

## **Listening to the Earth Speak**

Nisqually River Education Project, Summer Institute for Teachers, 2022

Poetry workshop by Kathleen Byrd, M.Ed, MFA

**Monday morning:** How does poetry relate to our teaching and learning about place and our relationships to place?

Poetry is a way of knowing that is subjective and relational. It might be called intuitive or even intimate. It's a place where our inner landscape can meet or encounter the outer landscape in ways that might be surprising, healing, inspiring, or restorative, connecting our innermost selves with the world. Metaphor is always more than metaphor.

Mountain Pose: Drop into the body with your senses. Head over heart, heart over pelvis, pelvis over heels, grounding. Feel the earth beneath you, the sky above. Pull the mind in alignment with the heart and body. Imagine the mind reaching toward the sky, limitless, the feet or sits bones rooted into the earth, and the heart open to the world. Strong back body for courage, lift the sternum slightly to up lift the heart.

### **Eagle Poem**

by Joy Harjo (US Poet Laureate)

To pray you open your whole self  
To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon  
To one whole voice that is you.  
And know there is more  
That you can't see, can't hear;  
Can't know except in moments  
Steadily growing, and in languages  
That aren't always sound but other  
Circles of motion.  
Like eagle that Sunday morning  
Over Salt River. Circled in blue sky  
In wind, swept our hearts clean  
With sacred wings.  
We see you, see ourselves and know  
That we must take the utmost care  
And kindness in all things.  
Breathe in, knowing we are made of  
All this, and breathe, knowing  
We are truly blessed because we  
Were born, and die soon within a  
True circle of motion,  
Like eagle rounding out the morning  
Inside us.  
We pray that it will be done  
In beauty.  
In beauty.

Over the course of the day, write down thoughts on the board related to hopes and fears in the face of climate change. Sharing them together can help us process these thoughts.

**Tuesday** field day.

During the field day activities, pause occasionally to drop into the body and experience the senses. Maybe take a note card and write down notes of what you are observing within yourself as well as through your senses.

**“Eco-poetry is looking for wildness wherever one can find it” — Gary Snyder**

**Wednesday: Listening to the Earth speak:**

**“Poems would be easy if our heads weren’t so full of the day’s clatter. The task is to get through to the other side, where we can hear the deep rhythms that connect us with the stars and the tides.” — Stanley Kunitz**

**Morning:**

Find stillness, quiet the mind, and drop into the body. Head over heart, heart over pelvis, pelvis over heels. Feel the stability of the ground beneath you and the infiniteness of the sky above. With the mind opening to the sky and the feet and sits bones supported by the Earth, your heart is open to the world. Spine aligned and a strong back body for courage, lift the sternum slightly to lift the heart. Breathe in deeply letting the energy of arrival settle you; exhale letting go of all that has come before this moment.

Write for 10 minutes: Reflect on what you felt and experienced over the last couple of days. Take a moment to quiet the mind, recall images and listen to anything that comes up for you. What has surprised you about your own felt experience? What new hopes and fears come to the surface? How do you feel the landscape and other beings in relation to your hopes and fears? Is there a particular plant, feature, or element that is speaking to you?

Over the course of the morning and early afternoon, take some time to give voice to elements of the Earth, writing lines on the board to complete the prompts. In the face of climate change, what does The Mountain say? The Prairies? Rivers and Streams? Fire?

The Mountain says  
The Prairies say  
Rivers and streams remind us  
Fires can teach us

## **Afternoon workshop**

Return to morning reflection. Change or add anything. Share with 2 people near you. Common themes? Surprises? New hopes or fears?

Closing collaborative poem: 4 volunteers read the collaborative poem out loud, one person for each voice.

## **Closing Poem**

### ***You, Reading This, Be Ready***

**by William Stafford** (PNW poet, WWII conscientious objector who spent 4 years in government labor camps, putting out fires, and building roads and trails).

Starting here, what do you want to remember?  
How sunlight creeps along the shining floor?  
What scent of old wood hovers, what softened  
sound from outside fills the air?

Will you ever bring a better gift for the world  
than the breathing respect that you carry  
wherever you go right now? Are you waiting  
for time to show you some better thoughts?

When you turn around, starting here, lift this  
new glimpse that you found; carry into evening  
all that you want from this day. This interval you spent  
reading for hearing this, keep it for life —

What can anyone give you greater than now,  
starting here, right in this room, when you turn around?