**Introduction to Poetry**

**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.

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| oem Number 45 | **Nights****Kevin Hart**There’s nothing that I really want:The stars tonight are rich and coldAbove my house that vaguely broodsUpon a path soon lost in dark.My dinner plate is chipped all round(It tells me that I’ve changed a lot);My glass is cracked all down one side(It shows there is a path for me).My hands—I rest my head on them.My eyes—I rest my mind on them.There’s nothing that I really needBefore I set out on that path. |

# Grammar

## Tony Hoagland

Maxine, back from a weekend with her boyfriend,
smiles like a big cat and says
that she's a conjugated verb.
She's been doing the direct object
with a second person pronoun named Phil,
and when she walks into the room,
everybody turns:

some kind of light is coming from her head.
Even the geraniums look curious,
and the bees, if they were here, would buzz
suspiciously around her hair, looking
for the door in her corona.
We're all attracted to the perfume
of fermenting joy,

we've all tried to start a fire,
and one day maybe it will blaze up on its own.
In the meantime, she is the one today among us
most able to bear the idea of her own beauty,
and when we see it, what we do is natural:
we take our burned hands
out of our pockets,
and clap.

# Football

## Louis Jenkins

I take the snap from the center, fake to the right, fade back...
I've got protection. I've got a receiver open downfield...
What the hell is this? This isn't a football, it's a shoe, a man's
brown leather oxford. A cousin to a football maybe, the same
skin, but not the same, a thing made for the earth, not the air.
I realize that this is a world where anything is possible and I
understand, also, that one often has to make do with what one
has. I have eaten pancakes, for instance, with that clear corn
syrup on them because there was no maple syrup and they
weren't very good. Well, anyway, this is different. (My man
downfield is waving his arms.) One has certain responsibilities,
one has to make choices. This isn't right and I'm not going
to throw it.

# Reckless Poem

## Mary Oliver

Today again I am hardly myself.
It happens over and over.
It is heaven-sent.

It flows through me
like the blue wave.
Green leaves – you may believe this or not –
have once or twice
emerged from the tips of my fingers

somewhere
deep in the woods,
in the reckless seizure of spring.

Though, of course, I also know that other song,
the sweet passion of one-ness.

Just yesterday I watched an ant crossing a path, through the
          tumbled pine needles she toiled.
And I thought: she will never live another life but this one.
And I thought: if she lives her life with all her strength
          is she not wonderful and wise?
And I continued this up the miraculous pyramid of everything
          until I came to myself.

And still, even in these northern woods, on these hills of sand,
I have flown from the other window of myself
to become white heron, blue whale,
          red fox, hedgehog.
Oh, sometimes already my body has felt like the body of a flower!
Sometimes already my heart is a red parrot, perched
among strange, dark trees, flapping and screaming.

# A New Poet

## Linda Pastan

Finding a new poet
is like finding a new wildflower
out in the woods. You don't see

its name in the flower books, and
nobody you tell believes
in its odd color or the way

its leaves grow in splayed rows
down the whole length of the page. In fact
the very page smells of spilled

red wine and the mustiness of the sea
on a foggy day - the odor of truth
and of lying.

And the words are so familiar,
so strangely new, words
you almost wrote yourself, if only

in your dreams there had been a pencil
or a pen or even a paintbrush,
if only there had been a flower.

# The Summer Day

## Mary Oliver

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean-
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?