

"*Fooling with Words* is a PBS documentary special produced with young people in mind. We wanted them to see just how vital, compelling, and enjoyable poetry can be....

The result is a film that will introduce your students to the power and pleasure of poetry in many guises—from the rhythmic cadences of Amira Baraka and Kurtis Lamkin (who accompanies his poems on the kora, the African ancestor of the harp) to the haunting evocations of Lorna Dee Cervantes and Shirley Geok-lin Lim, the puckish wit of Paul Muldoon, the spiritual power of Jane Hirshfield, the wry commentary by Deborah Garrison on the life of women in the workplace, and the moving remembrances of "Halley's Comet" by Stanley Kunitz, at 95 the dean of American poets."

"We have fallen into the place where everything is music. That's what the Festival feels like—we feel this vast interconnectedness. It's amazing that this many people can be really genuinely excited about **fooling with words**."  
—Coleman Barks

from <i>New Year's Day Nap</i> by Coleman Barks	My Notes
<p>Fiesta Bowl on low. My son lying here on the couch on the "Dad" pillow he made for me in the Seventh Grade. Now a sophomore at Georgia Southern, driving back later today, he sleeps with his white top hat over his face.</p> <p><i>I'm a dancin' fool.</i></p> <p>Twenty years ago, half the form he sleeps within came out of nowhere with a million micro-lemmings who all died but one piercer of membrane, specially picked to start a brainmaking, egg-drop soup, that stirred two sun and moon centers for a new-painted sky in the tiniest ballroom imaginable.</p> <p>Now he's rousing, six feet long, turning on his side. Now he's gone.</p>	<p>What is the speaker's attitude toward the subject of the poem? How do you know?</p> <p>Why this line by itself and in <i>italics</i>?</p> <p>What is unusual about the choice words in this section?</p> <p>What is the significance of the abrupt ending?</p>

<i>Jars of Springwater</i>	My Notes
<p>Jars of springwater are not enough anymore. Take us down to the river!</p> <p>The face of peace, the sun itself. No more the slippery cloudlike moon.</p> <p>Give us one clear morning after another and the one whose work remains unfinished,</p> <p>who <i>is</i> our work as we diminish, idle, though occupied, empty, and open.</p> <p>by Jelaluddin Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks</p>	

Where Everything Is Music	My Notes
<p>Don't worry about saving these songs! And if one of our instruments breaks, it doesn't matter.</p> <p>We have fallen into the place where everything is music.</p> <p>The strumming and the flute notes rise into the atmosphere, and even if the whole world's harp should burn up, there will still be hidden instruments playing.</p> <p>So the candle flickers and goes out. We have a piece of flint, and a spark.</p> <p>This singing art is sea foam. The graceful movements come from a pearl somewhere on the ocean floor.</p> <p>Poems reach up like spindrift and the edge of driftwood along the beach, wanting!</p> <p>They derive from a slow and powerful root that we can't see.</p> <p>Stop the words now. Open the window in the center of your chest, and let the spirits fly in and out.</p> <p>by Jelaluddin Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks</p>	

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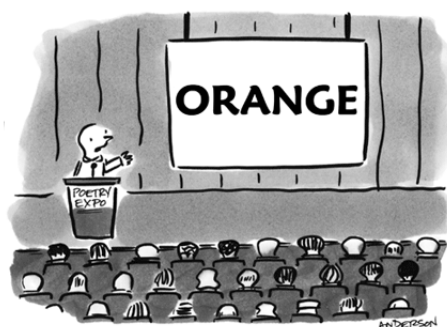
"I don't understand!  
It just shouldn't be this hard  
to write a haiku!"

<i>oh absalom my son my son by Lucille Clifton</i>	My Notes
<p>even as i turned myself from you i longed to hold you oh my wild haired son</p> <p>running in the wilderness away from me from us into a thicket you could not foresee</p> <p>if you had stayed i feared you would kill me if you left i feared you would die</p> <p>oh my son my son what does the Lord require</p>	

<p><b><i>Golden Retrievals by Mark Doty</i></b></p> <p>Fetch? Balls and sticks capture my attention seconds at a time. Catch? I don't think so. Bunny, tumbling leaf, a squirrel who's—oh joy—actually scared. Sniff the wind, then</p> <p>I'm off again: muck, pond, ditch, residue of any thrillingly dead thing. And you? Either you're sunk in the past, half our walk, thinking of what you can never bring back,</p> <p>or else you're off in some fog concerning —tomorrow, is that what you call it? My work: to unsnare time's warp (and woof!), retrieving, my haze-headed friend, you. This shining bark,</p> <p>a Zen master's bronzy gong, calls you here, entirely, now: bow-wow, bow-wow, bow-wow.</p>	
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"This, fellow poets, is the enemy."

*Messiah (Christmas Portions)*

*By Mark Doty*

*A little heat caught  
in gleaming rags,  
in shrouds of veil,  
torn and sun-shot swaddlings:*

*over the Methodist roof,  
two clouds propose a Zion  
of their own, blazing  
(colors of tarnish on copper)*

*against the steely close  
of a coastal afternoon, December,  
while under the steeple  
the Choral Society*

*prepares to perform  
Messiah, pouring, in their best  
blacks and whites, onto the raked stage.  
Not steep, really,*

*but from here,  
the first pew, they're a looming  
cloudbank of familiar angels:  
that neighbor who*

*fights operatically  
with her girlfriend, for one,  
and the friendly bearded clerk  
from the post office*

*—tenor trapped  
in the body of a baritone? Altos  
from the A&P, soprano  
from the T-shirt shop:*

*today they're all poise,  
costume and purpose  
conveying the right note  
of distance and formality.*

*Silence in the hall,  
anticipatory, as if we're all  
about to open a gift we're not sure  
we'll like;*

*how could they  
compete with sunset's burnished  
oratorio? Thoughts which vanish,  
when the violins begin.*

*Who'd have thought  
they'd be so good? Every valley,  
proclaims the solo tenor,  
(a sleek blonde*

*I've seen somewhere before  
—the liquor store?) shall be exalted,  
and in his handsome mouth the word  
is lifted and opened*

*into more syllables  
than we could count, central ah  
dilated in a baroque melisma,  
liquefied; the pour*

*of voice seems  
to make the unplanned landscape  
the text predicts the Lord  
will heighten and tame.*

*This music  
demonstrates what it claims:  
glory shall be revealed. If art's  
acceptable evidence,*

*mustn't what lies  
behind the world be at least  
as beautiful as the human voice?  
The tenors lack confidence,*

*and the soloists,  
half of them anyway, don't  
have the strength to found  
the mighty kingdoms*

*these passages propose  
—but the chorus, all together,  
equals my burning clouds,  
and seems itself to burn,*

<p><i>commingled powers deeded to a larger, centering claim. These aren't anyone we know; choiring dissolves</i></p> <p><i>familiarity in an up- pouring rush which will not rest, will not, for a moment, be still.</i></p> <p><i>Aren't we enlarged by the scale of what we're able to desire? Everything, the choir insists,</i></p> <p><i>might flame; inside these wrappings burns another, brighter life, quickenened, now,</i></p> <p><i>by song: hear how it cascades, in overlapping, lapidary waves of praise? Still time. Still time to change.</i></p>	
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**Brian Age Seven** by Mark Doty

Grateful for their tour  
of the pharmacy,  
the first-grade class  
has drawn these pictures,  
each self-portrait taped  
to the window-glass,  
faces wide to the street,  
round and available,  
with parallel lines for hair.

I like this one best: Brian,  
whose attenuated name  
fills a quarter of the frame,  
stretched beside impossible  
legs descending from the ball  
of his torso, two long arms  
springing from that same  
central sphere. He breathes here,

on his page. It isn't craft  
that makes this figure come alive;  
Brian draws just balls and lines,  
in wobbly crayon strokes.  
Why do some marks  
seem to thrill with life,  
possess a portion  
of the nervous energy  
in their maker's hand?

That big curve of a smile  
reaches nearly to the rim  
of his face; he holds  
a towering ice cream,  
brown spheres teetering  
on their cone,  
a soda fountain gift  
half the length of him  
—as if it were the flag

of his own country held high  
by the unadorned black line  
of his arm. Such naked support  
for so much delight! Artless boy,  
he's found a system of beauty:  
he shows us pleasure  
and what pleasure resists.  
The ice cream is delicious.  
He's frail beside his relentless standard.

***The Envoy by Jane Hirshfield***

One day in that room, a small rat.  
Two days later, a snake.

Who, seeing me enter,  
whipped the long stripe of his  
body under the bed,  
then curled like a docile house-pet.

I don't know how either came or left.  
Later, the flashlight found nothing.

For a year I watched  
as something—terror? happiness? grief?—  
entered and then left my body.

Not knowing how it came in,  
Not knowing how it went out.

It hung where words could not reach it.  
It slept where light could not go.  
Its scent was neither snake nor rat,  
neither sensualist nor ascetic.

There are openings in our lives  
of which we know nothing.

Through them  
the belled herds travel at will,  
long-legged and thirsty, covered with foreign dust.

***Symposium by Paul Muldoon***

You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it hold  
its nose to the grindstone and hunt with the hounds.  
Every dog has a stitch in time. Two heads? You've been  
sold  
one good turn. One good turn deserves a bird in the hand.

A bird in the hand is better than no bread.  
To have your cake is to pay Paul.  
Make hay while you can still hit the nail on the head.  
For want of a nail the sky might fall.

People in glass houses can't see the wood  
for the new broom. Rome wasn't built between two stools.  
Empty vessels wait for no man.

A hair of the dog is a friend indeed.  
There's no fool like the fool  
who's shot his bolt. There's no smoke after the horse is  
gone.

***Halley's Comet by Stanley Kunitz***

Miss Murphy in first grade  
wrote its name in chalk  
across the board and told us  
it was roaring down the stormtracks  
of the Milky Way at frightful speed  
and if it wandered off its course  
and smashed into the earth  
there'd be no school tomorrow.  
A red-bearded preacher from the hills  
with a wild look in his eyes



stood in the public square  
at the playground's edge  
proclaiming he was sent by God  
to save every one of us,  
even the little children.  
"Repent, ye sinners!" he shouted,  
waving his hand-lettered sign.  
At supper I felt sad to think  
that it was probably  
the last meal I'd share  
with my mother and my sisters;  
but I felt excited too  
and scarcely touched my plate.  
So mother scolded me  
and sent me early to my room.  
The whole family's asleep  
except for me. They never heard me steal  
into the stairwell hall and climb  
the ladder to the fresh night air.

Look for me, Father, on the roof  
of the red brick building  
at the foot of Green Street—  
that's where we live, you know, on the top floor.  
I'm the boy in the white flannel gown  
sprawled on this coarse gravel bed  
searching the starry sky,  
waiting for the world to end.

***The Clasp by Sharon Olds***

She was four, he was one, it was raining, we had colds,  
we had been in the apartment two weeks straight,  
I grabbed her to keep her from shoving him over on his  
face, again, and when I had her wrist  
in my grasp I compressed it, fiercely, for a couple  
of seconds, to make an impression on her,  
to hurt her, our beloved firstborn, I even almost  
savored the stinging sensation of the squeezing,  
the expression, into her, of my anger,  
"Never, never, again," the righteous  
chant accompanying the clasp. It happened very  
fast—grab, crush, crush,  
crush, release—and at the first extra  
force, she swung her head, as if checking  
who this was, and looked at me,  
and saw me—yes, this was her mom,  
her mom was doing this. Her dark,

deeply open eyes took me  
in, she knew me, in the shock of the moment  
she learned me. This was her mother, one of the  
two whom she most loved, the two  
who loved her most, near the source of love  
was this.

***To Television by Robert Pinsky***

Not a “window on the world”  
But as we call you,  
A box a tube

Terrarium of dreams and wonders.  
Coffer of shades, ordained  
Cotillion of phosphors  
Or liquid crystal

Homey miracle, tub  
Of acquiescence, vein of defiance.  
Your patron in the pantheon would be Hermes

Raster dance,  
Quick one, little thief, escort  
Of the dying and comfort of the sick,

In a blue glow my father and little sister sat  
Snuggled in one chair watching you  
Their wife and mother was sick in the head  
I scorned you and them as I scorned so much

Now I like you best in a hotel room,  
Maybe minutes  
Before I have to face an audience: behind  
The doors of the armoire, box  
Within a box—Tom & Jerry, or also brilliant  
And reassuring, Oprah Winfrey.

Thank you, for I watched, I watched  
Sid Caesar speaking French and Japanese not  
Through knowledge but imagination,  
His quickness, and Thank you, I watched live  
Jackie Robinson stealing

Home, the image—O strung shell—enduring  
Fleeter than light like these words we  
Remember in: they too are winged  
At the helmet and ankles.

## **I Chop Some Parsley While Listening To Art Blakey's Version Of "Three Blind Mice"**

And I start wondering how they came to be blind.  
If it was congenital, they could be brothers and sister,  
and I think of the poor mother  
brooding over her sightless young triplets.

Or was it a common accident, all three caught  
in a searing explosion, a firework perhaps?  
If not,  
if each came to his or her blindness separately,

how did they ever manage to find one another?  
Would it not be difficult for a blind mouse  
to locate even one fellow mouse with vision  
let alone two other blind ones?

And how, in their tiny darkness,  
could they possibly have run after a farmer's wife  
or anyone else's wife for that matter?  
Not to mention why.

Just so she could cut off their tails  
with a carving knife, is the cynic's answer,  
but the thought of them without eyes  
and now without tails to trail through the moist grass

or slip around the corner of a baseboard  
has the cynic who always lounges within me  
up off his couch and at the window  
trying to hide the rising softness that he feels.

By now I am on to dicing an onion  
which might account for the wet stinging  
in my own eyes, though Freddie Hubbard's  
mournful trumpet on "Blue Moon,"

which happens to be the next cut,  
cannot be said to be making matters any better.

Billy Collins

Because My Students Asked Me  
By Taylor Mali

what i would want them to do  
at my funeral, i told them:

write & perform a collective poem  
in which each of you says a line  
about what i was like as a teacher,  
about how i made you reach for stars  
until you became them,  
about how much you loved  
to pretend  
you hated me.

*You mean even after you die  
You're going to make us do work?*

