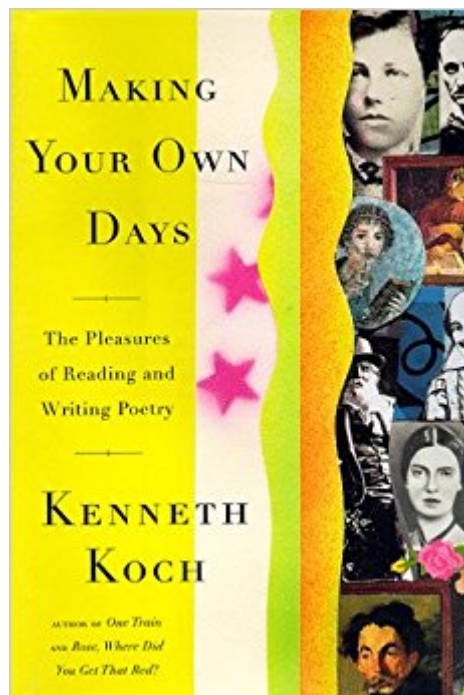




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# Making Your Own Days: The Pleasures Of Reading And Writing Poetry



## Synopsis

In *Making Your Own Days*, celebrated poet Kenneth Koch writes about poetry as no one has written about it before -- and as if no one had written about it before. Full of fresh and exciting insights and experiences, this book makes the somewhat mysterious subject of poetry clear for those who read it and for those who write it -- and for those who would like to read it and write it better. Koch accomplishes this revelation of poetry by presenting the idea that poetry is a separate language, a language in which music and sound are as important as syntax or meaning. Thus he is able to clarify the many aspects of poetry: the nature of poetic inspiration, what happens when a poet is writing a poem, revision, and what actually goes on while one is reading a poem -- how confusion or only partial understanding eventually leads to truly experiencing a poem. The language of poetry, like other languages, can be learned by reading it and writing it. To assist the reader in learning the language of poetry, Koch provides a rich anthology of poems -- each accompanied by an explanatory note -- specially designed to complement and illuminate his text. There are lyric poems, excerpts from long poems and from poetic plays, poems in English and in translation. Among the poets whose work is included are Homer, Ovid, Sappho, Shakespeare, Byron, Dickinson, Baudelaire, Li Bel, Stevens, Williams, Lorca, Ashbery, and Snyder. In this book, Kenneth Koch's genius for making poetry clear and bringing out its real pleasures is everywhere apparent.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ordinary mortals and poet scholars alike will find something to love in Koch's down-to-earth

approach to making sense of that most head scratching of literary genres. Asserting that "poetry ... is a separate language," he steers clear of the stodgy, hidden-meaning school of deciphering poems (wherein the reader digs through the poem "for some elusive and momentous significance") and takes us instead on a tour through the tonal, rhythmical, and metrical aspects of poetry. Yes, it's about the music: "The sound of words is raised to an importance equal to that of their meaning, and also to the importance of grammar and syntax." But rather than asking us to simply take his word for it, Koch provides lively and insightful examples (including many rarely anthologized poems). For instance, why does "two and two are rather green" have little or no meaning, while "two and two / Are rather blue" smacks of the truth? Why does "I don't know whether or not to commit suicide" plop from the mouth like so much cold oatmeal, while "To be or not to be, that is the question" is so pleasing to the ears? Resonance, says Koch. "Poetry lasts because it gives the ambiguous and ever-changing pleasure of being both a statement and a song." Moving from poetry's music to its methods (comparisons, personifications, and apostrophe, to name a few), Koch continues to offer up an amusing and edifying array of excerpts and analogies to clarify his point that with poetry, "as with baseball ... one has to understand a little in order to enjoy it...." Insightful, yet never patronizing, *Making Your Own Days* is for anyone who's ever read a poem and wished it were more "like a newspaper article." Though Koch can't tell us why Wallace Stevens wrote "I placed a jar in Tennessee," or why "So much depends / upon / a red wheel / barrow" (William Carlos Williams), he helps us listen to--and savor--that sometimes bewildering conglomeration of words otherwise known as poetry. --Martha Silano

Koch, a preeminent American poet and author of two best-selling books on teaching poetry to children, has at last produced a guide for adults. This book is divided into two parts: a series of essays on subjects such as meter, rhyme, and personification and an anthology of favorite poems. Most remarkably, non-English poems often appear with several translations, underscoring the flexibility of poetic language. *Making Your Own Days* will be most useful to writers already familiar with the basics. However, while some of the playfulness that marked *Wishes, Lies and Dreams* (HarperCollins, 1980) and *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?* (Vintage, 1990) creeps in, the overall tone is that of a lecturer, and Koch covers the same ground as Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux's *The Poet's Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry* (LJ 10/15/97), though in a less engaging manner. ?David Kirby, Florida State Univ., Tallahassee Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

helpful for my English class

As a struggling amateur poet, I found Koch's work so liberating. He reminded me that the purpose of poetry is to bring joy and delight, no matter what the form or content. As he did in his other books, he opens up the delight of reading AND speaking poetry.

Good boo

Get choice!

I really enjoyed this. I never really "got" poetry, so I enjoy reading other people's journeys of how they fell in love with poetry and why. This book does a good job of explaining and demystifying poetry, making it more accessible. It just made me feel good.

Am daunted, in the task of writing a review, by the fact that the previous reviewers all got it exactly right! The late Kenneth Koch (1925-2002), whimsical poet, teacher, and enthusiast for the evangel of poetry here gives us a book ideally suited for any poet or reader from high-schooler to nonagenarian. The first 135 pages of the book are something of an instruction manual, or an explanation of why poetry seems so strange at first. He patiently explains the obvious: sound matters as much as sense; words have musical value; there is a "poetry language" -- or perhaps several poetry languages? -- that we discover through reading anything & everything in sight. He comes up with the happy comparison of poetry as language being put through a synthesizer! He speaks of the need to build up a "poetry base" through much exposure to the poems of the past and present; he "opens up" the Wallace Stevens poem "Anecdote of the Jar" and makes enchanting a poem that irritated me on previous readings; he makes apposite remarks on revision and inspiration ... The latter half of the book is a neat -- but not quite comprehensive, as Koch himself admits -- anthology of poetry from across the globe, & encompassing three millennia. From Li Po (Li Bai) to Lorca, from Sappho to Snyder, from Ovid to O'Hara. Senghor and Césaire are alongside Ashbery and Wallace Stevens. Marvell and Shakespeare, Whitman and Hopkins and several in between, before and after. Most of the poems are suffixed by a comment by Koch of less than a page (except for Keats's "Bright Star" which he allows to shine by itself!). Especially good, I thought, his brief note on the sonnet by George Herbert, "Prayer," which I have been trying of late to memorize. Excellent reading for the train, the waiting room, the bed, or whatever region of the house you call your

workshop or study!!

Extroverted teacher, thinker, humanist, and poet Kenneth Koch has once again contributed a book that is everything its publisher and its reviewers claim. As a teacher - and a famous promoter of poetry, its creation and its creators - he is fun-loving, but also trustworthy. He knows a lot, he is humble and giving, and his goal is that you should know a lot, too. He tells the reader, "Certainly you don't have to be embarrassed by not understanding a poem right away." He succeeds. I took several weeks to read this book. You can't rush through it - it's too rich for that. Half is Koch's tour of poetry. His approach is bracing, stimulating, and calming in turn. It's a course, really, in Koch's approach, which is utterly straightforward, while retaining plenty of respect for language's possibilities for delight, mystery, enchantment, and love. Kenneth Koch admits on page 281 that he does not always understand W.H. Auden. I appreciated that. This book is especially useful for teachers of poetry. The "Anthology of Poems" that comprises the second half of this wonderful book are each followed by wise, interesting, and fresh commentary by Koch. Definitely worth reading.

This is excellent for beginning readers and writers of poetry. In the essays at the beginning, Koch is successful at convincing the reader that poetry is not as hard as we make it out to be. If we relax and don't allow ourselves to be intimidated, we can enjoy poetry. The rest of the book is devoted to groups of poems, each by one poet, thereby allowing the reader to get to know writers' styles. At the end of each section is a poetry writing exercise asking the reader to write a poem in the style they have just read. These are excellent exercises for broadening anyone's writing; they have certainly broadened my own writing. The only criticism that I have of the book is that the poets included are mostly men. I would think that it could have been more inclusive of women, especially the confessional poets such as Plath whose style new poets may grasp. Overall, this is a great book for teachers, writers, and readers.

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