

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird
BY WALLACE STEVENS

I

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II

I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

III

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV

A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

VI

Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.

VII

O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

VIII

I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

X

At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.

XI

He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

XII

The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

Read this poem by Wallace Stevens with your students, and don't worry so much about trying to understand what the poem means; focus more on the form of the piece and the images / subject matter. This is literally one object, a blackbird, seen thirteen different ways.

Try to get them to write a poem of their own that is "Thirteen Ways of Looking at _____" or any variation thereof. There are no restrictions on number of lines unless you want there to be. You could do "Ten Ways of Looking at Shortridge High School Room 238" and have them literally walk around and record their images in couplets.

The goal is to get them to work with one seemingly innocuous item and make it have meaning and significance by just repeating the images. The images don't have to even be real.