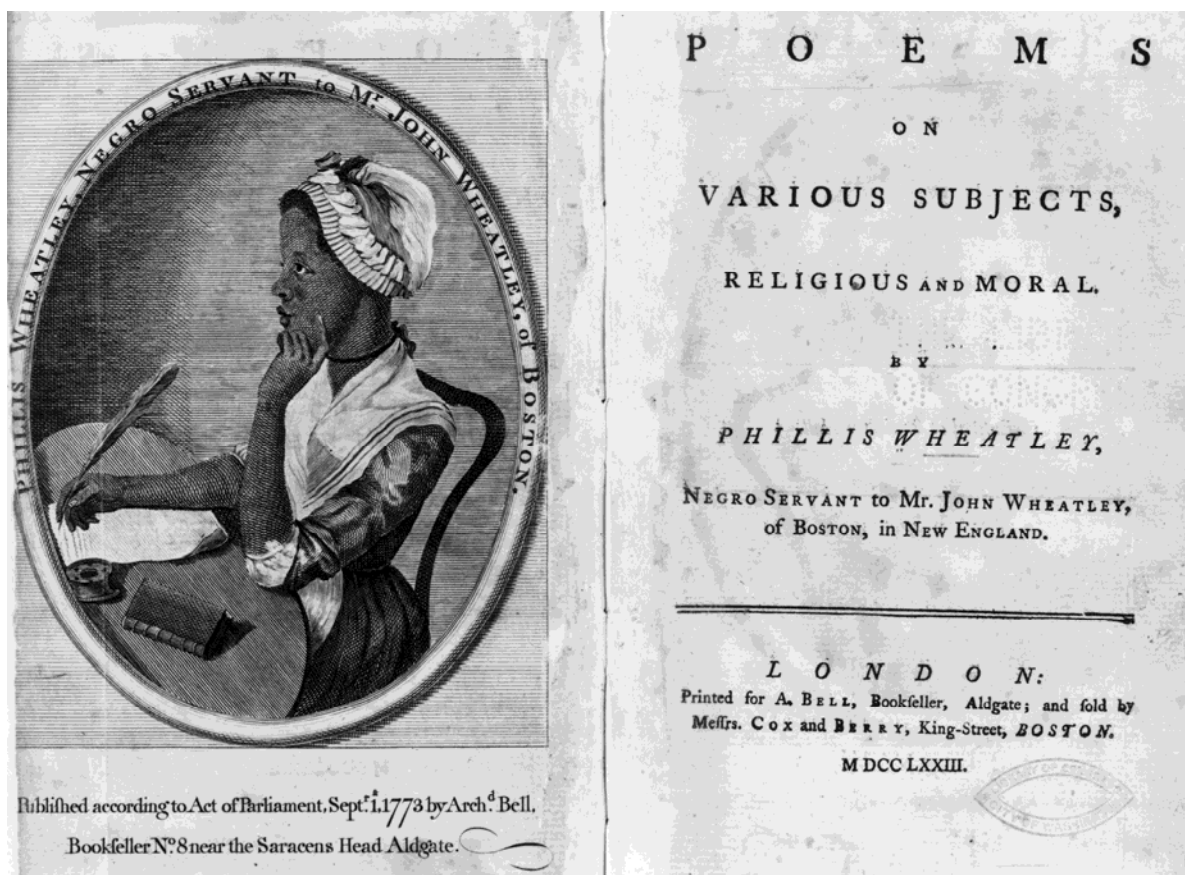


Various art forms were practiced in the colonial period. Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784), pictured here at age 20, was an early American poet. She began to write poetry at age thirteen. This portrait in her book of poetry is an example of early American portraiture.



Phyllis Wheatley. 1773, Archive Photos. Getty Images. Web.

Through the work of Wheatley, the anonymous portrait painter, and other colonial artists, we can sometimes get a glimpse of what it was like to be rich or poor, male or female, white or black in early America.

In this activity, you will read excerpts from two examples of early American verse: a poem by an author from the highest social level of New England and a poem by an enslaved African American female poet in Boston. You will choose one of the poems and write a paragraph briefly analyzing how the poem reflects the author's cultural region and social position. Then you will take the point of view of a person of a particular colonial culture region and social position—for example, a New England farmer, a Maryland indentured servant, or a free African American shipyard worker in New York City—and write your own poem in which you represent that person's point of view. Finally, you will create and publish your work in a form you can share with your class.

I. Analyzing a Poem from the Colonial Era

1. Read both poems below written from the perspective of colonial women in New England.

To My Dear and Loving Husband, by Anne Bradstreet, 1678

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were lov'd by wife, then thee.
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me, ye women, if you can.
I prize thy love more than whole Mines of gold
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.
My love is such that Rivers cannot quench,
Nor ought but love from thee give recompense.
Thy love is such I can no way repay.
The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.
Then while we live, in love let's so persever
That when we live no more, we may live ever.

Campbell, Helen. *Anne Bradstreet and Her Time*. London: Lothrop Company, 1891. *HathiTrust*. Web.

On Being Brought from Africa to America, by Phillis Wheatley, 1773

'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too:
Once I redemption neither fought nor knew,
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
"Their colour is a diabolic dye."
Remember, *Christians*, Negroes, black as Cain,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

Wheatley, Phillis. *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*.

1. Choose one of the poems above. In the space below, **take notes** on the content of the poem. Use the questions below to guide your note taking.
 - From whose perspective is the poem written?
 - What is the overall message or theme of the poem?
 - Based on the poem, what is the speaker's general outlook on life?
 - In what ways are the speaker's region and experiences reflected in the words of the poem?
 - In what ways is the message of the poem inconsistent with the speaker's station in life and region in which he or she lives?

Poetry Content	Notes
Perspective	
Message or Theme	
Speaker's Outlook	
Reflection of Speaker's Region and Experience	
Inconsistency of Poem's Message and Speaker's Station in Life and/or Region	

2. **Discuss** some common elements of poems. To make their point, poems by poets such as Anne Bradstreet and Phillis Wheatley very often contain many of the same elements.

Among these are:

- **Rhyme**, which is matching the last words or sounds at the end of pairs of lines (or more). Writers sometimes use rhyme to place emphasis on certain words so that readers pay closer attention to them.
- **Imagery**, which is using words that appeal to the five senses to help readers create an image in their minds.
- **Figurative Language (Simile and Metaphor)**, which is the use of language that goes beyond the usual, literal meaning of words.
- **Symbolism**, or using simple, everyday objects to stand for larger ideas
- **Theme**, or writing about one central idea or message.

3. **Identify** the common elements of poetry in either Anne Bradstreet's or Phillis Wheatley's poem. Based on your note taking on the poem of your choice, complete the table below.

Poetry Elements	Evidence of this element in _____
Rhyme —matching the last words or sounds at the end of pairs of lines (or more).	
Imagery —using words that appeal to the five senses to help readers create an image in their minds	
Figurative Language (Simile and Metaphor) —using language that goes beyond the usual, literal meaning of words	
Symbolism —using simple, everyday objects to stand for larger ideas	
Theme —writing about one central idea or message.	

II. Writing Your Own Poem

1. **Write** a poem that takes the perspective of a person living in a colonial region discussed in “Colonial Life—Multiple Perspectives.”
 - Select a single region on which to focus.
 - Select a perspective to represent. For example, if you choose the South, perspectives could include a plantation owner, an enslaved woman working on the farm, an indentured servant in Virginia, or an idea you come up with on your own.
 - Identify one to two themes relevant to the perspective you have chosen and write a poem exploring one or both of these themes from your chosen perspective.

Your poem should include at least two of the elements of poetry.

2. After you complete your poem, **write** a paragraph explaining your work.
 - From whose perspective was your poem created?
 - What point is your poem trying to make? How does your poem reflect that person’s perspective?
 - Which common elements of poetry did you use? How did you use them to help make your point?