

This Is Just To Say



SUMMARY

The speaker admits to having eaten plums that were previously stored in a cool box or cupboard known as an icebox (what today would be a refrigerator).

The speaker then admits to knowing that the person to whom the poem is addressed was most likely saving the plums and hoping to eat them for breakfast.

Because the speaker ate the plums that the other person was saving, the speaker now asks for forgiveness, going on to note that the plums were extremely tempting and delicious because they were extraordinarily sweet and cold.

as if they are extraordinary treasures. Indeed, it's almost as if the plums have been hidden away like beloved objects, placed carefully into the safety of the icebox. As a result, readers come to see the plums as too precious to leave out, despite the fact that plums don't generally need to be chilled or refrigerated.

In this way, plums emerge in the poem as cherished items that should be handled with delicacy and care, and this makes it easier for readers to understand the enjoyment the speaker experiences upon eating them, since the speaker clearly sees them as special, wonderful treats. It is this enjoyment that pushed the speaker to eat the plums even though it was obvious that this other person was saving them.

Because "This Is Just To Say" is such a simple poem, it's worth mentioning that William Carlos Williams was interested in documenting everyday life in a straightforward but meaningful way. To that end, many of his poems spotlight the beauty of life merely by focusing on commonplace things and holding them up to readers for closer inspection.

This artistic approach is perfectly exemplified by the poem's title, "This Is Just To Say"—a title that highlights the fact that the poem isn't trying to make any grand arguments or access any kind of deeper meaning. Rather, the poem merely looks at the gratification that can come from indulging in the pleasures of everyday life, ultimately encouraging readers to appreciate small joys like mischievously savoring the sweet taste of stolen plums.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-12



THEMES



TEMPTATION, GUILT, AND SIMPLE PLEASURES

"This Is Just To Say" can be understood as a poem about the simple pleasures of everyday life. To illustrate this, the poem features a speaker who has eaten chilled plums that another person—perhaps the speaker's lover—was saving. In the grand scheme of things, this act is rather unremarkable, but the speaker seems to take great joy in having stolen and eaten the plums. And though the speaker asks for forgiveness, it's abundantly clear that the pure joy of eating these "delicious" plums far outweighs any kind of guilt. This is because the poem is, at least on one level, a celebration of the simple, tempting delights of everyday life—delights like filching sweet plums from an icebox and enjoying them without reservation.

From the title on, the speaker tries to find the right words to confess to this little act of thievery, yet the apology the speaker delivers doesn't seem to contain very much regret. Immediately after saying, "Forgive me," for example, the speaker goes on to talk about how "delicious," "sweet," and "cold" the plums were—in a way justifying the thievery on the basis of how tempting the plums were. In this sense, the poem seems to suggest that nobody could possibly be upset with the speaker, given that the plums were so irresistible.

This also implies that the speaker is *still* thinking about how satisfying it was to eat the plums, thereby indicating that any sense of guilt related to this act pales in comparison to the speaker's lasting delight. Accordingly, readers see that the poem isn't really focused on the speaker's apology, but rather on the satisfaction the speaker derived from eating the plums in the first place.

In keeping with this satisfaction, the poem presents the plums



LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

*I have eaten ...
... the icebox*

The poem begins with the simple statement that the speaker has eaten plums that were stored in an icebox (a box or cupboard used to keep food cool; a precursor to the modern electrical refrigerator). This is a straightforward thing to say, but it's worth noting the way the speaker says it. Indeed, rather than saying, "I ate / the plums," the speaker says, "I **have** eaten / the plums."

The difference between these two phrases is subtle, but the speaker's use of the [present perfect tense](#) ("have eaten") instead of the [past tense](#) ("ate") makes the entire confession seem somehow more immediate, as if the act of eating the

plums is still bringing itself to bear on the present. After all, the word "have" is in the present tense, making it seem as if the eating of the plums isn't completely over and done with, though readers don't yet know why this might be the case. The only thing that's clear, then, is that, for some reason, the speaker's experience of eating the plums continues to resonate in this moment, despite the fact that the speaker has already eaten them.

It's also significant that the plums were stashed in an icebox, since it's usually unnecessary to keep plums chilled. Consequently, the plums themselves come to seem especially precious, since the mere fact that they were placed in an icebox in the first place implies that whoever put them there wanted to treat them with great care.

Because "This Is Just To Say" is such a simple poem, both its sound and rhythm are particularly noticeable; there are, after all, no difficult words or hidden layers of meaning to untangle. For this reason, the poem's musicality is quite important, as it alerts readers to the nuances of the speaker's overall mood, which, at this point, seems directly tied to the simple act of eating chilled plums.

With this in mind, the pleasant sound of the first stanza suggests a sense of satisfaction on the speaker's behalf. For instance, the stanza includes a number of consonant syllables that pair nicely with one another, as the /n/ sound appears alongside the /m/ and /l/ sounds to create a pleasing form of [euphony](#), one that is nicely accompanied by the speaker's use of [sibilance](#) in words like "plums" and "icebox":

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

The pairing of these consonant and sibilant sounds is very euphonic, creating an almost tactile sound that reflects the pleasure the speaker seems to have derived from eating the plums.

The pacing of this stanza is also important, as the short lines are all [enjambéd](#) with one another, thereby flowing from one line to the next in a seamless, effortless way. Of course, this *could* make the poem sound rushed, but the enjambment between the lines actually slows readers down, as is the case in line 3, when readers most likely experience a momentary feeling of suspension as they wait for the speaker to clarify what, exactly, the plums were kept in:

that were in
the icebox

This use of enjambment ultimately creates a relaxed, unbothered sound. This laid back tone aligns with the poem's

use of what William Carlos Williams called the "variable foot," which can (in this case) be interpreted as an alternative word for [free verse](#), meaning that there is no metrical consistency from line to line (though Williams would argue that this lack of consistency doesn't mean the lines are totally disordered or random).

Similarly, there is no overwhelmingly apparent [rhyme scheme](#) in this stanza, except for the subtle [slant rhyme](#) that appears between "eaten" in the first line and "were in" in the third line—a rhyme that, rather than establishing a pattern, simply adds to the poem's euphonic sound.

LINES 5-8

*and which ...
... for breakfast*

The second stanza ("and which ... for breakfast") reveals that the poem is addressed to an unidentified subject. In this way, the speaker employs [apostrophe](#), making it clear that this confession to having eaten the plums in the icebox is directed at somebody who was most likely saving the fruit for breakfast.

Although there's not enough information in the poem to determine who, exactly, the "you" is, it seems likely that the person is the speaker's lover, since they seem to share an icebox—suggesting that they live together. For this reason, many readers view the poem as a note that the speaker has left for the other person, letting this person know that the plums are no longer in the icebox because the speaker has eaten them. This makes sense of the poem's title, "This Is Just To Say," since the title reads like a quick, casual thought that the speaker dashed off and left on a kitchen table.

Interestingly enough, the speaker acknowledges that the other person was probably saving the plums for breakfast but doesn't seem particularly sorry about having eaten them. To that end, the second stanza reveals that the speaker was perfectly aware before eating the plums that they were being kept for something else—and yet, this knowledge did nothing to keep the speaker from resisting the temptation of the chilled fruit, which are apparently precious enough for the lover (or whoever the unidentified subject is) to actively save as a morning treat.

As is the case in the first stanza, the speaker's enjambment is worth thinking about, since the lines are so short and the overall sound of the poem seems almost as important as what the words mean. To that end, every line of this short stanza is [enjambéd](#), ultimately infusing the poem with a small amount of anticipation whenever the speaker reaches the end of a line. For instance, lines 5 through 7 ("and which ... saving") are enjambéd in a way that creates a somewhat contemplative sound:

and which
you were probably

saving

Each time a line ends, readers know that it is *connected* to the following line, but this doesn't erase the *pause* of the white space that arises between each line. This, in turn, makes the speaker sound reflective, as if the speaker has just now considered the fact that the other person was saving the plums. Whether the speaker feels any kind of regret for this, though, remains to be seen.

On another note, this stanza has a small amount of [consonance](#), as the speaker repeats the /b/ sound three times and combines this with the [sibilant](#) /s/ sound:

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

On the whole, these two poetic devices contribute to the poem's generally satisfying sound. In turn, readers will perhaps pick up on a sense of satisfaction that exists in the speaker's tone, effectively implying that the speaker is still quite pleased about having eaten the plums even though they were obviously intended for somebody else.

LINES 9-12

*Forgive me ...
... and so cold*

In line 9, the speaker says, "Forgive me." This suggests that the speaker *does* feel somewhat bad about having eaten this other person's plums, depriving the person of their delectable breakfast. And yet, nowhere in the poem does the speaker say the word "sorry." In fact, instead of actually apologizing, the speaker demands forgiveness—a gesture that feels a lot less genuinely remorseful than simply saying sorry.

In keeping with this insincere apology, the speaker immediately continues after saying "Forgive me" to talk about how "delicious" the plums were, describing them as incredibly "sweet" and "cold." By saying this, the speaker makes it abundantly clear that the experience of eating the plums was so irresistibly enjoyable that it's impossible to stop talking about how "delicious" the fruit was—even in a note apologizing for eating them in the first place. Indeed, despite the speaker's plea for forgiveness, it becomes clear that the poem is less of an apology than it is an unabashed celebration of the simple pleasure of eating the scrumptious plums.

The [imagery](#) that the speaker uses in this stanza is especially evocative. By describing the plums as "sweet" and "cold," the speaker subtly invites readers to imagine how satisfying it would be to eat a chilled plum directly from an icebox. Similarly, the speaker's use of [sibilance](#) once again creates a pleasing sound that reflects the speaker's general feeling of pleasure, as

the /s/ sound repeats several times in lines 10 through 12:

they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

This sibilance infuses the poem with a soft sound, one that is soothing and relaxing in a way that highlights the speaker's contentment. The [assonant](#) /o/ of "so cold" adds to this pleasing effect, while the [diacope](#) of "so" emphasizes the delightful sweetness and coldness of the plums.

All in all, it becomes even more clear that this poem, or this note to a lover, is primarily focused on the joy that can come from indulging simple pleasures like eating cold fruit. Though the speaker is mildly sorry for depriving the other person of this same experience, the poem implies that the plums were simply too irresistible to turn away from. And because they were so irresistible, it seems, the speaker doesn't feel all that bad about having eaten them. Instead of focusing on guilt, then, the speaker focuses on the plums themselves and the pure satisfaction of eating them.



SYMBOLS



THE PLUMS

It can be argued that the plums in the poem represent any number of things, with a common interpretation being that they [symbolize](#) the speaker's inability to resist the allure of pleasure or satisfaction. Under this interpretation, the plums are simply too tempting for the speaker to ignore, even though the speaker knows that someone else is saving them for breakfast.

In a way this might even be a subtle [allusion](#) to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Bible, from which Eve eats the forbidden fruit and ushers sin into the world. The speaker eating the plums is a transgression or sin of sorts, though it's clear that the speaker doesn't feel *that* bad about it. The poem, then, might even be taken as an [extended metaphor](#) about the general joys of indulgence and temptation, and even an argument against depriving oneself of the supposedly sinful luxuries of life.

Then again, it's also entirely possible that the plums *aren't* symbolic and are nothing more than, well, *plums*. This reading aligns with the fact that Williams was interested first and foremost in using straightforward, uncomplicated language and [imagery](#) in his poems. This, however, does not mean that it's incorrect to view the plums as symbolic of the speaker's unwillingness to turn away from desire, which is a perfectly valid reading, too.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-8
- Lines 10-12

**POETIC DEVICES****APOSTROPHE**

There is no mention of another person in the first stanza ("I have eaten ... the icebox"), but it becomes clear in the second stanza that the speaker is addressing an unidentified subject. Using [apostrophe](#), the speaker notes that this person was most likely saving the plums that the speaker has just eaten.

This use of apostrophe is important because it changes the overall context of the poem. At first, the poem seems like a simple meditation on the act of eating plums out of an icebox. But as soon as the speaker says, "which / you were probably / saving / for breakfast," the entire dynamic shifts, as readers realize that these words are addressed to a specific person. For this reason, many readers believe that the poem is supposed to be read as if it were a short note left on a kitchen counter, perhaps from the speaker to the speaker's spouse or lover.

This interpretation (that the poem is a note) also helps make sense of the title, since the phrase "this is just to say" is quite casual and familiar, as if the speaker has a good relationship with the person who will eventually read these words. At the same time, though, this casual tone ultimately suggests that the speaker doesn't feel any kind of remorse for having eaten this person's plums. In this way, it becomes overwhelmingly clear that even if the poem is technically a note of apology to another person, the speaker is focused more on how satisfying it was to eat the plums than on expressing regret for having stolen them.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-12

ENJAMBMENT

One of the defining qualities of "This Is Just To Say" is the speaker's use of [enjambment](#), as the majority of the lines are divided by line breaks. This is noticeable on a visual level, since the poem consists of very short lines, and very few of these lines stand alone as their own complete phrases. In keeping with the fact that the speaker's phrases stretch across multiple lines, the poem lacks any kind of punctuation whatsoever. This, in turn, gives the lines a free-flowing feel that enhances the fluidity of the enjambment, which allows the speaker's words to sound relaxed and unhurried.

At the same time, though, the enjambment in "This Is Just To Say" also adds a certain measured sound to the poem, since the

frequent line breaks slow readers down. Indeed, most of the lines aren't [end-stopped](#), but there are moments in which a small pause can be felt between two lines. For instance, readers will perhaps sense a brief moment of delay between lines 5 and 6:

and which
you were probably

Of course, there is no doubt that the line "and which" depends upon what follows in order for it to make sense, since it is an incomplete clause. And yet, the line break between these two parts of the phrase creates a very brief—but still noticeable—pause that ultimately gives the speaker's words a contemplative sound. Indeed, it is almost as if the speaker is hesitant to acknowledge that the other person was most likely saving the plums for breakfast. In turn, the use of enjambment ultimately hints at the possibility that the speaker feels somewhat guilty for having filched the other person's plums.

It's also worth noting that, in contrast to the rest of the poem, all the lines in the third stanza ("Forgive me ... and so cold") are end-stopped. This is because each line is capable of existing on its own, since phrases like "Forgive me" and "they were delicious" are independent clauses. Of course, the lines "so sweet" and "and so cold" *aren't* independent clauses, but they aren't enjambed because they don't necessarily flow into one another.

Indeed, although there is no punctuation, the poem reads as if there is a colon at the end of line 10, which makes it sound like line 10 ("they were delicious") is separated from line 11 ("so sweet"). Then, the word "and" in line 12 ("and so cold") separates it from line 11. As a result, the entire last stanza is made up of end-stopped lines. And this, in turn, slows readers down even more than the enjambment of the previous stanzas, urging them to truly imagine how "delicious" the plums were.

By playing with this contrast between enjambed and end-stopped lines, then, the speaker controls the rhythm and pacing of the poem. This is especially important because the poem is so short. What's more, the poem's overall lack of [meter](#) means that the rhythmic quality of the line breaks is particularly significant, as this is one of the only tools the speaker can use to control the flow of the words.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "eaten / the"
- **Lines 2-3:** "plums / that"
- **Lines 3-4:** "in / the"
- **Lines 5-6:** "which / you"
- **Lines 6-7:** "probably / saving"
- **Line 8:** "for"

CONSONANCE

Because "This Is Just To Say" doesn't contain many words, the small, concentrated moments of [consonance](#) are especially noticeable. In fact, this is the case even though the kind of consonance the speaker uses isn't all that [repetitive](#). For example, the /n/ sound only appears twice in the first stanza ("I have eaten ... the icebox"), but it still contributes to the stanza's overall sound. This is partially because it creates a [slant rhyme](#) between the words "eaten" and "in":

I have eaten
the plums
that were in

Because the poem doesn't have a set [rhyme scheme](#), this repetition of the /n/ sound at the ends of the first and third lines is rather prominent. What's more, the /th/ sound repeats three times in the first stanza, appearing as the first sound of lines 2, 3, and 4:

the plums
that were in
the icebox

The repetition of this /th/ sound creates a pleasant form of consonance, one that reflects the speaker's satisfaction after having eaten the plums from the icebox.

It's also worth noting that, although the /l/ and /m/ sounds appear only once in the first stanza, they create a slightly rounded sound that is quite pleasing. Alongside the consonant /n/ and /th/ sounds, this leads to [euphony](#). In this way, the speaker's language invites readers to luxuriate in the same kind of satisfaction and pleasure that the speaker experiences after eating the plums.

Furthermore, the poem also features subtle moments of [sibilance](#), which is yet another kind of consonance. Indeed, the sibilant /s/ sound pairs with the /z/, /th/, /sh/, and /f/ sounds to create an even broader kind of sibilance. This is especially apparent in the final stanza:

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

All in all, this sibilance accentuates the poem's musicality. In this stanza, for instance, the /f/, /sh/, and /s/ sounds build a nice soundscape to accompany the consonant /w/ sound that appears in the words "were" and "sweet." In turn, the poem takes on a musical quality that ultimately matches the speaker's general mood, since the speaker is interested first and foremost in expressing the delight of eating the (stolen) chilled

plums.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Line 2
- Line 3
- Line 4
- Line 5
- Line 6
- Line 7
- Line 8
- Line 9
- Line 10
- Line 11
- Line 12

IMAGERY

The speaker uses [imagery](#) in the final stanza ("Forgive me ... and so cold") as a way of describing what it was like to eat the chilled plums. Traditionally, poets use imagery to evoke various sensations using vivid language that has to do with the human senses. In this case, though, the speaker's language is simplistic and straightforward, a choice that aligns with William Carlos Williams's uncomplicated poetic style.

To that end, it's worth mentioning here that Williams is associated with the Imagist movement in poetry. The Imagists were primarily interested in using, unsurprisingly, imagery, but the movement championed the use of clear, precise language. In keeping with this simplicity, Williams often wrote about seemingly ordinary things, focusing on bringing otherwise unremarkable images to life without using excessive, tiresome descriptions.

With this in mind, "This Is Just To Say" is a perfect example of Williams's interest in simple but expressive imagery, as the speaker manages to perfectly capture the taste and sensation of eating chilled plums without going into great detail. In fact, the speaker's language is sparse and uncomplicated, and though readers are only told that the plums were "delicious," "sweet," and "cold," these simple words are somehow enough to convey just how satisfying it must have been for the speaker to eat them.

On another note, the speaker's use of imagery in the final stanza is worth considering because it suggests that the speaker can't stop thinking about the tasty plums. Even though the speaker has just asked for forgiveness after having stolen the plums, it's clear that the true point of this poem is not for the speaker to make amends with the other person, but to celebrate just how pleasing it was to eat the plums in the first place. In this way, the imagery accentuates the speaker's sense of satisfaction, turning the entire poem into a meditation on the lovely but simple experience of eating chilled fruit.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- **Lines 10-12:** "they were delicious / so sweet / and so cold"

DIACOPE

In the last two lines ("so sweet ... so cold"), the speaker uses [diacope](#) to repeat the word "so" two times, ultimately emphasizing just how satisfying it was to eat the chilled plums. This instance of diacope is especially prominent because it accentuates the [sibilance](#) that also appears in the final two lines:

so sweet
and so cold

By combining diacope and sibilance here, the speaker creates an extremely musical sound that aligns with the pleasure of eating plums directly out of an icebox (or some other cold place). What's more, the word "so" is a particularly relevant one to repeat because it is used as an intensifier, thereby placing emphasis on the fact that the speaker derived an extraordinary amount of satisfaction from eating the plums, which weren't just "sweet" and "cold," but *especially* "sweet" and "cold."

This, of course, is a subtle difference, but the fact remains that the word "so"—which is small and seemingly insignificant—modifies not only the way these lines sound, but the general perception of the speaker's experience. Indeed, by using diacope in the poem's concluding lines, the speaker effectively invites readers to see the act of eating chilled plums as dazzlingly wonderful, not ordinary or commonplace.

Where Diacope appears in the poem:

- **Line 11:** "so"
- **Line 12:** "so"

this regard, the poem's short lines and consistent stanza lengths are the only things that give it a feeling of organization.

On another note, some readers uphold that "This Is Just To Say" is a [found poem](#), since it can be read as a note from the speaker to the speaker's lover. According to this viewpoint, William Carlos Williams turned an actual real-life note about plums into a poem by adding line breaks and dividing the phrases into three separate stanzas. Regardless of this theory, though, the poem still does not follow a standard poetic form.

METER

"This Is Just To Say" is technically written in [free verse](#). This means that the poem does not have an overarching sense of metrical consistency. Having said that, though, it is the case that all the lines are quite short, ranging from two syllables to five syllables. This use of short lines ultimately creates a feeling of predictability, and it also controls the overall pace and flow of the poem, as the frequent enjambment creates a feeling of division between the lines without actually disrupting its fluid, easy rhythm.

RHYME SCHEME

"This Is Just To Say" does not adhere to a set [rhyme scheme](#). To that end, the only rhymes that can be found within the poem are [slant rhymes](#). For instance, the word "eaten" in line 1 ("I have eaten") creates a subtle slant rhyme with the word "in" in line 3 ("that were in").

In other moments, slant rhymes are placed rather far apart from one another, ultimately making it difficult to identify them. Consider, for example, the fact that the word "probably" in line 6 ("you were probably") is a near rhyme with the words "forgive me" in line 9 ("Forgive me"). If these lines were closer to each other, this slant rhyme might be more noticeable. As it stands, though, the word "probably" appears in the second stanza and the words "Forgive me" appear in the third stanza, meaning that they are a bit too far apart to create a very noticeable rhyme.

Similarly, the slant rhyme that occurs between the word "breakfast" in line 8 ("for breakfast") and the word "delicious" in line 10 ("they were delicious") isn't all that prominent, since the two words are very separated from one another. At the same time, though, such rhymes still have an overall effect, ultimately creating a sense of pleasant musicality that readers will perhaps feel but not pick up on right away. The final two lines of the poem, meanwhile, are clearly [assonant](#), the shared long /o/ vowels of "so cold" ending the poem on a lyrical note.

**VOCABULARY**

Icebox () - A chilled box or cupboard used to keep food cold before the invention of refrigerators.

**FORM, METER, & RHYME****FORM**

The poem consists of 12 lines that are organized into three [quatrains](#) (four-line stanzas), but it otherwise doesn't adhere to any kind of formal structure. That said, all the lines are short, and each stanza is the same length, so there is a sense of regularity to the poem despite its overall lack of uniformity. In

**SPEAKER**

The poem's speaker is an unidentified person who has just eaten plums that were previously stored in an icebox. As the poem progresses, it becomes clear that the speaker wasn't

supposed to eat these plums, since somebody else—t's never clear who, exactly—was saving them for breakfast. Even after acknowledging this transgression, though, the speaker concentrates primarily on how "delicious" the plums were, thereby implying that any sense of guilt about having eaten the other person's food is overshadowed by the pure satisfaction of having eaten the plums in the first place—something it seems the speaker would most likely do again if given the chance.

Because it's so short and written in such a casual tone, many readers view the poem as a note written by the speaker to a spouse or lover. With this in mind, some people believe that the speaker is William Carlos Williams himself and that the poem is addressed to his wife. While this might very well be true, there isn't quite enough evidence in the poem to confirm this theory, though it *does* seem rather safe to assume that the person to whom the poem is addressed is the speaker's spouse or lover.



SETTING

"This Is Just To Say" takes place in a domestic setting. Beyond this, it's difficult to say what kind of environment serves as a backdrop for the poem. Indeed, the only thing that is clear is that the speaker seems to be in a kitchen, considering that the plums the speaker has just eaten were previously stored in an icebox, which would normally be kept in a kitchen. On that note, the fact that the plums were inside an icebox instead of a refrigerator suggests that the poem is most likely set sometime before the 1930s, since refrigerators weren't common household appliances until that time period.



CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"This Is Just To Say" was published in 1934, long after the Imagist movement ended (around 1917). However, William Carlos Williams was an important member of the Imagist movement, and this poem beautifully exemplifies many of the core tenets of that particular poetic approach. In particular, "This Is Just To Say" is a very simple poem about the ordinary act of eating plums sneakily taken from an icebox, and it is this attempt to find beauty in such simplicity that ultimately aligns so perfectly with the Imagist movement, which was centered around the use of clear language and vivid, taught [imagery](#).

Because of Williams's association with Imagism and the poem's Imagist qualities, it's worth considering "This Is Just To Say" alongside "[In a Station of the Metro](#)," a two-line poem by Ezra Pound, whom many consider to be the founder of Imagism and the "father of Modernism." It's also worth comparing "This Is Just To Say" with some of William Carlos Williams's other famous poems, such as "[The Red Wheelbarrow](#)," which is perhaps an even *simpler* meditation on a single image.

It would also make sense to think about the poem alongside Williams's epic poem, "[Paterson](#)," which features one of the poet's most famous lines: "Say it, no ideas but in things." This sentiment perfectly reflects Williams's commitment to exploring the beauty of everyday life instead of getting bogged down by heady intellectual concepts—an approach that is on full display in "This Is Just To Say."

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The poem was published in 1934, meaning that it appeared in print during the Great Depression, when the United States (and many countries all over the world) experienced a marked downturn in the economy. However, it is unclear whether it was actually written during this period, and though it is in some ways a poem about food scarcity (something that was very common during the Great Depression), the fact of the matter is that the poem is divorced from any kind of historical setting.

To that end, it takes place in a domestic context that could exist in seemingly any time period—except, of course, for the fact that the speaker uses an icebox instead of the more modern refrigerator. Some take the poem as having been an actual note from Williams to his wife, making it an example of something called [found poetry](#).

Whether this story is true is up for debate, but either way the poem certainly makes a very mundane act *feel* distinctly *poetic*. To that end, Williams himself was actually a successful doctor, a working man who wrote mostly at night. Such context makes "This Is Just To Say" all the more interesting, a fleeting contemplation of domesticity that is at once exceedingly simple and profound.



MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- [Williams Reads the Poem](#) — Listen to this recording of William Carlos Williams reading "This Is Just To Say" to a live audience. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RQUFJ1X6s8>)
- [Adam Driver Recites The Poem](#) — Watch the actor Adam Driver talk about William Carlos Williams and read "This Is Just To Say" in a scene from the 2016 film "Paterson." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJIzjKv_7rc)
- [The Poet's Life](#) — Learn more about William Carlos Williams in this overview of his life and work. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-carlos-williams>)
- [Imagism](#) — For more information about the Imagist movement, take a look at this short guide. (<https://poets.org/text/brief-guide-imagism>)
- [The Paris Review Interview](#) — Check out The Paris

Review's interview with William Carlos Williams, who was the sixth poet they interviewed in their long-running "Art of Poetry" interview series.

<https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4486/the-art-of-poetry-no-6-william-carlos-williams>

LITCHARTS ON OTHER WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS POEMS

- [The Red Wheelbarrow](#)



HOW TO CITE

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