

“A Small Needful Fact”

By Ross Gay (b. 1974)

Is that Eric Garner worked
for some time for the Parks and Rec.
Horticultural Department, which means,
perhaps, that with his very large hands,
perhaps, in all likelihood,
he put gently into the earth
some plants which, most likely,
some of them, in all likelihood,
continue to grow, continue
to do what such plants do, like house
and feed small and necessary creatures,
like being pleasant to touch and smell,
like converting sunlight
into food, like making it easier
for us to breathe.

[2015]

Source: <https://poets.org/poem/small-needful-fact>

The title is part of the poem. The phrasing suggests that readers need to know some facts about Eric Garner. The facts the speaker presents encourages readers to draw conclusions about Eric Garner, the subject, conclusions that contrast with the media's criminalization of him.

patterns of repetition: "perhaps" (sarcastic)

"in all likelihood," "most likely"

"like" with comma before forces reader to breathe, which creates a poignant empathy with the subject, who can no longer breathe.

How it's important: It challenges the reader to see Eric Garner in a way that contrasts with the media's portrayal, which criminalized.

metaphor: plants, which provide oxygen, necessary for us (and "small and necessary creatures") to breathe.

symbolism: Eric Garner, because he planted plants, which allow us to breathe, symbolizes breath itself.

irony: the poem's poignant irony is that while Eric Garner

imagery: (synesthesia) quality plants, earth, sunlight, "small and necessary creatures" encourages readers to empathize with Eric Garner and see him in a way that contrasts with media's portrayal.

(contrast)