

Birds & Poetry, Wild Things, March 2011 (Examples are in the power point copy)

1. Listen!

A good way to start a writing session (J. Bruchac in Alphabet of the Trees)  
Whitman quote

2. Why are we doing this?

All poetry is communication – who are you writing for?  
Yourself? for observation and self-discovery, but may be limiting  
Define an imaginary reader (Kooser, Poetry Home Repair Manual)  
For teaching/interpretation

3. Poems are triggered by bits of language, glimpses of life; ideas emerge whether intended or not (Kooser)

Essential details, no spare parts  
Don't be intimidated, but much to gain from learning form and tradition

4. Why Birds?

All the wonders of birds, all the benefits of observing, journals etc.  
An aside on collections – many famous bird poems, Bright Wings anthology  
features less well known.

The Oven Bird – Frost

There is a LOT going on here, but don't fret about it  
Meanings are clear enough, but you may find different at new reading  
Beware of over analysis: "What is the poet trying to say?" as if you can't hear

5. How we use poems

Discovery – See things as if for the first time –  
What if you'd never seen or heard a cardinal?

Description and metaphor – examples in the power point from T. Gannon, J.  
Kerouac, R. Hass and myself

Communicate! many audiences, many messages

6. Forms

haiku

cinquain – the "English class" form vs. the syllable count form

quatrain

acrostic or alphabet poems – first letters, etc.

free verse

metered verse

ode

sonnet

shape - concrete poetry –Snyder

## 7. Detail – observation

The most effective poems are not likely from sweeping panorama but from close observation of detail.

“Be one of those on whom nothing is lost,”

Henry James

## 7. Exercise

Each participant contributes an observation words or short phrase about the cardinal – or your memory of a cardinal

Take as much from the audience as possible, then do a group exercise to assemble into a rough draft poem

Keep a journal, and use it!

Some exercise ideas you might try:

Copy descriptions from books, field guides, other sources, cut them into pieces and reassemble into a poem

Become the bird – write from the bird’s perspective, maybe as it might speak to you

Make a list of everything about a bird, all the birds in this area (or any other topic) – this is to focus on detail first, idea later

Deck: Collect your own interesting or useful words, play with rearranging them (your own magnetic poetry)

Group:

Cut up, in a group, is like “deck” done quickly

List poems work as a group exercise

Circle poem, put words on a circle, draw lines to connect, write about each connection and then assemble

Chant: “I am the owl...”

I am the owl that... (hunts by night, sees well in the dark

Questions: usual W W W W W, but also How, What if, Does it, Is it true?

(See especially *The Practice of Poetry* for exercise ideas.)

## 8. Conclusion

What is the definition of a good poem?

“One I like.” – Howard Moss

Why does it matter?

Mary Oliver quote

Be Like the Bird – Victor Hugo

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## References

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Parini, Jay, *Why Poetry Matters*, Caravan Books, 2008

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About what it says it is.

Tom Gannon's Cool Bird Poems

<http://incolor.inebraska.com/tgannon/bird.html#cred>

Huge anthology of poetry

Poetry Through the Ages.

<http://www.webexhibits.org/poetry/>

An Expressive Journey: forms, writing, etc

Jane Reichhold's World of Poetry

<http://www.ahapoetry.com/>

Short forms, especially haiku, lots on writing

Poetry Primer

[http://hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/davidc/6c\\_files/Poem%20pics/poetry\\_primer.htm](http://hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/davidc/6c_files/Poem%20pics/poetry_primer.htm)

Examples and suggested writing activities for a few forms