

## **\*IDEAS FOR WRITING POEMS ABOUT NUCLEAR WASTE\***

Compiled by 2025 Award-Winning Hot Poetry Contest Judge, [Sierra Nelson](#)

**Photography:** Choose a **Hanford declassified photo** and write a poem inspired by it.

- The U.S. government kept it a secret that Hanford was a nuclear production site, and documents connected to Hanford were classified as secret. Even most workers at Hanford and people living nearby did not know. In 1986, the Department of Energy released a 6-foot-high stack of previously unavailable documents concerning Hanford, 19,000 pages in all, including information about radiation dangers.
- Selection of declassified photos [here](#) and [here](#) (More info about the “at work” selected photos [here](#).)

**Warning:** Using words, images, and/or innovations—how would you **alert future people hundreds of thousands of years from now about the continued dangers** of the Hanford site and other nuclear areas’ radiation contamination?

- See also: Waste Isolation Pilot Project and the Ray Cat, more [here](#)

**Focus on a Person:** Nuclear production and nuclear waste contamination affect all people, but different people and communities are impacted in specific and amplified ways, locally and globally. Choose a **specific person or community** to focus on in your poem. (Perhaps that person is you, or a community you connect to personally.) What is their experience and perspective on the harm caused? What is their hope for the future?

- Some resources about different communities impacted by nuclear production [here](#) and [here](#).

**Non-Human World:** Explore the impact of nuclear waste from the perspective of a **plant or animal** that lives in the Hanford area. We highlight a few of our favorites on our Protect-This-Place page [here](#).

- Hanford is important to many unique plants and animals. There are 28 rare plants in the area listed as endangered or threatened, 15 species of small mammals, 38 species of birds at risk of being endangered, and over 1,500 species of insects. Several insects found near the Hanford Site are not found anywhere else in the world. Many plants and animals also live in and along this part of the Columbia River Basin, including one of the world’s largest Chinook salmon spawning areas (the Hanford Reach).
- Some resources for animals and plants in the Hanford area, [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#).

**Words that Pop:** What is one **word or phrase** that stood out to you as you learned about Hanford or nuclear waste? Focus on this word or phrase, repeating it, meditating on it, exploring different meanings, any personal associations, as well as its meaning to Hanford and/or nuclear waste. You can also watch a short video and write down the words that stick out to you and start from there. Some video suggestions about Hanford and nuclear waste:

- **Video:** - [Why Is Hanford the Cold War's Hot Mess](#), EarthFix Media (2016) (3min)
- **Video:** [Hanford: A Race Against Time](#), Columbia Riverkeeper (2015) (5min)
- **Animated Video:** [Waste Encapsulation Storage Facility](#) (2020) (1min)
- **Video:** [Nuclear Attack on the Yakama Culture](#), Russell Jim, Talking Stick TV (2001) (1hr)
- **News Footage:** [King 5 videos on Hanford](#) - there are a lot of stories and videos
- **Video:** [Hanford Hazards Update: Cleaning up Nuclear Waste](#)- OMSI Science Pub (2020) Presentation by Oregon Department of Energy superstars Jeff Burright and Ken Niles on Hanford history and Hanford tank waste. (2 hours)

**Explore a Poetic Form:** Try writing in a **poetic form**? Poet Kathleen Flenniken, the inspiration for this contest, has some great videos explaining some of these forms (plus example poems) at <https://www.hanfordchallenge.org/hotpoetry> (scroll down)

- **Black-out poem / Erasure / Redacted poem** (1:19) *Using a source text connected to the theme of nuclear waste, blackout or redact the words you don't want, revealing a poem inside with what you leave visible. Source text ideas [here](#).*
- **Concrete Poetry / Shape Poem** (3:30) *Write a poem from the perspective and/or in the shape of an object connected to nuclear production or nuclear waste.*
- **Palindrome / Mirrored Poem** (1:38) *Use repetition to create a poem that reads the same forward or backward*
- **Ekphrastic Poem** (:57) *Write a poem inspired by a piece of art connecting to the theme. Here's one resource for art connecting to nuclear waste: [art](#).)*
- **Abecedarian:** *In an [abecedarian poem](#), each line starts with the next letter of the alphabet. Check out Sophia Torres's poem [Hanford. my home](#), one of the 2024 poems that won using this style.*
- **Burning haibun:** *A poetry form invented by poet torrin a. greathouse that pays homage to the traditional Japanese haibun form. In a burning haibun, write a prose poem/paragraph, then erase / burn down that prose into an erasure poem, and then make an erasure of that erasure into a haiku/small core fragment. (Here's an [example](#).)*

Or go your own way! (More resources for learning & inspiration [here](#).)