Try a poem that uses only words of one syllable. To make it harder, you might even forbid your poem the use of any form of the verb “to be.” This will push you into non-Latinate language and short, active verbs. It is interesting to observe how these restrictions complicate the writing while simplifying what is said. The restrictions necessarily alter what’s expressed. It is difficult to find examples of poems written with only single syllable words; it is less difficult to find poems you could easily translate into words of one syllable. (I apologize for using my own lame poems as examples; those of others are harder to find)

Short Words

What if all the long words
fell out of your head?

Stuck with just
the crisp, short ones,
that’s all.

What can you still say?
Plain truths,
things you see —

Bright sun on bare trees,
a crow lands
black on snow.

Wind waves the smoke
from the shack next door,
flaps it like a flag.

Small birds peck
at thrown seeds.
One more new day starts.

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Cars pass by out front —
boats on a stream
of gray road.

Hard to share
deep thoughts
in short words, right?

I know now how it feels
to try to speak
in a tongue not your own.
Your thoughts beat
on the bars
but can’t get out.

I watch
as the boats pass by
on the stream out front.
I smile and wave.

The folks in the boats
must think me dumb —
the one with short words
who waves
from the bank.

Monosyllabics

Each note, clear and clean
sails out from the top
of the tall hill.

A man with a horn
pours his breath
through the brass,

and his quick notes,
crisp but sweet,
stream as bright joy

to meet the ears
of all who come out
of doors to dance

and laugh in the streets
as if there were
no plague.

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