

**CELEBRATING**

**RURAL POETRY**

*In New Hampshire's Secondary Schools*



*A group initiative of ...*

*Plymouth Writing Project*


*National Writing Project*

*Nebraska Writing Project*

*Rural School and Community Trust*



# *Why Poetry?*



*Poems*

*teach.*



*Think  
in  
poems.*

(Cappella, Wormser 2004)



*Feel  
language  
in  
your bones.*

(Cappella, Wormser 2004)



*Read aloud.*

*Think aloud.*

*Pay attention.*



*Poetry is an  
oral art.*



*Poetry is  
an aural  
art.*



# Read...

place-conscious poems aloud  
to your students.

Practice reading them out loud  
to yourself, until they sound  
the way you think the poet  
meant them to sound.

Then read them to students.


They will listen better  
if the beat is authentic  
and the music full of feeling.

**Poetry shouldn't sound  
like any other genre.**



**Read slowly.**

**Every syllable needs  
to be heard.**



Listen quietly and actively.  
Every word matters.

*Poems exist  
in relation to  
silence.*

(Cappella, Wormser 2004)




**According to Robert Frost...**

**words don't live in books--  
they live in mouths.**

(Cappella, Wormser 2004)




*Listen.*



**Historically, poetry  
has been an integral  
part of education.**

**We have dropped  
the ball.**



**Fewer than one  
percent of adult  
Americans pick up a  
book of poetry  
each year.**

(Cappella, Wormser 2004)



# Adrienne Rich

I have never believed that poetry is an escape from history, and I do not think it is more, or less, necessary than food, shelter, health, education, decent working conditions. It is as necessary.

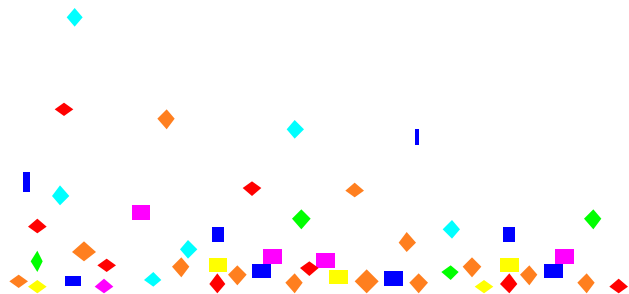
*What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics*





**It is difficult  
to get the news from poems,  
yet men die miserably every day  
for lack  
of what is found there.**

*William Carlos Williams*





# Poetry Every Day

**Improves verbal skills**

**Improves writing skills.**

**Improves vocabulary.**

**Improves spelling.**



# Poetry Every Day

- **Connects students with one another**

- **Connects students with communities**

- **Connects students with the multi-ethnic nature of our world**

- **Connects students with the larger world**





# Poetry Every Day

*Builds confidence*

*Builds self-knowledge*

*Builds community*



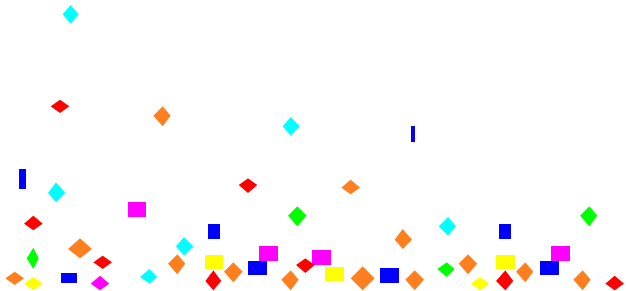
# Place Poetry Every Day

- Honors individual lives

- Honors memory and heritage

- Honors the ordinary...

  - which is extraordinary





*Listen...*


*“Cusp”*

*by Melanie Braverman*



**“Cusp” is a place-conscious  
poem.**

**What makes this so?**




**Braverman uses sound  
devices in “Cusp.”**


**What did you hear?**



*Poems are beautiful,  
but how do they build  
reading,  
writing,  
listening,  
speaking  
skills?*



**Working with  
poetry requires  
intimate,  
deep, and slow  
engagement with  
language.**



**Working with  
place-conscious poetry  
requires intimate,  
deep, and slow  
engagement with the  
unique language  
of one's place.**




Engagement with place poetry  
moves us through...

words,  
to lines,  
to groups of lines,  
to a whole  
that defines a place.



**Active connections with  
language of...  
people  
things  
events  
moments  
memories**



*Listen...look at  
the words,  
the lines,  
the stanzas.*



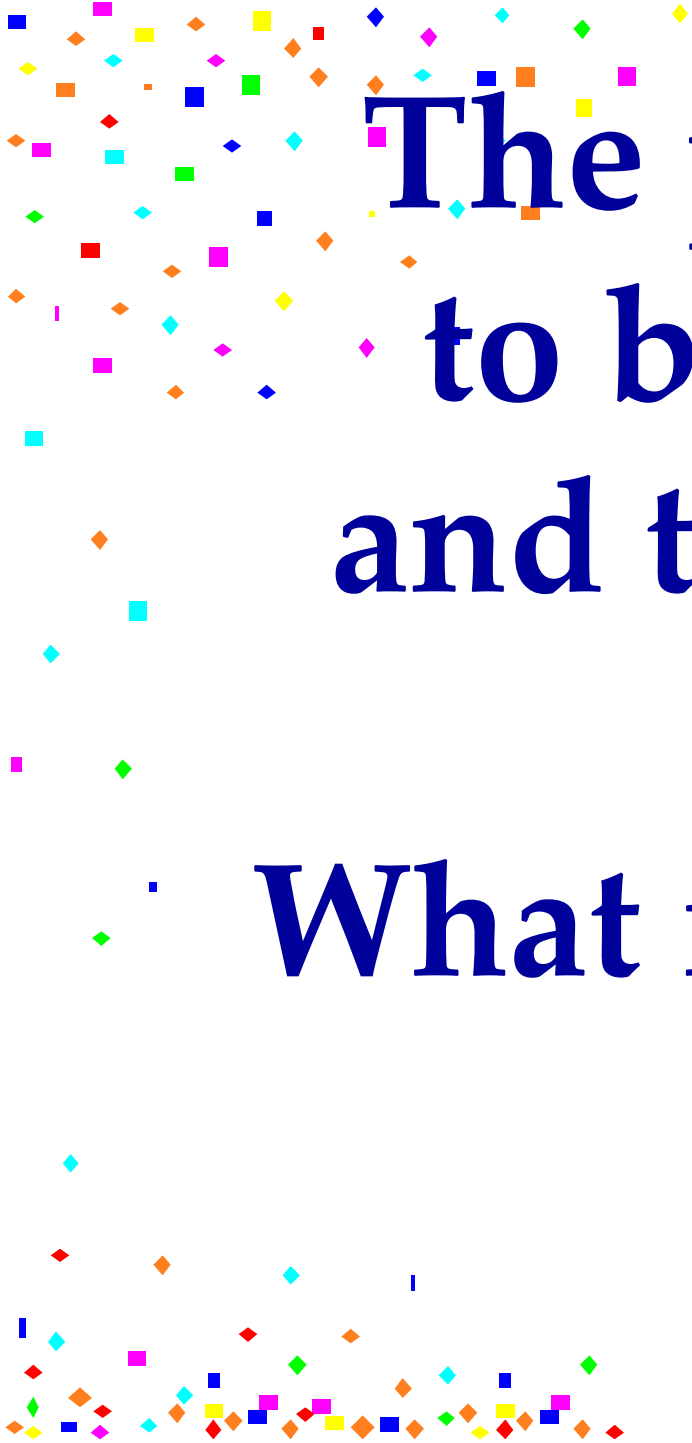
*What is the  
news?*

*What is  
found here?*

All must be remembered:  
A turning wind, the threads  
in the threadbare event must be gathered,  
yard after yard of all we inhabited,  
the train's long trajectory,  
and the trappings of sorrow .

Should a rosebush be lost  
or a hare be confused with the night,  
should the pillars of memory  
topple out of my reach,  
I must remake the air,  
the steam and the soil and the leaves,  
my skin and the bricks in the wall,  
the thorn in my flesh  
and the haste of my flight.

from *V. Sonata Critica*, "Memory," Pablo Neruda



**The poet's work:  
to bear witness  
and to remember.**

**What is the reader's  
work?**



**Neruda's poems are  
place-conscious:**

**Ordinary living  
Ordinary places  
Ordinary days...**

**Extraordinary Poems**



the world of objects at rest

wheels that have crossed

long dusty distances

sacks from the coal bins

barrels and baskets

carpenter's tool chest

contacts of man with the earth

text for all troubled lyricists

the wear hands give to things

air

the reality of the world that

should not be underprized

(Neruda, "Toward An Impure Poetry")






**Prize Place  
Poetry  
Every Day**

**Poetry Notebooks**

**Push revision.**

**Poetry Displays**

**Let them know writing  
poetry is hard work—  
important work-- and  
that you want their  
clearest, strongest voices  
to be heard.**



# Voices of Place



**Place includes all that is local.**

**The Internal**

**and**

**The External**



**people**

**heritage**

**memories**

**landscape**

**all that we love**

**events**

**problems**

**losses**

**history**



*Voice of place is  
the voice of home.*



Value  
the place  
you have  
chosen.



*Let's start now.*

*Listen...*


*Scott Russell Sanders*




*Practice  
what you  
teach*

**Take out paper  
and a pen. Write a  
couple of sentences or  
phrases that begin  
with...**


*The place I  
have chosen...*



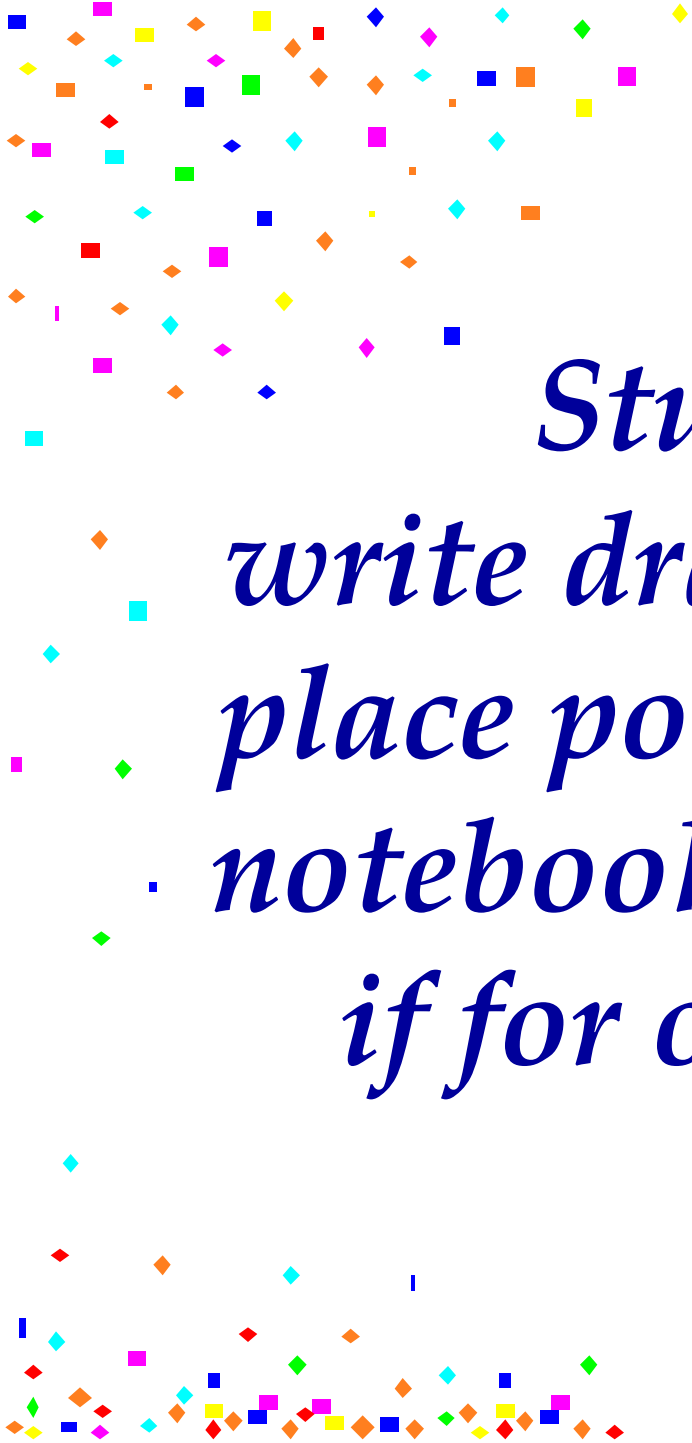
**Let's introduce  
ourselves and  
share what we've  
written  
about our places.**




*Read poems about place  
aloud every day.*



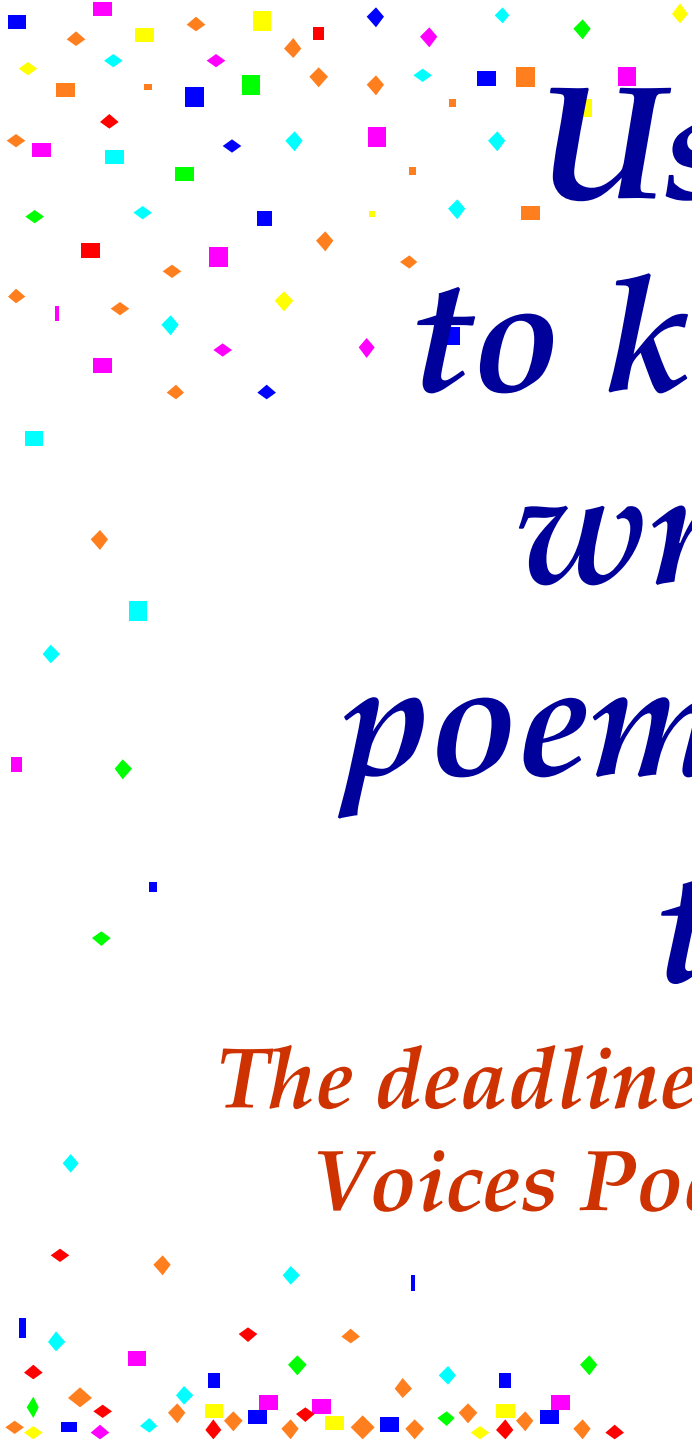
*Set up a schedule.  
Assign students  
to read one  
place-conscious poem  
aloud to the class  
every day.  
Put yourself on the  
schedule, too.*



*Students should  
write drafts or revisions of  
place poems in their poetry  
notebooks every day—even  
if for only ten minutes.*



*Set aside class time  
each week for several  
students to read their  
place poems to  
the class.*



*Use prompts  
to keep students  
writing place  
poems throughout  
the week.*

*The deadline for submission to the Rural  
Voices Poetry Project is March 31<sup>st</sup>.*




*The  
Politics  
of  
Writing  
Prompts*



**Display  
student and teacher  
poems together.**

**Butterfly comments  
in high school?**

**YES!**



**Should we get permission  
to write on the walls  
with sidewalk chalk  
or should we  
just do it?**



*Write a  
place poem  
now  
that you can  
read to your  
students  
next  
week.*

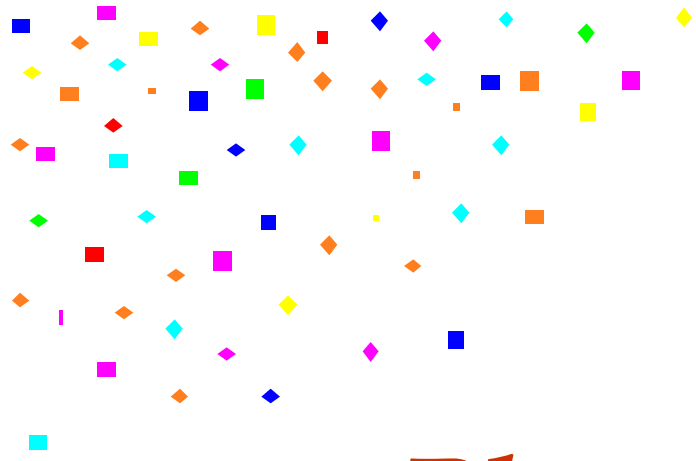
**My place  
fed me life as a  
child. I grew  
like a vine  
wrapping itself  
up and around  
the smooth  
trunk of home.**

*Phip Ross*

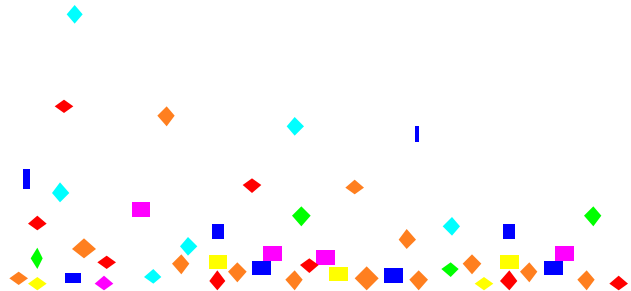


*I grew like...*

**Begin with these words  
and write 4-5 lines  
of poetry you can read  
to your students  
when you go back  
to school.**

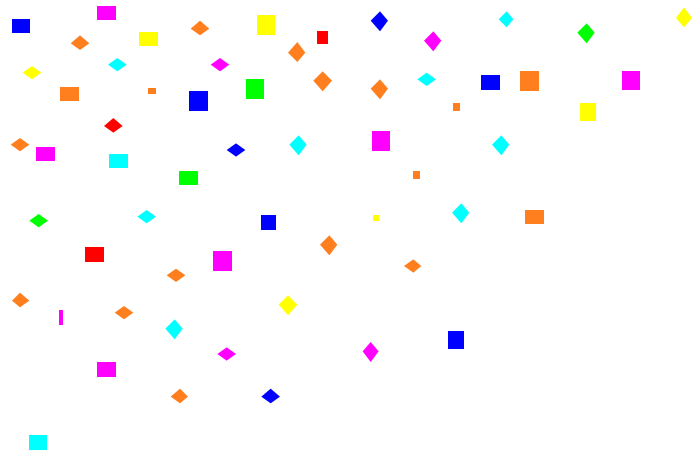


*Place  
Consciousness  
and  
Accountability*

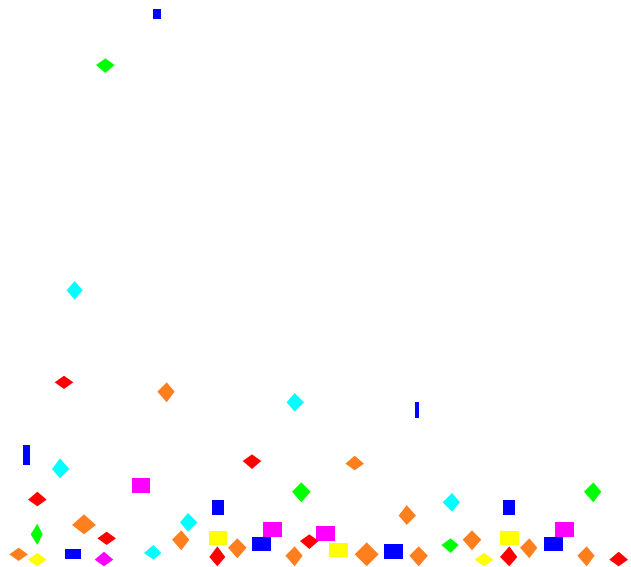


True accountability emerges when students learn how to live well, actively, and fully in a given place.

Meaningful writing and engaged citizenship emerge when teachers embrace place consciousness as a principle.



Place consciousness spirals out  
from local voices to the  
national and international  
world.





Local  
and  
global  
issues  
are  
equally  
relevant.

## And the Iroquois Are in New York

*by Louis Phillips*

The Iraqis  
Don't annoy  
The Iroquois,  
Iroquois  
Don't tease  
The Iraqis.  
If you wish  
Peace to start,  
Keep everybody  
Far apart.



Voices of  
Community

History

Landscape



## A Time to Talk

*by Robert Frost*

When a friend calls to me from the road  
And slows his horse to a meaning walk,  
I don't stand still and look around  
On all the hills I haven't hoed,  
And shout from where I am, What is it?  
No, not as there is time to talk.  
I thrust my hoe in the mellow ground,  
Blade-end up and five feet tall,  
And plod: I go up to the stone wall  
For a friendly visit.

*Selected Poems 1992*



from *Judevine*

by *David Budbill*

In Craftsbury there are two: Raboin's and Humphrey's;  
down in New Hampshire, in West Andover,  
it is Thornley's;  
in Five Islands, Maine,  
it's called Grover's;  
and between Lake Champlain  
and the Atlantic Ocean there has got to be  
a thousand known only as The Corner Store.

Almost all have gas pumps, only some  
have mechanics or a post office  
and I'd wager none  
still have all three.



# *Student Poem: I am from...*

I am from a small farm  
from early irrigation mornings and late harvest nights,  
from ears of sweet corn that fill the large silver pot like children fill a  
school.

I am from mowing lawns and pulling weeds  
from the landscape surrounding my house like the rings of Saturn.  
I am from the tree house around back and sand castles by the swing set.

*from Memories by Megan Luethie, Rural Voices*





## Write What's Right..

Turn to the person beside you. Person on the right speak 3-5 lines or phrases that begin with *I am from*.

Person on the left—write these down.

Speak quickly; let the lines come at random.

## Write What's Left

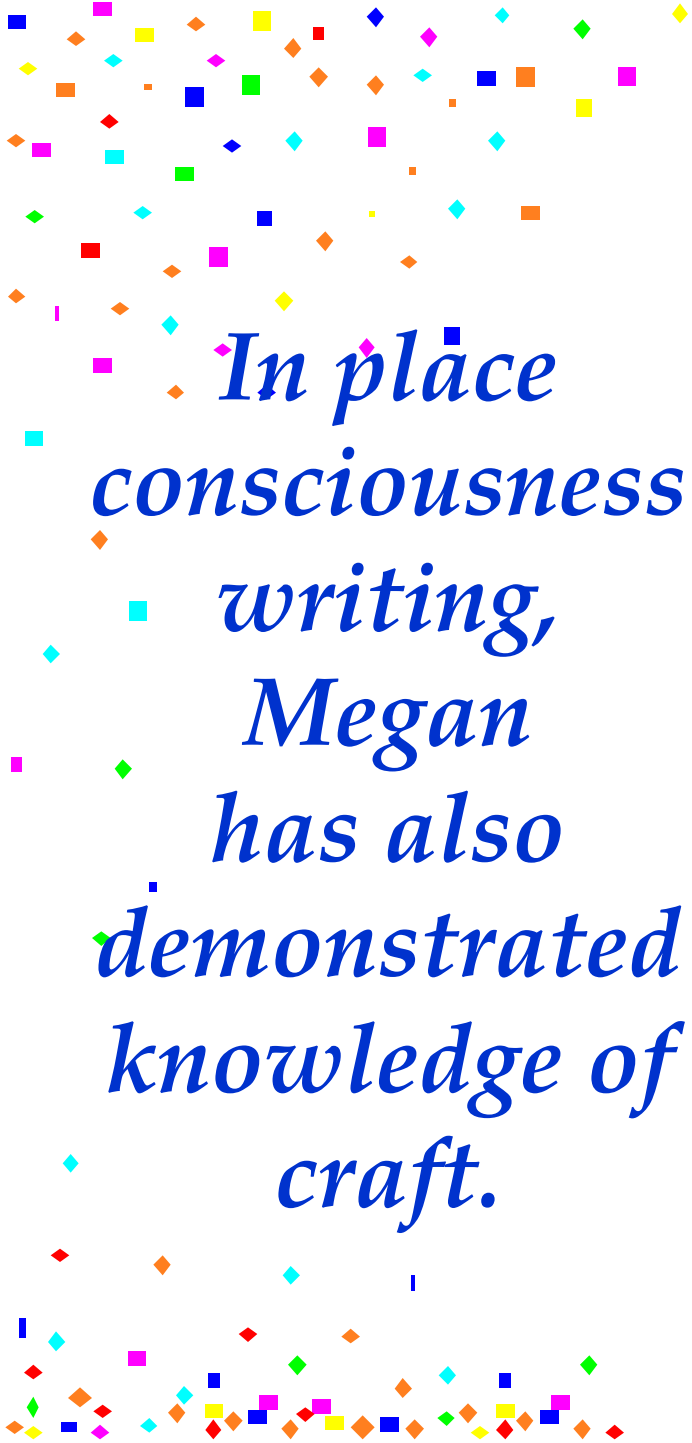
Now switch. Person on the left speak 3-5 lines or phrases that begin with *I am from*. Person on the right, write these down.

## Next...

Quick-write a poem—don't think too much—using the words and/or phrases you've been given. Your poem should be written in third person.

Now read the poems to your group.





*In place  
consciousness  
writing,  
Megan  
has also  
demonstrated  
knowledge of  
craft.*

Megan's poem employs  
many literary elements:  
It is an extended metaphor.  
It uses parallel form.  
It uses long lines.  
It uses simile.  
It uses repetition.  
It uses alliterative language.



*Teach  
as  
you  
go.*

As you teach the use of elements, have students record them in a self-made glossary in their poetry notebooks.

Encourage students to incorporate new elements in each new poem they write. This will help them to find and to trust their own diction and style.



# Voices of Belonging

*Connection*  
*Citizenship*  
*Personal Worth*  
*Mutual Concern*  
*Safety*



## One Time

When evening had flowed between houses  
and paused on the schoolground, I met  
Hilary's blind little sister following  
the gray smooth railing still warm from the sun  
with her hand; and she stood by the edge  
holding her face upward waiting  
while the last light found her cheek  
and her hair, and then on over the trees.

You could hear the great sprinkler arm  
of water find and then leave the pavement,  
and pigeons telling each other their dreams  
or the dreams they would have. We were  
deep in the well of shadow by then, and I  
held out my hand, saying, "Tina, it's me—  
Hilary says I should tell you it's dark,  
and, oh, Tina, it is. Together now—"

And I reached, our hands touched,  
and we found our way home.

*by William Stafford*



*Voice of  
belonging:  
New  
Hampshire  
poet Jane  
Kenyon:  
A memory,  
and then...  
a truth*

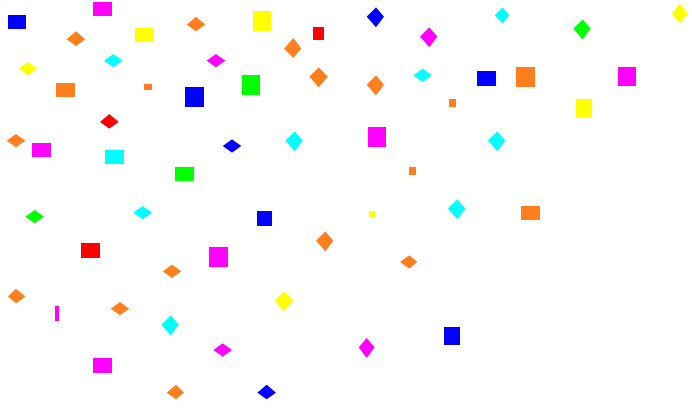
## In the Grove: The Poet at Ten

She lay on her back in the timothy  
And gazed past the doddering  
Auburn heads of sumac.

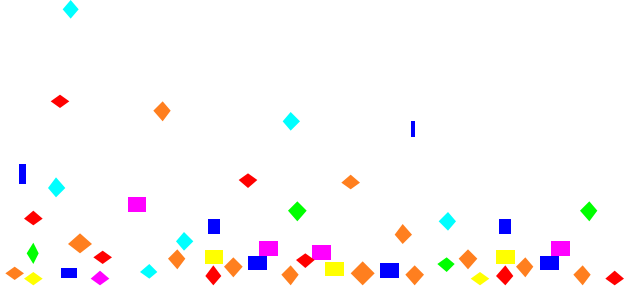
A Cloud—huge, calm,  
And dignified—covered the sun  
But did not, could not, put it out.

The light surged back again.

Nothing could rouse her then  
From that joy so violent  
It was hard to distinguish from pain.



Everyone wants to belong, and there is pain in not belonging. We can use place-based poetry to help students confront difficult issues. In real life, in our world, some people, even children, are lost.





## The Missing Boy

*by Sharon Olds*

Every time we take the bus

my son sees the picture of the missing boy.

He looks at it like a mirror—the dark

blond hair, the pale skin,

the blue eyes, the electric blue sneakers with slashes of jagged gold. But of course that

kid is little, only six and a half,

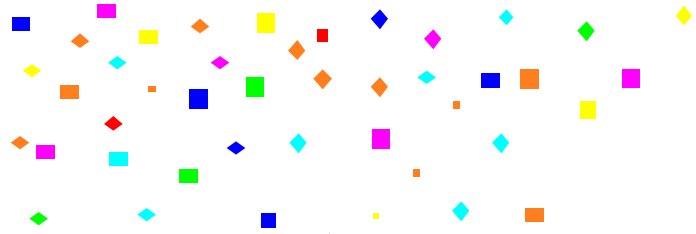
an age when things can happen to you,

when you're really not safe, and our son is seven,

practically full grown—why, he would

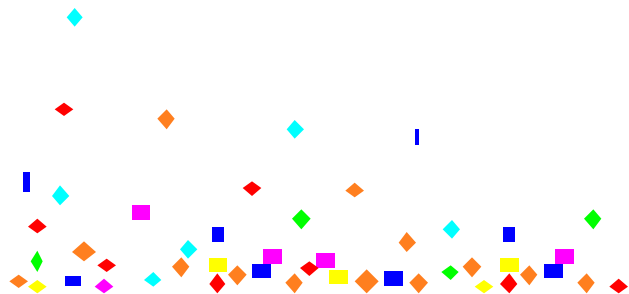
tower over that kid if they could

find him and bring him right here on this bus and



stand them together. He sways in the silence  
wishing for that, the tape on the picture  
gleaming over his head, beginning to  
melt at the center and curl at the edges as it  
ages. At night, when I put him to bed,  
my son holds my hand tight  
and says he's sure that kid's all right,  
nothing to worry about, he just  
hopes he's getting the food he likes,  
not just any old food, but the food  
he likes the most, the food he is used to.

*(The Dead and the Living)*






# *Voices of the Past and the Present*

---

*the people before us  
the people we remember  
the people among us*





# Lineage

*by Margaret Walker*

My grandmothers were strong.  
They followed plows and bent to toil.  
They moved through fields sowing seed.  
They touched earth and grain grew.  
They were full of sturdiness and singing.  
My grandmothers were strong.

My grandmothers are full of memories  
Smelling of soap and onions and wet clay  
With veins rolling roughly over quick hands  
They have many clean words to say.  
My grandmothers were strong.  
Why am I not as they?

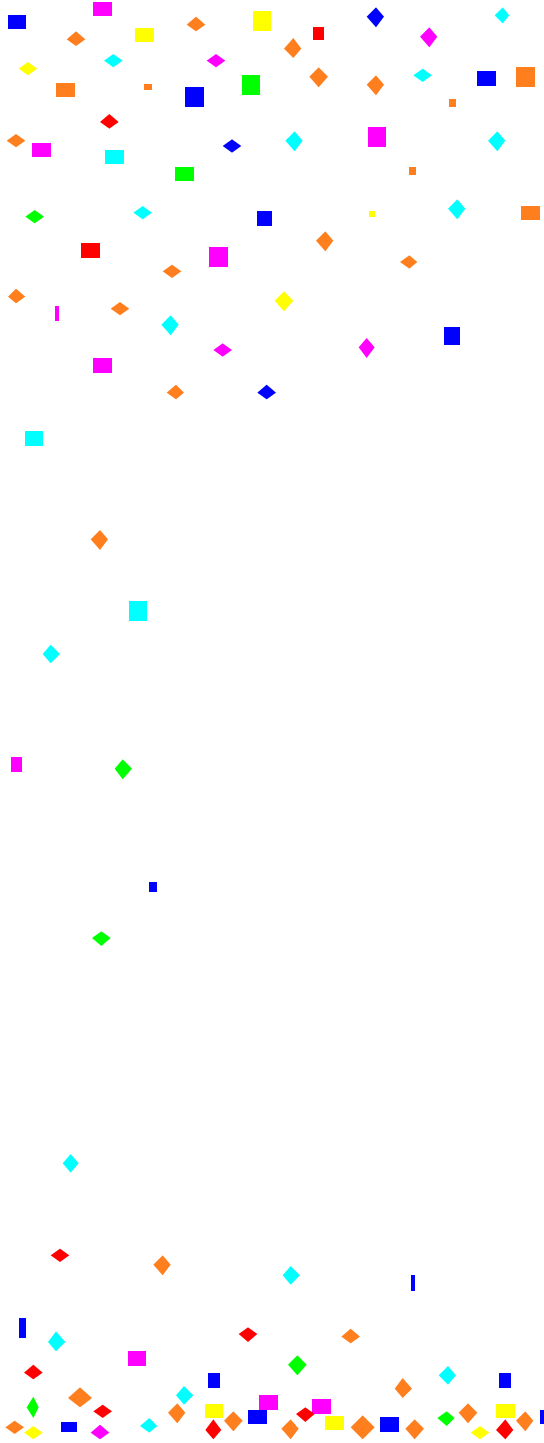


Dear Mom

*by Paul Zimmer*

At last I am able to tell you it was I  
Who started the Great Blizzard of 1940.  
Do you remember? It was a washday.  
I helped you shave soap from bars  
And sprinkle it into hot, gray water.  
We stirred and rinsed the clothes.  
And as I turned the ringer crank  
In heavy steam I made a wish.

Suddenly soap chips spiraled up  
And swirled to grim clouds in the sky.  
Snow came as fleecy powdering  
Then began to split and multiply,  
Driving down hard across our town  
To mount deep, benumbing drifts  
In the streets and over houses.



I remember you struggling with baskets  
Of frozen laundry in the yard,  
Your housedress flapping, face blue  
And pinched with the awful chill.

The storm had come a long way  
To make us feel small,  
Our house trembled in its clutches  
As light drained out of the windows.  
I remember poor Dad frightened,  
Weary, struggling home at last  
In darkness out of the snow blasts.

I regret my rashness and stupidity,  
But I was a child, afraid and stunned  
By what I had caused. It's taken me  
More than fifty years to confess.  
Now it is too late. But even at this  
Impossible hour, I beg your forgiveness.



■ Zimmer's Head Thudding Against the Blackboard

*by Paul Zimmer*

At the blackboard I had missed  
Five number problems in a row,  
And was about to foul a sixth,  
When the old, exasperated nun  
Began to pound my head against  
My six mistakes. When I cried  
She threw me back into my seat,  
Where I hid my head and swore  
That very day I'd be a poet,  
And curse her yellow teeth with this.



*Practice*

*what*

*you*

*teach*

- Write a poem about a person who has been important to you. Be conscious of place. Let what is ordinary become extraordinary.

Use one of the three “person” poems we just read as a template for structure.



# Analysis

- Students who can take a poem apart and interpret it will have better luck writing in the genre.

So how can teachers help students critique place-conscious poems?

## PRACTICE!



Let's  
try  
it.

Work with your  
group to  
analyze the  
poem you've  
been assigned.  
Find it on blue  
paper in your  
packet.



# Guidelines for Group Analysis

Assign a recorder, a reader, and a reporter.

All of the poems are place conscious. Explain what makes this true for your poem.

What is the news (action) in your poem?

What is found there? (poet's message)

What literary devices and strategies has the poet employed to make the poem work?

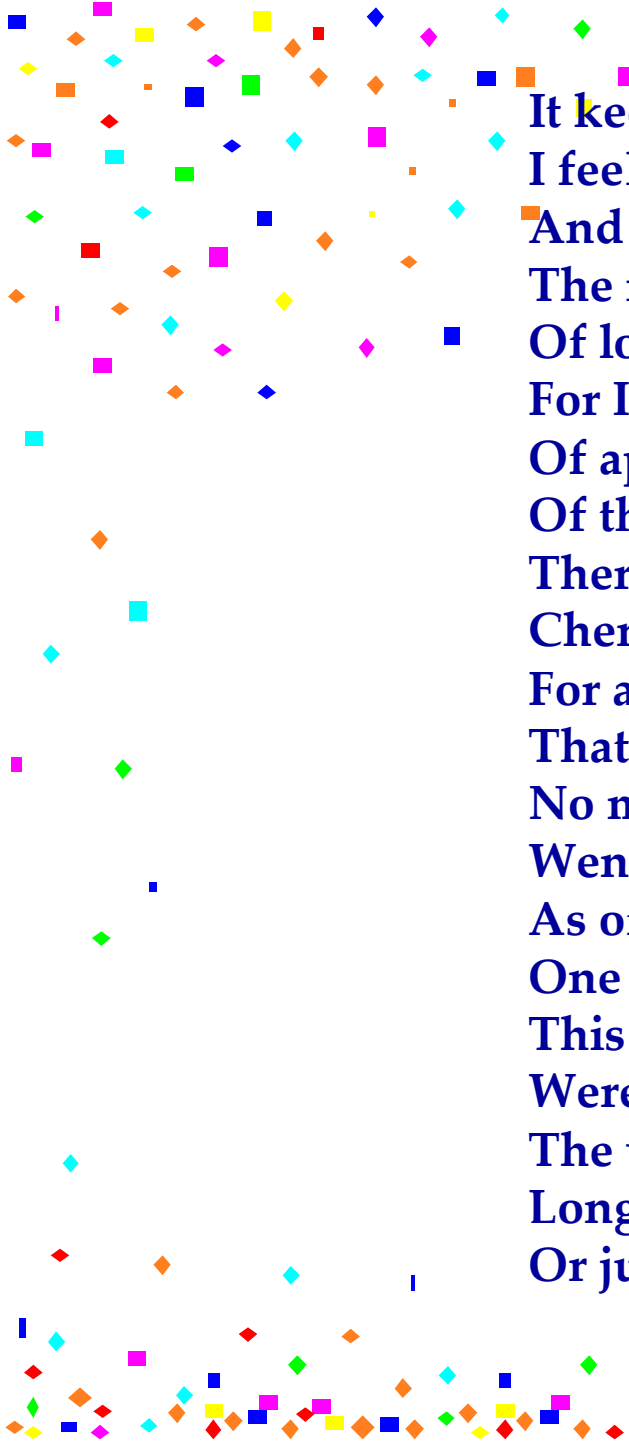




After Apple-Picking

*by Robert Frost*

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree  
Toward heaven still,  
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill  
Beside it, and there may be two or three  
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.  
But I am done with apple-picking now.  
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,  
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.  
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight  
I got from looking through a pane of glass  
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough  
And held against the world of hoary grass.  
It melted, and I let it fall and break.  
But I was well  
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,  
And I could tell  
What form my dreaming was about to take.  
Magnified apples appear and disappear,  
Stem end and blossom end,  
And every fleck of russet showing dear.  
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,



It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.  
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.  
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin  
The rumbling sound  
Of load on load of apples coming in.  
For I have had too much  
Of apple-picking: I am overtired  
Of the great harvest I myself desired.  
There were ten thousand fruit to touch,  
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.  
For all  
That struck the earth  
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,  
Went surely to the cider-apple heap  
As of no worth.  
One can see what will trouble  
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.  
Were he not gone,  
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his  
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,  
Or just some human sleep.



## Kicking the Leaves

Each fall in New Hampshire, on the farm where my mother grew up, a girl in the country, my grandfather and grandmother finished the autumn work, taking the last vegetables in from the cold fields, canning, storing roots and apples in the cellar under the kitchen. Then my grandfather raked leaves against the house as the final chore of autumn.

One November I drove up from college to see them. We pulled big rakes, as we did when we hayed in summer, pulling the leaves against the granite foundations around the house, on every side of the house, and then, to keep them in place, we cut spruce boughs and laid them across the leaves, green on red, until the house was tucked up, ready for snow that would freeze the leaves in tight, like a stiff skirt. Then we puffed through the shed door, taking off boots and overcoats, slapping our hands, and sat in the kitchen, rocking, and drank black coffee my grandmother made, three of us sitting together, silent, in gray November.

*Donald Hall 1978*



## Woodchucks

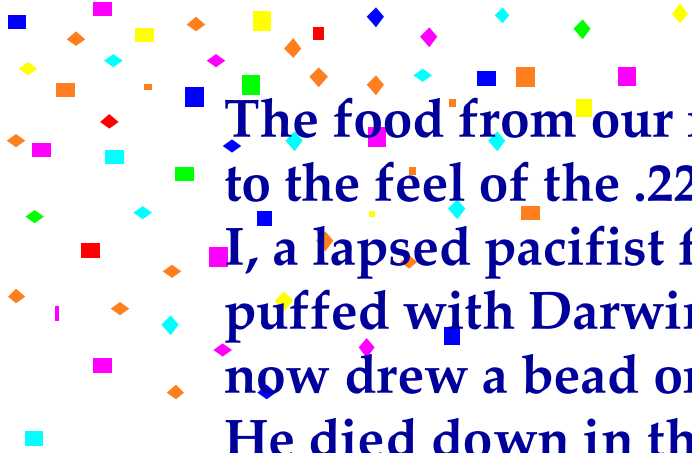
*by Maxine Kumin*

Gassing the woodchucks didn't turn out right.  
The knockout bomb from the Feed and Grain Exchange  
was featured as merciful, quick at the bone  
and the case we had against them was airtight,  
both exits shoehorned shut with puddingstone,  
but they had a sub-sub-basement out of range.

Next morning they turned up again, no worse  
for the cyanide than we for our cigarettes  
and state-store Scotch, all of us up to scratch.  
They brought down the marigolds as a matter of course  
and then took over the vegetable patch  
nipping the broccoli shoots, beheading the carrots.

*more*





The food from our mouths, I said, righteously thrilling  
to the feel of the .22, the bullets' neat noses.

I, a lapsed pacifist fallen from grace  
puffed with Darwinian pieties for killing,  
now drew a bead on the little woodchuck's face.  
He died down in the everbearing roses.

Ten minutes later I dropped the mother. She  
flip-flopped in the air and fell, her needle teeth  
still hooked in a leaf of early Swiss chard.

Another baby next. O one-two-three  
the murderer inside me rose up hard,  
the hawk-eye killer came on stage forthwith.

There's one chuck left. Old wily fellow, he keeps  
me cocked and ready day after day after day.

All night I hunt his humped-up form. I dream  
I sight along the barrel in my sleep.

If only they'd all consented to die unseen  
gassed underground the quiet Nazi way.





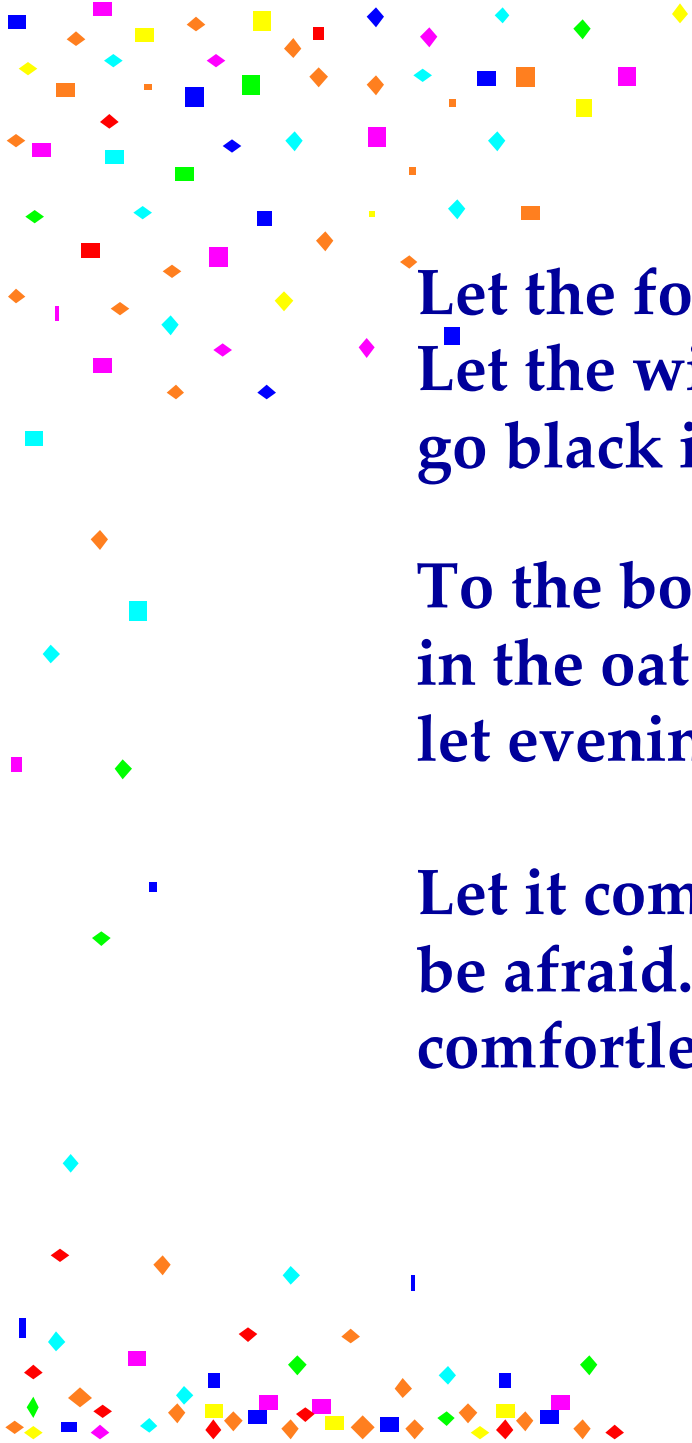
## Let Evening Come

*by Jane Kenyon*

Let the light of late afternoon  
shine through chinks in the barn, moving  
up the bales as the sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing  
as a woman takes up her needles  
and her yarn. Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned  
in long grass. Let the stars appear  
and the moon disclose her silver horn.



Let the fox go back to its sandy den.  
Let the wind die down. Let the shed  
go black inside. Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop  
in the oats, to air in the lung  
let evening come.

Let it come, as it will, and don't  
be afraid. God does not leave us  
comfortless, so let evening come.



## The Fence

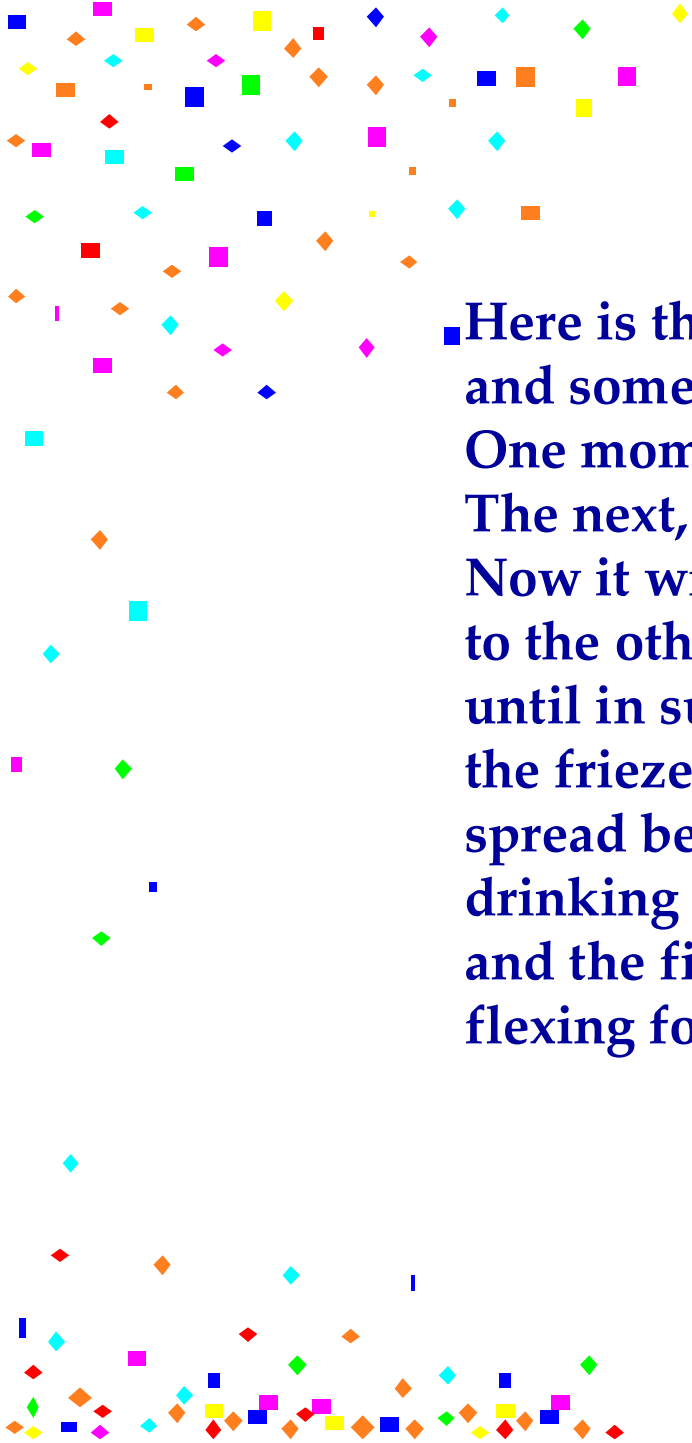
*by Louise Erdrich*

Then one day the gray rags vanish  
and the sweet wind rattles her sash.

Her secrets bloom hot. I'm wild for everything.  
My body is a golden armor around my unborn child's  
body,  
and I'll die happy, here on the ground.

I bend to the mixture of dirt, chopped hay,  
grindings of coffee from our dark winter breakfasts.  
I spoon the rich substance around the acid-loving  
shrubs.

I tear down last year's drunken vines,  
pull the black rug off the bed of asparagus  
and lie there, knowing by June I'll push the baby out  
as easily as seed wings fold back from the cotyledon,  
I see the first leaf already, the veined tongue  
rigid between the thighs of the runner beans.  
I know how the shoot will complicate itself  
as roots fill the trench.



■ Here is the link fence, the stem doubling toward it,  
and something I've never witnessed.  
One moment the young plant trembles on its stalk.  
The next, it has already gripped the wire.  
Now it will continue to climb, dragging rude blossoms  
to the other side  
until in summer fruit like green scimitars,  
the frieze of vines, and then the small body,  
spread before me in need  
drinking light from the shifting wall of my body,  
and the fingers, tiny stems wavering to mine,  
flexing for the ascent.

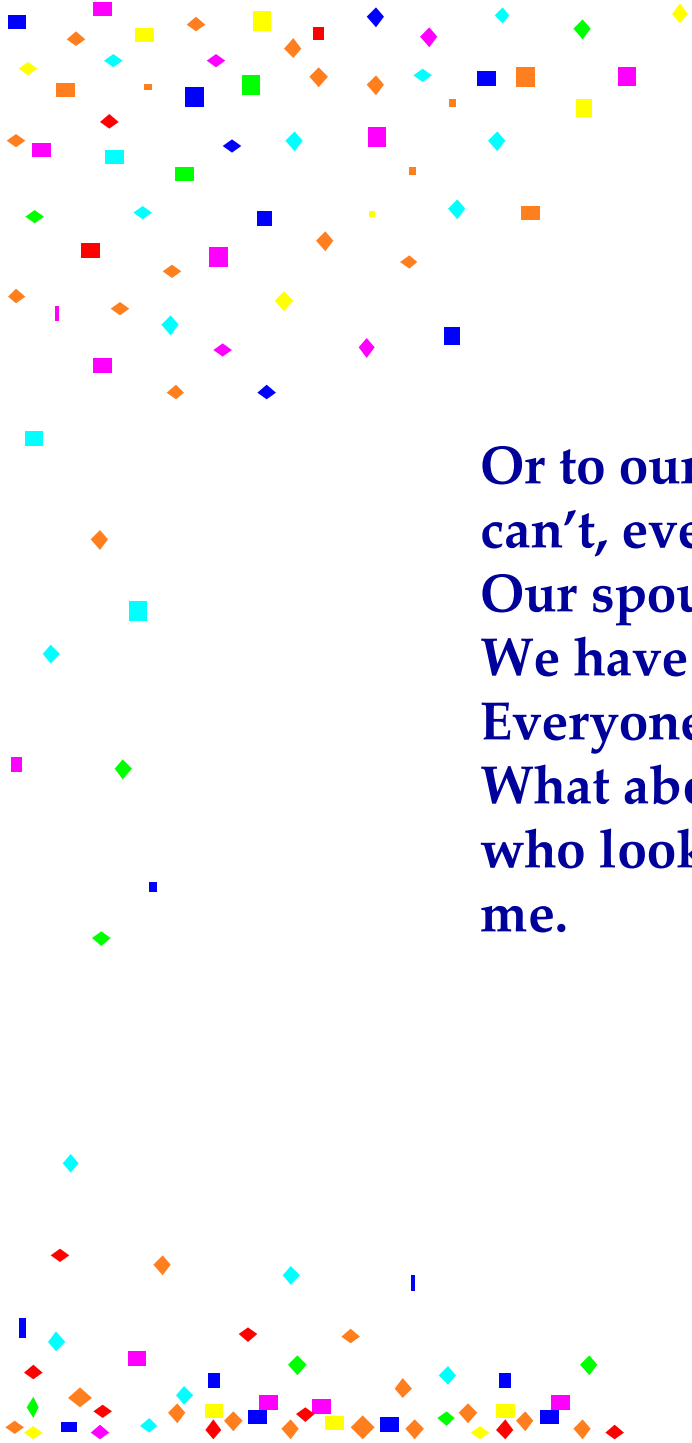
*(Original Fire: Selected and New Poems 2003)*



**The Man Splitting Wood in the Daybreak**

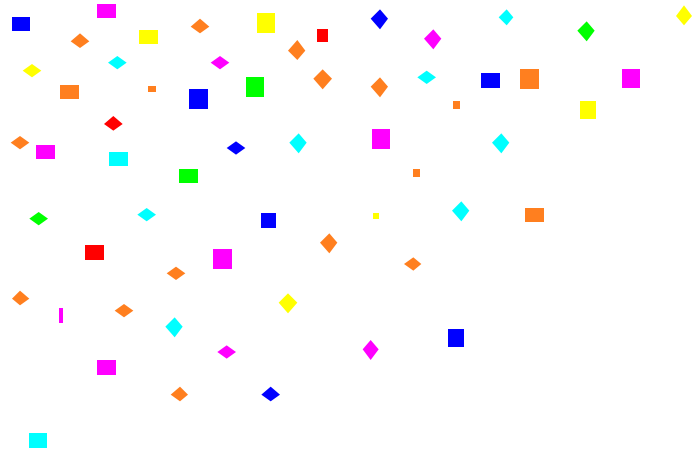
by Galway Kinnell

The man splitting wood in the daybreak  
looks strong, as though, if one weakened,  
one could turn to him and he would help.  
Gus Newland was strong. When he split wood  
he struck hard, flashing the bright steel  
through air of daybreak so fast rock maple  
leapt apart—as they think marriages will  
in countries about to institute divorce—  
and even willow, which, though stacked  
to dry a full year, on separating  
actually weeps—totem wood, therefore,  
to the married-until-death—miseried asunder  
with many small lip-smacking gasp noises.  
But Gus is dead. We could turn to our fathers,  
but they protect us only through the unperplexed  
looking-back of the numerals cut into their headstones.



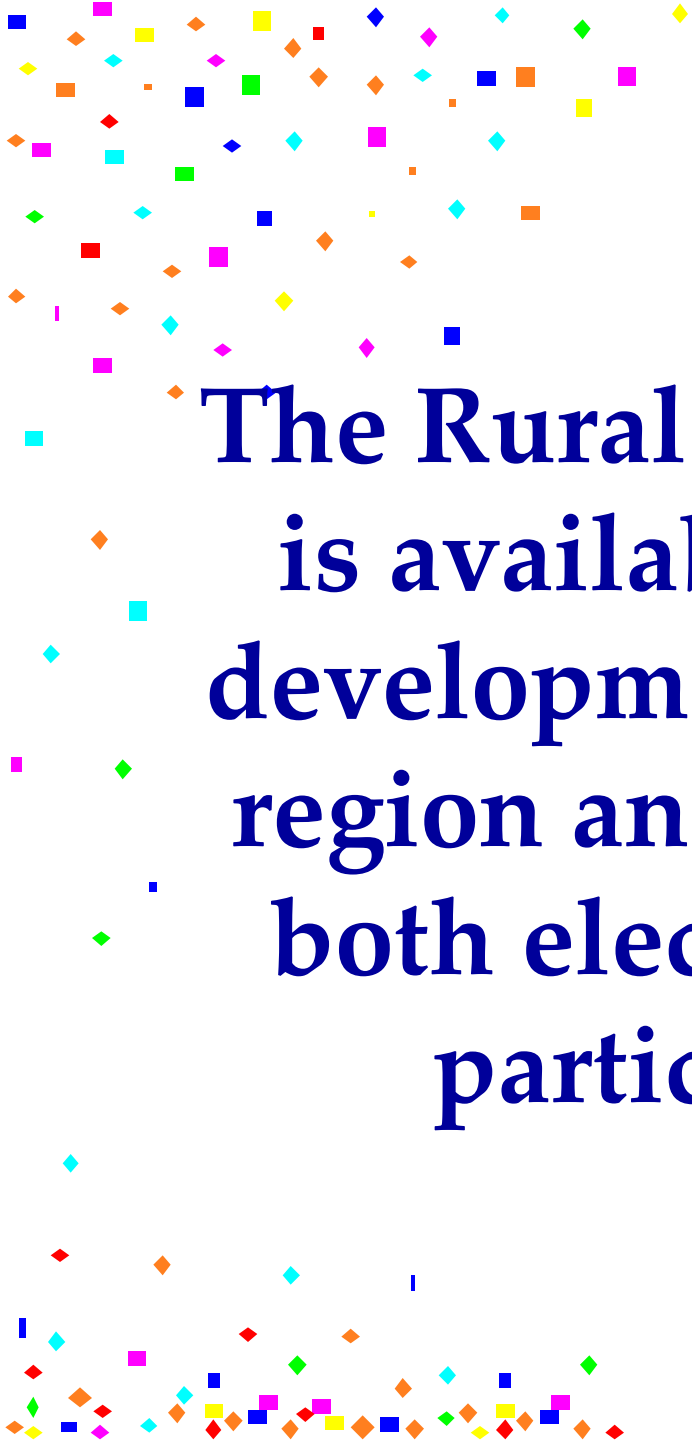
Or to our mothers, whose love, so devastated,  
can't, even in spring, break through the hard earth.  
Our spouses weaken at the same rate we do.  
We have to hold our children up to lean on them.  
Everyone who could help goes or hasn't arrived.  
What about the man splitting wood in the daybreak,  
who looked strong? That was years ago. That was  
me.

(Contemporary American Poetry 1990)



*Where we go from here.*





**The Rural Voices Poetry Project  
is available to present a staff  
development workshop in your  
region and to provide support,  
both electronic and onsite, to  
participating teachers.**



*We need  
regional leaders.*



# Regions

*Great North Woods*

*White Mountains*

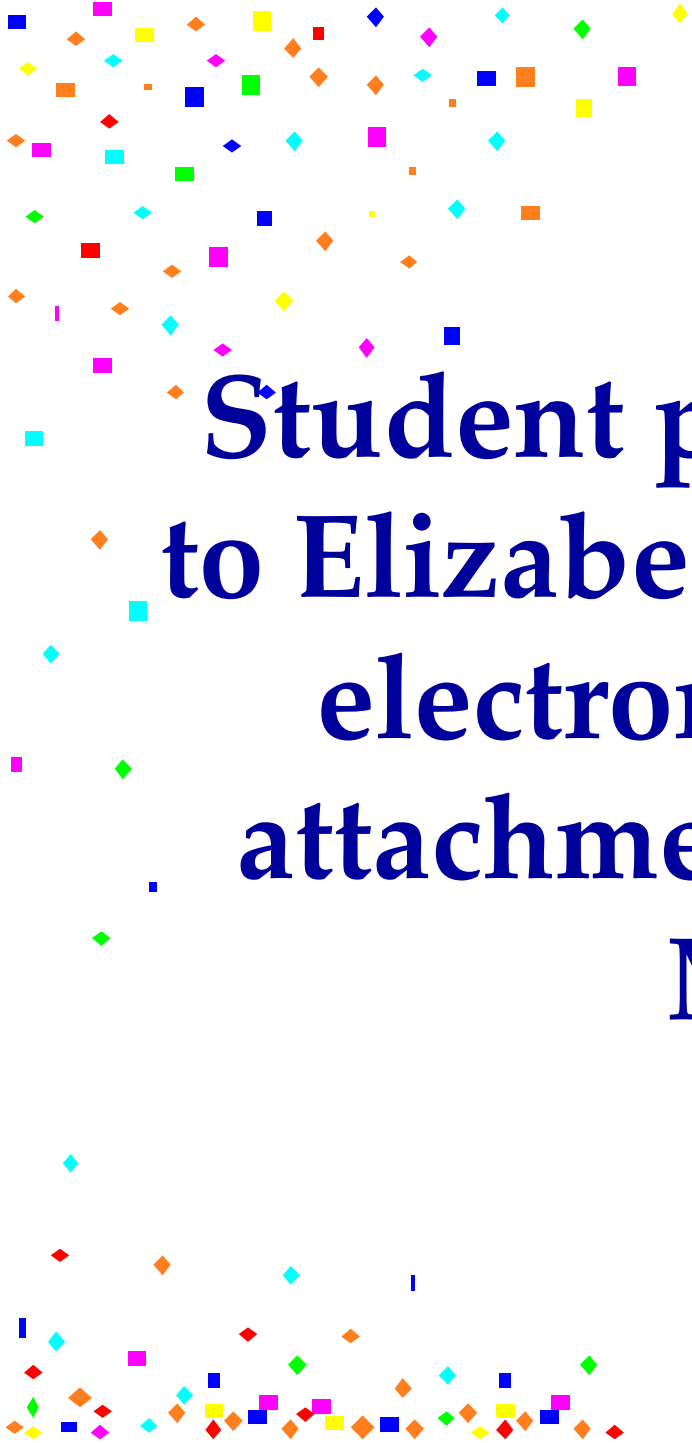
*Lakes*

*Monadnock*

*Merrimack Valley*

*Seacoast*

*Dartmouth-Lake Sunapee*



**Student poems must be sent  
to Elizabeth Jane Whittington  
electronically—as Word  
attachments—no later than  
March 31<sup>st</sup>.**



Published works quoted or paraphrased in this presentation include:

Braverman, Melanie. Red. 1989

Brooke, Robert E. *Rural Voices: Place Conscious Education and the Teaching of Writing*. National Writing Project. 2003

Budbill, David. Judevine. 1969

Cappella, David, Wormser, Baron. *A Surge of Language: Teaching Poetry Day by Day*. 2004

Erdrich, Louise. *Original Fire*. 2003

Frost, Robert. *Selected Poems*. 1992

Hall, Donald. *Kicking the Leaves*. 1978

Kenyon, Jane. *Let Evening Come*. 1990

Kinnell, Galway. *Imperfect Thirst*. 1994

Kumin, Maxine. *Up Country*. 1972

Neruda, Pablo. *Five Decades: Poems 1925-1970*. 1974

Olds, Sharon. *The Dead and the Living*. 1994

Rich, Adrienne. *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics*. 1993

Sanders, Scott R. *Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World*. 1993

Stafford, William. *Learning to Live in the World: Earth Poems*. 1994.

Walker, Margaret. *For My People*. 1942

Zimmer, Paul. *Crossing to Sunlight*. 1996

