**The Whipping** - by Robert Hayden

The old woman across the way

is whipping the boy again

and shouting to the neighborhood

her goodness and his wrongs.

Wildly he crashes through elephant ears,

pleads in dusty zinnias,

while she in spite of crippling fat

pursues and corners him.

She strikes and strikes the shrilly circling

boy till the stick breaks

in her hand. His tears are rainy weather

to woundlike memories:

My head gripped in bony vise

of knees, the writhing struggle

to wrench free, the blows, the fear

worse than blows that hateful

Words could bring, the face that I

no longer knew or loved . . .

Well, it is over now, it is over,

and the boy sobs in his room.

And the woman leans muttering against

a tree, exhausted, purged—

avenged in part for lifelong hidings

she has had to bear.

THE VOICE YOU HEAR WHEN YOU READ SILENTLY

 is not silent, it is a speaking-

out-loud voice in your head:  it is spoken,

a voice is saying it

as you read.  It’s the writer’s words,

of course, in a literary sense

his or her “voice” but the sound

of that voice is the sound of your voice.

Not the sound your friends know

or the sound of a tape played back

but your voice

caught in the dark cathedral

of your skull, your voice heard

by an internal ear informed by internal abstracts

and what you know by feeling,

having felt.  It is your voice

saying, for example, the word “barn”

that the writer wrote

but the “barn” you say

is a barn you know or knew.  The voice

in your head, speaking as you read,

never says anything neutrally--some people

hated the barn they knew,

some people love the barn they know

so you hear the word loaded

and a sensory constellation

is lit:  horse-gnawed stalls,

hayloft, black heat tape wrapping

a water pipe, a slippery

spilled chirrr of oats from a split sack,

the bony, filthy haunches of cows . . .

And “barn” is only a noun--no verb

or subject has entered into the sentence yet!

The voice you hear when you read to yourself

is the clearest voice:  you speak it

speaking to you.

                                    --Thomas Lux

                                                in the New Yorker in July 1997

|  |
| --- |
| THE SACRED By Stephen Dunn  After the teacher asked if anyone had    a sacred place and the students fidgeted and shrunk  in their chairs, the most serious of them all    said it was his car, being in it alone, his tape deck playing  things he'd chosen, and others knew the truth    had been spoken and began speaking about their rooms,  their hiding places, but the car kept coming    up, the car in motion, music filling it, and sometimes one other person  who understood the bright altar of the dashboard    and how far away a car could take him from the need  to speak, or to answer, the key    in having a key and putting it in, and going. |

## The Peace of Wild Things

by Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me

and I wake in the night at the least sound

in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be,

I go and lie down where the wood drake

rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things

who do not tax their lives with forethought

of grief. I come into the presence of still water.

And I feel above me the day-blind stars

waiting with their light. For a time

I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Snowy Egret

By Bruce Weigl

My neighbor's boy has lifted his father's shotgun and stolen  
down to the backwaters of the Elizabeth  
and in the moon he's blasted a snow egret  
from the shallows it stalked for small fish.

Midnight. My wife wakes me. He's in the backyard  
with a shovel so I go down half drunk with pills  
that let me sleep to see what I can see and if it's safe.   
The boy doesn't hear me come across the dewy grass.   
He says through tears he has to bury it,   
he says his father will kill him  
and he digs until the hole is deep enough and gathers  
the egret carefully into his arms  
as if not to harm the blood-splattered wings  
gleaming in the flashlight beam.

His man's muscled shoulders  
shake with the weight of what he can't set right no matter what,   
but one last time he tries to stay a child, sobbing  
please don't tell. . . .   
He says he only meant to flush it from the shadows,   
but only meant to watch it fly  
but the shot spread too far  
ripping into the white wings spanned awkwardly for a moment  
until it glided into brackish death.

I want to grab his shoulders,   
Shake the lies loose from his lips but he hurts enough,   
he burns with shame for what he's done,   
with fear for his hard father's  
fists I've seen crash down on him for so much less.   
I don't know what do to but hold him.   
If I let go he'll fly to pieces before me. What a time we share, that can make a good boy steal away,   
wiping out from the blue face of the pond  
what he hadn't even known he loved, blasting  
such beauty into nothing.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| How to Read a Poem: Beginner's Manual |  | |
| by Pamela Spiro Wagner | | |
|  | | |
| First, forget everything you have learned,  that poetry is difficult,  that it cannot be appreciated by the likes of you,  with your high school equivalency diploma,  your steel-tipped boots,  or your white-collar misunderstandings.  Do not assume meanings hidden from you:  the best poems mean what they say and say it.  To read poetry requires only courage  enough to leap from the edge  and trust.  Treat a poem like dirt,  humus rich and heavy from the garden.  Later it will become the fat tomatoes  and golden squash piled high upon your kitchen table.  Poetry demands surrender,  language saying what is true,  doing holy things to the ordinary.  Read just one poem a day.  Someday a book of poems may open in your hands  like a daffodil offering its cup  to the sun.  When you can name five poets  without including Bob Dylan,  when you exceed your quota  and don't even notice,  close this manual.  Congratulations.  You can now read poetry. |  |  |

The Red Wheelbarrow

by William Carlos Williams

so much depends

upon

a red wheel

barrow

glazed with rain

water

beside the white

chickens

The Interrogation of Red Wheelbarrow

Kevin Corcoran

They came at night and arrested

"The Red Wheelbarrow" by

William Carlos Williams,

suspicious of its effortless grace

and the unknown way it made

so much depend upon it.

They disassembled the wheelbarrow

tagged and numbered its parts

killed and dissected the chickens

sent the rainwater away for analysis.

They counted syllables,

made anagrams, ground up words

until there was nothing left,

just a vacuous impression

where words once were.

And oh, of course: they tortured Red Wheelbarrow.

But Red Wheelbarrow never yielded its secrets.

*the dance of ordinary objects*

*the wisdom of mud*

*the secret ambitions of the inanimate*

*the razor-perfect honor in natural things*

Secrets never let go because

they're not secret, not hidden

just delicate layers held

for a moment in space

Intuition can't be learned --

it's already there, already free.

In the end they lost interest in the case

and simply did to Red Wheelbarrow what

they did to McMurphy in Cuckoo's Nest

You see Red Wheelbarrow around the town now

a shamble poem all bones and twitches

eyes distant, glazed as if with rainwater

never meeting your face just staring loosely

remembering some rainy afternoon long ago.

# This Is Just to Say

# by William Carlos Williams

I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox

and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast

Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet  
and so cold

Some Keep The Sabbath Going To Church

by Emily Dickinson

Some keep the Sabbath going to church;

I keep it staying at home,

With a bobolink for a chorister,

And an orchard for a dome.

Some keep the Sabbath in surplice;

I just wear my wings,

And instead of tolling the bell for church,

Our little sexton sings.

God preaches, -- a noted clergyman,--

And the sermon is never long;

So instead of getting to heaven at last

I’m going all along!

A Word Is Dead (Emily Dickinson)

A word is dead

When it is said,

Some say.

I say it just

Begins to live

That day.

Harlem Night Song

Langston Hughes

Come,

Let us roam the night together

Singing.

I love you.

Across

The Harlem roof-tops

Moon is shining.

Night sky is blue.

Stars are great drops

Of golden dew.

Down the street

A band is playing.

I love you.

Come,

Let us roam the night together

Singing.

Ardella

by Langston Hughes

I would liken you

To a night without stars

Were it not for your eyes.

I would liken you

To a sleep without dreams

Were it not for your song.

To the United States Army

by Kenneth Koch

It felt unusual

Even if for a good cause

To be part of a destructive force

With my rifle in my hands

And in my head

My serial number

The entire object of my existence

Was to eliminate Japanese soldiers

By killing them

With a rifle or with a grenade

And then, many years after that,

I could write poetry

Fall in love

And have a daughter

And think

About these things

From a great distance

If I survived

I was “paying my debt

To society” a paid

Killer. It wasn’t

Like anything I’d done

Before, on the paved

Streets of Cincinnati

Or on the ballroom floor

At Mr. Vathe’s dancing class

What would Anne Marie Goldsmith

Have thought of me

If instead of asking her to dance

I had put my BAR to my shoulder

And shot her in the face

(Or what would a certain Japanese rifleman

Have done

If I asked him to dance?)

They were unusual afternoons

Unusual mornings, evenings and nights.

As machines make ice

So we made dead enemy soldiers

You sending us forth

Onto beaches and through

Dark jungle alleys

With weapons in our hands

That produced fire

The blood spilled on you

Came off in the dry cleaning of headlines

With Extras

You shook yourself free

Of the mutilation and the lament

And came out strong

You put up posters

To convince new people to come in

And be glad to be with you.

The End and the Beginning

*Wislawa Szymborska*

After every war

someone has to clean up.

Things won't

straighten themselves up, after all.

Someone has to push the rubble

to the side of the road,

so the corpse-filled wagons

can pass.

Someone has to get mired

in scum and ashes,

sofa springs,

splintered glass,

and bloody rags.

Someone has to drag in a girder

to prop up a wall,

Someone has to glaze a window,

rehang a door.

Photogenic it's not,

and takes years.

All the cameras have left

for another war.

We'll need the bridges back,

and new railway stations.

Sleeves will go ragged

from rolling them up.

Someone, broom in hand,

still recalls the way it was.

Someone else listens

and nods with unsevered head.

But already there are those nearby

starting to mill about

who will find it dull.

From out of the bushes

sometimes someone still unearths

rusted-out arguments

and carries them to the garbage pile.

Those who knew

what was going on here

must make way for

those who know little.

And less than little.

And finally as little as nothing.

In the grass that has overgrown

causes and effects,

someone must be stretched out

blade of grass in his mouth

gazing at the clouds.

from *Miracle Fair: Selected Poems of Wislawa Szymborska*, 2001

W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, NY

A Small Needful Fact

Is that Eric Garner worked  
for some time for the Parks and Rec.  
Horticultural Department, which means,  
perhaps, that with his very large hands,  
perhaps, in all likelihood,  
he put gently into the earth  
some plants which, most likely,  
some of them, in all likelihood,  
continue to grow, continue  
to do what such plants do, like house  
and feed small and necessary creatures,  
like being pleasant to touch and smell,  
like converting sunlight  
into food, like making it easier  
for us to breathe.

by Ross Gay

https://poets.org/poet/ross-gay

**Introduction to Poetry**

By Billy Collins

I ask them to take a poem

and hold it up to the light

like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem

and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem’s room

and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski

across the surface of a poem

waving at the author’s name on the shore.

But all they want to do

is tie the poem to a chair with rope

and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose

to find out what it really means.

Grandfather

by Mohja Kahf

Your grandchildren

are climbing

the oak tree in the backyard

on the planks of wood

you nailed in its side

Soon they will not remember

who spaced them so evenly

Do you feel the weight

of a small foot on your heart,

and when they reach the top

will you grasp their hands

and hoist them up with you?

1983

Credo

by Alfred Kreymborg

I sing the will to love:

the will that carves the will to live,

the will that saps the will to hurt,

the will that kills the will to die;

the will that made and keeps you warm,

the will that points your eyes ahead,

the will that makes you give, not get,

a give and get that tell us what you are:

how much a god, how much a human.

I call on you to live the will to love.

**Poetry Discussion Guide**

Read the poem silently at least twice. Then have someone in the group read it aloud for the group.

What do you **notice** in the poem? In other words, what catches your attention?

Who is the speaker in this poem?

What seems to be going on in this poem?

What lines seem puzzling to you? Discuss them in your group.

Can you make a generalization based on what the poem says to you? (Love can make you happy; life is full of surprises; winter is like a death that comes each year; etc.)

What is the tone of this poem? (Joyful, depressed, angry, etc.)

What poetic devices does this poem use to convey its message effectively? (clever shape to the lines, metaphors, similes, personification, hyperboles, sound patterns – consider the terms we discussed.)

Appeal factor on a scale of 1 to 10?

**Teacher Preparation:** Find 10 to 15 poems to print out and post around the room. Hand out the Scavenger Hunt (example below) with one question for each poem. Put on some music and let them go.

Tailor this to your curriculum. AP Literature students will be expected to know the vocabulary of poetry study, so this is a way to have some fun with the likes of "synechdoche."

**Poetry Scavenger Hunt**

Rules: Do not share any information with any other student in the room.

You must use a different poem for each response.

1. Find a poem about a child who runs away from home looking for the place where he/she used to live. What does the child take along on this “trip”?

***Answer:*** *"In California" by Margaret Levine - the blue elephant, a few marbles, a cap gun, a doughnut*

2. Find a poem where the speaker expresses 3 wishes for his ex-wife. What are they?

***Answer:*** *"What I Want" by George Bilgere* - *leprosy, struck by lightning, lethal injection*

3. Locate a metaphor. Poem\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Poet\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Metaphor: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

***Answer:*** *"Monday" by Billy Collins. Metaphor: "The ping-pong game of proofreading"*

4. Find a poem with a sarcastic tone.

Title of poem: “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_” Poet: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

***Answer:*** *"The Benefits of Ignorance" by Hal Sirowitz*

5. Find a poem with exact rhyme. Write 4 words and the words that rhyme with them.

***Answer:*** *"The Courage That My Mother Had" by Edna St. Vincent Millay*

*still/hill; wore/more; wear/spare;me/she*