

POETRY ANALYSIS: NATURE POETRY

For this assignment, your group will analyze a poem about nature, write a commentary about your analysis, then present your findings to the class. Follow the directions below and consult the example included.

Step 1: Annotate the Poem

Read the poem and annotate— not just highlight— your thoughts, ideas, and/or questions as you read. Each group member should annotate the same poem.

Step 2: Analyze the Poem

Answer the questions on the Poetry Analysis sheet. Then, research the poem using Destiny OR search (“key terms”site:.edu) and cull one to three quotes from an expert’s analysis on the poem. Use this information to write a 2-3 paragraph literary commentary on the following prompt: ***How does the poet use literary devices and elements of nature to shape and refine the poem’s theme?*** This should be typed using MLA format (see example for details).

Step 3: Present the Poem

First, read your poem aloud. Tell us a little bit about your poet and how his/her life experiences influenced this particular poem. Explain how natural elements shape and refine the poem’s theme. Discuss meter, rhyme, and devices used in the poem and how that furthers the poet’s ideas.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Poetry Analysis Sheet

Be sure to include all members' names on this paper. Answer the questions below and use this as a guide to complete your poetry analysis.

1. What does the title mean?

Take a look at the title and reflect on what it means: _____

(You will need this for the introductory paragraph.)

2. Put it in your own words

Read the poem two or three times. You will see something different each time you read the poem. Write a brief summary of the poem in your own words. Highlight or list some of the words (nouns, verbs, phrases) that are important to understanding the poem.

3. What do you think the poem means?

Now think about the meaning of the poem, not just the obvious meaning of each word but what they mean beyond the literal. Do these words suggest something else?

Answer these questions:

- Who is the subject of the poem? _____
- What are they talking about? _____
- Why do you think the author wrote the poem? _____
- When is the poem happening? _____
- Where is the poem happening? _____
- What is the poet's attitude? _____
- How does the poem shift from person to person or between different times or places? _____

Most poems tell us about a poet's understanding of an experience so the beginning will be different than the end. The change may be in feelings, language (slang to formal), or connotation (positive to negative). Explain how these shifts convey the poem's message.

continued

Poetry Analysis Sheet (continued)

4. Poetic devices: Tools of the poet

Identify different poetic devices and how they convey the poem's message.

- *Simile* – comparison using like or as _____
- *Metaphor* – a direct comparison _____
- *Personification* – giving human qualities to nonhuman things _____
- *Tone* – what emotion does the speaker use as he talks _____
- *Point of view* – who is the telling the poem _____
- *Imagery* – creating pictures with words _____
- *Alliteration* – repeating the same letter _____

5. Theme

Identify the theme (central idea) of the poem. How does the theme convey the poem's message?

6. Look at the title again

Now look at the title again. Do you now have a different interpretation of the title?

7. Begin writing your analysis

Start with the introductory paragraph. It should contain the title, the author, and an explanation of the writer's position as well as the significance of the title. Include a brief overall statement of the meaning of the poem. This will lead you into the body of the analysis. In the body of the analysis, discuss how the poem was written, which poetic devices were used, the tone, the poet's attitude, and the shift of the poem from the beginning to the poet's ultimate understanding of the experience in the end. Add your interpretation of the poem.

8. Historical and cultural context

Integrate the research you have done on your author into your poetry analysis. Explain how the author's history and culture have influenced the poem.

List two important experiences that influenced the author:

1. _____
2. _____

List two conditions in the author's country that influenced his/her life (poverty, political unrest, war, lack of opportunities, social constraints especially for women):

1. _____
2. _____

The Red Wheelbarrow

William Carlos Williams

physician
1900s

Imagist movement
focused on common people
& everyday life

Essential -
life & death?

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain

water

beside the white
chickens.

tone: serious, grave? - also, simple poem depends on each word for meaning

Colors: red, blue, white

Americana: wheelbarrow, chickens

Simple sentence = simple life



w = assonance

most clear image -
like a painting

- what depends upon this farm scene? Who depends upon this farm?

↳ economic

↳ physician - maybe brought to the house?

↳ father is dying - "so much depends upon"
his ability to provide? Or someone else
sick/dying?

↳ Could also be
more objective
commentary on
American
life

Theme: Americana; demands
of a simple life

- like a snapshot of one moment
- Staccato meter mirrors this
- Similar amount of syllables → makes poem more cohesive structure as well
- internal rhyme -

rad → barrow
glazed → rain
beside → white } add to poetic sound

- w/ poetic devices, simple idea is transformed into poetry
- like a painting, reader sees image at the end of poem

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Literary Analysis for "The Red Wheelbarrow"

William Carlos Williams primarily wrote in the early 20th century and was part of the Imagist movement, an offshoot of Modernism that was "devoted to "clarity of expression through the use of precise visual images" (*Brief Guide to Imagism*). This is especially evident in the poem "The Red Wheelbarrow", with its stark and concise wording. The staccato meter focuses the reader's attention much like focusing a lens on a camera, yet the 6-syllable structure of each stanza makes it one cohesive unit— or image.

A physician by trade, Williams often wrote of everyday life, of common people, and of the American experience. This is visible in the Americana detail. The colors— red, blue, and white— are seen in the wheelbarrow, the rain, and the chicken. The objects themselves are iconic of American farm life— wheelbarrow, chickens, and implicitly, a farmyard. As stated in *Poetry for Students*, "The colors red and white contrast sharply with one another, while the word "glazed" works to transform the image into its new, poetic form." Williams is painting a picture of everyday life for the reader, a "still life" of an early 20th century American farmhouse (*Poetry for Students*).

Not only does this poem reflect on Americanism, but the demands of this simple life as well. The first stanza prompts us to ask what— or who— depends upon this farm scene? As Williams was a physician, does this harken back to a patient who was gravely ill or possibly dying? And what would that mean for a turn-of-the-century agrarian

household? Perhaps, as poets.org suggests, this is a commentary on the importance of the ordinary: "What does this poem value? Common things, clearly. The only objects in the poem are ordinary, enduring, and somehow essential." As William so sparsely states, so much depends upon the Common Man.

Works Cited

"A Brief Guide to Imagism." Poets.org. Academy of American Poets, 16 May 2004. Web. 15 Feb. 2017.

"Explication of The Red Wheelbarrow." Explication of The Red Wheelbarrow. Collin County Community College, n.d. Web. 15 Feb. 2017.

"On 'The Red Wheelbarrow'." Poets.org. Academy of American Poets, 01 Oct. 2015. Web. 15 Feb. 2017.

Grass

By Carl Sandburg

Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo.
Shovel them under and let me work—
I am the grass; I cover all.

And pile them high at Gettysburg
And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun.
Shovel them under and let me work.
Two years, ten years, and passengers ask the conductor:
What place is this?
Where are we now?

I am the grass.
Let me work.

The Tyger

By William Blake

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

I heard a Fly buzz - when I died

By Emily Dickinson

I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air -
Between the Heaves of Storm -

The Eyes around - had wrung them dry -
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset - when the King
Be witnessed - in the Room -

I willed my Keepsakes - Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable - and then it was
There interposed a Fly -

With Blue - uncertain - stumbling Buzz -
Between the light - and me -
And then the Windows failed - and then
I could not see to see -

Fire and Ice

Robert Frost

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

anyone lived in a pretty how town

e. e. cummings

anyone lived in a pretty how town
(with up so floating many bells down)
spring summer autumn winter
he sang his didn't he danced his did.

Women and men(both little and small)
cared for anyone not at all
they sowed their isn't they reaped their same
sun moon stars rain

children guessed(but only a few
and down they forgot as up they grew
autumn winter spring summer)
that noone loved him more by more

when by now and tree by leaf
she laughed his joy she cried his grief
bird by snow and stir by still
anyone's any was all to her

Nothing Gold Can Stay

by Robert Frost

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

"Hope" is the thing with feathers

By Emily Dickinson

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chilliest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

The Night Dances

by Sylvia Plath

A smile fell in the grass.
Irretrievable!

And how will your night dances
Lose themselves. In mathematics?

Such pure leaps and spirals ----
Surely they travel

The world forever, I shall not entirely
Sit emptied of beauties, the gift

Of your small breath, the drenched grass
Smell of your sleeps, lilies, lilies.

Their flesh bears no relation.
Cold folds of ego, the calla,

And the tiger, embellishing itself ----
Spots, and a spread of hot petals.

The comets
Have such a space to cross,

Such coldness, forgetfulness.
So your gestures flake off ----

Warm and human, then their pink light
Bleeding and peeling

Through the black amnesias of heaven.
Why am I given

These lamps, these planets
Falling like blessings, like flakes

Six sided, white
On my eyes, my lips, my hair

Touching and melting.
Nowhere.

The Jabberwocky

by Lewis Carroll

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

'Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!'

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought --
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood a while in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffing through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One two! One two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

'And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
Oh frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!'
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

A Noiseless, Patient Spider

by Walt Whitman

A noiseless, patient spider,
I mark'd, where, on a little promontory, it stood, isolated;
Mark'd how, to explore the vacant, vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself;
Ever unreeling them—ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you, O my Soul, where you stand,
Surrounded, surrounded, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing,—seeking the spheres, to connect them;
Till the bridge you will need, be form'd—till the ductile anchor hold;
Till the gossamer thread you fling, catch somewhere, O my Soul.

Still I Rise

by Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may tread me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

The Secret Garden

By Rita Dove

I was ill, lying on my bed of old papers,
when you came with white rabbits in your arms;
and the doves scattered upwards, flying to mothers,
and the snails sighed under their baggage of stone . . .

Now your tongue grows like celery between us:
Because of our love-cries, cabbage darkens in its nest;
the cauliflower thinks of her pale, plump children
and turns greenish-white in a light like the ocean's.

I was sick, fainting in the smell of teabags,
when you came with tomatoes, a good poetry.
I am being wooed. I am being conquered
by a cliff of limestone that leaves chalk on my breasts.

I Was Sleeping Where the Black Oaks Move

by Louise Erdrich

We watched from the house
as the river grew, helpless
and terrible in its unfamiliar body.
Wrestling everything into it,
the water wrapped around trees
until their life-hold was broken.
They went down, one by one,
and the river dragged off their covering.

Nests of the herons, roots washed to bones,
snags of soaked bark on the shoreline:
a whole forest pulled through the teeth
of the spillway. Trees surfacing
singly, where the river poured off
into arteries for fields below the reservation.

When at last it was over, the long removal,
they had all become the same dry wood.
We walked among them, the branches
whitening in the raw sun.
Above us drifted herons,
alone, hoarse-voiced, broken,
settling their beaks among the hollows.
Grandpa said, These are the ghosts of the tree people
moving among us, unable to take their rest.

Sometimes now, we dream our way back to the
heron dance.

Their long wings are bending the air
into circles through which they fall.
They rise again in shifting wheels.
How long must we live in the broken figures
their necks make, narrowing the sky.

Mother Picking Produce

by Richard Blanco

She scratches the oranges then smells the peel,
presses an avocado just enough to judge its ripeness,
polishes the Macintoshes searching for bruises.

She selects with hands that have thickened, fingers
that have swollen with history around the white gold
of a wedding ring she now wears as a widow.

Unlike the archived photos of young, slender digits
captive around black and white orange blossoms,
her spotted hands now reaching into the colors.

I see all the folklore of her childhood, the fields,
the fruit she once picked from the very tree,
the wiry roots she pulled out of the very ground.

And now, among the collapsed boxes of yucca,
through crumbling pyramids of golden mangos,
she moves with the same instinct and skill.

This is how she survives death and her son,
on these humble duties that will never change,
on those habits of living which keep a life a life.

She holds up red grapes to ask me what I think,
and what I think is this, a new poem about her—
the grapes look like dusty rubies in her hands,

what I say is this: they look sweet, very sweet.

May

by Christina Rossetti

I cannot tell you how it was;
But this I know: it came to pass
Upon a bright and breezy day
When May was young; ah, pleasant May!
As yet the poppies were not born
Between the blades of tender corn;
The last eggs had not hatched as yet,
Nor any bird forgone its mate.

I cannot tell you what it was;
But this I know: it did but pass.
It passed away with sunny May,
With all sweet things it passed away,
And left me old, and cold, and grey.

Annabel Lee

by Edgar Allan Poe

It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of ANNABEL LEE;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me.

I was a child and she was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea;
But we loved with a love that was more than love-
I and my Annabel Lee;
With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven
Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,
In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling
My beautiful Annabel Lee;
So that her highborn kinsman came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre
In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in heaven,
Went envying her and me-
Yes! - that was the reason (as all men know,
In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud by night,

Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
Of those who were older than we-
Of many far wiser than we-
And neither the angels in heaven above,
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee.

For the moon never beams without bringing me
dreams
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And the stars never rise but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling- my darling- my life and my bride,
In the sepulchre there by the sea,
In her tomb by the sounding sea.

Oranges

by Gary Soto

The first time I walked
With a girl, I was twelve,
Cold, and weighted down
With two oranges in my jacket.
December. Frost cracking
Beneath my steps, my breath
Before me, then gone,
As I walked toward
Her house, the one whose
Porch light burned yellow
Night and day, in any weather.
A dog barked at me, until
She came out pulling
At her gloves, face bright
With rouge. I smiled,
Touched her shoulder, and led
Her down the street, across
A used car lot and a line
Of newly planted trees,
Until we were breathing
Before a drugstore. We
Entered, the tiny bell
Bringing a saleslady
Down a narrow aisle of goods.
I turned to the candies
Tiered like bleachers,
And asked what she wanted -
Light in her eyes, a smile
Starting at the corners
Of her mouth. I fingered
A nickle in my pocket,

And when she lifted a chocolate
That cost a dime,
I didn't say anything.
I took the nickle from
My pocket, then an orange,
And set them quietly on
The counter. When I looked up,
The lady's eyes met mine,
And held them, knowing
Very well what it was all
About.
Outside,
A few cars hissing past,
Fog hanging like old
Coats between the trees.
I took my girl's hand
In mine for two blocks,
Then released it to let
Her unwrap the chocolate.
I peeled my orange
That was so bright against
The gray of December
That, from some distance,
Someone might have thought
I was making a fire in my hands.

This Is Just To Say

By William Carlos Williams

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

A Poison Tree

by William Blake

I was angry with my friend;
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I waterd it in fears,
Night & morning with my tears:
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night.
Till it bore an apple bright.
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine.

And into my garden stole,
When the night had veild the pole;
In the morning glad I see;
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

The Journey

by Mary Oliver

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice—
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
"Mend my life!"
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,

as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do—
determined to save
the only life you could save.

Night Journey

by Theodore Roethke

Now as the train bears west,
Its rhythm rocks the earth,
And from my Pullman berth
I stare into the night
While others take their rest.
Bridges of iron lace,
A suddenness of trees,
A lap of mountain mist
All cross my line of sight,
Then a bleak wasted place,
And a lake below my knees.
Full on my neck I feel
The straining at a curve;
My muscles move with steel,
I wake in every nerve.
I watch a beacon swing
From dark to blazing bright;
We thunder through ravines
And gullies washed with light.
Beyond the mountain pass
Mist deepens on the pane;
We rush into a rain
That rattles double glass.
Wheels shake the roadbed stone,
The pistons jerk and shove,
I stay up half the night
To see the land I love.

Peace

by Bessie Rayner Parkes

THE steadfast coursing of the stars,
The waves that ripple to the shore,
The vigorous trees which year by year
Spread upwards more and more;

The jewel forming in the mine,
The snow that falls so soft and light,
The rising and the setting sun,
The growing glooms of night;

All natural things both live and move
In natural peace that is their own;
Only in our disordered life
Almost is she unknown.
She is not rest, nor sleep, nor death;
Order and motion ever stand
To carry out her firm behests
As guards at her right hand.

And something of her living force
Fashions the lips when Christians say
To Him Whose strength sustains the world,
"Give us Thy Peace, we pray!"

Fog

by Carl Sanburg

The fog comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

Morning Song

by Sylvia Plath

Love set you going like a fat gold watch.

The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry
Took its place among the elements.

Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival.
New statue.

In a drafty museum, your nakedness
Shadows our safety.
We stand round blankly as walls.

I'm no more your mother
Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow
Effacement at the wind's hand.

All night your moth-breath
Flickers among the flat pink roses.
I wake to listen:
A far sea moves in my ear.

One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral
In my Victorian nightgown.

Your mouth opens clean as a cat's.
The window square

Whitens and swallows its dull stars.
And now you try
Your handful of notes;
The clear vowels rise like balloons.

from On the Pulse of Morning

By Maya Angelou

A Rock, A River, A Tree
Hosts to species long since departed,
Marked the mastodon,
The dinosaur, who left dried tokens
Of their sojourn here
On our planet floor,
Any broad alarm of their hastening doom
Is lost in the gloom of dust and ages.

But today, the Rock cries out to us, clearly, forcefully,
Come, you may stand upon my
Back and face your distant destiny,
But seek no haven in my shadow,
I will give you no hiding place down here.

You, created only a little lower than
The angels, have crouched too long in
The bruising darkness
Have lain too long
Facedown in ignorance,
Your mouths spilling words
Armed for slaughter.

The Rock cries out to us today,
You may stand upon me,
But do not hide your face.

One Today

by Richard Blanco

One sun rose on us today, kindled over our shores,
peeking over the Smokies, greeting the faces
of the Great Lakes, spreading a simple truth
across the Great Plains, then charging across the Rockies.
One light, waking up rooftops, under each one, a story
told by our silent gestures moving across windows.

My face, your face, millions of faces in morning's mirrors,
each one yawning to life, crescendoing into our day:
pencil-yellow school buses, the rhythm of traffic lights,
fruit stands: apples, limes, and oranges arrayed like rainbows
begging our praise. Silver trucks heavy with oil or paper -
bricks or milk, teeming over highways alongside us,
on our way to clean tables, read ledgers, or save lives -
to teach geometry, or ring up groceries as my mother did
for twenty years, so I could write this poem for all of us today.

All of us as vital as the one light we move through,
the same light on blackboards with lessons for the day:
equations to solve, history to question, or atoms imagined,
the 'I have a dream' we all keep dreaming,
or the impossible vocabulary of sorrow that won't explain
the empty desks of twenty children marked absent
today, and forever. Many prayers, but one light
breathing color into stained glass windows,
life into the faces of bronze statues, warmth
onto the steps of our museums and park benches
as mothers watch children slide into the day.

One ground. Our ground, rooting us to every stalk
of corn, every head of wheat sown by sweat
and hands, hands gleaned coal or planting windmills
in deserts and hilltops that keep us warm, hands
digging trenches, routing pipes and cables, hands
as worn as my father's cutting sugarcane
so my brother and I could have books and shoes.

The dust of farms and deserts, cities and plains
mingled by one wind - our breath. Breathe. Hear it
through the day's gorgeous din of honking cabs,
buses launching down avenues, the symphony
of footsteps, guitars, and screeching subways,
the unexpected song bird on your clothes line.

Hear: squeaky playground swings, trains whistling,
or whispers across cafe tables, Hear: the doors we open
each day for each other, saying: hello, shalom,
buon giorno, howdy, namaste, or buenos días
in the language my mother taught me - in every language
spoken into one wind carrying our lives
without prejudice, as these words break from my lips.

One sky: since the Appalachians and Sierras
claimed
their majesty, and the Mississippi and Colorado
worked
their way to the sea. Thank the work of our
hands:
weaving steel into bridges, finishing one more
report
for the boss on time, stitching another wound
or uniform, the first brush stroke on a portrait,
or the last floor on the Freedom Tower
jutting into the sky that yields to our resilience.

One sky, toward which we sometimes lift our
eyes
tired from work: some days guessing at the
weather
of our lives, some days giving thanks for a love
that loves you back, sometimes praising a mother
who knew how to give, or forgiving a father
who couldn't give what you wanted.

We head home: through the gloss of rain or
weight
of snow, or the plum blush of dusk, but always,
always - home,
always under one sky, our sky. And always one
moon
like a silent drum tapping on every rooftop
and every window, of one country - all of us -
facing the stars
hope - a new constellation
waiting for us to map it,
waiting for us to name it - together.

Lost Sister

by Cathy Song

1

In China,
even the peasants
named their first daughters
Jade—
the stone that in the far fields
could moisten the dry season,
could make men move mountains
for the healing green of the inner hills
glistening like slices of winter melon.
And the daughters were grateful:
They never left home.
To move freely was a luxury
stolen from them at birth.
Instead, they gathered patience;
learning to walk in shoes
the size of teacups,
without breaking—
the arc of their movements
as dormant as the rooted willow,
as redundant as the farmyard hens.
But they traveled far
in surviving,
learning to stretch the family rice,
to quiet the demons,
the noisy stomachs.

2

There is a sister
across the ocean,
who relinquished her name,
diluting jade green
with the blue of the Pacific.
Rising with a tide of locusts,
she swarmed with others
to inundate another shore.
In America,
there are many roads
and women can stride along with men.
But in another wilderness,
the possibilities,
the loneliness,
can strangulate like jungle vines.
The meager provisions and sentiments
of once belonging—
fermented roots, Mah-Jong tiles and firecrackers—set
but
a flimsy household
in a forest of nightless cities.
A giant snake rattles above,
spewing black clouds into your kitchen.
Dough-faced landlords
slip in and out of your keyholes,
making claims you don't understand,
tapping into your communication systems
of laundry lines and restaurant chains.
You find you need China:
your one fragile identification,
a jade link
handcuffed to your wrist.
You remember your mother
who walked for centuries,
footless—
and like her,
you have left no footprints,
but only because
there is an ocean in between,
the unrelenting space of your rebellion.

Cotton Candy on a Rainy Day

by Nikki Giovanni

Don't look now
I'm fading away
Into the gray of my mornings
Or the blues of every night
Is it that my nails
keep breaking
Or maybe the corn
on my second little piggy
Things keep popping out
on my face or of my life
It seems no matter how
I try I become more difficult
to hold
I am not an easy woman
to want
They have asked
the psychiatrists . . . psychologists . . .
politicians and social workers
What this decade will be
known for
There is no doubt . . . it is
loneliness

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

by Langston Hughes

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Daffodils

by William Wordsworth

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced, but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not be but gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed - and gazed - but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

The Eagle

by Lord Alfred Tennyson

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.