A Place to Stand" Trailer](#) – Watch the trailer for "A Place to Stand," the movie based on Jimmy Santiago Baca's

memoir of the same name. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYOG0uHn63w>)

- [Jimmy Santiago Baca Reads the Poem](#) – Listen to Baca himself reading "I Am Offering This Poem" aloud. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sm7U9BtPXXM>)
- [More About Baca](#) – For more information about Jimmy Santiago Baca, take a look at this brief overview of his life and work. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/jimmy-santiago-baca>)
- [An Interview with Baca](#) – Listen to an interview in which Baca talks about the power of language and what it was like to learn to read as a young man in prison. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2GRv_yPWE)
- [Baca's Writing Workshops](#) – Learn about Baca's nonprofit organization, Cedar Tree, which works to bring writing workshops for at-risk young people to prisons, community centers, and schools. (<https://www.jimmysantiagobaca.com/cedar-tree>)



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