

POETRY NOW!

"Ideogram" poem

--from **Cardinal Ideograms**

- 0 A mouth. Can blow or breathe,
be a funnel, or Hello.
- 1 A grass blade or cut.
- 2 A question seated. And a proud
bird's neck.
- 3 Shallow mitten for a two-fingered hand.
- 4 Three-cornered hut
on one stilt. Sometimes built
so the roof gapes.
- 5 A policeman. Polite.
Wearing a visored cap.

by May Swenson

© May Swenson (1913-1989). Swenson wrote some of the most thought-provoking poems in the English language. "Cardinal Ideograms" is from The Complete Poems to Solve, by May Swenson, which is a REALLY COOL BOOK!!! Find it! Read it! Solve the riddles in it!!

Poetry Idea

In case you haven't already figured this poem out, May Swenson looks at the numbers 0-5 (the poem actually goes up to 9) as mere shapes, and tries to figure out what they look like. Try writing an "Ideogram" poem:

1. Use the letter of your first (or last) name, either capitals or lowercase. Line them up vertically on the page:

J
O
Y
C
E

2. Look at each letter individually. What does its shape remind you of? Write a brief descriptive phrase or two next to each letter. (“J : A raindrop splatting. A cane, waiting, handle down.”)

3. Try to make each descriptive phrase relate to your life somehow, so that when you finish your Ideogram, the poem is really about YOU.

J A raindrop splatting. A cane, waiting, handle down.

O A mouth, eating chocolate.

Y The fork of a tree where creatures shelter.

C A big toe, hanging over the sun-drenched dock.

E Hair, streaming behind a running girl.

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