**Background** The topic of nature is popular with poets around the world and throughout history. Two of the most important poets of the 20th century, Pablo Neruda and Mary Oliver, continue this tradition with their poems in this lesson. Neruda's poem “Ode to enchanted light” was written originally in Spanish. Its Spanish title is “Oda a la luz enchantada.”

---

**Ode to enchanted light**

Poem by Pablo Neruda

**Sleeping in the Forest**

Poem by Mary Oliver

---

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973) was the pen name of Ricardo Eliecer Neftali Reyes Basoalto. Born in a small town in Chile, Neruda began writing poetry as a child. While a student, he met Gabriela Mistral, a famous poet. She encouraged Neruda to continue writing. Neruda went on to write hundreds of poems and gain a worldwide reputation. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971 for his lifetime of work.

Mary Oliver (b. 1935) was born in Maple Heights, Ohio. She spent a great deal of time in her younger years writing, reading, and walking through the woods where she grew up. Today, Oliver always walks with a notepad so she can write down her thoughts immediately. Oliver’s first book of poems was published in 1962. Since then she has written many books and won many awards for her poetry.

**SETTING A PURPOSE** As you read, think about how each poet portrays a meaningful experience in nature. Beyond the subject matter, how are the poems similar? How are they different? Write down any questions you have while reading.
Ode to enchanted light
by Pablo Neruda
translated by Ken Krabbenhoft

Under the trees light
has dropped from the top of the sky.
light
like a green
latticework of branches,
shining
on every leaf,
drifting down like clean
white sand.

A cicada sends
its sawing song
high into the empty air.

The world is
a glass overflowing
with water.
Analyze Form: Ode

Pablo Neruda’s poem is an **ode**, a poem that deals with serious themes, such as justice, truth, or beauty. An ode praises or celebrates its subject, which is usually a person, event, thing, or element in nature.

The word *ode* comes from the Greek word *aidein*, which means to sing or chant. Originally, the ode was written to be accompanied by music and dance. A traditional ode is a long poem with a formal structure, and due to its dignified nature, its language is often formal as well. Many modern poets experiment with the form to make it fresh and interesting for modern readers. What do you notice about the length and arrangement of lines in Neruda’s poem?

Analyzing the Text

1. **Infer** What feelings are suggested in lines 1–9 of this poem? How does the poet suggest those feelings?

2. **Analyze** A cicada is an insect that makes a high-pitched, continual sound, usually in summer. Reread lines 10–12. What repeated first sounds, or **alliteration**, do you hear, and how are the sounds connected to the poem’s meaning?

3. **Analyze and Evaluate** Does this poem meet the requirements of an ode? Why or why not?
Sleeping in the Forest
by Mary Oliver

I thought the earth
remembered me, she
took me back so tenderly, arranging
her dark skirts, her pockets
full of lichens¹ and seeds. I slept
as never before, a stone
on the riverbed, nothing
between me and the white fire of the stars
but my thoughts, and they floated
light as moths among the branches
of the perfect trees. All night
I heard the small kingdoms breathing
around me, the insects, and the birds
who do their work in the darkness. All night
I rose and fell, as if in water, grappling²
with a luminous doom. By morning
I had vanished at least a dozen times
into something better.

COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION Read the first two lines of each poem and compare the images they present. What do these lines say about the speaker's relationship to nature? Share your ideas with the students in your class.

¹ lichens (ˈlɪkənz): fungi that grow together with algae and form a crust-like growth on rocks or tree trunks.
² grappling: struggling.
**Analyze Form: Lyric Poem**

"Sleeping in the Forest" is a **lyric poem**, a short poem in which a single speaker expresses personal thoughts and feelings. Lyric poetry is a broad category that includes traditional forms such as odes and sonnets, as well as **free verse**, a form that does not use formal structure or rhyme schemes. In fact, in ancient times, lyric poems were created to be sung. Although they aren't sung today, lyric poems do have some elements in common with songs, including:

- a sense of rhythm and melody
- imaginative word choice, or **diction**
- the creation of a single, unified impression

What is the single, unified impression conveyed in this poem?

**Analyzing the Text**

**Cite Text Evidence** Support your responses with evidence from the text.

1. **Interpret** Reread the last sentence in the poem. What might the speaker mean by "something better"?

2. **Analyze** Reread lines 5–7. What is compared to "a stone / on the riverbed"? Where else does that image appear in the poem?

3. **Analyze and Evaluate** Identify examples of each of the elements of a lyric poem that appear in "Sleeping in the Forest." Do you think Oliver's poem is a good example of a lyric poem? Why or why not?