

# Turning Prose Into Poetry: *The Great Gatsby*

## ORIGINAL

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.

"Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."

He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that.

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## Poetic Recreation #1

In my younger and more vulnerable years  
my father gave me some advice  
that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.

"Whenever you feel like criticizing any one,"  
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"just remember that all the people in this world  
haven't had the advantages that you've had."

He didn't say any more,  
but we've always been unusually communicative  
in a reserved way,  
and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that.

*In this first version I've tried to break lines at the natural pauses and rhythms suggested by a regular reading of the passage. Notice that there is no specific syllabic rhythm to the newly created poem, but there is a rhythm nonetheless largely created by the sounds that close most lines. See in particular the emphasis created by closing the final two stanzas with breath stopping mute sounds (a mute is a consonant sound that cannot be sounded at all without a vowel, and which at the end of a syllable suddenly stops the breath--b,d,p,k,q,t,and c and g hard).*

## Poetic Recreation #2

In my younger and  
more vulnerable years  
my father gave me  
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*Recreation #2 represents an attempt to focus more on single or even double words. The attempt in this recreation is less about sound and rhythm and more about emphasis and impact of particular word choices placed in isolation so as to demand attention from the reader.*

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## PROSE

- A basic paragraph shares an idea about a topic.
- Each paragraph will identify the idea, explain and provide evidence.
- **Focuses on content and structure.**

## stanza

## POETRY

- A group of lines that share an idea.
- **Stanzas are separated by an empty line.**
- **Stanzas in poetry are equal to paragraphs in prose.**

# EXERCISE

Now it's your turn. Using the passage below taken from Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*, recreate two poetic versions of the prose passage and then following each offer your explanation of what you think the resulting poetic choice has resulted in. Remember, this is practice with both working with analyzing prose as well as poetry selections. The goal of course is to strengthen your writing by making you more aware of how sentences can be chosen to create various effects.

'Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!'

Poetic Recreation #1	Poetic Recreation #2