

• CONTENTS •

INTRODUCTION FOR STUDENTS

2

TOOLS FOR READING, WRITING, AND THINKING ABOUT POETRY

3

PROLOGUE

6

Naomi Shihab Nye

Always Bring a Pencil

THE THREE DIMENSIONS: POEMS AND QUESTIONS

THE FIRST DIMENSION: CREATURES

SET 1. FANTASY

Elizabeth Bishop	Sleeping on the Ceiling	8
Gregory Corso	A Difference of Zoos	10
Thomas Rabbitt	Gargoyle	12
Anne Sexton	Rumpelstiltskin	14

SET 2. SURVIVAL

Linda Gregg	The Small Lizard	18
Maxine Kumin	The Hermit Meets the Skunk	20
Charles Simic	Dog on a Chain	22
William Jay Smith	Seal	24
Wallace Stevens	Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird	26
Mary TallMountain	Gaal Comes Upriver	28

THE SECOND DIMENSION: JOURNEYS

SET 1. IDENTITY

Jacinto Jesús Cardona	Muck	32
Marilyn Chin	Turtle Soup	34
Lucille Clifton	at the cemetery, walnut grove plantation, south carolina, 1989	36
Nikki Giovanni	Poem for Flora	38
Mary Oliver	Some Questions You Might Ask	40
Margaret Walker	Lineage	42

SET 2. RECOGNITION

Countee Cullen	Incident	44
Juliet S. Kono	Internment	46
Margaret Walker	For My People	48

THE THIRD DIMENSION: RELATIONSHIPS

SET 1. CONFLICT

Maya Angelou	The Telephone	52
Jimmy Santiago Baca	Work We Hate and Dreams We Love	54
Jacinto Jesús Cardona	Mother Never Read to Me	56
George Draper	Rink Keeper's Sestina: Hockey, hockey	58

SET 2. IDENTITY

Marilou Awiakta	The Real Thing	60
Gwendolyn Brooks	First Fight, Then Fiddle	62
Rita Dove	Fifth Grade Autobiography	64
Langston Hughes	Mother to Son	66

CLOSE-UPS OF TWO POETS: POEMS AND QUESTIONS

SET 1.

e. e. cummings	Buffalo Bill's	70
e. e. cummings	[maggie and milly and molly and may]	72
e. e. cummings	in Just-	74
e. e. cummings	love is more thicker than forget	76

SET 2.

Naomi Shihab Nye	Because of Libraries We Can Say These Things	78
Naomi Shihab Nye	Boy and Mom at the Nutcracker Ballet	80
Naomi Shihab Nye	Morning Glory	82
Naomi Shihab Nye	Passing It On	84

CLASSIC MODELS: POEMS AND QUESTIONS

THE BALLAD

Anonymous	Bonny Barbara Allan	88
-----------	----------------------------	----

SYLLABIC POETRY

Kaga no Chiyo	untitled haiku	90
Matsuo Bashō	untitled haiku	91
Ōtomo no Yakamochi	untitled tanka	91
Ezra Pound	In a Station of the Metro	91

THE SESTINA

Robert Francis	Hallelujah: A Sestina	92
----------------	------------------------------	----

SHAPE AND SOUND POEMS

Lou Lipsitz	Skinny Poem	94
Louise Bogan	Train Tune	94
Carl Sandburg	Fog	95

THE SONNET

William Shakespeare	Sonnet 18	96
---------------------	------------------	----

ACTIVITIES

97

GLOSSARY OF POETIC TERMS

102

ABOUT THE POETS

109

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

114

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

115

INDEX OF POETS AND TITLES

118

• INTRODUCTION FOR STUDENTS •

Imagine life as a dog tethered to a chain. Learn about the struggles and endurance of a salmon swimming upstream. View the world from a new point of view—from the top of a cathedral or from a ceiling. Experience the pain of racial prejudice and isolation; how does it feel to be called an ugly name or to be imprisoned in a Japanese internment camp? Celebrate family and accomplishment. In *Poetry in Three Dimensions* we invite you to explore all of these ideas—and more, and to enjoy the form and rhythm that poetry offers.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS BOOK

You will see that the poems in this book are divided into five main sections. There are three topics or *Dimensions*: Creatures, Journeys, and Relationships. Within each of these *Dimensions*, the poems are further divided into subtopics called *Sets*. In addition, we have included two sections called *Close-Ups* and *Classic Models*. In *Close-Ups*, we offer four poems by e.e. cummings and four poems by Naomi Shihab Nye. All of the poems in the *Dimensions* and *Close-Ups* sections are by American poets writing in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. In *Classic Models*, you will find examples of traditional “fixed form” poems that poets have written throughout the ages in Europe, Asia, and the United States. *Poetry in Three Dimensions* also includes several modern variations on these traditional forms.

WHAT YOU WILL DO

After each poem in the *Dimensions*, *Close-Ups*, and *Classic Models* sections, you will find two questions encouraging you to investigate the structure or language of the poem and the literary devices used by the poet. We also ask you to consider what the poem means and how this meaning relates to your personal experiences. For many of the poems, we have provided Activities designed to stimulate your creativity by asking you to write a poem or draw a picture, engage in some form of research, or compare and contrast different works.

Poetry in Three Dimensions is a collection of works mainly by Americans: African Americans, Asian Americans, European Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans. Our society has been enriched by the contributions of each of these groups. Through *Poetry in Three Dimensions* we hope you will celebrate our shared heritage and enjoy thinking about the many ways human beings are different and the same.

THE FIRST STEP—GETTING THE FEELING OF A POEM

The first characteristic of poetry that most students notice is its brevity. Poems are short! Like small treasures, they are also packed with gem-like words and phrases that appeal to your senses. When you read a poem, you will hear and see, and possibly taste, touch, or smell the images that the poet puts before you. Sometimes, reading and listening to poetry is similar to listening to music. Even when you hear a song in a foreign language, you can feel the expression that the composer is conveying to you.

Poems, even complex poems, can have a similar effect on the reader. Don't give up if a poem doesn't "make sense" to you after an initial reading. First, try to express what the poem makes you feel in the same way you would for a song you've heard for the first time. Write your feelings in your book, right next to the poem's title. Then use the reading, writing, and thinking tools suggested below to help you find ways to understand why and how the poem makes you feel a certain way.

IDENTIFYING THE SPEAKER IN A POEM

When poets write poems, sometimes they imagine what it must be like to observe the world from the point of view of a creature or a person who is very different from themselves. This creature or person is the observer looking at the world conveyed to you through the poet's words. In this book, we refer to this observer as the **speaker**, and sometimes we refer to the **point of view** of the speaker. In other words, the speaker and the poet are often not the same.

To understand a poem, you must know who or what is telling you a story, expressing a feeling, or describing a scene in a poem. Is the speaker a boy or girl, a man or woman, a dog, an objective observer (such as a newspaper reporter), someone looking back on the past, or someone looking ahead to the future? Even if a poet uses an "I" as a speaker, that speaker may have a very different point of view from that of the poet.

The poet is like an invisible puppeteer or someone who manipulates the strings of a marionette and makes the puppet or marionette speak and move. The poet creates the words that the speaker speaks. He or she is the master artist behind the words. When we refer to the feelings or ideas that a poem creates, we refer to the speaker's feelings or ideas, not those of the poet.

UNDERSTANDING POETIC DEVICES

Like all artists, poets have **techniques** to make their art appealing and understandable to the reader. We call these tools **poetic devices**. In the “Glossary of Poetic Terms,” you will find helpful explanations for all the poetic devices and techniques referred to in the questions.

The questions on a poem might ask you to identify and explain the effects of these devices. For example, if a question asks you to find **figures of speech** such as **similes** in a poem, you will need to look for phrases that employ the words *like* or *as*, such as “My heart is like a rose.” After you find the similes and circle them in the poem, you are ready to ask, “What do they make me see or feel?”

The questions might also ask you to put brackets around the main sections of the poem. The sections of the poem, sometimes determined by **stanzas**, sometimes by punctuation, and sometimes only by a slight change in the types of words or **images** in the poem, constitute its **structure**. Like a well-planned house, a poem is built on a solid foundation, and it may have a simple or an intricate architecture. Locating the parts of the poem’s structure is similar to looking at a blueprint for a building. The parts enable you to see how the poet has organized the main ideas of the poem.

THE FIVE SENSES—GETTING THE PICTURE

The language of poetry often appeals to the five senses: sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste. While the last two may appear only rarely in a poem, the first three are very common. Frequently, an “Activity” assignment will ask you to draw a picture of a poem. After you read a poem, try to make a picture in your head, or a series of pictures, that reflect the words of the poem. These pictures are the **imagery** of poetry. Sometimes the imagery involves the process of comparison in **figures of speech** such as **metaphor**, **simile**, or **personification**. These comparisons in figures of speech help you to make sense of the pictures in your head by comparing one thing to another.

If the words use **rhyme** or **rhythm** or repeated consonant or vowel sounds to create a feeling in a poem, you are hearing as well as seeing the picture in your head. Such a poem is like a movie with sound. If the other senses are involved, you may be stepping into the “virtual reality” of a poem. For example, if you can smell as well as picture and hear the skunk in Maxine Kumin’s “The Hermit Meets the Skunk,” you have entered the scene of the poem and have let your senses stimulate your imagination.

When you first read a poem, circle or underline words that appeal to your senses. Write those senses down in the margin of the poem, and they will serve as reminders of how the poem works.

THE READER

Once you have an idea of the picture or the feelings expressed in a poem, you are on your way to interpreting the poem's meaning. Sometimes a question will ask you to *explain* how a specific poetic device works. For example, you might be asked about the **simile** in "My love is like a red, red rose," and you would probably answer that the image uses a direct comparison between the speaker's feeling of love and a beautiful red flower. You might also be asked about something like what a word or title *implies*, or why there is a *contrast* between two images. To respond to such questions, you must figure out how the poem works—how the poetic devices contribute to your understanding of the feelings and ideas expressed in the poem.

A second question might ask you for your *interpretation*, *personal response*, or *opinion*. You are ready for these questions after you have tried to figure out how each piece of the poem fits into the big picture.

A question on *interpretation*, *personal response*, or *opinion* asks you, the reader, to take a stand on the poem. What do you think or feel about a particular subject and why?

USING THE BOOK

Poetry in Three Dimensions is easy to use.

- ◆ Beside the questions that follow each poem, you will find space for writing answers to the questions.
- ◆ The footnotes that accompany the poem will help you to understand difficult words and **allusions**.
- ◆ Before you do your first assignment in the book, examine the Contents to see where you can go to help yourself.
- ◆ The Glossary of Poetic Terms will help you to understand questions that ask you to identify examples of specific devices or techniques in a poem. (These devices or techniques are always indicated in **bold** type.)
- ◆ The Activities section, which follows the poetry sections, contains additional assignments that your teacher may ask you to complete.
- ◆ The section titled About the Poets gives you biographical information about the authors that you may find useful in helping you to understand the **context** of a particular poem.
- ◆ The Index will help you locate authors and titles.

We hope you will find both challenge and pleasure in reading the poems in this book.

Carol Clark and Alison Draper

THE THIRD DIMENSION: RELATIONSHIPS



TIFFANY BERES

The Real Thing

Marilou Awiakta

For Bernice

"We're the most exclusive
Indian shop in New York City.
We only sell the *real thing*."

Coyote-smooth, the man
lured a covey of customers 5
to where he held up a weaving
three feet by two.

"This rug is genuine Navajo.¹
You know it by the tiny flaw
they always leave 10
to let the evil spirit out."

"Ah . . ." sighed the covey
and leaned closer.

Behind them a buckshot laugh
exploded 15
scattered thoughts
turned heads

toward a black-haired
four-square woman.
"I am Navajo," she said. 20

"My family makes rugs.

When I was a child

I herded our sheep
helped mother clean the wool.
Grandma spun and wove it. 25

We don't leave a flaw
'to let the evil spirit out.'
We leave it to show
what's made by humans
can't be perfect. 30

Only the Great Spirit²
makes perfect things."

The covey stared
blank
silent 35

then closed back
to their smooth comfort—
"As I was saying . . .

This rug is genuine Navajo.
You know it by the tiny flaw 40
they always leave
to let the evil spirit out."

1994

1 Navajo — A Native-American tribe occupying an extensive reservation in New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah. Rug weaving is one of the traditions of Navajo culture.

2 Great Spirit — the Supreme Being of the Navajo religion.

Questions for **The Real Thing**

1. Why are the following words especially effective in conveying the speaker's attitude toward the man who is selling rugs in "the most exclusive/Indian shop in New York City" (lines 1–2): "Coyote-smooth" (line 4), "lured" (line 5)? In the second stanza, which words express the speaker's attitude toward the Navajo woman? How is that attitude different from her attitude toward the man selling the rugs and why?

2. What is the specific conflict in the relationship between makers of Navajo rugs and those who sell or buy the rugs? How does the third stanza emphasize that conflict?

First Fight, Then Fiddle

Gwendolyn Brooks (1917–2001)

First fight. Then fiddle. Ply the slipping string¹
With feathery sorcery; muzzle the note
With hurting love: the music that they wrote
Bewitch, bewilder. Qualify to sing
Threadwise.² Devise no salt,³ no hempen⁴ thing 5
For the dear instrument to bear. Devote
The bow to silks and honey.⁵ Be remote
A while from malice and from murdering.
But first to arms, to armor. Carry hate
In front of you and harmony behind. 10
Be deaf to music and to beauty blind.
Win war. Rise bloody, maybe not too late
For having first to civilize a space
Wherein to play your violin with grace.

1949

1 slipping string — a reference to a loose string on a stringed instrument such as a violin or cello.

2 threadwise — careful in the use of the thread or string.

3 Devise no salt — a reference to the association of salt with flavor or passion, which is sometimes painful.

4 hempen — made of hemp, a fiber used to make rope or string.

5 silks and honey — word play on the phrase “a land flowing with milk and honey” from the Bible.

Questions for **First Fight, Then Fiddle**

1. Underline words and phrases in the first eight lines (**octave**) of the poem that show how the speaker wants the violin to be played. What does she mean by “Be remote/A while from malice and from murdering” (lines 7–8)?

2. Underline the speaker’s commands in the last six lines (**sestet**) of the poem. How do they differ from the speaker’s wishes or commands in the first eight lines? How do the poem’s **rhyme scheme** and **structure** reinforce the different ideas presented in each section?

Fifth Grade Autobiography

Rita Dove (1952–)

I was four in the photograph fishing
with my grandparents at a lake in Michigan.
My brother squats in poison ivy.
His Davy Crockett¹ cap
sits squared on his head so the raccoon tail 5
flounces down the back of his sailor suit.

My grandfather sits to the far right
in a folding chair,
and I know his left hand is on
the tobacco in his pants pocket 10
because I used to wrap it for him
every Christmas. Grandmother's hips
bulge from the brush, she's leaning
into the ice chest, sun through the trees
printing her dress with soft 15
luminous paws.

I am staring jealously at my brother;
the day before he rode his first horse, alone.
I was strapped in a basket
behind my grandfather. 20
He smelled of lemons. He's died—

but I remember his hands.

1989

¹ Davy Crockett — (1786–1836) American folk hero known for his abilities as a marksman, bear hunter, and fighter. Elected to Congress, he was known for his homespun stories and wit. Crockett was killed in the eighteenth-century mission of the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas, during a battle for the independence of Texas from Mexico.

Questions for Fifth Grade Autobiography

1. Which specific details in the remembered photograph convey the striking **images** of the four people pictured: the **speaker**, her brother, the grandfather, and the grandmother?

2. Note the space between “He’s died—” (line 21) and “but I remember his hands” (line 22). What idea or feeling does the separation emphasize? Why is the last sentence of the poem especially important in conveying the poem’s meaning?

SEE ACTIVITIES, PAGE 99.

Mother to Son

Langston Hughes (1902–1967)

Well son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up, 5
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I've been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's 10
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps 15
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I've still goin', honey,
I've still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair. 20

1926

Questions for **Mother to Son**

1. What **extended metaphor** does the **speaker** establish in line 2? What do lines 3–7 and lines 10–13 tell you about the kind of experiences the speaker has had in her life?

2. What advice does the **speaker** have for her son?

SEE ACTIVITIES, PAGE 99.