

Dear Teachers,

In honor of William Stafford's centennial birthday, Ooligan Press has organized a statewide writing competition for seventh through twelfth-graders. We are launching the competition in October 2012 and will collect submissions throughout the year. We aim to publish the students' work by January of 2014 to coincide with the yearlong celebration of William Stafford's birth.

We at Ooligan are excited and pleased to be able to provide this opportunity for Oregon students. We believe that the beauty, grace, and substance of Stafford's poetry will speak to the students, and that the opportunity to be published will stimulate them to write.

William Stafford (1914–1993) was one of the most prolific and important American poets of the last half of the twentieth century. Among his many credentials, Stafford served as a consultant in poetry at the Library of Congress, and received the National Book Award for his poetry collection *Traveling through the Dark* (1963). During his lifetime, Stafford wrote over sixty books of poetry that still resonate with scholars and general readers. Stafford's perspectives on peace, the environment, and education serve as some of the most articulate and engaging dialogues by a modern American writer about three of the most important issues of the second half of the twentieth century ([williamstaffordarchives.org](http://williamstaffordarchives.org)).

Ooligan Press is a teaching press dedicated to the art and craft of publishing. Affiliated with Portland State University, the press is staffed by students pursuing master's degrees in an apprenticeship program under the guidance of a core faculty of publishing professionals.

We are a general trade publisher rooted in the rich literary tradition of the Pacific Northwest. A region widely recognized for its unique and innovative sensibilities, this small corner of America is one of the most diverse in the United States, comprising urban centers, small towns, and wilderness areas. Its residents range from ranchers, loggers, and small business owners to scientists, inventors, and corporate executives. From this wealth of culture, Ooligan Press aspires to discover works that reflect the values and attitudes that inspire so many to call the Northwest their home.

We are looking forward to this project and hope you will join us. If you have any questions, please contact [wsproject@ooliganpress.pdx.edu](mailto:wsproject@ooliganpress.pdx.edu)

Sincerely,

Ooligan Press

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Portland, Oregon 97201  
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<http://ooligan.pdx.edu/poetry/william-stafford-project/>

## Packet Contents

1. Lesson plans
2. Poems and essay
3. Permissions/consent for publication form
4. Contact form
5. Mailing Checklist

## Competition and Submission Requirements

Ooligan has provided sixteen poems and one essay for use in this competition. Because of the legalities in obtaining poem permissions, we can only publish student work inspired by the sixteen poems and one essay included in this packet.

We have also provided three teaching plans; however, please feel free to use your own lesson plans or prompts. The lesson plans provided correlate directly to the included poems and have been generously provided to us by the William Stafford Archives, Erin Ocón, Stacy Erickson, Robin Scialabba.

1. Students must be currently enrolled in seventh through twelfth grade.
2. Students must use their own writing.
3. Works must be inspired by the poems and/or essay provided.
4. Each teacher may send up to ten submissions, but no more than one submission from any individual student.
5. Teachers must provide a permissions form, signed by the student and their legal guardian, for each piece of writing.
6. Teachers must send in a completed submissions packet (please include all students' work in one packet) to be eligible. A checklist is provided with this packet.

## Deadlines

There are two deadlines for submission. All submissions must be mailed, and must include both a hard copy and a compact disc with the students' work, to ensure each student has given the appropriate permissions. Teachers who are submitting multiple student entries may send one disc with all included submissions.

- Winter deadline: Received by January 31, 2012
- Spring Deadline: Received by April 31, 2013

We will respond to each student with an acceptance or rejection letter within three months of their submission.

## Contact Information

County \_\_\_\_\_

District \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

School Address \_\_\_\_\_

Room Number \_\_\_\_\_

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Grade currently enrolled in \_\_\_\_\_

Student Phone Number (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Student email address \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher Name \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher Phone Number (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher email address \_\_\_\_\_

This information is private and will be used for contact only by Ooligan Press.

I would like to continue to receive updates on this project.

## Permission/Consent for Publication

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Guardian Name \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby authorize Ooligan Press use the following original—written or created entirely by me—work(s):

story or essay titled \_\_\_\_\_

poem titled \_\_\_\_\_

artwork titled \_\_\_\_\_

photograph of me \_\_\_\_\_

If the students or teaching staff would like to include pictures of themselves or the students please identify the name of the student(s) and staff from left-right.

In the publication tentatively titled *William Stafford Project* and in materials related to its design, production, and marketing. Also, the work or photographs may be published and republished, either separately or in connection with each other, in materials developed by Ooligan Press. I certify that this is my original work and understand that the copyright of the work resides with me.

I prefer not to be identified by full (first and last) name.

Use instead \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Consent on behalf of a minor: [I] [we] certify that [I am] [we are] the parent[s] or person[s] legally appointed the guardian[s] of the above signator of this instrument, a minor person, and that [I] [we] also hereby give the consents and make the authorization detailed above.

I prefer the minor not to be identified by full (first and last) name.

Use instead \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent or Guardian)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent or Guardian)

## Teacher Checklist for Submissions

### Before mailing: Do you have these things?

- Permissions form for each student
- Typed submissions in word format
- Disc with students work in word format
- Contact information for teacher and student

### Are pictures included?

- Yes-format in jpeg on a disc and include identification of all persons in photograph in a caption or Word document

Make sure all students included in the photograph have checked the “photograph of me” portion of the permissions

## **William Stafford Poetry Unit and Lesson Plans**

### **Objectives:**

- Discuss William Stafford's poetry.
- Examine William Stafford's revision process.
- Write new poetry based on William Stafford's poems.
- Write about nature, and how it is connected to thoughts and feelings.

### **Basic Agenda:**

Each day will begin with a free write. Some days the students might be completely free to choose their topic (there will be a student-generated list on the bulletin board of possible choices if they get stuck) while other days they will write on a prompt.

1. Background information or background vocabulary (if needed)
2. Read Poem
3. Short presentation or discussion on Stafford's revision
4. Discussion Questions / Student Response Time
5. Student poem writing time
6. Student poem sharing time

### **Lesson One: William Stafford and his Writing Process**

To begin our unit on William Stafford, I divide the class into eight small groups. Each small group examines one paragraph of prose by William Stafford about writing and the writing process. I call these paragraphs Stafford's "writing advice."

Each group spends a class period reading the paragraph and preparing a brief presentation for the class in which they summarize Stafford's thoughts and add their own thoughts on what he said. Each group makes a poster on butcher paper that can be posted around the room to remind us of Stafford's words.

Two groups present at the start of class for four days in a row, and while these groups present the rest of the class takes notes on the presentations.

We constantly refer back to these notes throughout the Stafford unit, and at the end of the unit, students write on the following prompt: What William Stafford writing advice did you use throughout this unit? What William Stafford writing advice could you improve on?

## Agenda:

1. Re-introduce free writes. Discuss “expectations” of them.
2. Free write time. Prompt: Poetry.
3. Share free writes. (Highlight vocabulary that may come up like “metaphor,” “simile”, “six senses of poetry”. Or, bring them up if they don’t come up!)
4. Who is William Stafford? Mini-lesson (power point/lecture).
5. Small groups examine William Stafford’s writing advice (prose writings on his writing process. Each group will have about one paragraph to read and a set of questions to help prepare a short 2 – 3 minute presentation to the class). Each group will prepare a presentation that will be given over the next few days in class. Teachers may want to have groups create posters, or write notes on index cards.

### Notes:

This does not follow our basic lesson format, as it is the first day.

As our days studying Stafford go on, two groups will present at the start of every class on the writing advice they read (so, this will take a total of four class days).

### Materials Needed:

- Handout I’ve typed of Writing Advice for each group (**included on the next page**), cut into small sections for students to read.
- Blank Note cards for students to write on, or butcher paper for posters, or both

## **Presentation Group #1**

I don't believe that the most profitable way to become a writer is to seek intense experiences. If you write, things will occur to you. The activity of writing will make things occur to you in your mind. You write the documentary that you think, rather than the documentary that you live. When you write, it doesn't make so very much difference what you have done, or intend to do, but it makes quite a bit of difference what occurs to you at the moment you're writing. —From William Stafford's "Five Footnotes to 'Traveling through the Dark'"

### **Key Vocabulary:**

Documentary: re-creating an actual event (this can be done through movies, TV, writing, music...)

### **Key Thinking to Share with the class:**

1. Does Stafford think you have to have lots of interesting and unique experiences in order to be a good writer?
2. What does he think you have to do to be a good writer?
3. How do you feel about this?
4. Anything else you want to share about this?

## **Presentation Group #2**

The things that occur to you. You know, you start to tell someone something. There are some things you think are more worth telling than others. You get home and someone says, "What happened?" You start to tell them. Sometimes you don't know why it is that this seems important to you, but if you start to tell it, and then you tell the things that make you feel a certain way about it, it begins to be more. That's what writing is. You say something, and then something else adds to it. —From William Stafford's "Five Footnotes to 'Traveling through the Dark'"

### **Key Thinking to Share with the class:**

1. What does Stafford think writing is?
2. Do you agree with him that "there are some things you think are more worth telling than others"?
3. Does Stafford think that you should just re-tell an event? What else should you add to the event?
4. Anything else you want to share about this?

### **Presentation Group #3**

When I write, I like to have an interval before me when I am not likely to be interrupted. For me, this means usually the early morning, before others are awake. I get pen and paper, take a glance out of the window (often it is dark out there), and wait. It is like fishing. But I do not wait very long, for there is always a nibble – and this is where receptivity comes in. To get started I will accept anything that occurs to me. —From William Stafford’s “A Way of Writing”

#### **Key Vocabulary:**

Receptivity: Being able to take in/listen to ideas and knowledge.

#### **Key Points to Share with the Class:**

1. How does William Stafford write?
2. What is his metaphor for writing? How is writing like this?
3. How is this the same or different from how you already write?
4. Any other thoughts you want to share about this?

### **Presentation Group #4**

Something always occurs, of course, to any of us. We can't keep from thinking. Maybe I have to settle for an immediate impression: it's cold, or hot, or dark, or bright, or in between! Or – well, the possibilities are endless. If I put down something, that thing will help the next thing come, and I'm off. If I let the process go on, things will occur to me that were not at all in my mind when I started. These things, odd or trivial as they may be, are somehow connected. And if I let them string out, surprising things will happen. —From William Stafford’s “A Way of Writing”

#### **Key Vocabulary:**

Trivial: Of little importance; ordinary, common.

#### **Key Points to Share with the Class:**

1. If William Stafford thinks of something (in other words, if something occurs to him) does he always write it down?
2. Why does William Stafford write down even trivial things?
3. Do you already do this? Can you think of examples of times we've done this in class?
4. Any other thoughts you want to share about this?

## Presentation #5

I must be willing to fail. If I am to keep on writing, I cannot bother to insist on high standards. I must get into action and not let anything stop me, or even slow me much.

I am making something new, something that has not been judged before. Later others – and maybe I myself – will make judgments. Now, I am headlong to discover. Any distraction may harm the creating.—From William Stafford’s “A Way of Writing”

### Key Vocabulary:

Standards: A requirement that things are expected to live up to.

Headlong: Quickly, without stopping to think about it.

### Key Points to Share with the Class:

1. Does William Stafford have high standards for his free writes? Why is this?
2. What would it look like if someone were “headlong to discover” when they were free-writing?
3. Will he go back and look at (judge) his writing later?
4. Any other thoughts you want to share about this?

## Presentation #6

So, receptive, careless of failure, I spin out things on the page. And a wonderful freedom comes. If something occurs to me, it is all right to accept it. It has one justification: it occurs to me. No one else can guide me. I must follow my own weak, wandering, diffident impulses.—From William Stafford’s “A Way of Writing”

### Key Vocabulary:

Justification: something that defends what you or someone else did (Example: Her justification for lying was that she didn’t want to hurt her feelings).

Diffident: Not confident; shy.

### Key Points to Share with the Class:

1. Describe how William Stafford writes.
2. How does he defend his writing choices? Does he need to defend them?
3. Does William Stafford think he has great impulses (ideas) of what to write?
4. Any other thoughts you want to share about this?

## Presentation #7

Yet another attitude I find necessary: most of what I write, like most of what I say in casual conversation, will not amount to much...It will be like practice. In conversation I allow myself random remarks – in fact, as I recall, that is the way I learned to talk – so in writing I launch many expendable efforts. —From William Stafford’s “A Way of Writing”

### Key Vocabulary:

Expendable: Not worth keeping; okay to be sacrificed.

### Key Points to Share with the Class:

- Does William Stafford use all of his free writing?
- If he doesn’t use it all, why do you think he writes it?
- When have you done this in the past?
- Any other thoughts on this?

## Presentation #8

Writers may not be special – sensitive or talented in any usual sense. They are simply engaged in sustained use of a language skill we all have. Their “creations” come about through confident reliance on stray impulses that will, with trust, find occasional patterns that are satisfying.—From William Stafford’s “A Way of Writing”

### Key Vocabulary:

Sustained: Over a long period of time.

Reliance: Confident dependence (Example: Your dog has reliance on you to feed him every day).

Impulses: Sudden urge, without a lot of thinking.

### Key Points to Share with the Class:

- What does William Stafford think a writer is?
- What does William Stafford think a writer should depend on?
- How is this like or unlike what you have heard about writing in the past?
- Any other thoughts on this?

## Lesson Two: “Traveling through the Dark”

### First free write prompts: Choose one – dark, deer, roads, decisions

- 1.) Background vocabulary: what does it mean to swerve? Pair share – class share – write definition on board
- 2.) Read “Traveling through the dark”
- 3.) Look at first draft and final draft (in the first draft, he does not have the final line about pushing the deer). Why do you think he included this later? Why might he have not had it at first? Which version do you like better?

Class discussion.

- 4.) Discussion questions: craft – list the words he uses that help create the mood or that feel powerful to you. Share with group.

Discussion questions: content – Why did Stafford make the decision that he did? Was it an easy decision for him?

What decision would you have made?

Write in notebook. Share with group.

- 5.) Student poem:

Show example of the poem I wrote in response (highlighting writing process)

Some choices that connect with “Travelling through the Dark”:

A time you had to make a tough decision (possible starting line = I thought hard...)

A story you have that takes place in the dark (possible starting line = \_\_\_\_\_ through/in the dark...)

A story you have about a road or a roadside (possible starting line = Traveling through...)

Writing hints: Choose your words carefully to help create the mood. Build suspense about what happens at the end. Don't tell us the ending until the very last line.

- 6.) Share student poems (each student shares their end line with the class. Then, students who would like to share their whole poem).

**Notes:** Anticipated time period is 2 days (50 minute classes)

**Materials Needed:** Copies of “Traveling through the Dark”

## Lesson Three: “Level Light and Fall Wind”

- 1.) Background vocabulary: review meanings of compare and contrast. Today, we will compare and contrast two poems.

- 2.) Read “Level Light” and “Fall Wind”. Go over general meaning: What message does the light give Stafford? How does the fall wind make Stafford feel, and why?
- 3.) Revision: Look at rough draft of Fall Wind on the overhead. What do you notice about the first draft and the final draft? (It’s much longer!) On overhead, highlight the words that stay from the first to the final draft.
- 4.) Discussion Questions: In your small groups, compare and contrast the poems. Write down your ideas (can be done in a Venn Diagram, or just simple lists). Go over similarities and differences as a class. If it doesn’t come up, point out that both the poems show Stafford observing something in nature, and this event that he observes makes him feel/think something. Also, point out that the mood of the poems, while having similarities are also very different (share with students the phrase “orange with its hope” from Stafford’s daily write of “Level Light”). Is this normal? Can you feel one thing one day and another the next? Can both be true?

5.) Student poem:

Show my examples

Brainstorm on the following questions: Think of a kind of weather or a time of day. What does this look like (especially the color)? What does it sound like? What does it smell like? How does it make you feel? What does it make you think of? Your answers can be hopeful, not hopeful, or mixed. As students are brainstorming, have some pictures of light/weather and clips of sound to help stimulate this process.

Write poem. Some possible starting lines: (Sometimes the \_\_\_\_\_; \_\_\_\_\_ crowds around the door)

6.) Share poems. After writing poems and listening to poems write “how does your poem compare or contrast with Stafford’s?”

**Notes:** Anticipated time period is 2 class periods (50 minutes each)

**Materials Needed:** Copies of “Level Light” and “Fall Wind”

## **Lesson Four: “Representing Far Places”**

Free Write: While we’re in here, what is going on outside? So far, we’ve been looking at Stafford poems about things that happen right where we are – on roads not far from Hillsboro, or standing in our doorways. Now, we’re going to start thinking a little bigger – to places that are farther away.

1.) Background vocabulary: Students divided into group of six. Each student gets one word to define, illustrate, and

use in a sentence. That will then be presented to their small group. After the small group presentations, we will review the words as a class.

Key vocabulary: witty, polarize, treason, contradictory, crescendo, representing

- 2.) Read “Representing Far Places.” Highlight the vocabulary they learned prior to reading this poem. How does this vocabulary help make meaning of the poem?
- 3.) Give students typed copies of the first draft, along with the final draft. Highlight what stayed the same. Circle what’s different. Then, write about how the poem changed/stayed the same as it was revised. Concentrate especially on the ending.
- 4.) Discussion: Share writing on poem revisions. How is the meaning of the first draft different from the meaning of the final? Share my theory that I think the more Stafford wrote, the more he was able to believe that it was OK to be simply the way he had to be. Do we often get the message that we have to be a certain way in social situations? Where do we get that message from? Go back to the first stanza. What feeling does that give you? How is this feeling related to the last two lines?

#### 5.) Student Poem

Share my example

Choices: “The Way I Have to Be” or “What Far Place do you Represent?”

#### 6.) Student volunteers share poems

**Notes:** This one may take three days.

**Materials Needed:** Typed copies of rough draft. Copies of Final Draft (possibly on the same page – side by side?)

### **Lesson Five: “The View From Here”**

- 1.) Background information: How many of you have seen movies about penguins? Here’s just a short clip to show you what they do (March of the Penguins clip, or something similar).
- 2.) Read “The View From Here”
- 3.) Revision: Show rough draft on the board. That day he wrote a lot on another topic (teacher load – that’s how many classes and students teachers have to teach). He didn’t use this for the poem, but maybe he just had to get it out in a free write, since it was something on his mind.

4.) Discussion Questions: Craft: What comparisons does Stafford make in his poem? Content: How are the penguins and humans connected? What could be the cold that people feel?

5.) Student Poem

Show my example

Possible Prompts: Pick an animal that is important to you. Describe that animal. How is it connected to people?

Why is it important to you? What does it represent? OR, what far place do you think about (a place you've never been to). Why is this place meaningful to you? How might it be connected to you? OR, describe a time you have been cold – either physically, emotionally, or both.

6.) Students volunteers share

**Notes:** This can be a one-day lesson

**Materials Needed:** copies of “The View from Here”

## **Lesson #6: Revision**

1.) Students choose the poem that they are going to revise – read poems to each other first; then write letters recommending which poems they should revise. Students write about what poems they think they should revise.

2.) Revision mini-lesson showing examples from William Stafford poem: Representing Far Places; Revision hand-out. Class exercise: Circle words you need to look at more, write question marks next to lines you might change.

3.) Revision time; read revised draft to a partner.

4.) Final Draft writing time

5.) Final Draft read aloud

**Notes:** Revision takes at least two days. Final draft poems can be read aloud to the entire class or in small groups. Teachers may also choose to use other publication methods. (**Revision chart included on next page.**)

## How to Revise and Edit your Poem

### Revising

What to Revise	Example from a William Stafford Poem
<p><b>Word Choice:</b> make sure each word is the most descriptive, the most powerful, you can make it.</p>	<p>William Stafford changed the line in “The View from Here” from “the wind is always after them” to “the wind bites over them”.</p>
<p><b>Length:</b> See if there is anything you can shorten from the poem. See if there is anything you can add to the poem.</p>	<p>Remember that William Stafford took out tons of lines from “Fall Wind”. He only kept the really powerful lines, and took off the lines that didn’t fit as well.</p>
<p><b>Sensory Details:</b> see if there are any that you can add.</p>	<p>In “Level Light” William Stafford uses the sense of sight to give lots of detail about color.</p> <p>In “Fall Wind” William Stafford uses the sense of hearing to add details about the sound of the wind.</p>
<p><b>Metaphors, similes, and personification:</b> See if there are any places you can add these to make your poem more powerful.</p>	<p>William Stafford used personification in many poems, such as in “Level Light” when he says, “in one stride night then takes the hill.”</p> <p>An example of a simile is in “The View From Here” he says “drooping their little shoulders like bottles the penguins stand”.</p>

## Editing

What to Edit	Example from a William Stafford Poem
<p><b>Line length:</b> poetry lines should not be long. There should be about one idea on each line, or if there are more, they should connect in some way.</p>	<p>“Pods of summer crowd around the door; I take them in the winter of my hands.”</p> <p>Fall Wind</p>
<p><b>Stanzas:</b> Stanzas are like poetic paragraphs. A new stanza is begun by skipping a line. This usually means that you’re going on to talk about a new main idea.</p>	<p>All of the William Stafford poems we’ve read are great examples of this. Look at them for more assistance.</p>
<p><b>Capitalization:</b> Usually poets only capitalize the first word of the sentence, not the first word of every line.</p>	<p>“Traveling through the dark I found a deer dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.”</p> <p>Traveling through the Dark</p>
<p><b>Punctuation:</b> Use commas as you normally would, for instance, when you’re listing items.</p> <p>Normally, poets have their end punctuation (periods, question marks, exclamation marks) fall at the end of a line.</p>	<p>“In Antarctica drooping their little shoulders like bottles the penguins stand, small, sad, black – and the wind bites hard over them.”</p> <p>The View From Here</p>

**Other tools that poets use that you might want to add include repeating sounds and words, and rhyming.**

## “Writing Down My Family”

### Using oral histories as research for autobiographical poems

Robin Scialabba, Success Alternative High School: Woodburn School District 103. July/August, 2009. Unit Plan: House of Words: William Stafford Fellowship: Lewis and Clark College

#### Unit Question:

Where do oral family histories and autobiographical poetry meet?

#### Unit Goals:

Students will...

- Gain familiarity with the questioning and answering process.
- Engage members of their families in an interview to obtain information that will help them construct meaningful autobiographical poems.
- Use William Stafford’s style, organization, and word choice in seven poems to create their own original poetry.

#### Objectives:

Students will...

- Interview parent(s) to find more information about their families.
- Use interview responses and questions to infuse creative writing with relevant information, stories, and family anecdotes.
- Define and use active verbs, lively adjectives, and interesting nouns in autobiographical poetry.
- Analyze and discuss major themes in poems by William Stafford.
- Brainstorm, write, and revise original, autobiographical poetry.

#### Standards:

- Increase word knowledge through systematic vocabulary development; determine the meaning of new words by applying knowledge of word origins, word relationships, and context clues; verify the meaning of new words; and use those new words accurately across the subject areas.
- Listen critically and respond appropriately across the subject areas.

EL.HS.LI.02

❖ *Demonstrate listening and reading comprehension of more complex literary text through class and/or small*

*group interpretive discussions.*

EL.HS.LI.13

- ❖ *Evaluate the impact of word choice and figurative language on tone, mood, and theme.*

EL.HS.WR.08

- ❖ *Revise drafts to improve the logic and coherence of the organization and controlling idea, the precision of word choice, and the tone—by taking into consideration the audience, purpose, and formality of the context.*

EL.HS.SL.17

- ❖ *Analyze how language and delivery affect the mood and tone of the oral communication and make an impact on the audience.*

EL.HS.SL.05

- ❖ *Analyze the occasion and the interests of an audience, and choose effective verbal techniques and language to convey ideas.*

### **Interview Guidelines:**

- Choose one parent to interview
- Start with five urgent questions – ask about the things you want to know really badly but might not have been brave enough to speak about honestly before now
- Conversations should yield several more questions and answers that build upon the original five urgent questions.

### **Transcription:**

- Students may use recording devices and tapes or CDs if they have them available to use at home. If you have a recorder on a cell phone, you may use that.
- Otherwise, they will handwrite their interview questions and responses and type the information they record in class.

### **On the phone with mom:**

Objective: Model the interview process for students by having them call my mom

1. Have students write one question before they meet her
2. Once she begins talking, have students prepare questions as she responds: they must listen carefully to her responses in order to do this.
  - a. The best speakers are the best listeners: interrupting can disrupt the conversation

Their follow-up questions can...

- b. clarify confusion
- c. go into more depth and detail about the same topic
- d. formulate new questions about related topics

### **From the William Stafford Archives (Lewis and Clark College):**

Poems will be used for daily reading and writing activities: as a springboard for students to think creatively about their lives.

1. “Parentage”
2. “Vocation”
3. “Listening”
4. “At Liberty School”
5. “In Fear and Valor”
6. “Thinking for Berky”

### **Time:**

- Success HS Schedule: 4 weeks, 1 hour 25 minutes per class meeting, every other day: Wednesdays and Fridays  
8AM-9:30AM
- For 55 minute classes, stagger the poetry workshop every other day.

### **Materials:**

- Class sets of the seven poems and the discussion/writing prompts for each in chronological order.
- Spiral notebooks for interviews
- In Focus Projector
- Document camera
- Master list of student usernames and passwords
- Treats for our poetry reading on the last day

### **Assessments: Formative and Summative**

- Daily conferencing one on one

- Check-ins during the transcription process and the poetry workshops
- Presentation reflection
- Final Interview: typed and transcribed
- All daily writing and reflection on the Stafford poems
- Three original drafts of poems
- One polished, revised poem that synthesizes the poetry study and the interview.
- Daily discussion
- Final Evaluation of the class
- Poetry revisions
- Poetry reading

## Daily Lessons:

### Week 1

#### Day 1.

1. Share expectations: attendance, cycle grades, classroom conduct.
2. Cover necessary materials for the unit (see list).
3. Have students fill out information cards for contact and any urgent things I must know about them as students before we begin: collect these.
4. Introduce the unit: part poetry reading and writing, part oral family history.
5. Questions, concerns, comments.
6. Cover Interview and Transcription Requirements.
7. The fun part:
8. Pre-write for the interviews: ask 5 pressing questions for ONE member of your family who you still talk to.
9. Students write.
10. Introduce sharing as an opportunity to learn things about each other and ourselves: kids will hesitate and I will explain silence is OK – building trust in me and in the class, requires time.
11. Pass out packets of poems and prompts.
12. Have In Focus set to William Stafford Archive: “Parentage”.
13. Introduce William Stafford:
  - a. Not a rapper
  - b. Not a thug: actually a conscientious objector and a pacifist...define?
14. They will have two choices while reading his poetry:
  - a. Reject him and make fun of him, check-out, and avoid him.
  - b. Listen to what he might have to say and see how he can change your mind about inner struggles and life experiences.

15. Share personal story about my dad...
  - a. Black sheep of the LAPD, not your average cop, not your average dad.
  - b. Prewrite: Who is your father: to you; to your family; to everyone else? Where does he belong? What is one thing you want from him?
  - c. Share responses
16. Read “Parentage” aloud
17. Cover stanzas, line breaks, and repetition
18. Decipher Stafford’s feelings about his father.
19. Discuss: how are his feelings similar to/different from your own?

## **Week 1**

### **Day 2**

1. Introduce questioning and answering process
2. Model Interview process over speaker phone with mom
3. Students practice recording
4. Debrief: frustrations – overcoming obstacles, other topics we could have developed during the interview, questions they wrote but didn’t ask, questions that didn’t get answered, problem-solving, how our written forms of the interview are different – how they’re similar: use document camera to make this transparent.
5. Students add to their five questions from yesterday, by anticipating answers and trying to develop the questions further – have at least 15 by the end of today.
6. Students will take their questions home, set up interview times with the designated family member and be ready to transcribe by the following week – this leaves them the weekend to conduct their interviews. Offer to call parents to discuss the assignment. Allow for extra time with students who rarely see their parents.
7. Transition into workshop: break for bathroom and fountain.
8. Prewrite: T-Chart: left side is Mom, right side is Dad
9. Show them my T-Chart on the In Focus: From the Powerpoint (have the slide ready)
10. Students write, then we share
11. Read “Vocation”: students highlight verbs and nouns.
12. What did they notice about the verbs and nouns he used?
13. Review verbs and nouns for use in their own poems.

14. What could they take from this poem and put into theirs?
15. What did Stafford say about his own parents?
16. Were they happy?
17. Remind them: transcription begins Wednesday!

## **Week 2**

### **Day 1.**

1. Begin with “Listening”
2. Pre-write: Five senses – review what the five sense are, have them choose one to describe one parent, explain why they chose the sense they did.
3. Share.
4. Write down all the words they can think of that describe that sense to someone else...give examples.
5. Share
6. Read “Listening”
7. Highlight all the verbs and nouns and any details that catch their attention
8. Share responses.
9. How did Stafford’s choice of words paint a picture in your mind?
10. Begin composing a poem about that parent, using the words they chose earlier. Repeat that person’s relationship (example: “My father...”) in at least two stanzas.
11. Transition into Friday’s homework assignment:
12. Who did they chose to interview?
13. Why did they choose this person?
14. What are some anticipated difficulties with the process?
15. Three things they learned about their family member that they didn’t know before...
16. Logging in and getting Username/Password information distributed
17. Refer to format expectations from Day 1
18. Students spend time transcribing their interviews – computer time
19. Create a title and save work every 15 minutes!

## Week 2

### Day 2

1. Prewrite: What are the responsibilities of all parents to their families? How have yours succeeded? How have they failed with you?
2. Loss: What are all the ways we can lose somebody? What are some of their experiences with loss? How has it impacted their lives? What are some good coping techniques?
3. What happens with kids at school when they've experienced loss at home? How do other kids and teachers generally react? What are the warning signs that someone is coping with sadness?
4. Introduce the poem first: be careful to mention sensitivity with the topic. You can never know who is dealing with loss or who has survived. We must respect peoples' rights to be silent, and encourage those who need a space to feel safe sharing. Some people are more comfortable than others with speaking about their feelings. Some things people are currently going through will never be talked about or shared.
5. Read Poem "At Liberty School"
6. Comprehension questions
7. What happened at school?
8. Why was this girl important?
9. Discuss: in a family, how can people heal?
10. Transition to interview process:
11. Check in on their interview transcriptions: where are they in the typing process? What are their frustrations? Sudden realizations? Tips?
12. Students transcribe
13. Save work!

## Week 3

### Day 1

I may have students write multiple poems using their interviews. If this is the case, we'd replace steps 1-4 with printing interviews and conducting a poetry workshop around their work.

1. Pre write:
2. Tell your mom's story.
3. Share
4. Introduce the poem – background information
5. Read “In Fear and Valor”.
6. Students will highlight or underline all the Symbols in the poem: share my example of the T-Chart after we've read the poem together: Have In-Focus ready.
7. T-chart (description and Symbol with literal explanation)
8. Compose poems: make a poem that exposes a mistake you made with your mom, or a mistake she made in her own life, this poem should tell the story of a big regret.
9. What can we learn from our mistakes?
10. Transition into transcribing.
11. Reminder that they should be finished typing today: Presentations on Friday.
12. Cover Oral Presentation rubric and guidelines for cue cards: duration, presentation modes (eye contact, professional dress, etc)
13. Students work on computers
14. Save work!

## Week 3

### Day 2

1. Review presentation guidelines.
2. Make list of presentation order on the board – students volunteer the order.
3. Have evaluation sheets ready for each presenter
4. Students write praise on a sticky note for each presenter: at least one thing they loved about the presenter's oral history. After each presentation, they'll give their notes to me – on the evaluation sheet.

5. Share oral histories.
6. Assess learning.
7. Transition into poem: brief break for bathroom and fountain.
8. Prewrite:
  - a. How do you define HOME? What makes a place, a family, a home?
  - b. Describe YOUR home and your favorite memory from there.
9. Share.
10. Discuss.
11. How do you normally cope with being home for breaks?
  - a. What are some good alternatives to the unhealthy ones?
12. Read “Thinking for Berky”:
13. What does the narrator remember about Berky?
14. Describe your HOME and your favorite memory there.
15. Workshop a poem where you describe your reaction to and all your feelings about your home.
16. Share poems.
17. Dismiss for the weekend: safe, healthy decisions.

## **Week 4**

### **Day 1**

1. The next two days of the cycle will be spent picking apart your interviews for pearls of information to use in a poem.
2. We’ll reread, write, and revise to make at least one polished poem fit for publishing.
3. Go back into your interviews
4. Highlight the interesting details and information – consider things the person shared that you didn’t already know about them – find the stories in their responses. Consider using some of the questions you asked creatively for your poems.
5. Pre-write a poem about the person you interviewed using the interview information and your own descriptions of them. Begin by describing them in single words: make a list.
6. Dismiss

## Week 4

### Day 2

I could bring treats for the poetry reading.

1. Students pick a first line from the Stafford list of unwritten first lines.
2. Free-write a poem about a sibling or a best friend.
3. Share
4. Workshop interview poems from Friday: go back to the interview and the prewrite to continue writing.
5. Share
6. Use an example of Stafford's revision process for the poem "Parentage" and read through his early drafts to track their changes.
7. Describe Stafford's revision style: what does he do when he revises? What does he change? What do the changes mean? What do they add or take away from the original words? What can you take away from his revisions and use in your own writing process?
8. Revise the poem.
9. Type a polished draft
10. Reread the polished draft
11. Last minute revisions of one poem. Remind them that Stafford would return to a poem over the course of many months.
12. Poetry reading of revised poems: each student reads or I read their poems for them. Audience gives encouraging feedback.
13. Talk about the poetry reading experience...
14. Debrief the class
15. Assess the learning through a final evaluation/write-up

## Writing Down My Family

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Interview Guidelines

Choose one parent to interview

Generate at least 15 questions that you could ask them

For each question, ask one follow-up question by anticipating their answers

(you will have 30 questions at the end)

Parent's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

In some families, it is considered rude to ask your parent when their birthday is, and sometimes parents "lie" about their age anyway: if this is true of your family, tell the story of "age" with the parent you chose for your interview:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Why did you choose this parent? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What will be difficult about sitting down to an interview with him/her? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What will make this experience easier for both of you? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What does he/she need to know in order to be successful and give you everything you need to complete the assignment? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Favorite meal: \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite saying or quote: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Happiest memory: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Regret: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Biggest Fear: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Deepest Worry: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Best Victory/Success/Accomplishment: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Definition of love: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Definition of family: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Responsibilities of parents: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Responsibilities of children: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Greatest hope/wish: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Interview Questions**

Write the answers carefully – if you have a cell phone, you can record the conversation with your phone so you don't lose it in the writing process.

You may use ANY technology that will help you with this project!

Avoid questions that elicit one word (or, dead-end) responses

Ask questions to find answers for who, what, when, where, and why?

Set up a time to meet with your parents and keep this commitment!

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Follow up: \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Finish these phrases**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, poems are... \_\_\_\_\_ because ...  
\_\_\_\_\_

My favorite poem is... \_\_\_\_\_

The thing I like most about poetry is... \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The thing I hate most about poetry is (and don't say "It's boring" without explaining what you mean!)... \_\_\_\_\_

In order to write poetry, I need... \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Fill in the blank with your feeling:** I \_\_\_\_\_ sharing and reading my writing aloud because... \_\_\_\_\_

## Writing Down My Family

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Attach your poem to this sheet.

This is a collection of unfinished first lines William Stafford wrote as notes but didn't use as poems.

Directions: Use one of the following William Stafford lines as the first line for a poem about your family:

- Sound is beginning to burn...
- Put alone where no one can live...
- My father and my mother have gone...
- Where water lives long enough to ghost the land...
- When rain hits our house...
- The dog that ran across our yard...
- If the world is listening...
- All secrets added make the answer, coming near...
- The wise always puzzle forward...
- Sometimes what your part of the world gives...
- The trapped giant we made small...
- Finding you took all this time...
- Some people, they say, turn to each other...

### Tips:

- DON'T try to finish Stafford's poem FOR him.
- DON'T try to figure out what HE meant.
- DO figure out what you want his phrase to mean for YOU.
- DO find a way to make his line relate to YOUR family.
- DO use his line as a springboard for your own ideas and images.

IF YOU GET STUCK...START WRITING! Even if what you write is nonsense, but it gets your mind working and your hand moving, it's useful and helpful.

Questions to make you think BEFORE you write your poem:

1. Which line do you like best? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How does this line relate to your family? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What kinds of other details could you add to your poem to make it fit with the line from William Stafford? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Will your poem be about your WHOLE family or just one specific member? Explain \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **William Stafford in the Environmental Science Classroom**

This unit of study attempts to integrate the poetry of William Stafford into the study of our planet and our care of it. This work focuses on grades 9-12 but I believe that many of the resources would be valuable for all ages.

### **OVERVIEW:**

There is an intense need to bring the voice of creativity to the study of our environment to help students connect to the earth and our reasons for saving it. The question, can poetry save the world, is facilitated in the environmental science context because the seeds of creativity not only live in us but as we see them in others, we can become inspired. These are the poems that I selected for each stop along the way. This study can be tailored to your timing and curriculum needs.

### **SCIENCE AND POETRY:**

#### **Inspiration Quote:**

“Science and poetry are both ways of knowing about the world and they can be combined and integrated in classroom instruction. In the most productive educational theories, both science and writing are seen as methods of creating meaning. Science is treated as the process of examining individual pieces of data and observation to form generalizations; writing, in the process-oriented classroom, is recognized as a method of making meaning, the act of forming one’s ideas and experiences into writing. Science and poetry involve: (1) making close and careful observations; (2) making connections; and (3) forming an empathic identification. It is wonder and awe that bind poetry and science together in their attempts to closely observe, to discover and create connections, and to offer their results for empathic identification.” —from Robert King “Science and Poetry in the Classroom,” *Insights into Open Education*, v22 n5 Jan-Feb 1990

Audio Clip of NPR interview with John Felstiner answering the question: Can Poetry Save the Earth?

- <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=102795472>

### **PRIMARY RESOURCE:**

The William Stafford Archives reside at Lewis & Clark College, Portland, Oregon. They have a digital version of a portion of his archives that is not only elegant in format, but incredibly powerful for teaching. The following link will lead you to this treasure trove:

The William Stafford Archives at Lewis & Clark College

<http://www.williamstaffordarchives.org/>

### **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:**

- Can poetry save the Earth?
- How can we treasure hope?

- What is my role here?
- How can we share our connection to the Earth?
- What can we do?
- What does it mean to really see the world around us?

#### PROJECT IDEAS:

- Student generated Google Earth “Lit Trip”
- Have students write their own environmental poem
- Student written poetry shared for authentic audiences (student newspaper, poetry jam, broadsides)
- Photo essays about place, the planet, and where I belong

#### POSSIBLE LESSON PLAN AND SEQUENCE:

- Choose to discuss one or all of the following poems in your classroom
- Have students respond to the poems by producing one of the above projects.
- Have the student create a google earth literature trip with either poems that from William Stafford or poems that they created and the places that inspired them.

1. Interest Builder: Take students on Google Lit trip with the attached .kmz files

- Download Google earth (free program)
- Let the .kmz file open on your computer
- Double click each site
- Read each poem as you go through the tour
- Background and support of Google Lit Trips: <http://www.googlelitrrips.org/>

2. As each poem is read:

- Have students respond to the environmental components of the writing
- Have students discuss the role of a poet in caring for the earth

- Go through the possible resources for each poem if a deeper discussion is generated

3. Discuss the listed essential questions for this area of study

- Can poetry save the Earth?
- How can we treasure hope?
- What is my role here?
- How can we share our connection to the Earth?
- What can we do?

4. Have students begin work on one of the student project ideas

- Student generated Google Earth “Lit Trip”
- Have students write their own environmental poem
- Student written poetry shared for authentic audiences (student newspaper, poetry jam, broadsides)
- Photo essays about place, the planet, and where I belong

5. Share the work as an authentic audience

## POEMS AND RESOURCES:

### *The Well Rising*

The well rising without sound,  
the spring on a hillside,  
the plowshare brimming through deep ground  
everywhere in the field—

The sharp swallows in their swerve  
flaring and hesitating  
hunting for the final curve  
coming closer and closer—

The swallow heart from wing beat to wing beat  
counseling decision, decision:  
thunderous examples. I place my feet  
with care in such a world.

### **Resources:**

- Audio recordings included in digital archive
- Daily writing: April 13 & 23, 1953
- <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=102795472>

The above is an NPR story where Stanford professor, John Felstiner has to answer the question, “If you could pick one poem that would save the world if everyone would read it, what would it be? He chose “The Well Rising”

*The Fish Counter at Bonneville*

Downstream they have killed the river and built a dam;  
by that power they wire to here a light:  
a turbine strides high poles to spit its flame  
at this flume going down. A spot glows white  
where an old man looks on at the ghosts of the game  
in the flickering twilight—deep dumb shapes that glide.

So many Chinook souls, so many Silverside.

**Resources:**

- Wild Beauty: Photographs of the Columbia River Gorge, 1867-1957, Terry Toedtemeier and John Laursen, Oregon State University Press, 2008
- No audio
- Daily writing: Sept. 7, 1951

## *The Tillamook Burn*

These mountains have heard God;  
they burned for weeks. He spoke  
in a tongue of flame from sawmill trash  
and you can read His word down to the rock.

In milky rivers the steelhead  
butt upstream to spawn  
and find a world with depth again,  
starting from stillness and water across gray stone.

Inland along the canyons  
all night weather smokes  
past the deer and the widow-makers—  
trees too dead to fall till again He speaks,

Mowing the criss-cross trees and the listening peaks.

### **Resources:**

- Audio
- Daily writing: Jan. 6, 1955
- VIDEO RESOURCES: Legacy of fire [DVD]: the story of the Tillamook Burn

Tillamook Forest Center; Oregon Department of Forestry; Northshore Productions.

Name: Anderson, Tobias.

Edition: Widescreen Ed.

Publisher: [Tillamook, Or.]: Tillamook Forest Center, c2006

Description: 1 videodisc (DVD) (ca. 15 min.): sd., col., b. &w.; 4 3/4 in.

General note: DVD format, all regions; Dolby sound.

General note: Bonus feature: Historic slideshow.

Credits: Written, produced and directed by Eric Slade.

Performer: Narrated by Tobias Andersen.

Summary:” Experience the power of a fast-moving wildfire as you witness the story of the Tillamook Burn, told by the men and women who knew this forest when it was devastated by fire in the 1930s and 1940s...[this film] is a dramatic re-telling of one of Oregon’s worst natural disasters, and of the remarkable forest that grew from its ashes.” -Container.Language: In English with English subtitles.

### *At the Bomb Testing Site*

At noon in the desert a panting lizard  
waited for history, its elbows tense,  
watching the curve of a particular road  
as if something might happen.

It was looking at something farther off  
than people could see, an important scene  
acted in stone for little selves  
at the flute end of consequences.

There was just a continent without much on it  
under a sky that never cared less.

Ready for a change, the elbows waited.

The hands gripped hard on the desert.

#### **Resources:**

- No audio in digital archives
- Daily writing: Dec. 10-16, 1953
- PDF of essay by Leonard Nathan in digital archives
- <http://www.enotes.com/bomb-testing>
- Above is a snapshot of analysis of this poem

## *Ceremony*

On the third finger of my left hand  
under the bank of the Ninnescah  
a muskrat whirled and bit to the bone.  
The mangled hand made the water red.

That was something the ocean would remember:  
I saw me in the current flowing through the land,  
rolling, touching roots, the world incarnadined,  
and the river richer by a kind of marriage.

While in the woods an owl started quavering  
with drops like tears I raised my arm.  
Under the bank a muskrat was trembling  
with meaning my hand would wear forever.

In that river my blood flowed on.

## STANDARDS ADDRESSED

OR- Oregon Standards

**Subject: English/Language Arts**

**Content Strand: WRITING**

- Use writing as a tool to learn, reflect, and communicate for a variety of audiences and purposes.
- Communicate knowledge of the topic, including relevant examples, facts, anecdotes, and details.

**Common Curriculum Goals:**

- Express ideas in an engaging and credible way appropriate to audience and purpose.
- Communicate knowledge of the topic, including relevant examples, facts, anecdotes, and details appropriate to topic, audience, and purpose.

**Subject: Science**

**Content Strand: EARTH AND SPACE SCIENCE**

- Understand physical properties of the Earth, how those properties change, and the Earth's relationship to other celestial bodies.
- Identify the structure of the Earth system and the availability and use of the materials that make up that system.
- Describe how the importance and use of resources has changed over time with changes in economic and technological systems.

**Common Curriculum Goals: THE DYNAMIC EARTH:**

Understand the properties and limited availability of the materials which make up the Earth.

If you have any questions about this lesson or want to share your thoughts, please

email the author, Stacy Erickson at [erickson.stacy@gmail.com](mailto:erickson.stacy@gmail.com)



# Poems and Essay

## Level Light

Sometimes the light when evening fails  
stains all haystacked country and hills,  
runs the cornrows and clasps the barn  
with that kind of color escaped from corn  
that brings to autumn the winter word—  
a level shaft that tells the world:

*It is too late now for earlier ways;*

*now there are only some other ways.*

*and only one way to find them—fail.*

In one stride night then takes the hill.

## **Fall Wind**

Pods of summer crowd around the door;

I take them in the autumn of my hands.

Last night I heard the first cold wind outside;

the wind blew soft, and yet I shiver twice:

Once for thin walls, once for the sound of time.

## **Ceremony**

On the third finger of my left hand

under the bank of the Ninnescah

a muskrat whirled and bit to the bone.

The mangled hand made the water red.

That was something the ocean would remember:

I saw me in the current flowing through the land,

rolling, touching roots, the world incarnadined,

and the river richer by a kind of marriage.

While in the woods an owl started quavering

with drops like tears I raised my arm.

Under the bank a muskrat was trembling

with meaning my hand would wear forever.

In that river my blood flowed on.

## Representing Far Places

In the canoe wilderness branches wait for winter;  
every leaf concentrates; a drop from the paddle falls.

Up through water at the dip of a falling leaf  
to the sky's drop of light or the smell of another star  
fish in the lake leap arcs of realization,  
hard fins prying out from the dark below.

Often in society when the talk turns witty  
you think of that place, and can't polarize at all:  
it would be a kind of treason. The land fans in your head  
canyon by canyon; steep roads diverge.

Representing far places you stand in the room,  
all that you know merely a weight in the weather.

It is all right to be simply the way you have to be,  
among contradictory ridges in some crescendo of knowing.

## **The View from Here**

In Antarctica drooping their little shoulders  
like bottles the penguins stand, small,  
sad, black—and the wind  
bites hard over them.

Edging that continent they huddle to turn their eyes.  
penguins, we can't help you; and all that cold  
hangs over us too, wide beyond thought.  
We too stand and wait.

## **At Liberty School**

Girl in the front row who had no mother  
and went home every day to get supper,  
the class became silent when you left early.

Elaborate histories were in our book  
but of all the races you were the good:  
the taxes of Rome were at your feet.

When the bell rang we did not write any more.  
Traitor to everything else, we poured  
to the fountain. I bent and thought of you.

Our town is now Atlantis, crystal-water bound;  
at the door of the schoolhouse fish are swimming round;  
thinking in and out of the church tower go deep waves.

Girl in the front row who had no mother,  
as I passed the alleys of our town toward supper  
there were not spiteful nails on any board.

## Thinking for Berky

In the late night listening from bed  
I have joined the ambulance or the patrol  
screaming toward some drama, the kind of end  
that Berky must have some day, if she isn't dead.  
The wildest of all, her father and mother cruel,  
farming out there beyond the old stone quarry  
where highschool lovers parked their lurching cars,  
Berky learned to love in that dark school.

Early her face was turned away from home  
toward any hardworking place; but still her soul,  
with terrible things to do, was alive, looking out  
for the rescue that—surely, some day—would have to come.

Windiest nights, Berky, I have thought for you,  
and no matter how lucky I've been I've touched wood.  
There are things not solved in our town though tomorrow came:  
there are things time passing can never make come true.

We live in an occupied country, misunderstood;  
justice will take us millions of intricate moves.  
Sirens will hunt down Berky, you survivors in your beds  
listening through the night, so far and good.

## **Traveling through the Dark**

Traveling through the dark I found a deer  
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.  
it is usually best to roll them into the canyon:  
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car  
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;  
she had stiffened already, almost cold.  
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching her side brought me the reason—  
her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,  
alive, still, never to be born.

Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;  
under the hood purred the steady engine.  
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;  
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—,  
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

## **At the Bomb Testing Site**

At noon in the desert a panting lizard  
waited for history, its elbows tense,  
watching the curve of a particular road  
as if something might happen.

It was looking at something farther off  
than people could see, an important scene  
acted in stone for little selves  
at the flute end of consequences.

There was just a continent without much on it  
under a sky that never cared less.

Ready for a change, the elbows waited.

The hands gripped hard on the desert.

## **The Fish Counter at Bonneville**

Downstream they have killed the river and built a dam;  
by that power they wire to here a light:  
a turbine strides high poles to spit its flame  
at this flume going down. A spot glows white  
where an old man looks on at the ghosts of the game  
in the flickering twilight—deep dumb shapes that glide.

So many Chinook souls, so many Silverside.

## **The Tillamook Burn**

These mountains have heard God;  
they burned for weeks. He spoke  
in a tongue of flame from sawmill trash  
and you can read His word down to the rock.

In milky rivers the steelhead  
butt upstream to spawn  
and find a world with depth again,  
starting from stillness and water across gray stone.

Inland along the canyons  
all night weather smokes  
past the deer and the widow-makers—  
trees too dead to fall till again he speaks,

Mowing the criss-cross tress and listening peaks.

## **The Well Rising**

The will rising without sound,  
the spring on a hillside,  
the plowshare brimming through deep ground  
everywhere in the field—

The sharp swallows in their swerve  
flaring and hesitating  
hunting for the final curve  
coming closer and closer—

The swallow heart from wing beat to wing beat  
counseling decision, decision:  
thunderous examples. I place my feet  
with care in such a world.

## **In Fear and Valor**

My mother was afraid  
and in my life her fear has hid:  
when Perseus holds the Gorgon's head,  
she cringes, naked.

Clothed in my body, wild,  
even as I grew strong,  
my mother, weeping, suffered  
the whole world's wrong.

Vanquished and trembling before she died,  
she claimed a place in my every limb:  
my mother, lost in my stride, fears Death,  
as I hunt him.

## **Listening**

My father could hear a little animal step,  
or a moth in the dark against the screen,  
and every far sound called the listening out  
into places where the rest of us had never been.

More spoke to him from the soft wild night  
than came to our porch for us on the wind;  
we would watch him look up and his face go keen  
till the walls of the world flared, widened.

My father heard so much that we still stand  
inviting the quiet by turning the face,  
waiting for a time when something in the night  
will touch us too from that other place.

## Parentage

My father didn't really belong in history.

He kept looking over his shoulder at some mistake.

He was a stranger to me, for I belong.

There never was a particular he couldn't understand,

but there were too many in too long a row,

and like many another he was overwhelmed.

Today drinking coffee I look over the cup

and want to have the right amount of fear,

preferring to be saved and not, like him, heroic.

I want to be as afraid as the teeth are big,

I want to be as dumb as the wise are wrong:

I'd just as soon be pushed by events to where I belong.

## Vocation

This dream the world is having about itself  
includes a trace on the plains of the Oregon trail,  
a groove in the grass my father showed us all  
one day while meadowlarks were trying to tell  
something better about to happen.

I dreamed the trace to the mountains, over the hills,  
and there a girl who belonged wherever she was.  
But then my mother called us back to the car:  
she was afraid; she always blamed the place,  
the time, anything my father planned.

Now both of my parents, the long line through the plain,  
the meadowlarks, the sky, the world's whole dream  
remain, and I hear him say while I stand between the two,  
helpless, both of them part of me:  
"Your job is to find what the world is trying to be."

## A Way of Writing

A writer is not so much someone who has something to say as he is someone who has found a process that will bring about new things he would not have thought of if he had not started to say them. That is, he does not draw on a reservoir; instead, he engages in an activity that brings to him a whole succession of unforeseen stories, poems, essays, plays, laws, philosophies, religions, or--but wait!

Back in school, from the first when I began to try to write things, I felt this richness. One thing would lead to another; the world would give and give. Now, after twenty years or so of trying, I live by that certain richness, an idea hard to pin, difficult to say, and perhaps offensive to some. For there are strange implications in it.

One implication is the importance of just plain receptivity. When I write, I like to have an interval before me when I am not likely to be interrupted. For me, this means usually the early morning, before others are awake. I get pen and paper, take a glance out of the window (often it is dark out there), and wait. It is like fishing. But I do not wait very long, for there is always a nibble--and this is where receptivity comes in. To get started I will accept anything that occurs to me. Something always occurs, of course, to any of us. We can't keep from thinking. Maybe I have to settle for an immediate impression: it's cold, or hot, or dark, or bright, or in between! Or well, the possibilities are endless. If I put down something, that thing will help the next thing come, and I'm off. If I let the process go on, things will occur to me that were not at all in my mind when I started. These things, odd or trivial as they may be, are somehow connected. And if I let them string out, surprising things will happen.

If I let them string out.... Along with initial receptivity, then, there is another readiness: I must be willing to fail. If I am to keep on writing, I cannot bother to insist on high standards. I must get into action and not let anything stop me, or even slow me much. By "standards" I do not mean "correctness" spelling, punctuation, and so on. These details become mechanical for anyone who writes for a while. I am thinking about such matters as social significance, positive values, consistency, etc.... I resolutely disregard these. Something better, greater, is happening! I am following a process that leads so wildly and originally into new territory that no judgment can at the moment be made about values, significance, and so on. I am making something new, something that has not been judged before. Later others--and maybe I myself--will make judgments. Now, I am headlong to discover. Any distraction may harm the creating.

So, receptive, careless of failure, I spin out things on the page. And a wonderful freedom comes. If something occurs to me, it is all right to accept it. It has one justification: it occurs to me. No one else can guide me. I must follow my own weak, wandering, diffident impulses.

A strange bonus happens. At times, without my insisting on it, my writings become coherent; the successive elements that occur to me are clearly related. They lead by themselves to new connections. Sometimes the language, even the syllables that happen along, may start a trend. Sometimes the materials alert me to something waiting in my mind, ready for sustained attention. At such times, I allow myself to be eloquent, or intentional, or for great swoops (Tracherous! Not to be trusted!) reasonable. But I do not insist on any of that; for I know that back of my activity there will be the coherence of my self, and that indulgence of my impulses will bring recurrent patterns and meanings again.

This attitude toward the process of writing creatively suggests a problem for me, in terms of what others say. They talk about "skills" in writing. Without denying that I do have experience, wide reading, automatic orthodoxies and maneuvers of various kinds, I still must insist that I am often baffled about what "skill" has to do with the precious little area of confusion when I do not know what I am going to say and then I find out what I am going to say. That precious interval I am unable to bridge by skill. What can I witness about it? It remains mysterious, just as all of us must feel puzzled about how we are so inventive as to be able to talk along through complexities with our friends, not needing to plan what we are going to say, but never stalled for long in our confident forward progress. Skill? If so, it is the skill we all have, something we must have learned before the age of three or four.

A writer is one who has become accustomed to trusting that grace, or luck, or--skill.

Yet another attitude I find necessary: most of what I write, like most of what I say in casual conversation, will not amount to much. Even I will realize, and even at the time, that it is not negotiable. It will be like practice. In conversation I allow myself random remarks--in fact, as I recall, that is the way I learned to talk--so in writing I launch many expendable efforts. A result of this free way of writing is that I am not writing for others, mostly; they will not see the product at all unless the activity eventuates in something that later appears to be worthy. My guide is the self, and its adventuring in the language brings about communication.

This process-rather-than-substance view of writing invites a final, dual reflection:

Writers may not be special or talented in any usual sense. They are simply engaged in sustained use of a language skill we all have. Their "creations" come about through confident reliance on stray impulses that will, with trust, find occasional patterns that are satisfying.

But writing itself is one of the great, free human activities. There is scope for individuality, and elation, and discovery, in writing. For the person who follows with trust and forgiveness what occurs to him, the world remains always ready and deep, an inexhaustible environment, with the combined vividness of an actuality and flexibility of a dream. Working back and forth between experience and thought, writers have more than space and time can offer. They have the whole unexplored realm of human vision.

**Thank you and have fun!**

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