

Introduction to Poetry

by Billy Collins

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

Ice Breaking

Candy
Is dandy,
But liquor
Is quicker

-Ogden Nash

Sir, I admit your general rule,
That every poet is a fool,
But you yourself may serve to show it,
That every fool is not a poet.

-Samuel Taylor Coleridge

The Termite

Some primal termite knocked on wood
And tasted it, and found it good!
And that is why your Cousin May
Fell through the parlor floor today.

-Ogden Nash

The Ant

The ant has made himself illustrious
Through constant industry industrious.
So what?
Would you be calm and placid
If you were full of formic acid?

-Ogden Nash

The Common Cold

Go hang yourself, you old M.D.!
You shall not sneer at me.
Pick up your hat and stethoscope,
Go wash your mouth with laundry soap;
I contemplate a joy exquisite
In not paying you for your visit.
I did not call you to be told
My malady is a common cold.

By pounding brow and swollen lip;
By fever's hot and scaly grip;
By those two red redundant eyes
That weep like woeful April skies;
By racking snuffle, snort, and sniff;
By handkerchief after handkerchief;
This cold you wave away as naught
Is the damnedest cold man ever caught!

Give ear, you scientific fossil!
Here is the genuine Cold Colossal;
The Cold of which researchers dream,
The Perfect Cold, the Cold Supreme.
This honored system humbly holds
The Super-cold to end all colds;
The Cold Crusading for Democracy;
The Führer of the Streptococcracy.

Bacilli swarm within my portals
Such as were ne'er conceived by mortals,
But bred by scientists wise and hoary
In some Olympic laboratory;
Bacteria as large as mice,
With feet of fire and heads of ice
Who never interrupt for slumber
Their stamping elephantine rumba.

A common cold, gadzooks, forsooth!
Ah, yes. And Lincoln was jostled by Booth;
Don Juan was a budding gallant,
And Shakespeare's plays show signs of talent;
The Arctic winter is fairly coolish,
And your diagnosis is fairly foolish.
Oh what a derision history holds
For the man who belittled the Cold of Colds!

-Ogden Nash