I love poetry. I love how words can twist into stanzas that can evoke such strong feelings. I also love the writing of poetry, the ability to tell stories in a short concise way.

Whether you join me in my love of poetry, you could live with or without it, or you avoid reading it at all costs, I hope that today I can show you the necessity of poetry, as I cover the psychological, historical, and spiritual impact of it.

Now you’ve probably heard that poetry is good for the soul, but would it surprise you to know it’s also good for the brain? That’s right, reading or hearing poetry can affect the brain in many positive ways. One of the reasons is because poetry pushes the limits of language. According to a study by the University of Liverpool, listening to the works of Shakespeare, who is known for his linguistic prowess, “excites positive brain activity”. The brain looks at reading Shakespeare similar to the way it does putting together a jigsaw puzzle. This excites it, and helps boost activity. Another benefit of reading poetry is that it can help our reasoning skills. According to another experiment by the University of Liverpool, the same parts of the brain that we would use trying to find the real meaning of a poem, also “help us to navigate unpredictable events and make choices in our everyday lives.” So reading poetry does a lot for our brains, but what about writing it? According to Dr. Mathew Lieberman, a neuroscientist at the University of California, writing things down can be “a sort of unintentional emotion regulation.” It’s part of why people write diaries, or letters that will never be sent. I know that writing poetry has definitely helped me process the emotional onslaught known as adolescence. It helps me analyze what I’m thinking, and put it into an easily digestible form. Writing the poems also helps me express my feelings, instead of keeping them inside. My poetry
book has often turned into my version of a diary, and some of my most emotional times have resulted in some of my best - and worst - poems. Most of my poetry I share, but some of it will more than likely NEVER grace the ears of anyone but me, myself and I. But then, who knows what may happen? Someday, perhaps, one of my personal poems will be some other student’s brief window into the past.

Now, if you were like most high school students you can probably remember, at one point or another, going over poems from throughout history. Perhaps you even studied *Oh Captain My Captain*, or *The Road Not Taken*. Both of these poems have meaning, but it may not be the meaning you expect. Do you know what *Oh Captain My Captain* is really about? On the surface, this poem by Walt Whitman is about a shipmate mourning the death of his captain, while telling him that the ship has made it to port, and begging him to wake up and hear the celebration. However, what you may not know is that this poem is really about Abraham Lincoln’s assassination. In the first stanza Whitman writes “O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done, The ship has weather’d every rack, the prize we sought is won,” According to Trent Lorcher, author at Bright Hub Education, “The Captain is Abraham Lincoln. The fearful trip is the Civil War. The ship is the United States. The prize is the preservation of the Union.” Wow. Talk about a deeper meaning. Next let’s talk about what is arguably one of the most debated over poems, *The Road Not Taken*, by Robert Frost. It’s about a traveler that happens upon a fork in the path while walking in the woods. The traveler describes the difference between the two paths, and tells us he ends up taking “the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.” It has been the source of many philosophical ponderings...
you know the kind. What do the roads represent? Why pick the one less traveled? Who is this traveler? Where is he going? Questions like these have sprung up in response to this poem, which is really just a joke. You read that right, according to The Poetry Foundation. "Robert Frost wrote *The Road Not Taken* as a joke for a friend, the poet Edward Thomas." The story is that when the two would go walking together, Edward was very indecisive about which path they should take, and looking back often wished they had taken the other one. So, there you have it, one of the most philosophical poems of its time, was really just an inside joke. In fact, when Frost took the poem to a group of college students, he lamented the fact that he couldn’t get them to realize he was joking. So next time you hear anyone speak of the road not taken, you can laugh to yourself, knowing that you are now aware of the true meaning of this poem.

Many people are aware of the poetry written throughout history, but did you know there’s poetry in the Bible as well? The most obvious example would be the Psalms. Beautifully crafted works of linguistic art, they are written as warnings, advice, and as praises to God. Perhaps the most well-known of them is Psalm 23, which starts out “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” This Psalm was written by David, and contains imagery that has inspired people throughout generations. The Psalms are the clearest examples of poetry in the Bible, but what most people don’t realize is that there is actually poetry woven throughout its sixty-six books. You may be thinking “Poetry in the Bible? My Bible doesn’t rhyme!” However, poetry isn’t defined by rhyming. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, poetry is “...language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound, and rhythm” Poetry doesn’t
have to rhyme; it simply has to make you feel. How many times have you felt joy at the promises of God written in the Bible, or felt peace flood your spirit when reading a verse that seems it was written for you at that exact moment? The poetic nature of the Bible serves to cultivate these feelings, and in the process, changes our very nature. In fact, Ephesians 2:10 says that in Christ, we are God’s workmanship. According to Strong’s Concordance, the word “workmanship” in this verse is actually the Greek word poiēma, which means “a work” or that which is crafted. As you may have guessed, this is indeed where we get our English word poem from. Now does this mean that God literally meant for us to consider ourselves His poetry? I don’t know. But personally, I love the idea that in Christ I am God’s work - His poiēma. And that He chose that word knowing its future meaning would be something beautiful. Writing poetry has gotten me through some of the roughest times in my life. If you were to go through my poem book, you would be able to see what my emotional and spiritual state was at any given point in time. I’ve written in poetic form: prayers, pieces of the Bible, or just me crying out to God. I’ve written poems of encouragement to other people, and ones where I am simply thanking God for creation. I am so thankful for this gift God has given. He knew that I would need it to remember some of my highest highs, and to get through some of my lowest lows.

Some people say that poetry is confining, why trap yourself in a rhyme or rhythm instead of just writing? But it’s not always that simple. Sometimes, we need poetry. For some people, it’s easier to express their feelings in a neat little 4-line stanza then it is to stumble over a plethora of words, struggling to say what they really mean. Poetry can be like a coded message, only to be deciphered by those who really care. Poetry is
important, whether you rhyme all the time and you think it's sublime, or you groan and you moan when you hear its sweet tone. The art of poetry isn't some ancient practice only scholars and English teachers can understand. Poetry is here today for you and me. It can help us appreciate the beauty in this world, and it can help us appreciate God's Word even more. So, go ahead and boost your brain activity. Whether you're able to just take it at face value and enjoy it, or you have a burning desire to unlock the deeper meanings, I encourage you to take the time to read a favorite poem again. Poetry is a window into the mind of a poet. So why don't you take a look? You might like what you see.