A POEM A WEEK

A COLLECTION OF 36 POEMS
WITH POETRY PROMPTS
FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

BY

ELSA PLA

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INTRODUCTION

Dear young poet,

*A Poem a Week* is a collection of poems that will hopefully inspire you and provide you with ideas for writing your own poetry. The poems follow the seasons and school holidays, and each includes a corresponding poetry prompt. You may choose to write to the prompt or follow your own inspiration. Before or while you utilize this collection, you should study the poetry documents on the Scrumptious Poetry page of my website [www.writecook.com](http://www.writecook.com): “About Poetry,” “Reading Poetry,” “Writing Poetry,” “Elements of Poetry,” and “Poetry Checklist.” The poems are mostly written in free verse and all contain elements of poetry for you to identify and emulate. Read and study the poems before composing your own. This will not only help you develop your craft as a poet, it will also spark ideas for further poems. As you read, try to have a small notebook with you, so you can write down any poetic thoughts that pop into your head. Then, just follow the writing process and enjoy! By the end of the school year you will have your own collection of poems to publish and share with family and friends.

Happy writing,

Elsa Pla
WEEK 1- SAILING BY DAY

The unfurled sailboat glides on,
urged by wind and will and brilliant bliss,
cutting its own magnificent path
across the crystal-blue abyss.

Stately and proudly it darts,
dressed in golden glint and morning might,
like a fiery arrow, onward,
toward the endless edge of sight.

Later in repose, becalmed
by the hush of moon and dimming light,
it nods, folded like a sleeping bird,
kissed by foam and salt and breath of night.
PROMPT: Compose a symbolic poem that represents your approach to the new school year or your feelings about the new school year.

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WEEK 2- THREE HAIKU

Rows of bent palm trees
Worship the sea, sun, and sky
In island heaven

Ribbons of sea foam
Wrap the emerald island
With angel-white bows

A pale-white ghost ship
Slides over the horizon
Silent as a dream
PROMPT: Compose three haiku that paint a picture of a place you visited during the summer (or at any other time).
WEEK 3 - BY THE SEA

By the sea, my soul is silent,
and, like the spread wings of a seagull,
my heart opens up wider.
I imbibe water and wind, sand and fire;
I read the shoreline like an open volume
and take in all its joy and sadness.

By the sea, like a soaring seagull,
I open my heart wider
and let the ocean fill me
with all its strength and gladness.

By the sea, my small life stretches
like the long silver horizon.
Eternity is clear and obvious,
and God's mysteries, designs, and purpose
unfold with every wave in action.
By the sea, my world grows larger;
I'm close to other shores, to other lives, to other longings.
Somewhere on the other side of the blue chasm
perhaps another heart is open wider.
PROMPT: What is your favorite aspect of nature? Compose a poem about how that aspect of nature inspires you.

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WEEK 4- LUMINESCENT BLUE

The sea has soaked up the brilliance of the sun --
it lights up from within.

Translucent.

Like phosphorescent crystal
or incandescent glass.

Turquoise? Aquamarine? Precious Opal?

No name exists for such a luminescent blue.

It’s a glowing gem that burns my eyes,
inflaming my senses with its blue-green light,
forever imprinting me with its fiery hue.
PROMPT: Compose a poem about your favorite color. Why do you like it?

Mention objects or places that possess that color.
WEEK 5- I AM THE OCEAN

I am the ocean, feral and brave
Moody, yet unwavering in my resolve
Cold, yet passionate in my embrace
Hiding dark depths and unexpected strengths
Life-giving and life-snatching
Beautiful and monstrous
Silent and shrill
Peaceful and wild
Made of tears and roars
Songs and sighs
Woman
Ocean
I
PROMPT: Compose a metaphor poem that compares you to an aspect of nature (living or non-living).

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WEEK 6 - AD

In the depth of the ocean lies a throne of rock abandoned by a king who, legend has it, died of forgetfulness and sorrow.

Dark and barnacles have taken over, and enemies have ransacked the region.

But there is still great power to be had and countless undiscovered riches,

and the position of Sea King

is still open.
PROMPT: Compose a serious or humorous advertisement poem.
WEEK 7 - OCTOBER WALK

Oh, riotous autumn!

Summer greens pale and

Give way to the splendor of

Your burgundy reds and fiery oranges,

Your golden yellows and rusty browns,

Expectancy and possibility

Painted on each and every

Leaf that falls.

Lit by sunlight,

The luminous leaves explode.

The world is aflame!

Trees glow like bonfires,

Leaves drop like sparks

Igniting the ground

With golden fire.
I walk the flaming corridors of fall,

Embracing the blazing colors

Until I, too, catch fire

And join the conflagration:

Life, like a phoenix,

Burning itself up;

A million willing flames

Heralding rebirth and hope.
PROMPT: What are your thoughts and feelings about the autumn? Compose a lyrical poem about the autumn.

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WEEK 8 - MOON-DREAM

The misty morning moon
descends, diaphanous and divine,
on the snow-capped mountains --
a ghostly apparition.
Like a long-lost dream,
like a melancholy memory,
cloud-white on snow-white,
moon-dream on day-dream.
PROMPT: How would you describe the moon? Compose an imagist poem about the moon.

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WEEK 9- OCTOBER LEAVES

I didn’t expect to open the door

   just as that mischievous cold wind

   began chasing the chittering

   October leaves,

   shoving them like a bully until

   they no longer scuttled and scattered,

but whirled and stormed and

   somersaulted,

   crashing into each other

   in a crescendo of panic,

   out of control like spooked

   cattle or spilled marbles.

   So I stood there shaking in the dark,

   my hand to my chest

   as they rumbled past me,

   rattling and crumpling in protest,

   scraping the rigid curb
of the road that lead them on

like a ghostly black river

from autumn into winter.
PROMPT: Compose a dark or light-hearted poem about a spooky October night.

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WEEK 10 - TRANSFORMATIONS

When I’m by myself, I transform
into a warrior princess
or a model in a magazine cover.

When I’m with my brother,
we turn into secret agents
or blood-thirsty pirates.

When I visit my next-door neighbors,
we’re super heroes
or rock stars in a music video.

When I’m alone with my best friend,
we’re the coolest, most popular girls
in the whole wide world.

But the moment I step into my school,
I morph into an alien from another galaxy

who can’t speak or understand

human language,

and who’s embarrassingly aware

of her foreign freakish body,

totally unsuited to life on Earth.
PROMPT: We all feel awkward and out of place sometimes. Compose a poem about feeling like you don't belong.
WEEK 11 - EACH LIFE

A minuscule speck

of energy and mass

holding a single breath

of miraculous life

and joining other lives

like strings of pearls

forming a winding path

that extends across time

and travels across space

from the first touch

to the last embrace.

Each tiny speck

a peculiar work of art

a microscopic mosaic

of subtle shade and light

so small, so very small
you must look closely to spy

every detail, so precise

so precious, so unique

each life.
PROMPT: Compose a poem about the importance and value of individuality.
WEEK 12 - MY MUSE

I didn't recognize her

at first. I expected

someone grander, divine even --

an angel or a goddess,

irradiating brilliant thoughts

and calling forth the glorious rosy

fingers of the aurora,

exquisite, ethereal,

sublime.

I certainly didn’t expect

this inadequate waif-child

I seem to be stuck with,

thin as a whisper,

hunched over from carrying

that old familiar Box.

“What’s in it?” I ask,
as if I didn’t already know.

She opens the box and shrugs.

“The usual: pain and hope.”

I sigh and roll my eyes.

“Hold on, there’s more.”

She rummages inside and takes out
an ancient bronze lantern
and a delicate silver net.

“A lantern to reveal truth;
a net to capture beauty,”
the waif-child explains.

Ever cynical, I raise my eyebrows,
and sigh again.

Then she laughs.
And her laughter causes the sun
to explode into a supernova
that propels me into the next universe.
PROMPT: Compose a poem about your real or imaginary muse.
WEEK 13 - PHOENIX

The sun rises like a newborn phoenix,
Stretching fiery wings over sea and mountain.
All day long it carries out its life-sustaining business,
Like a mother bird caring for her helpless young ones:
Diligent, brave, and ever constant.

But by evening, burnt and spent and, oh, so drowsy,
The phoenix sinks behind the gray horizon,
Leaving the world under a cloak of cold and darkness.
Yet, in their nest, her trusting children lie in fearless slumber,
Waiting for a new and radiant sunrise.
PROMPT: Compose a poem about the sun, the sunrise, or the sunset.
WEEK 14 - THE SPIRIT OF THE SEASON

It descends

like a warm breath from heaven,

thawing and melting our hearts,

tickling the tip of our minds.

It sharpens our senses,

dusting and distilling memories

full of sights, sounds, smells, and smiles.

We inflate like balloons,

changing for a while

into magical creatures that can float and fly.

Angels of joy

clothed in a cacophony of colors,

we swoop down to swim in a sea of sweet scents,

singing like sleigh bells

and laughing like babes.
PROMPT: Compose a happy poem about the holidays.

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WEEK 15- A CLOSER LOOK

From across the street,

the glowing Christmas tree lot looks

like a misplaced emerald forest

from the magical land of OZ.

But after a closer look,

the trees seem starved and stunned,

and you realize this is not OZ,

but a concentration camp illuminated

by yellow, naked bulbs.

Get closer.

As you walk among the firs,

you'll hear the miserable,

uprooted whisperings

of the starving prisoners

as they beg for mercy.
But none shall be given.

Their is to be

a very slow death.

Closer still,

sit under the branches.

Place your arms around the

powerless trunks

no longer flowing with life.

Imagine yourself as the tree:

your life cut short,

hopeless and afraid.

Listen.

Hear the whimpering

of the nevermore-greens

on this glowing emerald

Christmas eve.
PROMPT: Compose a dark poem about the holidays.
WEEK 16- THE SANDMAN

An easy fellow,
all warm and mellow,
has tucked me in again.

His worn, old blanket
around my feet,
a song of silence
he sings to me.

His magic dust
of dreams dispensed,
my eyelids close,
my breathing slows,
without a care,
I sleep.
PROMPT: Compose a poem about a mythical person such as Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, or the Boogieman.
WEEK 17- ON THE LAST DAY OF THE YEAR

A flock of hundreds of little blackbirds like memories chose to visit me this morning.

They flew in harmony, like a symphony,
like piano chords, landing in unison high up on the bare tree branches,
then drifting down like scales onto the melted ice below my window. Blackbirds like little memories,
their echoing sound waves disturbing my brain and heart, stirring up dark remembrances and secret hurts.

Birds like little black memories -- here and gone --
past moments to mourn with a sad song and a smile,
a twitter and a feathered wave, goodbye.
PROMPT: Compose a reflection poem about saying goodbye to the past year.
WEEK 18- MILK AND WHITE ROSES

I open the morning door
to a resplendent milk-world.

My neighborhood has become
a white-frosting cavern and
my street, a river of fresh
cream flowing through,
untouched, unspoiled.

I step out into the whiteness.

The world’s a nourishing,
whited-out cocoon,
bursting with possibility.

I can transform into anything
I wish: an angel with eagle wings,
a silver-armored hero,
perhaps even a real,
life-breathing girl.
I look up to see sugar sprinkling
from the upturned bowl above,
like little white roses that land
on my new self and dissolve
in the sun-kissed milk.
PROMPT: Compose a poem about your hopes and goals for the New Year.

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They ask me where I’m from.

I’d love to say I was born on the shore
of an emerald island,
that the day moon is my mother,

the setting sun, my father,

the restless sea, my sister,

and the playful wind, my brother;

that when I was a child, I was lulled to sleep

by the songs of copper frogs

and the hush of silver waves;

that I awoke to sun kisses, tree rustlings, and bird trills;

that I am from a place of sunlight and rain and friendly people --

a place they should sometime visit;

but that now my sweet-home is somewhere else --

meaning here.

But what they really want to know is:

Who were your ancestors?
Why aren’t you brown?

Why is your surname so strange?

So I sigh and look them straight in the eye and answer:

I’m from planet Earth.

Nothing more. Nothing else.
PROMPT: Compose a reflection poem about where you were born and/or spent your childhood.

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WEEK 20- TAXONOMY

All tucked neatly in
Boxes,
Drawers,
File cabinets,
Compartments,
And ignorant minds,

Superbly classified according to
Race,
Gender,
Education,
Bank accounts,
And, of course, I.Q.,

Forming a practical and efficient
List,
Order,
Pattern,

Gradient,

Or computer database,

Full of labeled information clearly

Absurd,

Useless,

Irrelevant,

Misleading,

And infested with hidden agendas,

We find the meticulous and exact

Underestimation of a human being.
PROMPT: Have you ever made an assumption about somebody based on their race, gender, social status, appearance, etc.? Compose a reflection poem about any form of stereotyping.

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WEEK 21 - MORNING DAYDREAMS

I like to get to school early
before anyone else shows up
when the railing is still dewy
the sun is yawning awake
and the day is like a glistening glass
of fresh orange juice.
I like to hear the sound of my steps
echoing down the hallways
talking stuff to themselves.
I like to stand still and steal
a few moments of solitary silence
in front of his locker.
I like to walk on the wet green grass
like a blue fairy or a gray ghost
dream about what the day will be like
and imagine that he smiles at me
as we brush past each other
in the crowded hall.

I like to make-believe

that something extraordinary happens

a silver spaceship lands on the field

right in the middle of the soccer game

a wily wind carries away

all our unfinished tests

or I make the winning three-pointer

just as the end-of-the-basketball-game buzzer

startles us into a full stop.

And that he smiles at me

(did I mention that?)

as we brush past each other

in the crowded hall.
PROMPT: Compose a poem about your daydreams.
WEEK 22- ONE ROSE

One rose
One heart
One longing
For a star.

One kiss
One bliss
One moment
To be missed.

One dream
One hope
One waiting
To be loved.
PROMPT: Compose a Valentine’s Day poem to yourself.

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WEEK 23 - BE CAREFUL WHOM YOU DRAW

What is it about boys with dark brown eyes?
What is it about those eyes that pulls you in?

I'm falling down the deep dark well of your eyes.
Instead of drawing from your well,
I'm drawn in, hooked like a fish.

But don't think that because
my eyes are green and tranquil,
they are shallow like tide pools.

And my arms may be slim like willow boughs,
my voice soft like the morning rain,
but, boy, underneath the willow lies the rock,
and the rain flows into a mighty river.

Be careful whom you draw into yourself.
PROMPT: Compose a serious or silly love poem.

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WEEK 24 - CAUTION! HIGH ENTROPY!

My locker
is such a crowded mess
that the densely packed particles
react and explode
from time to time
(like me, I guess).
I open my locker and duck.
Too much potential energy!

Like stretched rubber bands
the items SNAP
and projectiles shoot out
following a dangerous trajectory
hitting the class bully
SMACK!
right on the head.
PROMPT: Most of us have experienced some form of bullying in our lives.

Compose a poem about bullying.

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WEEK 25 - BOY ON A TRAMPOLINE

He rose high, bouncing
on the rickety, gray trampoline,
this 11-year-old rocket,
off into space, defying
the law of gravity,
ricocheting again and again,
trying to reach escape velocity,
wind and sky licking
his milk-chocolate face,
friends’ voices like static
playing with the volume
knob in his head.

But the push just wasn’t
enough.

Plus the Earth must have
turned (which wasn’t fair),
and that’s when she chose
to yank him back,
slamming him into the rough
cement, face first.

Such a cold, possessive mother,
not caring how much
it hurt.
PROMPT: Compose a poem about an accident you or someone else had.
WEEK 26- AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT

If we travel at the speed of light,

we can visit wondrous worlds

and gain much knowledge of the universe.

But like Einstein pointed out,

strange things occur

when we travel that fast.

We would arrive at Alpha Centauri in four years,

return home in four more,

and discover that on Earth more than a century has passed,

and there’s really nothing to come back to,

for we’ve become strangers and misfits,

rejected and despised by all.

So if we really want to leave this Earth,

we should plan on moving ever forward,

light and fast, never looking back,
determined to search for and to find

brighter bigger better worlds,

and to always travel at the speed of light.
PROMPT: Sometimes life’s problems or the people around us make us feel like “getting away from it all.” Write a poem that expresses those feelings.

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WEEK 27- THE WARBLER'S SONG

When spring comes, it's time to fly
Under a candy-orange colored sky
Under clouds dipped in sugar-white
Over worlds waking up to life
Time to chirp and sing and dance
To whoosh on up and swoop on down
To budding trees and swirling streams
To sun-warmed roofs and children's knees
Time to snuggle and build nests
And eat of the sweet fruit of the earth
Time to bathe in cooling pools
To flit from tulips to cherry blooms
To fly above a land so green, so newly dressed
To count all blessings and be truly blessed.
PROMPT: Compose a happy poem about the spring.
WEEK 28 - CHERRY BLOSSOMS

I walk along the cobbled path by the river,
immersed in the observation of cherry trees
that have burst into leafless bloom
and now stand bewildered and self-conscious,
laden with pearl and pale-pink blossoms,
their branches bent low over the glistening flow.

I step under the fragrant miracle
and let my spirit be touched by the spirits
of the newborn flowers,
kissed by the tender sunlight that filters
through their translucent pink.

My soul inhales the sweet loveliness.
Softly, gently, I am stolen,
taken, be-spelled, rendered helpless.
I become the tree,
the petals, the light, the flowing stream;
one for a fleeting moment with newly-birthed Beauty.
PROMPT: Compose a descriptive poem about something you find beautiful.
WEEK 29- WATCHING THE BIRDS

I enjoy watching flocks of birds,
their choreographed comings and goings
like a performance of an aerial ballet,
harmony in all their movements.

I enjoy observing how they fly,
how they navigate the morning air,
stretching their wings like sails.
And I imagine I'm flying with them.

What a comical sight that would be:
a clumsy bird-girl bobbing up and down
in the sky, flanked by honking geese.

Then again, what a prodigious sight that would be:
to look down on the world,
instead of the world looking down on me.
PROMPT: Have you ever imagined or dreamed of being able to fly? Compose a poem about flying.
WEEK 30 - THE FUEL THAT DRIVES US

The waste of the ages seeps through the gulf;
black gold, some call it.
The fuel that drives our suicidal efforts
born out of ignorance and madness.

Under the contaminated waves,
grim consequences bear witness:
pierced depths, poisoned organs,
bleached bones that now lie blackened,
and an unstoppable massacre of newborns.

Indolent arrogance and greed --
that’s the true fuel that drives us.
PROMPT: Compose a poem about an environmental issue you care about.
WEEK 31- BEACH:

Evidence of time and death
of the ebb and flow of life
remains of inevitable battles
that repeat again and again
discarded and gathered
on the sunburned sand.

The ocean washes itself of death
scours his skin and rinses off the filth
brittle sponges, broken coral, calcareous debris
empty shells, dislodged kelp, fish bones
plus all the human garbage
pushed away to form a billion million mounds
of decomposing and eroding refuse.

Beach: graveyard, junkyard
dumpster of the world.
PROMPT: Compose a reflection poem about something in the world that you find ugly or wrong or disturbing.
I walk to my piano lesson
past the small houses of my neighborhood
old and simple cement houses
weathered down, old fashioned
their rusty grillwork too ornate for modern tastes
shrubs and wild roses crowding their tiny gardens
houses that smell of rice & beans
café con leche
and fried plantains

I walk past fragrant houses
where middle-aged women are busy
making a simple home and a dinner

I walk past my cement neighborhood
and cross the cement bridge over the cement causeway
littered with the refuse of weathered-down lives
I walk by the river canal

and peer down at all the simple items
casually discarded by the mossy-green current
broken toys, plastic bags, cardboard boxes, dented cans
the neighborhood’s flotsam and jetsam

I walk to my piano lesson
making up simple refuse stories
as I enter the new neighborhood
full of quiet and barren houses
all larger and whiter than mine
all smelling of fresh paint, empty house
and busy, complicated lives
too early for mothers to be home from work
too early for food smells and laughs

I walk to my piano lesson
making up simple family stories
wondering what it will be like
to live inside a bigger house
in a different neighborhood
having a busy, complicated life
wondering what it will be like
to walk fifty years from now
down these cement streets
wondering if the houses will appear
small and simple and worn
like mine does now

I walk to my last piano lesson
I sit and let my fingers play
simple good-bye songs on the piano
songs like old family houses
like flotsam and jetsam
like fried plantains
like life
PROMPT: Compose a descriptive poem about your neighborhood.
WEEK 33 - MOTHER MOON

My mother moon

brings me to sleep ashore

lulling me with her sea-song

full of tears and sand and fog.

There she guards my silver sleep

tilting her head

benevolently

and peering down

adoringly

as I sleep like a pearl

within my stardust shell.

Lulled by my mother moon I rest

kissed by the ocean's tide

wrapped in the velvet coverlet

of softly-pulsing night.
PROMPT: Compose a metaphor poem about your mother (or mothers in general).

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WEEK 34 - COFFEE AT THE BEACH

When we go to the beach,

my mother brings

a silver thermos full of

hot coffee and milk.

From eight to ten,

she lets me soak

in the bowl of salty sea;

then she calls out to me.

At first I ignore her --

I've morphed into a seal

and have forgotten such things

as dry land and mothers.

But soon my worn-out limbs

remind me, and I emerge

from the frothing surf,
fingertips turned to raisins,
pale skin and tangled hair
coated with briny sand.

Chilled by the sea breeze,

I turn from graceful, golden seal
into awkward, frozen chicken.

I rub my bumpy chicken skin
and do a silly hoping-dance,
my teeth clacking like castanets.

Mom laughs and wraps me
in a toasty oversized towel,

massaging its warmth into me
and holding me close.

And I let her,

though I'm too old

for such things.
Then she hands me a cup
of the sweet steaming brew.

I assure you, that coffee is magical;

nothing in this world
feels or tastes so good.
PROMPT: Compose a narrative poem about your mother or a female family member, mentor, or guardian.

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WEEK 35- THE TELESCOPE

My father and I took the telescope
he gave me for Christmas
to the sidewalk out front
where the old Buick was parked.

I love that small telescope;
I love its warm metallic scent,
the rusty fragrance of its little nuts and bolts,
like the smell of saved-up coins.

Such a tiny, tidy contraption,
small enough for a gnome or a fairy,
or a young girl's hand.

We held it reverently,
my father and I,
placed it on top of the dented hood,
balanced it on its skinny-legged tripod,
and pointed it toward the dark infinity.

Then, whispering to each other like spies,

we contemplated the sky

through its long metal eye

in wonder.

We saw Venus

suspended like a diamond,

Mars like a radiant ruby,

Jupiter like a flash of jasper,

and my favorite, the moon,

dangling in the dark

like a silver scimitar.

I imagined the heavens

as a black-velvet display

featuring the crown jewels

of a solitary star-king

waiting for his companion star
who has lost her way somewhere

along the milky way.

I asked my father if the sun felt lonely,

and he whispered, “Sometimes.”

We were silent after that,

like two sharing a secret

too sad for words.
PROMPT: Compose a narrative poem about your father or another male family member, mentor, or guardian.
WEEK 36 - SUMMER SNOW

Sizzling under the blazing sun
the lofty cottonwoods
release their wispy white seeds
which -- free at last --
dance on the summer breeze
pirouetting up and down the busy streets
like snow flurries
like newborn fairies
like hopeful dreams.
PROMPT: Are you excited about summer vacation? Compose a poem about the wonderful summer days that lie ahead.

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