

POETRY IN AMERICA

REVIEW OF THE FINDINGS

Submitted to: **THE POETRY FOUNDATION**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Poetry in America is the first national, in-depth survey of people's attitudes toward and experiences with poetry. The survey was conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago on behalf of The Poetry Foundation. The survey investigated people's leisure time pursuits and general reading habits, their early and more recent experiences with poetry, their perceptions of poets and poetry readers, their favorite poems, and their experiences with coming across poetry in unexpected places. The survey sample includes more than 1,000 adult readers with varying levels of interest in poetry. Respondents included adults who currently read or listen to poetry, those who have read poetry in the past but no longer do so, and those who have never read poetry.

This report, which summarizes the findings from the *Poetry in America* study, provides a richly detailed snapshot of poetry's role today. It serves as a benchmark against which The Poetry Foundation and other literary and cultural organizations can measure the impact of programs intended to broaden and deepen people's involvement with poetry.

There are many who believe that poetry and other arts serve important purposes – they celebrate our culture, create economic opportunities, educate our citizenry, and enhance our lives. The arts challenge us to think about ourselves and the world around us in new ways. To this end, it is important to understand the experiences that encourage and those that inhibit participation in the arts. *Poetry in America* brings to light some of the factors that are related to people's involvement with poetry, and begins to delineate the ways in which one art, poetry, benefits those who read and listen to it.

TEN KEY FINDINGS

1. Readers in general, and poetry readers in particular, tend to be women and adults with higher levels of education.

Demographic Characteristics			
	Poetry Users	All Readers	All Adults
Percent Women	62.0	60.8	51.0
Percent Men	38.0	39.2	49.0
Percent < College Degree	55.7	57.5	75.6
Percent College Degree +	44.2	42.3	24.4

- Compared to U.S. Census Bureau population estimates, men and people with less than a college education are under-represented among general readers and among poetry users.

2. While some people may imagine that poetry readers are quiet and perhaps loners by nature, we find that they are a vibrant, active and sociable group.

Participation Rates in Leisure Activities		
	Poetry Users	Non-Users
Read	97.2	91.6
Listen to music	95.8	85.6
Watch television	86.7	92.6
Play sports or exercise	76.4	73.0
Use the Internet	74.4	63.7
Attend cultural events	64.8	47.1
Volunteer	56.3	40.2

- With the exception of watching television, poetry users have higher rates of participation in almost all leisure activities.
- Poetry users socialized with friends and family members more frequently than did non-users.

3. Parents and teachers are most often cited as people who were influential during people's early experiences with poetry.

Persons Associated with Early Poetry Experiences		
	Poetry Users	Non-Users
Parent	42.0	22.5
Other relatives	28.8	15.5
One specific teacher	33.6	49.3
Multiple teachers	23.5	26.8

- Current poetry users are more likely to name parents and other family members as early influences than are non-users.
- Non-users more often cite teachers as people they associate with their early experiences with poetry.
- Parents share poetry with their children. Current users and non-users are equally likely to have been read nursery rhymes and books like Dr. Seuss but current users are more likely to have been read other types of poetry as well.
- Both groups are equally likely to read nursery rhymes and books like Dr. Seuss to their own children, but current poetry users are more likely to read other types of poetry as well.

4. Most people are first exposed to classic poetry but people who continue to engage with poetry are more likely to read or listen to contemporary poetry.

First Type of Poetry Encountered		
	Poetry Users	Non-Users
Classics	55.4	53.8
Contemporary	46.9	37.1
Current Type of Poetry Read		
Classics	42.6	--
Contemporary	55.1	--

- Slightly less than one-third of current users read contemporary poetry exclusively and an additional 23 percent read both classic and contemporary poetry.

5. While poetry readers tend to have more positive perceptions of poetry than do non-poetry readers, non-poetry readers do recognize and appreciate the benefits that poetry has to offer.

Some Positive Perceptions of Poetry		
	Poetry Users	All Readers
Poems help you appreciate the world around you.	95.1	70.7
Poems make you laugh.	94.7	80.5
Poems help you understand other people.	90.4	58.7
Poems provide comfort at difficult times.	88.3	56.4

- Current poetry users endorsed positive statements about poetry at higher rates than did non-users. It appears that non-users hold similar but weaker views of poetry's benefits.
- Non-users endorsed negative statements about poetry at higher rates than did poetry users. They were most likely to agree with statements that indicated that reading poetry is effortful. While many thought poetry is boring and irrelevant to their daily lives, less than half thought that reading poetry is a waste of time.

6. While most people who no longer read poetry say that they simply didn't enjoy it, there is a sizable number who stopped reading poetry because they no longer have time or because they now have other interests.

Reasons People Stopped Reading Poetry	
	Non-Users
Don't like it/not interested	54.0
Lack of time	32.0
Other interests	24.0

- Current users who read poetry less often now than they used to also cite a lack of free time as a barrier to their participation.
- When asked to estimate the amount of free time that they do have, poetry users and non-users provide comparable estimates, reporting between 30 and 35 hours of leisure per week.

7. Non-users do read or listen to poetry when they come across it in unexpected places.

Incidental Exposure to Poetry		
	Poetry Users	Non-Users
At a private ceremony	92.1	81.0
In the newspaper	71.3	53.4
At a public event	49.0	30.2
On a billboard	45.3	30.6

- Of the more than 1,000 people we spoke to, all but nine had been incidentally exposed to poetry.
- Seventy-nine percent of the people who commute via public transportation saw or heard poetry on trains, subways or busses.
- Most people read and like the poetry that they find in unexpected places but it doesn't inspire them to seek out more poetry.
- Non-poetry books and magazines reach many people who might not otherwise read poetry. More than half of the people who said that they have never read poetry, also said that they read it at least some of the time when they come across it in non-poetry books and magazines.

8. People share poetry with one another.

Sharing Poetry		
	Poetry Users	Non-Users
Lent a book of poetry to a friend	31.1	2.7
Received a book of poetry from a friend	39.7	7.4
Copied or emailed a poem to a friend	51.5	22.5
Received a poem from a friend	72.8	39.2

- Poetry users and non-users share poetry with one another. Copying out or emailing poems to friends, family or co-workers are popular ways of sharing poetry.
- Just under 40 percent of adult readers purchased books of poetry. Of those who did, most purchased them for someone other than themselves.

9. Libraries, books clubs and the Internet are among the untapped resources for sharing poetry.

Access to Poetry		
	Poetry Users	Non-Users
Have a library card	72.6	61.5
Borrowed books of poetry from the library	36.3	--
Borrowed CDs or videos of poetry from the library	11.4	--
Attended a library program related to poetry	7.1	0.5
Has access to the Internet	81.3	78.8
Used the Internet to find poetry	36.5	4.8
Used the Internet to get information about a poetry event.	13.6	1.2

- Substantial numbers of adult readers have library cards and have access to the Internet.
- Despite their high levels of access, few use libraries or the Internet for poetry-related activities.

10. Regardless of whether people still read or listen to poetry, many of them can recall the names of poets, titles of poems, and can recite lines of poetry.

Why Do People Remember Poetry?		
	Poetry Users	Non-Users
Felt inspired by the poem or felt a connection with the subject matter	32.0	24.0
Reminded me of school/youth	15.0	23.0
Associated a person or event with the poem	12.0	8.0
The poet is famous	11.0	8.0
The language is beautiful	6.0	3.0

- More than half of current and former poetry users remember the title of a poem.
- Nearly half of former poetry readers can name a poet.
- People are more likely to remember the names of classic rather than contemporary poets.
- People remember poems for a variety of reasons but many mention poetry's ability to touch their lives as one reason why a particular poems has stayed with them.

The Poetry Foundation, sponsor of *Poetry in America*, is committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. The Foundation's mission is to discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience.

The Poetry Foundation commissioned the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago to conduct a large-scale, national research study on the state of poetry in America. This ground-breaking study replaces the usual anecdotal information about poetry with factual information about people's attitudes towards and experiences with poetry. This research will enable the Foundation, and other literary and cultural institutions, to better understand the factors that bring poetry enthusiasts to their appreciation of poetry and those that may dissuade people from engaging with this art form. The results from the *Poetry in America* study will serve as a benchmark against which The Poetry Foundation will measure its program effectiveness over time.

IMPORTANCE OF THE ARTS

The literature on arts participation often emphasizes the potential of the arts to serve broad social and economic goals. Earlier work on the benefits of the arts focused on the benefits youth receive from participating in arts education in school (Catterall, 1998; Cossentino & Shaffer, 1999; Heath, Soep, & Roach, 1998). More recently, this focus has broadened to explore the public benefits (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras & Brooks, 2004) and public mandates of the arts (American Assembly, 1997).

In 1997, The American Assembly, a national, non-partisan public affairs forum, gathered together 78 policy makers from a multitude of disciplines to define the ways in which the arts can and do meet the needs of the nation (American Assembly, 1997). The assembly identified four public mandates for the arts, including to: help define what it is to be an American; contribute to our quality of life and provide the opportunity for economic growth; make our citizens more educated and aware; and, enhance our lives through the promotion of creativity, relaxation and entertainment (American Assembly, 1997).

ENHANCING OUR LIVES THROUGH POETRY AND THE ARTS

Poetry as an art form is charged with same public mandates as the arts in general: defining our culture, improving the quality of life for both those who create and those who appreciate it, educating and invigorating the citizenry, and enhancing people's lives by providing them with deeply meaningful experiences. Poetry and the arts challenge us to think about the world around us and about ourselves in new ways. They can open our minds and eyes to new possibilities. The extent to which poetry achieves these goals is neither well understood nor easy to quantify. *Poetry in America* is one of the first national studies that asks specific questions about both the personal and social benefits associated with reading or listening to poetry. Data from this study provide one of the first views of poetry's unique and shared contribution to the public good.

PROJECT GOALS

Poetry in America was designed to answer five critical research questions:

- 1) What are the characteristics of poetry's current audience?
- 2) What factors are associated with people's ongoing participation with poetry?
- 3) What are people's perceptions of poetry, poets and poetry readers?
- 4) What hinders those people without a strong interest in poetry from becoming more engaged with this art form?
- 5) What steps might be taken to broaden the audience for poetry in the United States?

Poetry in America was designed to answer these questions by gathering information about people's attitudes toward and experiences with poetry. We interviewed people with varying levels of interest in poetry including people who currently read and/or listen to poetry, those who may not have read poetry in many years, and those who have never read poetry at all.

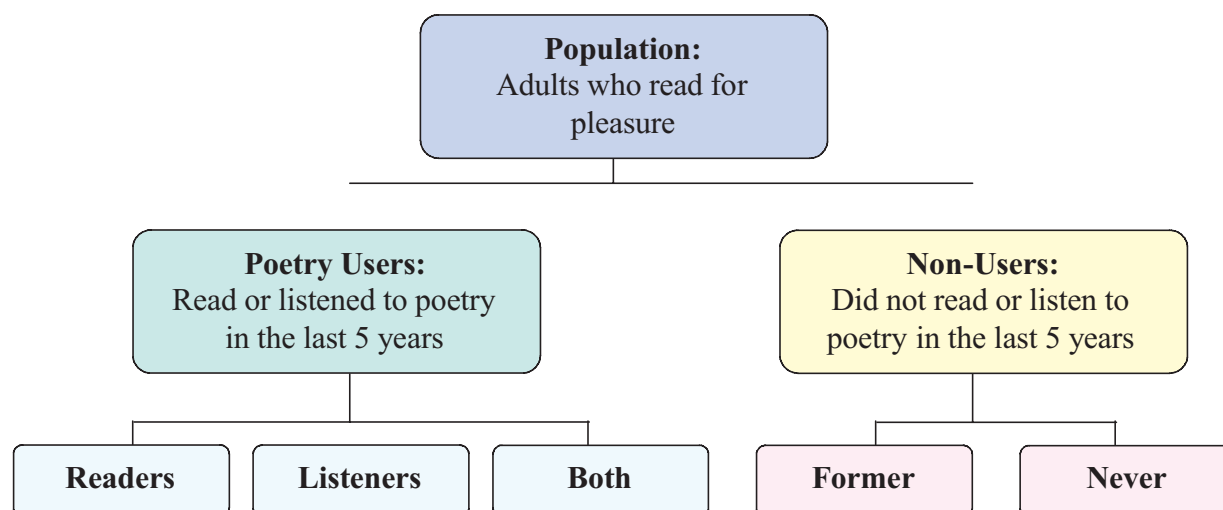
METHODOLOGY¹

The *Poetry in America* survey used a random digit dial (RDD) sample of telephone numbers from across the United States. Only residential landline telephone numbers were included in the sample – telephone numbers belonging to businesses, institutions, and cellular telephones were out of scope. Adults who read for pleasure, that is, reading that is not required for work or school, and who read primarily in English were eligible for the study. One respondent per household was randomly selected to participate.

Eligible respondents were classified into two major groups – poetry users and non-users. Poetry users were those people who have read poetry, listened to poetry, or both within the last five years. Poetry non-users were those who have never read poetry or who have not read poetry within the last five years. Thus, there were two sampling strata – poetry users and non-users – and five respondent types defined for *Poetry in America*: Current Poetry Readers, Current Poetry Listeners, and Current Poetry Readers and Listeners, comprising the poetry user group; and Former Poetry Readers and Non-Poetry Readers, making up the poetry non-user group. Our goal was to complete 1,000 interviews divided nearly equally between poetry users and non-users. Figure 1 depicts the survey strata (poetry users and non-users) and their associated respondent types.

¹ Please see the methodology report for a more detailed description of the methods and procedures used on this study.

FIGURE 1: POETRY IN AMERICA SAMPLE STRATA AND RESPONDENT TYPES



It is important to keep in mind, when reading this report, that we did not interview the general population of adults. We spoke with a sample of adult readers, a group of people who are different in a number of important ways from the general population.

Data collection initially ran ten weeks beginning on June 6th, 2005 and ending on August 13th, 2005. During September and October, NORC conducted a second phase of data collection. During this second phase, a subsample of telephone numbers was released and worked for an additional four weeks. At the close of data collection, we completed 1,023 interviews of which 623 were with poetry users and 400 were with non-users.

Our analyses were conducted using weighted response data. Sample weights take into account sample members' probability of selection, and then make adjustments for non-response. During data collection, we used a quota system that screened out some respondents because we had filled our quota for completed cases with current poetry readers and listeners. Had we interviewed all individuals who screened in as current poetry users, 75 percent of the respondents would have fallen into this stratum. As a result, we needed to weight up the responses of poetry users to take into account those potential participants who were deemed ineligible. Our weighted response data reflect this distribution and result in 773 current poetry readers and listeners, and 250 non-poetry readers.

The unweighted screener response rate, defined as the ratio of completed screeners to all known households in the sample, was 41 percent. The unweighted main interview response rate (the ratio of completed interviews to eligible, screened in households) was 94.0 percent for poetry users, 83.2 percent for poetry non-users, and 89.4 percent overall. The weighted overall response rate for *Poetry in America* was 37.3 percent. If we assume that the quota cases that were screened out would have been willing to complete the interview at the same rate as the poetry users who were screened in before the quota system was in effect, the overall response rate for *Poetry in America* would have been 49.3 percent.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

This report is organized thematically and roughly corresponds to the order in which topics were addressed in the *Poetry in America* questionnaire. Although demographic data were gathered at the end of the questionnaire, we present these data next, in Chapter Two, to familiarize readers with the characteristics of the survey sample.

To place poetry usage in context, in Chapter Three we discuss people's leisure time pursuits and describe their general reading habits in Chapter Four.

Chapter Five describes people's early experiences with poetry and explores the ways that an appreciation for poetry may be transmitted across generations. In Chapter Six, we explore people's more recent experiences with poetry. Chapter Seven looks at the intensity with which people engage with poetry as a function of the intent with which they pursue it.

Perceptions of poetry, poets, and poetry readers are described in Chapter Eight in which we also examine the extent to which cultural stereotypes of poets and poetry readers may exist among adult readers. The personal and social benefits of poetry, as well as the barriers to participation are discussed in Chapter Nine. Chapters Ten and Eleven focus on incidental exposure to poetry and opportunities for increased exposure. In Chapter Twelve, we explore people's favorite and long-remembered poems. Our conclusions and recommendations for audience development strategies are presented in Chapter Thirteen.

WHO READS FOR PLEASURE?

In June 2004, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) released “Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America,” a report based on a subset of data collected in the 2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA). Literary reading was defined as reading novels, short stories, plays or poetry in the previous 12 months, without regard to the quality of the literary works (Bradshaw & Nichols, 2004). Reading that was required for work or school was excluded. The researchers found that literary readers are predominantly white women over the age of 24 with graduate-level educations. We expected our participants, all of whom are readers, to be similar, but not identical, to literary readers. Some differences were expected due to the selection criteria used for *Poetry in America*. First, our sample includes adults who read newspapers, magazines, and non-fiction and was not restricted to literary readers. Second, a small number of participants in *Poetry in America* (around 2 percent) qualified for the study even though they did not read for pleasure. Seventeen adults reported that they listened to poetry but they did not read outside of work or school.

Consistent with the findings on literary readership, more women than men participated in the *Poetry in America* study. Sixty-one percent of our respondents were women. Seventy-five percent of the participants reported their race as white.² Participation was fairly evenly distributed across age groups, although it tended to be lower among young adults (18-24 years old) and older adults (65 years and older). Participation rates were also fairly even across education levels, with only those adults with less than a high school education being less likely to participate in the study. In general, the broader class of readers included in the *Poetry in America* study are very similar to the literary readers who participated in the 2002 SPPA with two exceptions: (1) The 2002 SPPA included significantly more white respondents than did *Poetry in America*, and (2) the SPPA included more adults with less than a high school education and fewer with graduate degrees. These data are summarized in Table I.

² All respondents were asked to describe their ethnicity and race. The ethnicity question was “Do you consider yourself to be Hispanic or Latino(a)?” The race question was “What race do you consider yourself to be? Please select one or more of the following: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; White, or some other race.” Responses were recoded by combining answers to ethnicity and race. Respondents who picked more than one race category were recoded as multi-racial.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Readers

Percentage of Readers in Demographic Categories			
		Poetry In America Sample	SPPA Sample (Those who read in the past year)
GENDER	Male	39.2	40.8
	Female	60.8	59.2
RACE	African American	10.7	9.8
	White*	75.4	85.4
	Other	12.7	4.8
AGE	18-24	10.1	11.8
	25-34	14.0	18.7
	35-44	19.8	22.2
	45-54	22.5	20.4
	55-64	15.1	12.8
	65-74	10.9	8.2
	75 and Older	7.6	5.9
EDUCATION	Less than High School*	3.1	7.5
	High School Diploma or GED	24.0	25.2
	Some College	30.4	31.2
	Bachelor's Degree	23.6	23.4
	Master's Degree or Higher*	18.7	12.6

* Significant at $p < .05$

WHO READS POETRY?

The SPPA asked two questions about poetry, both of which were included on the *Poetry in America* questionnaire.³ Readers should note, however, that there were three major differences between the two surveys that could affect responses to these questions. First, *Poetry in America* provided all respondents with a definition of poetry whereas the SPPA did not.⁴ Second, we included as poetry users those adults who read or listened to poetry in the last five years whereas the SPPA restricted this time frame to one year. Third, the SPPA implicitly excluded poetry that was read for work or school whereas we explicitly included it.⁵ The methodology report provides a detailed description of the rationale for each of these design decisions. These differences should be kept in mind when making comparisons to the SPPA.

³ Both surveys asked respondents, “In the last 12 months, did you read poetry?” The SPPA also asked, “During the last 12 months, did you listen to a reading of poetry, either live or recorded?” We asked, “In the last 12 months, did you listen to poetry?”

⁴ The definition stated, “In this study, I will ask you questions about poems or poetry. Poetry is unique because it uses rhythm and language in verses to create images in the mind of the reader. Sometimes poetry rhymes, but not always. I will use the words ‘poetry’ or ‘poems’ to refer to verses intended to be understood as poems, not as part of something else such as rap, song lyrics, Bible verses, or greeting card messages.”

⁵ Only adults who read for pleasure were eligible for the *Poetry in America* study. However, based on findings from qualitative research conducted during the design phase of this project, we allowed adult readers to identify as poetry users if they read poetry for work or school.

Table 2 shows the demographic comparisons between respondents to the 2002 SPPA who reported that they had read poetry in the year prior to their interview, and a subset of current poetry readers from *Poetry in America* who read poetry in the last 12 months. As seen in Table 2, there are few significant differences between these two groups of poetry readers. Compared to the 2002 SPPA, *Poetry in America* includes:

- Fewer young adults between the ages of 18-24 and more adults aged 75 years or older.
- Fewer white Americans
- Fewer people with less than a college education

These differences may be due to differences in the definition of poetry and other design decisions described above or may be due to differences in the sample, mode and time at which the surveys were conducted.

Table 2: Demographic Comparisons of Poetry Readers in the SPPA and *Poetry in America*

Percentage of Poetry Readers in Demographic Categories			
		Poetry In America Sample	SPPA Sample
GENDER	Male	33.5	30.9
	Female	66.5	69.1
RACE	White**	76.8	84.6
	African American	10.7	11.5
ETHNICITY	Hispanic	5.7	4.6
	Non-Hispanic	94.3	95.4
AGE	18-24**	12.1	14.9
	25-34	15.4	16.2
	35-44	20.1	19.3
	45-54	23.0	22.3
	55-64	12.7	13.0
	65-74	9.2	8.4
	75+ *	7.6	5.9
EDUCATION	Less than College*	52.5	55.8
	Bachelor's Degree or Higher	47.2	44.4

* Significant at $p < .05$

** Significant at $p < .01$

Estimates from the 2002 SPPA indicate that poetry readers and listeners comprise 14 percent of the general population. For *Poetry in America*, we expected a higher proportion of our population, adult readers, to identify as poetry users. Table 3 shows the weighted and unweighted number of respondents who fell into the five respondent type designations. Interviews were completed with sixty percent poetry users ($n=623$) and 40 percent non-poetry users ($n=400$). Of the poetry users, the majority (57 percent) both read and listened to poetry. Non-users were most often categorized as former poetry readers (82 percent).

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents across Respondent Types

Distribution of Respondent Types				
RESPONDENT TYPES	Unweighted Number	Unweighted Percent	Weighted Number	Weighted Percent
Current Poetry Readers	194	19.0	242	23.6
Current Poetry Listeners	74	7.2	90	8.8
Current Readers and Listeners	355	34.7	441	43.1
Former Poetry Readers	328	32.1	210	20.5
Non-poetry readers	72	7.0	40	3.9
Total	1,023	100	1,023	100

DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCE BETWEEN POETRY USERS AND NON-USERS

Table 4 summarizes the demographic characteristics of poetry users and non-users.

We compared poetry users and non-users with respect to seven key demographic characteristics: gender, race, age, education, employment status, marital status and income. We used these variables in a statistical model to determine which characteristics predict participation with poetry. We found that gender, age, race, marital status and education are independent predictors of participation. We found no relationship between poetry participation and either employment status or income. Women, African Americans, and people with graduate degrees are more likely to be poetry users than non-users. While poetry users tend to be under 55 years of age, young adults between the ages of 18-24 are more likely to be current poetry users than non-users, and older adults between the ages of 55 and 75 are more likely to be non-users. People who have never married are more likely to be poetry users and those who are currently married are more likely to be non-users. Twenty-four percent of the poetry users have never married compared to 12 percent of non-users. Nearly two-thirds of the non-users (70 percent) are married compared to just over half of the poetry users (54 percent).

The relationship between poetry user status and age is particularly interesting. As people age, they become less likely to read or listen to poetry. Seventy percent of poetry users are under the age of fifty-five, whereas only 55 percent of the non-users are below this age. Young adults, aged 18-24 years old, are also more likely to identify as poetry users than non-users. Although the questionnaire did not collect information about in-school status from all respondents, we did ask those who were not employed what best described their situation.⁶ Twenty-eight of the 103 young adults who participated in this study (27 percent) were not employed and responded to this question. All but one of these young adults was a poetry user. Of these 27 young adult poetry users, slightly more than half (55 percent) indicated that they are not working because they are in school.

⁶ People who were not employed were asked, "What best describes your situation at this time? Are you retired from a job or business; looking for work; in school; taking care of house or family; disabled or ill; or something else?"

Table 4: Demographic Characteristics of Poetry Users and Non-Users

Percentage of Respondents in Demographic Categories				
		Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
GENDER	Male	38.0	42.8	39.2
	Female*	62.0	57.2	60.8
RACE AND ETHNICITY	African American**	12.2	6.3	10.7
	White Hispanic	1.8	1.5	1.7
	White Non-Hispanic*	72.1	78.7	73.7
	Multi-Racial	4.5	4.2	4.4
	Other	8.1	8.8	8.2
AGE	18-24**	12.2	3.5	10.1
	25-34	15.1	10.9	14.0
	35-44	19.7	20.1	19.8
	45-54	23.2	20.7	22.5
	55-64**	13.3	20.5	15.1
	65-74**	9.1	16.6	10.9
	75 and Older	7.6	7.7	7.6
EDUCATION	Less than High School	3.1	3.4	3.1
	High School or GED	21.8	31.0	24.0
	Some College, No Degree	30.8	29.0	30.4
	Bachelor's Degree	23.4	24.2	23.6
	Master's Degree or Higher**	20.8	12.3	18.7
EMPLOYMENT STATUS	Full-Time	53.6	49.3	52.5
	Part-Time	15.0	13.4	14.6
	Not Employed	31.4	37.4	32.8
MARITAL STATUS	Never Married*	24.2	11.7	21.2
	Married*	53.9	70.2	57.9
	Separated or Divorced	13.0	9.6	12.2
	Widowed	7.4	7.7	7.5
INCOME	<10k	5.0	5.7	5.1
	10-25k	12.3	8.8	11.4
	25-50k	23.1	22.7	23.0
	50-75k	18.0	23.4	19.3
	75-100k	13.7	11.1	13.1
	100k+	15.6	14.8	15.4
	Not Reported	12.0	13.0	12.7

* Significant at $p < .05$;

**Significant at $p < .01$

Overall, 73 percent of the participants in *Poetry in America* have children. Given the significant differences in marital status between users and non-users, it is not surprising that non-users (83 percent) are significantly more likely to have children than are poetry users (64 percent). Table 5 shows that for poetry users and non-users who are parents, there are no significant differences in the average number of children they have, the average number currently living in their households, or in the average ages of their children. In reviewing Table 5, the reader should keep in mind that the average age of our respondents was 48 years old, therefore it is not surprising that the average age of respondents' youngest child is 20 years old.

Table 5: Characteristics of Children of Poetry Users and Non-Users				
	Poetry Users		Poetry Non-users	
	Average	N	Average	N
Number of Children	1.74	617	1.74	617
Number of Children Currently Living in Household	1.09	439	1.05	329
Age - <i>Only Child</i>	16.83	96	17.25	61
Age - <i>Oldest Child</i>	27.43	343	29.56	268
Age - <i>Youngest Child</i>	20.40	343	22.25	268
Age span of children (Oldest-Youngest)	7.03	343	7.31	268

DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES WITHIN STRATA

As noted in the introduction, each of the two sampling strata was made up of different respondent types. Within the poetry user strata, there were three respondent types: (1) Current Readers which included adults who had read poetry in the last five years; (2) Current Listeners which included adults who had listened to poetry in the last five years; and (3) Current Readers and Listeners which included people who had done both in the last five years. Table 6 shows the demographic characteristics of each of these respondent types. In general, poetry users, regardless of how they choose to experience poetry, are similar to one another. The only notable exceptions are within the Current Listener group. African Americans and men are significantly more likely to listen to, but not read, poetry.

Table 6: Demographic Characteristics of Poetry User Respondent Types

		Current Poetry Readers	Current Poetry Listeners	Both Readers and Listeners
GENDER	Male*	23.5	53.8	42.8
	Female	76.5	46.2	57.2
RACE	African American*	5.1	26.8	13.1
	White	82.6	58.2	72.3
	Multi-Racial	5.4	6.1	3.7
	Other	5.8	6.4	9.6
AGE	18-24	8.0	2.5	16.4
	25-34	17.3	9.8	14.9
	35-44	19.9	24.8	18.5
	45-54	22.6	25.1	23.1
	55-64	12.9	11.4	13.9
	65-74	11.4	12.0	7.2
	75 and older	8.0	14.5	6.0
EDUCATION	Less than High School	0.2	11.7	2.8
	High School diploma or GED	29.1	27.9	16.5
	Some College	33.4	23.1	30.9
	Bachelor's degree	22.5	23.4	23.9
	Master's degree or higher	14.8	13.9	25.5
MARITAL STATUS	Never married	18.3	21.7	28.0
	Married	60.4	45.1	52.2
	Separated or divorced	11.4	16.5	13.2
	Widowed	9.0	15.6	4.9
INCOME	<10k	2.4	12.5	4.8
	10-25k	12.0	10.9	12.8
	25-50k	24.3	21.2	22.7
	50-75k	16.0	19.2	18.9
	75-100k	12.0	11.2	15.1
	100k+	18.3	13.6	14.6

*Significant at $p < .05$

Within the non-user strata there were two respondent types: (1) Former Poetry Readers which included adults who had read poetry at some point in their lives but who had not read poetry within the last five years; and (2) Non-Poetry Readers which included adults who read for pleasure but who have never read poetry. As seen in Table 7, these groups are also very similar to one another. Non-poetry readers are significantly more likely to include older adults aged 65 and older as well as adults with less than a college education.

Table 7: Demographic Characteristics of Non-User Respondent Types

		Non-Poetry Readers	Former Poetry Readers
GENDER	Male	48.7	41.6
	Female	51.3	58.4
RACE	African American	11.8	5.3
	White	77.3	80.7
	Multi-Racial	4.2	4.2
	Other	6.7	9.2
AGE	18-24	3.4	3.5
	25-34	2.5	12.5
	35-44	16.0	20.9
	45-54	18.5	21.1
	55-64	17.7	21.1
	65-74*	26.9	14.6
	75 and older*	15.1	6.3
EDUCATION	Less than High School*	11.8	1.8
	High School diploma or GED*	43.7	28.6
	Some College*	30.3	28.8
	Bachelor's degree	7.6	27.3
	Master's degree or higher	5.9	13.5
MARITAL STATUS	Never married	13.5	11.4
	Married	55.5	73.0
	Separated or divorced	15.1	8.5
	Widowed	14.3	6.4
INCOME	<10k	8.4	5.1
	10-25k	15.1	7.6
	25-50k	26.9	21.9
	50-75k	20.2	24.0
	75-100k	4.2	12.4
	100k+	5.9	16.6
	NOT REPORTED	19.3	12.5

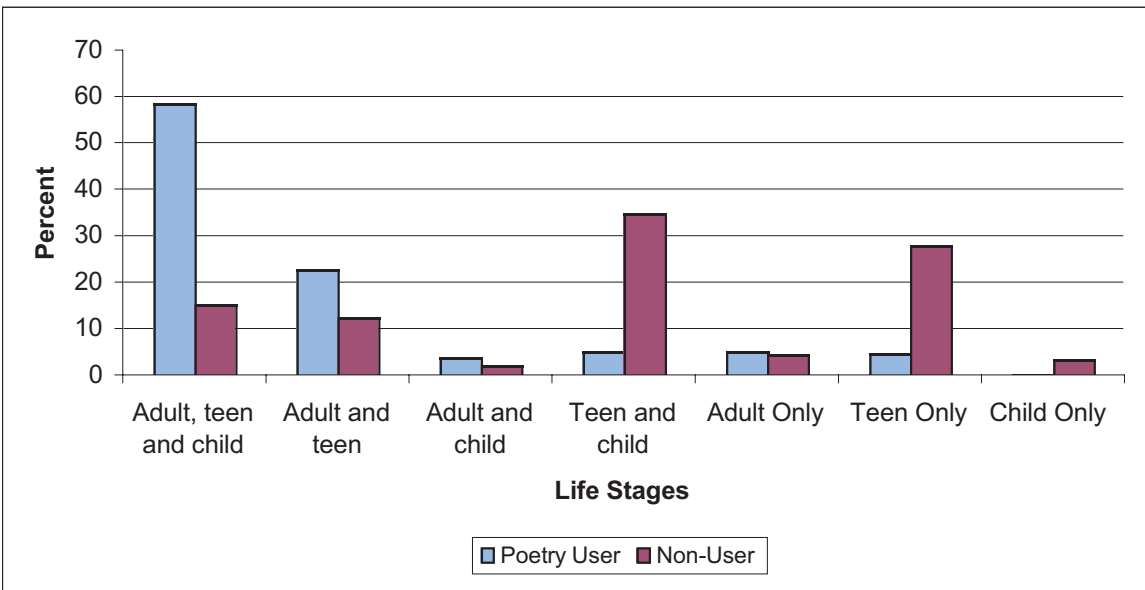
* Significant at $p < .05$.

AT WHICH POINTS IN THEIR LIVES DO PEOPLE EXPERIENCE POETRY?

Overall, we found that 94 percent of readers indicate that they have read poetry at some point in their lives, whether as an adult, teenager or youth.

Almost 60 percent of poetry readers indicate that they’ve read poetry throughout their lives. In contrast, only 15 percent of non-users report having read poetry as an adult, as a teen, and as a child. Sixty-two percent of non-users indicate that they read poetry as teenagers or children, or during their teenage years only. Figure 2 shows poetry readership by both current and former poetry readers across life stages.

FIGURE 2: POETRY READERSHIP AT THREE LIFE STAGES



The Poetry Foundation’s primary concern is with the reading and listening audiences for poetry. However, stakeholders and participants in the qualitative research phase of this project felt it was important to collect information about people’s experiences writing poetry. We asked all participants about their experiences writing poetry as adults, and we asked those who wrote poetry about their experiences performing their own poetry.⁷ Their responses are summarized in Table 8. Thirty-six percent of all readers have written poetry as adults. Poetry users are significantly more likely to write poetry (45 percent) than are non-users, fewer than 1 percent of whom have written poetry as adults. Just over one-quarter of the adults who have written poetry (27 percent) have performed their own poetry in public.

We asked people who had written poetry as adults how recently they had done so. Their responses are shown in Table 9. In general, respondents’ experiences writing poetry mirrored their experiences reading or listening to poetry – current poetry users were more likely to have written poetry within the last year and non-users were more likely to have written poetry 10 or more years ago. It is worth noting that within the last five years, 36 percent of non-users wrote, but did not read or listen to poetry.

⁷ We asked, “Have you written poetry as an adult?” The follow-up question for those who wrote poetry was, “Have you performed or read your own poetry in public?”

Table 8: Producers of Poetry by Respondent Types

	Current Readers	Current Listeners	Current Readers & Listeners	Former Poetry Readers	Non-Poetry Readers
Wrote poetry as an adult*	37.2	12.2	55.8	0.1	0.03
Performed poetry in public	24.4	27.3	29.3	4.8	0

* Significant at $p < .05$

Note: Percentages for those who performed their poetry in public are a proportion of those who have written poetry.

Table 9: Recency with Which Adults Have Written Poetry

Percentage of Respondents who Wrote Poetry as Adults			
	Percent	Number	Percent
Within the last year	53.6	22.7	51.8
Between 1 and 5 years ago	26.2	13.6	25.5
Between 6 and 10 years ago	9.2	9.1	9.2
10 or more years ago	11.0	54.5	13.6

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Compared to the SPPA, *Poetry in America* expands the definition of readership to include adults who have read newspapers and magazines in addition to book readers. Despite our broader definition of adult readers, the picture of who reads remains relatively unchanged: Both surveys find that middle-aged women with post-secondary educations are the most frequent readers. Literary readers and poetry users tend to be better educated than the general population of readers with both literary readers and poetry users more often holding graduate degrees.

Current poetry users, regardless of how they choose to participate, are demographically very similar to one another. Among current poetry users, listeners may be a special audience that includes a higher percentage of African Americans and a higher percentage of men. By and large, current poetry users are lifelong poetry participants whose involvement with poetry began in their youth and continued into adulthood. Most former poetry readers encountered poetry during their teenage years but did not choose to continue their participation into adulthood.

Adults who have never read poetry and those who have read in the past but do not continue to do so are also demographically similar to one another, although those who have never read poetry tend to be older and have lower educational levels.

3 UNDERSTANDING HOW PEOPLE SPEND THEIR TIME

Free time may be one of the most basic yet influential factors affecting participation in the arts. The amount and structure of available free time constrains people's choices and opportunities for arts engagement. For example, attending an arts event generally requires having at least an hour or two of time available at a specific time of day whereas reading or exercising may be leisure activities that can be undertaken at one's convenience. How one chooses to allocate one's free time can also be seen as a preference indicator. Figure 3 summarizes participation rates in a variety of leisure time activities (activity in the last 12 months). The data, from the 1982, 1992 and 2002 SPPA, show that participation in the arts has remained relatively stable over the past 20 years.

FIGURE 3: TRENDS IN LEISURE ACTIVITIES

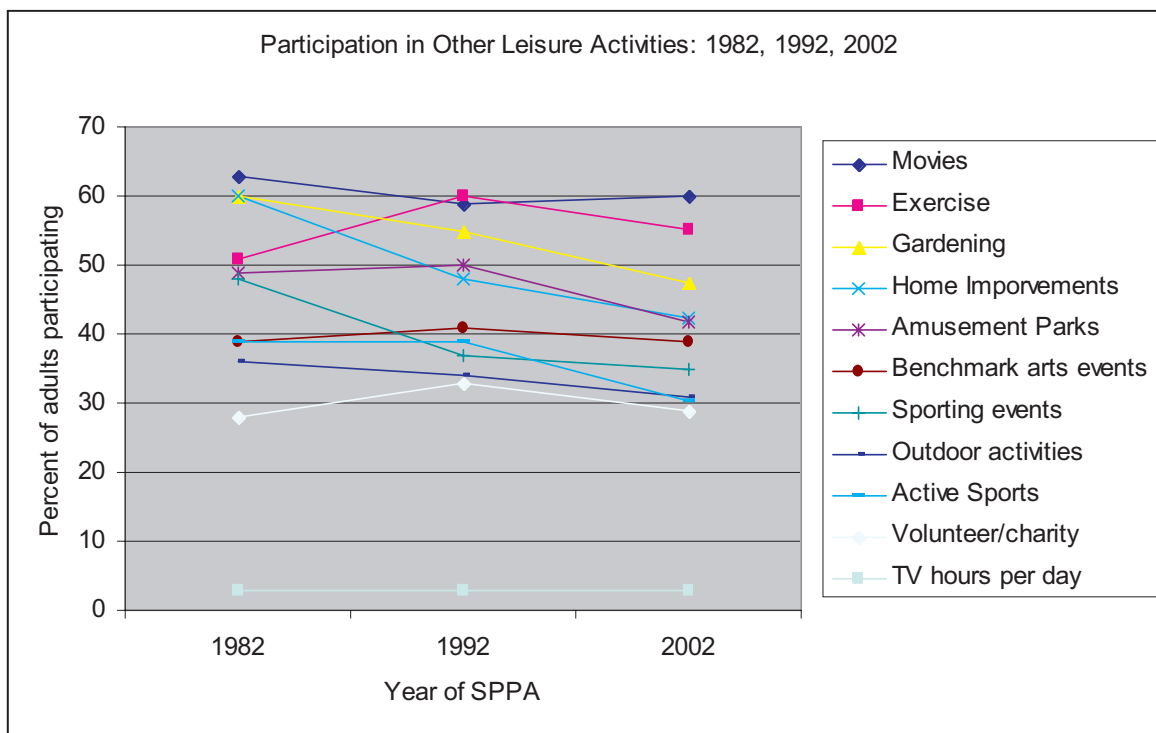
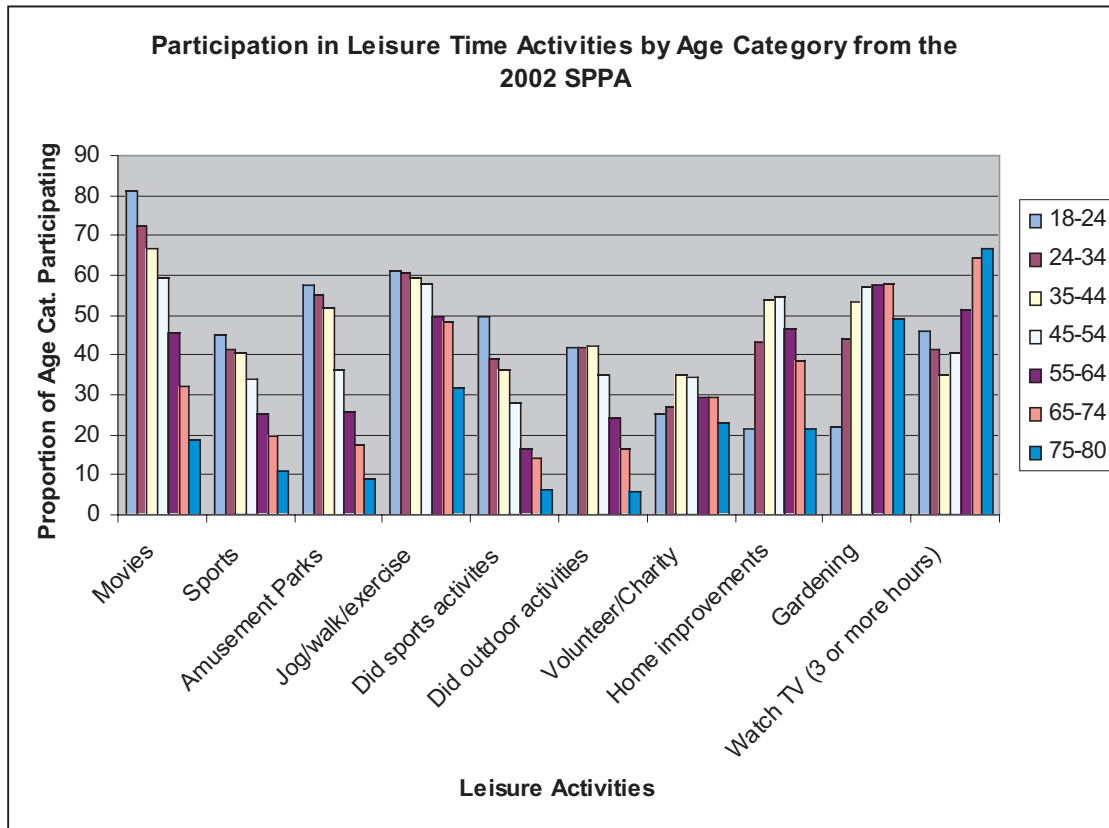


Figure 4 presents data from the 2002 SPPA and shows that participation in leisure activities varies by age and by type of activity. For example, going to movies, sporting events, amusement parks, participating in exercise, sports and outdoor activities all show declining participation rates with age. Participating in volunteer or charity work, home improvements, and gardening tend to peak in middle ages, and the highest rates of television watching are observed among the youngest and oldest groups. These changes in participation rates across the life course suggest that other factors, such as changes in the amount of available free time or resources, or changes in the interests of friends and family may influence participation in a variety of leisure pursuits.

FIGURE 4: AGE-RELATED CHANGES IN LEISURE



LEISURE AND WORK HOURS

We sought to answer two important research questions by including a module on leisure time on the *Poetry in America* questionnaire: (1) Is there a relationship between the amount of free time people have available and their participation with poetry? Is it possible that readers who find themselves with very little free time might be more amenable to poetry because an individual poem, generally speaking, can be read in a short amount of time? On the other hand, if poetry is but one of many interests, perhaps people with ample free time are more likely to engage with poetry because they can more easily make time for it along with their other interests. (2) Are there differences in the kinds of leisure activities in which poetry users and non-users choose to participate? If so, what do these differences reveal about these two types of readers?

To help us understand how the amount of available free time may affect people's leisure pursuits, we asked all respondents to estimate the amount of free time that they have each week⁸. Respondents were also asked to estimate the total hours per week they usually work. We then examined how leisure and work estimates vary by strata, age, marital status, employment status, education, income, race and gender. These data are shown in Table 10.

⁸ Respondents were asked two questions that were then recoded into a single estimate of free time. We first asked "Thinking about a typical weekday, about how many hours of free time would you say you have?" We then asked, "Now, thinking about a typical weekend day, about how many hours of free time would you say you have." We defined free time as "the time that you have left over after you take care of all the things that you have to do. Free time, or leisure time, is the time you have available after you've taken care of yourself by sleeping and eating, met your commitments like work or school, and taken care of your home and family."

Table 10: Average Hours of Leisure and Average Hours Worked per Week

Leisure and Work Hours by Demographic Characteristic			
		Average Number of Leisure Hours per Week	Average Number of Hours Worked per Week
AGE	18-24	52.4	28.9
	24-34	32.5	40.9
	34-44	29.1	43.4
	45-54	33.0	42.4
	55-64	40.7	28.2
	65-74	44.8	17.0
	75+	47.7	6.6
GENDER	Male	40.4	39.7
	Female	35.7	30.6
RACE	Black	40.7	32.9
	White	37.5	31.2
	Multi-Racial	60.7	43.0
	Other	33.4	38.9
MARITAL STATUS	Never Married	44.2	35.0
	Married	33.2	36.1
	Separated or Divorced	43.8	35.0
	Widowed	42.9	13.4
EDUCATION	Less than High School	51.6	21.0
	High School	41.6	28.9
	Some College	39.0	33.4
	Bachelor's Degree	32.1	35.2
	Master's Degree or Higher	34.0	39.3
EMPLOYMENT STATUS	Full Time	31.1	48.7
	Part Time	39.9	28.9
	Not Employed	47.3	11.0
INCOME	< \$10,000	45.0	16.9
	\$10,000 - 25,000	46.4	28.0
	\$25,000 - 50,000	39.0	32.6
	\$50,000 - 75,000	32.8	36.7
	\$75,000 - 100,000	36.3	39.0
	\$100,000+	31.9	40.0
STRATA	Poetry Users	39.8	34.9
	Non-Users	35.2	31.6
TOTAL		37.6	33.4

On average, participants in the *Poetry in America* study reported having 4.3 hours of free time on a typical week day and 7.2 hours of free time on a typical weekend day. These numbers are consistent with those found for all adults aged 15 years and older on the American Time Use Survey (ATUS). The 2004 ATUS data show on average, adults devote 4.7 hours per weekday to leisure time activities, and 6.3 hours per day on weekends and holidays.

Table 10 shows the relationship between leisure and work hours and various demographic characteristics. Table 10 also provides the average weekly hours of leisure and hours of work reported by poetry users and non-users.

Free time is most abundant among young adults, and among people who are not employed or married. We found evidence of gender differences in amount of available free time such that men, despite reporting nine more hours of work per week than women, also report seven more hours of free time per week. We found only minor differences between Blacks and Whites in terms of leisure and work time. Of the demographic characteristics shown in Table 10, only age and employment status are significant predictors of the amount of available free time.

We found no differences between poetry users and non-users with respect to the number of hours they work each week or their available free time. Despite working three more hours per week, poetry users report almost five more hours of free time per week. These minor differences suggest that lack of leisure time is unlikely to be a major barrier to increased poetry use among people who do not currently engage with this art form.

LEISURE ACTIVITIES

All respondents were asked which of a series of activities they engage in during their free time. The participation rates by various demographic segments are shown in Tables 11 and 12.

Table 11: Participation Rates in Leisure Activities by Gender, Age, and Race

	Gender		Age Range ⁹							Race		
	Men	Women	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	White	Black	Other
Read	94.8	96.5	97.0	96.5	94.4	95.6	99.3	93.7	90.5	96.2	95.6	94.2
Listen to music	91.6	94.4	99.0	96.5	91.6	92.6	90.9	93.7	91.0	92.6	96.6	98.1
Watch television	88.2	88.1	75.7	85.4	90.1	92.6	87.7	91.9	87.3	88.5	90.8	86.8
Watch movies	85.5	85.6	86.4	95.1	89.2	87.0	83.8	82.0	62.8	84.8	92.4	83.0
Play sports or exercise	77.5	74.4	86.4	88.9	76.2	73.6	71.4	61.6	69.2	75.5	76.5	80.8
Internet/computer games	76.6	68.7	78.6	85.4	82.7	78.8	67.7	49.1	26.9	73.8	71.4	53.8
Listen to talk radio	73.6	61.3	57.3	66.0	62.6	64.5	66.2	75.0	78.2	66.2	72.3	64.2
Attend cultural events	61.9	59.6	55.3	55.6	57.9	65.4	68.8	59.8	53.2	61.6	51.3	73.6
Volunteer	55.9	50.0	55.3	49.0	55.0	55.2	52.3	43.8	51.3	54.0	44.5	50.0
Write	45.1	55.4	65.0	63.2	50.0	45.5	44.2	47.7	52.6	51.1	63.0	37.7
Draw, paint, craft	25.3	51.6	34.0	44.4	44.6	46.3	41.6	30.6	35.9	42.5	31.1	55.8
Play a musical instrument, sing	32.2	29.8	38.8	33.6	24.1	31.7	30.5	30.4	29.1	29.5	39.5	34.0

Table 12: Participation Rates in Leisure Activities by Education, Employment Status, and Income

	Education			Income ¹⁰						Employment		
	<BA	BA	MA+	1	2	3	4	5	6	Full	Part	Not
Read	92.5	97.1	98.4	93.5	95.7	94.8	95.5	98.5	96.8	95.5	97.3	95.5
Listen to music	93.5	92.9	93.2	90.4	95.7	91.1	96.0	94.8	93.7	92.4	94.0	94.3
Watch television	89.3	87.1	86.9	86.5	88.9	89.4	90.4	86.6	88.0	88.7	87.2	87.8
Watch movies	84.6	88.4	85.4	80.8	92.3	81.7	89.3	88.0	87.3	88.5	84.5	81.3
Play sports or exercise	71.8	81.3	80.2	56.6	77.8	72.3	78.2	89.5	75.8	77.3	83.9	69.0
Internet/computer games	64.0	80.5	85.3	44.2	53.8	65.1	81.8	82.8	89.2	82.7	76.5	52.1
Listen to talk radio	62.3	67.6	76.0	63.5	69.2	65.5	67.0	68.4	68.4	66.1	63.1	67.4
Attend cultural events	50.6	68.5	81.7	48.1	54.3	50.6	64.0	69.2	70.9	62.2	63.8	56.1
Volunteer	47.4	56.0	62.8	41.5	41.9	47.4	58.1	54.9	64.6	51.2	62.4	49.4
Write	49.4	51.2	58.1	57.7	59.0	50.6	50.5	47.0	52.5	48.0	56.7	54.2
Draw, paint, craft	41.1	41.7	41.4	28.8	44.4	46.6	38.6	40.3	38.0	41.0	44.7	40.4
Play a musical instrument, sing	30.9	24.1	38.7	37.7	26.5	27.2	31.8	27.8	36.1	30.5	28.2	32.1

⁹ Age ranges are: 18-24; 25-34; 35-44; 45-54; 55-64; 65-74; 75+

¹⁰ Income categories are: < \$10,000; \$10-\$25,000; \$25-\$50,000; \$50-\$75,000; \$75-\$100,000; \$100,000+

Table 13 below shows the participation rates in various activities by poetry users and non-users. Poetry users participate at significantly higher rates in nearly all activities, except for watching television. Non-users are significantly more likely to watch television than are poetry users. The two groups watch movies, listen to public or talk radio, and exercise at comparable rates but poetry users participate at significantly higher rates in all other leisure activities.

Table 13: Participation Rates in Leisure Activities by Poetry Users and Non-Users			
Poetry Users' and Non-Users' Leisure Pursuits			
ACTIVITY	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
Read**	97.2	91.6	95.8
Listen to music**	95.8	85.6	93.3
Watch television*	86.7	92.6	88.2
Watch movies	86.5	82.6	85.5
Play sports or exercise	76.4	73.0	75.6
Use Internet or play computer games**	74.4	63.7	71.8
Listen to talk radio	67.3	62.2	66.1
Attend cultural events**	64.8	47.1	60.5
Volunteer**	56.3	40.2	52.3
Write**	57.1	33.9	51.4
Draw, paint, craft**	44.7	30.8	41.3
Play instrument or sing**	35.1	17.3	30.7

* Significant at $p < .05$

** Significant at $p < .01$

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social networks may play an important role in encouraging or discouraging arts participation. Briefly, social network theory focuses on an individual's social networks as a means toward understanding behavior (Fischer, 1977). The primary focus is on interpersonal relationships linking individuals to other individuals, such as relatives, friends, co-workers, and acquaintances. At the center of this network is the individual and radiating outward are his or her various relationships with the most intimate relationships closer to the core. Stokowski (1994) found that one's leisure patterns are significantly influenced by one's social network.

To examine the role that social networks may play in arts participation, we asked all respondents a series of questions designed to explore the extent to which they socialize with others over the course of a week.¹¹ First, we asked respondents about being in touch with friends and relatives by telephone, letters and email, and then asked about getting together with friends and relatives.¹² In the week prior to their interviews, 92 percent of all participants were in touch with friends and relatives by telephone, email or by letter. Seventy-six percent socialized with friends and 71 percent visited with relatives.

On all measures, poetry users appear to be slightly more sociable than non-users. Ninety-four percent of poetry users were in touch with friends in the week prior to their interview and 79 percent visited with friends in the prior week. In comparison, 89 percent of non-users spoke or wrote to friends in the prior week and 69 percent visited with friends. These differences are significant. Poetry users and non-users socialized with relatives at comparable rates, although the trend was toward higher levels of socializing among poetry users. Ninety-two percent of poetry users and 91 percent of non-users were in touch with relatives in the preceding week. Seventy-two percent of poetry users and 70 percent of non-users socialized with relatives. Not only were poetry users more likely to socialize either through various media or in person, they also socialized more frequently over the course of a week than did non-users. These data are summarized in Table 14.

Table 14: Socializing by Poetry Users and Non-Users					
Number of Days Respondents were In Touch by Telephone, Letter or Email					
Number of Days Last Week	with Friends			with Relatives	
	Poetry Users	Non-Users		Poetry Users	Non-Users
Three days or more	73.5	61.7	Three days or more	69.7	65.8
One to two days	20	27.3	One to two days	22.6	24.8
Not at all	6.2	10.8	Not at all	7.6	8.9
Number of Days Respondents Got Together by Going Out or Visiting					
Number of Days Last Week	with Friends			with Relatives	
	Poetry Users	Non-Users		Poetry Users	Non-Users
Three days or more**	34.9	24.8	Three days or more	32.5	27.2
One to two days	43.6	44.1	One to two days	38.6	42.9
Not at all**	21	30.9	Not at all	28.3	29.8

* Significant at $p < .05$

** Significant at $p < .01$

¹¹ A more comprehensive examination of social networks that would include mapping respondents' various relationships was beyond the scope of this project.

¹² The first question asked, "Thinking of telephone calls, letters, or emails, how many days were you in touch with relatives last week, not counting any who live with you?" This question was followed by, "In the last week, how many days did you get together with any relatives? I mean things like the going out together or visiting in each others' homes?" The series then repeated for friends other than relatives.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The image of poetry users that emerges from this examination of their leisure habits is not the picture of socially isolated individuals that anecdote often suggests. Instead, what we see is a group of very active adults who engage in a wide variety of leisure activities and who enjoy active social lives. Participation rates among various leisure activities, with the exception of television watching, were consistently higher among poetry users than non-users. In addition to participating at higher rates in almost all activities, current poetry users also socialized more frequently in the week prior to their interview.

To be eligible to participate in *Poetry in America*, sample members needed to read newspapers, books or magazines for pleasure; that is, not as part of their work or schooling. The only exception to this eligibility requirement was that people who did not read for pleasure but who listened to poetry could participate. Seventeen respondents (2 percent) screened in as poetry listeners who do not read for pleasure. Ninety-eight percent of the participants are readers. Our exploration of general reading habits focused on three important research questions: (1) Are there classes of readers that can be identified through their reading choices – that is, are there some readers who are primarily seeking information or insight and others who read mainly for entertainment? (2) Do readers have an affinity for a particular type of reading material – that is, do readers choose a genre and read within it to the exclusion of other types of material or are our reading habits more inclusive? As readers, are we generalists or specialists? (3) Do the reading habits of poetry users differ from those of non-users?

The questionnaire module on leisure activities included a detailed section on reading habits. Respondents were asked about the types of materials they read¹³ and were asked follow-up questions if they indicated that they read magazines,¹⁴ fiction¹⁵ or non-fiction.¹⁶ The follow-up questions identified the types of publications respondents read in each of these genres.

GENERAL READING HABITS

Among adults who read for pleasure, most people obtain their reading material from more than one source. On average, people reported four reading sources.¹⁷ Poetry users reported an average of 4.2 sources and non-users reported an average of 3.6. This difference was not statistically significant. If we use the average number of sources read as an indicator of intensity, then poetry users do not appear to read with greater intensity than do non-users. Figure 5, however, shows that simply looking at the average number of sources reported may mask an interesting pattern. As seen in Figure 5, a greater proportion of poetry users read from three or more sources than do non-users. Fewer than 25 percent of non-users read more than four sources. In comparison, over 40 percent of poetry users read from five or more sources. It appears that poetry users may be more avid readers, reading across a greater breadth of materials than do non-poetry readers.

¹³ The section began with a series of questions about the types of materials respondent read: “Now I would like to ask about your reading habits in general. Do you read: Newspapers; magazines; the Bible or other religious texts; poetry?” “Do you read fiction?” “Do you read non-fiction?”

¹⁴ Magazine readers were asked if they read popular culture and entertainment magazines; news and opinion; business; women’s lifestyle; men’s lifestyle; health exercise and fitness; home magazines; sports and car magazines; and literary magazines. Examples of each category of magazine were provided.

¹⁵ Follow-up categories for fiction included mystery, crime or thrillers; romance; science fiction or fantasy; novels; short stories; and plays.

¹⁶ Follow-up categories for non-fiction included business, technical or professional books; history; cookbooks, home and garden, other do-it-yourself books; self-improvement or inspirational; biography or memoir; and essays.

¹⁷ A composite score was generated from the data indicating the number of sources from which respondents read.

FIGURE 5: DISTRIBUTION OF POETRY USERS AND NON-USERS ACROSS NUMBER OF GENERAL READING SOURCES

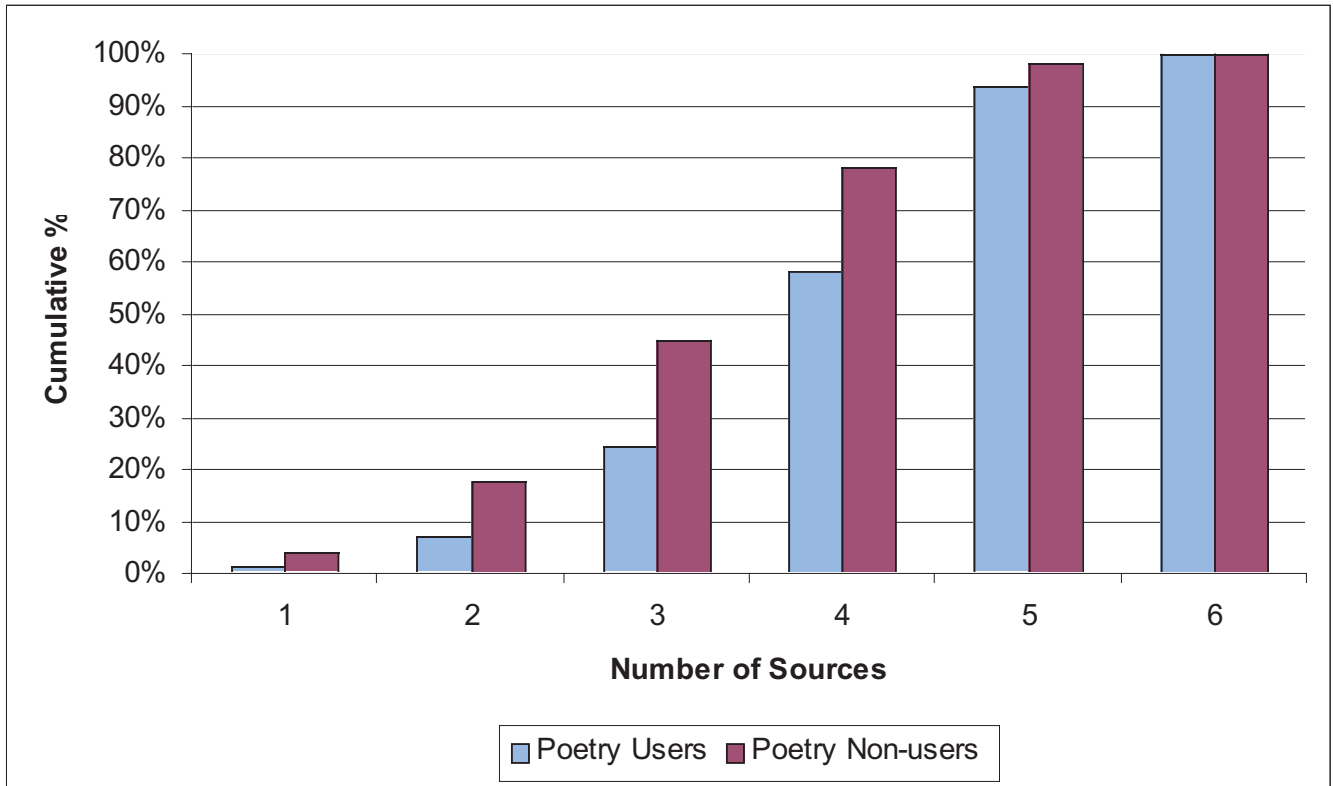


Table 15 displays levels of readership across broad categories of reading sources. Newspapers and magazines have the highest levels of readership, with more than 80 percent of respondents reading from these sources. With the exception of newspapers, significantly more poetry users read from each of these major sources, further supporting the notion that poetry users consume a greater breadth of materials than do non-users.

Table 15: Reading Habits of Poetry Users and Non-Users			
Percentage of Respondents Reading from Various Sources			
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
Newspapers	83.8	86.6	84.5
Magazines**	89.7	83.7	88.2
Bible**	64.5	52.1	61.4
Fiction**	78.2	61.5	74.1
Nonfiction**	82.4	64.0	77.8
Other**	15.6	8.6	13.9

** Significant at $p < .01$.

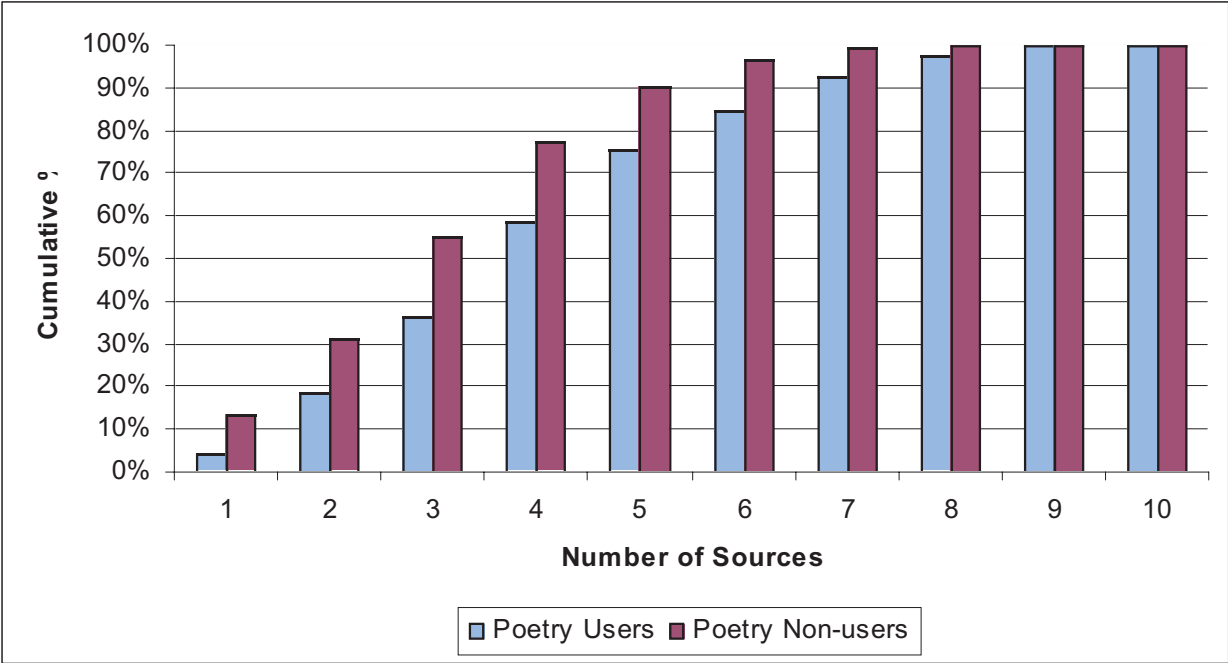
MAGAZINES

Eighty-eight percent of adult readers read magazines. Because there are many different types of magazines, each of which is usually directed toward a particular audience, no one type of magazine garners a clear majority of the magazine market. Instead, the population of adult readers is widely distributed across several types of magazines. These data are shown in Table 16.

On average, adults read four different types of magazines. Among the most popular are news and opinion magazines, and home magazines, capturing 60 percent and 59 percent of magazine readers, respectively. Half or nearly half of all adults who read magazines read health, exercise or fitness magazines (50 percent), and popular culture and entertainment magazines (49 percent).

Poetry users read an average of 4.3 magazines and non-users read an average of 3.4. This difference was not statistically significant. However, poetry users exhibit greater consumption habits with 36 percent of poetry users reading more than four different types of magazines compared to 23 percent of non-users. These data are shown in Figure 6.

FIGURE 6: DISTRIBUTION OF POETRY USERS AND NON-USERS ACROSS NUMBER OF MAGAZINE TYPES



As seen in Table 16, poetry users and non-users were comparable in their percent readership of home magazines, sports and car magazines, and other magazines. For all other magazine types, poetry users made up a significantly larger portion of the readership.

Table 16: Types of Magazines Read by Poetry Users and Non-Users

Percentage of Respondents Reading Various Types of Magazines			
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
News and opinion magazines**	63.8	47.4	59.9
Home magazines	59.4	57.1	58.9
Health, exercise and fitness magazines **	52.4	41.6	49.8
Popular culture and entertainment magazines**	50.9	40.7	48.5
Women's lifestyle magazines **	45.1	34.5	42.6
Sports and car magazines	37.4	37.9	37.5
Business magazines**	35.7	26.6	33.5
Literary magazines **	22.6	3.4	18.1
Men's lifestyle magazines **	15.4	7.7	13.6
Other types of magazines	13.1	9.8	12.3

** Significant at $p < .01$.

FICTION AND NON-FICTION

Seventy-four percent of the population of adult readers indicated that they read fiction, and 77 percent read non-fiction. On average, readers enjoy 3.4 different types of fiction and 3.9 different types of non-fiction. Across all readers, the most popular types of fiction are mystery, crime and thrillers which are read by 75 percent of fiction readers; novels which are read by 71 percent of the population; and short stories which are read by 68 percent of the adult fiction readers. Within non-fiction, readers favor history books (75 percent); biographies and memoirs (74 percent); and, cookbooks, home and garden, and other do-it-yourself books (68 percent).

Table 17: Average Number of Sources of Fiction and Non-Fiction Read by Poetry Users and Non-Users

Number of Fiction and Non-Fiction Sources						
	Poetry Users		Non-users		Total	
	Average	N	Average	N	Average	N
Number of Fiction Sources	3.51	480	2.80	236	3.36	716
Number of Nonfiction Sources	4.06	502	3.28	254	3.90	756

Table 17 shows the average number of fiction and non-fiction sources read by poetry users and non-users, and Figures 7 and 8 depict the distributions of poetry users and non-users across numbers of sources read. On average, poetry users read more sources of fiction and more sources of non-fiction than do non-users; although these differences were not statistically significant. As seen with general reading habits and magazines, a higher proportion of poetry users read more than the average number of sources for both genres. Approximately 26 percent of non-users read more than three types of fiction whereas nearly half of the poetry users (47 percent) read four or more types of fiction. Similarly, 17 percent of non-users, and 36 percent of poetry users, read more than four types of non-fiction.

FIGURE 7: DISTRIBUTION POETRY USERS AND NON-USERS ACROSS NUMBER OF FICTION SOURCES

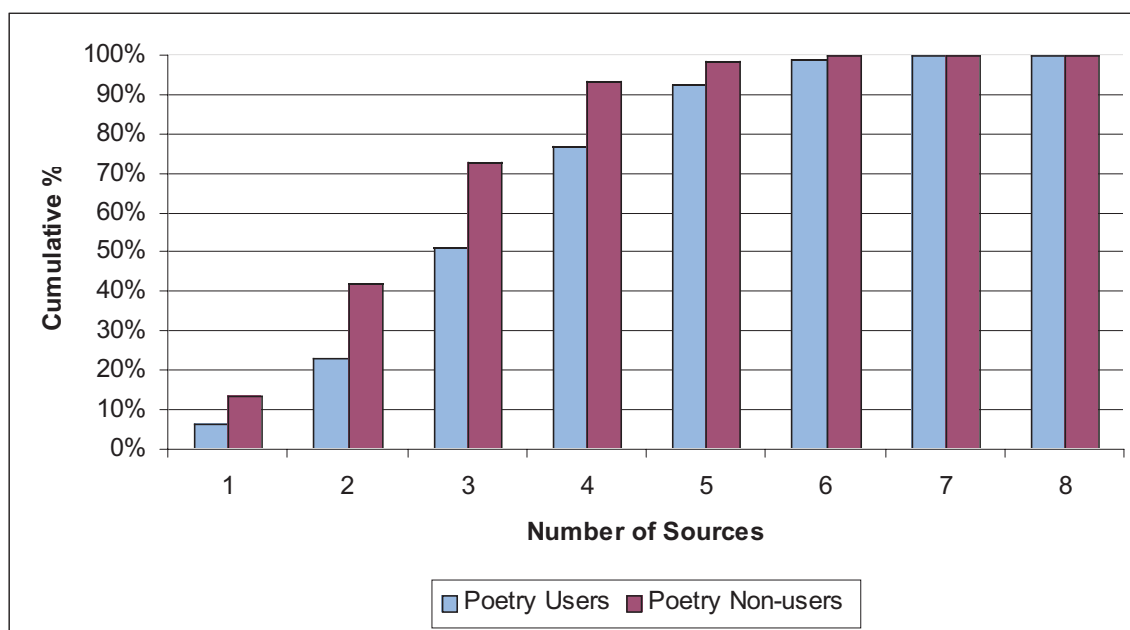


FIGURE 8: DISTRIBUTION OF POETRY USERS AND NON-USERS ACROSS NUMBER OF NON-FICTION SOURCES

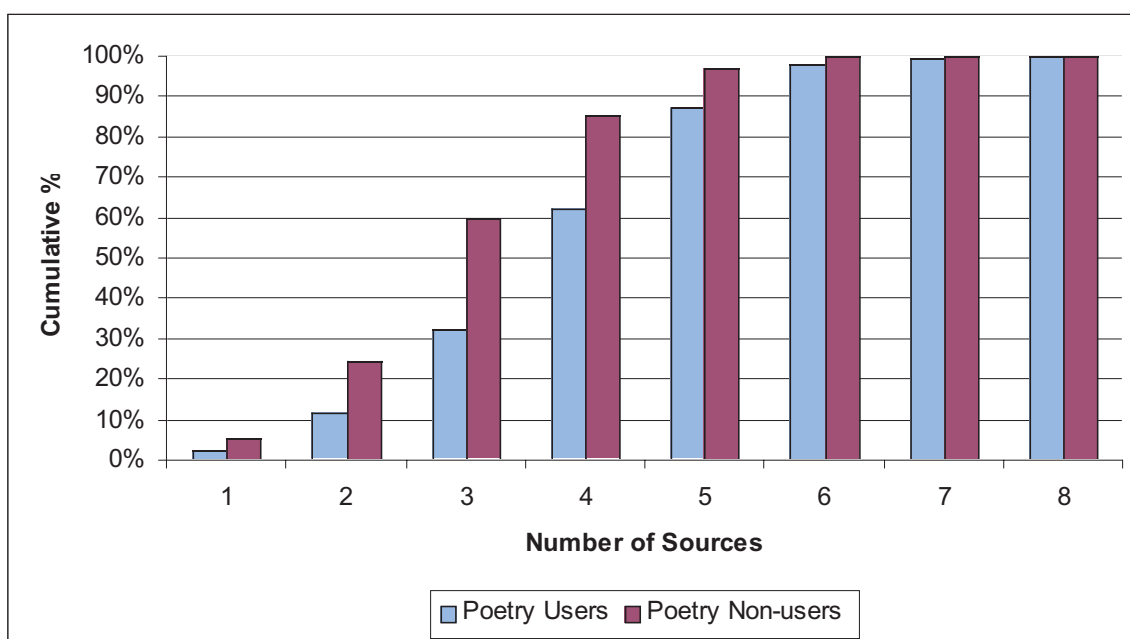


Table 18 shows the types of fiction and non-fiction read by poetry users and non-users. A significantly higher proportion of poetry users read all genres of fiction except for mystery, crime and thrillers, and romance. Poetry users are also significantly more likely to read what can be classified as literary fiction – short stories, novels and plays. Equal proportions of poetry users and non-users read romance, and a greater proportion of non-users read mystery, crime or thrillers although this difference was not statistically significant.

Similar trends hold for non-fiction genres. With the exception of cookbooks, home and garden, and other do-it-yourself books, poetry users read all non-fiction genres at significantly higher rates than do non-users.

Table 18: Types of Fiction and Non-Fiction Read by Poetry Users and Non-Users

Percentage of Respondents Reading Fiction and Non-Fiction			
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
Mystery, Crime or Thrillers	73.8	78.3	74.7
Other Novels**	73.9	59.4	70.9
Short Stories**	72.6	52.0	68.3
Science Fiction or Fantasy**	51.8	42.8	49.9
Romance	36.5	36.6	36.6
Plays**	26.0	6.8	22.0
Other type of fiction*	7.6	3.7	6.8
Types of Non-Fiction			
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
History**	77.2	65.6	74.8
Biographies or Memoirs**	77.6	60.6	74.1
Cookbooks, Home & Garden or other Do-it-Yourself books	68.8	63.5	67.6
Business, Technical or Professional Books*	66.3	58.4	64.6
Self-Improvement or Inspirational books**	65.0	56.3	63.2
Essays**	34.7	14.8	30.6
Other type of non-fiction	12.8	9.7	12.1

* Significant at $p < .05$.

** Significant at $p < .01$.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The data from the *Poetry in America* study strongly suggest that the answer to the first two research questions that framed this chapter is “No.” We do not find evidence for genre-specific reading or for clear classes of readers. More than two-thirds of adult readers seek out reading materials that are informative, as evidenced by our non-fiction readers, two-thirds read popular fiction like mysteries, crime stories or thrillers, and the vast majority of them, 88 percent, read magazines that run the gamut from news and opinion magazines to pop culture and entertainment. Within genres, readers sample from various types of magazines, fiction and non-fiction books, with most types within a genre capturing more than half of the readers within that category.

Most striking in these data is the consistent finding that poetry users tend to be more omnivorous in their consumption of reading materials than are non-users. Poetry readers do not read poetry to the exclusion of other types of literary and non-literary materials. Instead, poetry is but one of many genres that they choose to read.

The discussion in chapter two highlighted that most people begin their relationship with poetry early in their lives, usually around the time that they are teenagers. For some, that early relationship persists into adulthood while for others, poetry never becomes a lifelong interest. We asked people more detailed questions about their early experiences with poetry to help us address three important research questions: (1) What characterizes people's early experiences with poetry? (2) In what ways are the early experiences of current poetry users different from those of non-users? (3) How is interest in poetry transmitted across generations?

CHILDHOOD EXPOSURE TO POETRY

In "The Social Psychology of Leisure," Argyle (1996) emphasizes the influence of social learning and socialization on participation in leisure time activities. In his work, Argyle highlights a study by Kelly (1977) that looked at how people acquire their interest in a variety of leisure time activities. The study found that interest in almost all leisure activities were acquired in a school, family or peer setting. Nearly half (47 percent) of the reported adult leisure time pursuits were activities that the participant had first engaged in as child within the context of family activities. Families continue to exert influence over the leisure pursuits of adults as well. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents reported that they acquired a leisure time interest in adulthood within the context of their family life. In Kelly's work, friends (both those of our childhoods and our adulthoods) exert a much weaker, but steady influence on adults' leisure choices.

Poetry in America explored how parents may transmit an appreciation of poetry to their children. First, we asked all respondents if a parent or other child read nursery rhymes or books like Dr. Seuss to them when they were children. Nursery rhymes and books like Dr. Seuss may be considered poetry that is suitable for young children. Seventy-seven percent of all respondents reported that someone had read these types of poetry to them when they were young. Current poetry users (80 percent) were significantly more likely to report having had nursery rhymes or books like Dr. Seuss read to them than were non-users (68 percent). We then asked all respondents if an adult or other child had read other types of poetry to them. Overall, 45 percent of all respondents reported that someone had read other types of poetry to them. Here, the differences between current poetry users and other respondent types are dramatic. More than half (52 percent) of the current poetry users had been read other types of poetry. In comparison, only one-quarter (25 percent) of the non-users had been read other types of poetry. These data are summarized in Table 19.

Table 19: Poetry Users and Non-Users Early Exposure to Poetry

Percentage of Respondents with Early Exposure to Poetry			
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
Had nursery rhymes or books like Dr. Seuss read to them**	80.2	67.5	77.1
Had other types of poetry read to them**	51.5	24.6	44.9

** Significant at $p < .01$

By and large, most respondents' early experiences with poetry were favorable. Of the participants who had been read either nursery rhymes, books like Dr. Seuss, or other types of poetry when they were children, 77 percent rated these experiences as "mostly positive." Current poetry users were significantly more likely to rate these experiences as "mostly positive" than were non-users. However, less than 1 percent of participants rated these experiences as "mostly negative." Figure 9, which appears on page 33, shows respondents ratings of their early experiences with poetry both in and outside of school.

All parents who participated in the study were asked questions about reading poetry to their own children. Of the parents who participated in the study, 93 percent said that they had read nursery rhymes or books like Dr. Seuss to their children. A higher proportion of current poetry users (95 percent) read these child-friendly types of poetry to their children than did non-users of poetry (88 percent). Fewer parents read other types of poetry to their children. Overall, 60 percent of the parents we interviewed read other types of poetry to their children. A significantly higher percentage of current poetry users (71 percent) read other types of poetry to their children than did non-users. Twenty-nine percent of non-users read other types of poetry to their children. These data are summarized in Table 20.

Table 20: Parents' Reading of Poetry to Their Children

Percentage of Reading Poetry to Their Children			
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
Read nursery rhymes or books like Dr. Seuss to their children**	95.4	88.3	93.4
Read other types of poetry to their children**	70.6	29.0	58.9

** Significant at $p < .01$

Current poetry users are significantly more likely to have had nursery rhymes or books like Dr. Seuss read to them, and are significantly more likely to read these types of poetry to their own children. Similarly, current poetry users are significantly more likely to have been read other types of poetry and are significantly more likely to read other types of poetry to their own children. These data suggest that generational transmission may play an important role in the development of adult poetry fans.

We created a statistical model to identify which factors are most closely associated with parents' reading behaviors with their children. The model gives estimates for the likelihood that parents in a particular group (e.g., current poetry users or someone who had poetry read to them when they were children) will read to poetry to their own children while holding constant other factors like gender, age, and education that could influence these outcomes. The major research question that we were attempting to answer is: What predicts whether parents will read poetry to their children – the parents' status as a poetry user or the parents' own experiences having poetry read to them when they were children? We ran the model separately for parents who read nursery rhymes and books like Dr. Seuss to their children, and those who read other types of poetry to their children.

We found that current status as a poetry user did not predict whether parents will read nursery rhymes or books like Dr. Seuss to their children, but having been read these types of poetry did. Ninety-seven percent of parents who had been read nursery rhymes and books like Dr. Seuss when they were children read these types of poetry to their own children. We also found that having been read other types of poetry and being a current poetry user predicted that parents would read other types of poetry to their own children. Here, it seems likely that having been read other types of poetry alone is not sufficient to encourage parents to read other types of poetry to their own children. Nearly forty percent of parents who had been read other types of poetry did not choose to read similar poetry to their own children.

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES WITH POETRY

Education has been shown to significantly increase participation in the arts. In particular, arts education or some form of early experience with the arts has the ability to stimulate interest in the arts into adulthood (Bergonzi and Smith, 1996). Walker et al. (2000) found that adults who had taken lessons in any art form, or who had participated in arts and cultural activities as children, attended arts and cultural events at significantly higher rates than those without similar childhood experiences. In fact, the rate of arts participation for those who did not have childhood exposure was 85 percent lower than those who did, with arts socialization being the most significant factor associated with adult participation for respondents with lower levels of educational attainment.

Data from the SPPA provide further evidence in support of the important role of early arts socialization on later arts engagement. Bergonzi and Smith (1996) investigated the effects of arts education on arts participation and found that arts education had a much stronger impact than did overall educational attainment on adult participation in the arts, even after taking personal background and socioeconomic status into account. Respondents who had participated in school and community based arts education programs were more likely to both create and participate in the arts.

Eighty percent of the *Poetry in America* respondents studied poetry in school. Of these respondents, 55 percent studied poetry in elementary or grammar school, 61 percent in middle school or junior high school, 87 percent studied in high school, and 49 percent studied poetry in college. Table 21 shows the distribution of current poetry users and non-users across the grade levels at which they studied poetry in school. Respondents could report studying poetry at more than one grade level.

Table 21: In-School Experiences with Poetry

Percentage of Respondents with In-School Experience by Grade Level			
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
Elementary School**	57.5	46.7	55.1
Middle School or Junior High School**	63.1	53.3	60.9
High School**	89.0	79.1	86.8
College**	53.6	33.0	49.0

** Significant at $p < .01$

Current poetry users were significantly more likely to have studied poetry at every grade level than were non-users. Overall, 82 percent of poetry users studied poetry in school compared to 73 percent of non-users. Most respondents who studied poetry in school did so at the high school level.

We asked respondents about the kinds of educational activities they engaged in when they studied poetry in school regardless of the level at which they studied. These data are summarized in Table 22. Nearly all respondents were required to read a poem as part of their educational experiences. However, as seen in Table 22, current poetry users tended to have a more comprehensive experience of poetry in the classroom. Significantly more poetry users than non-users engaged in each of the educational activities asked about in this study. More than 80 percent of the current poetry users who studied poetry in school memorized, recited, and wrote a poem in addition to reading poetry. In comparison, fewer than 70 percent of the non-users engaged in these kinds of educational activities. The types of educational activities that respondents engaged in were not related to their ratings of their in-school experiences with poetry.

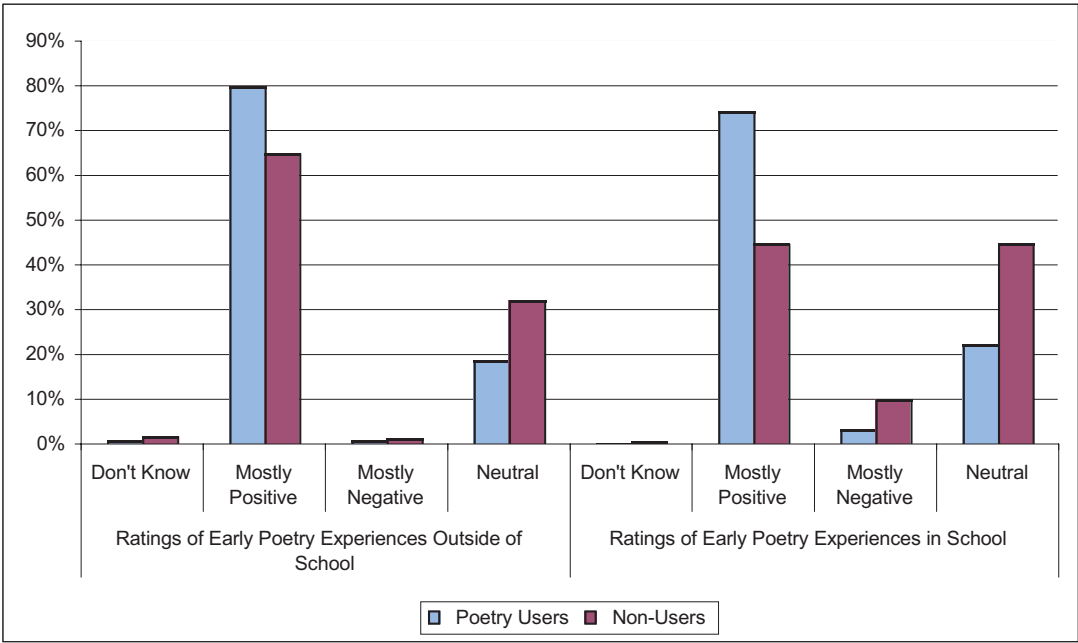
Table 22: Educational Activities Associated with Studying Poetry in School

Percentage of Respondents who Participated in Poetry-Related Educational Activities			
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
Read a poem**	98.4	92.3	97.1
Memorized a poem**	80.2	63.2	76.4
Recited a poem**	85.7	69.2	82.0
Wrote a poem**	82.9	66.5	79.2

** Significant at $p < .01$

Compared to respondents' favorable ratings of their early experiences with poetry outside of school, ratings of in-school experiences with poetry were somewhat less favorable. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents who studied poetry in school rated that experience as mostly favorable (80 percent rated their out-of-school experiences as "mostly positive"). Twenty-seven percent had a neutral experience with studying poetry in school and 5 percent rated their in-school experiences as "mostly negative." Figure 9 shows poetry users' and non-users' ratings of their early experiences with poetry. Poetry users were significantly more likely to report that their in-school experiences were "mostly positive" than were non-users. Non-users were equally likely to rate their in-school experiences with poetry as neutral as they were to rate them as "mostly positive."

FIGURE 9: RATINGS OF IN- AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL EXPERIENCES WITH POETRY



Our earlier qualitative work highlighted the influential role that one person can play in the development of an appreciation of poetry. Focus group discussions with people with little or no interest in poetry brought to light some of the experiences, particularly school experiences, that can dissuade people from further engaging with this art form. We examined both of these issues by asking respondents two open-ended questions: (1) Is there a person or persons you associate with your early experiences with poetry? And (2) Is there an experience or experiences that you associate with your early exposure to poetry? For both of these questions, respondents could report more than one person or experience. Those who did so were asked to name the person or event that they mainly associate with their early experiences with poetry.

EARLY INFLUENCES

Eighty-six percent of adult readers had early exposure to poetry and were asked about the people or experiences they associate with them. Of those participants with early poetry experiences, 55 percent said that there is a person or persons they associate with those early experiences. Current poetry users were nearly twice as likely

as non-users to say that they associate someone with their early experiences – 61 percent of current poetry users associate someone with their early experiences compared to 36 percent of non-users. This difference was significant. Parents and teachers were frequently named as influences by both poetry users and non-users; however, non-users were more likely to name one specific teacher as an early influence, whereas current users were more likely to name a parent. These data are shown in Table 23.

Table 23: Persons Associated with Early Experiences with Poetry

Percentage of Respondents who Named an Influential Person			
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
Parent**	42.0	22.5	39.3
One specific teacher**	33.6	49.3	35.9
Multiple teachers	23.5	26.8	24.0
Relative*	18.2	12.7	17.4
Friend	11.8	9.9	11.5
Grandparent**	10.6	2.8	9.4
One specific poet**	6.5	1.4	5.7

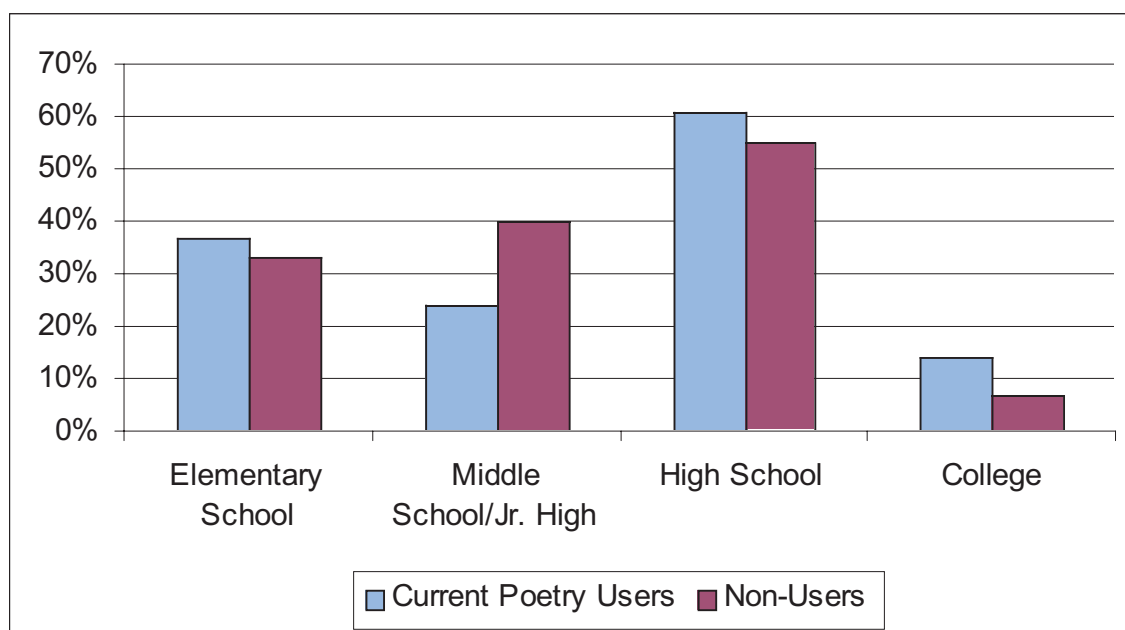
* Significant at $p < .05$

** Significant at $p < .01$

Note: Percentages shown are of those respondents who associate a person with their early experiences with poetry.

As noted above, most participants studied poetry in high school. Not surprisingly, when teachers were named as early influences, high school teachers were more often singled out than were teachers at other grade levels. These data are depicted in Figure 10.

FIGURE 10: GRADE LEVEL AT WHICH RESPONDENTS ENCOUNTERED AN INFLUENTIAL TEACHER



Fewer respondents recalled a particular experience that they associate with their early exposure to poetry. Overall, 37 percent of respondents who reported early experiences with poetry recalled a specific, memorable experience. Current poetry users were overwhelmingly more likely to recall an early event. Ninety percent of the people who remembered an early event associated with poetry were current poetry users. Table 24 summarizes the kinds of experiences people reported.

Table 24: Events Associated with Early Experiences with Poetry			
Percentage of Respondents who Named an Influential Event			
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
Other event	35.1	40.6	35.7
Listening to/having poetry read	26.4	21.9	25.6
School	24.7	25.0	24.7
Reading a specific poem*	20.9	15.6	20.4
Memorizing a specific poem**	17.9	9.7	17.1
Writing a specific poem**	16.9	3.1	15.5

* Significant at $p < .05$

** Significant at $p < .01$

Note: Percentages shown are of those respondents who associate an event with their early experiences with poetry.

Many respondents provided responses that could not easily be classified into one of the available response options. A review of the “other/specify” responses for this question found that responses ranged from the benefits people received from reading poetry (e.g., “It broadens horizons and imagination.”) to people’s emotional responses to poetry (e.g., “The warm feelings, sadness and sharing [of poetry]”). Of the 98 people who recalled an event other than the ones shown in Table 24 above, thirteen people mentioned unpleasant early associations such as “the breakup of a relationship” and “not liking it – the teacher made it too hard and not fun.” Twelve people mentioned that there was something going on in their own lives that they connected with their early experiences with poetry (“If I am going through something in my life, I use or read poetry.”), and five people mentioned the comfort that poetry provides (“I was overcoming hardship.”)

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Almost all adult readers first heard poetry in the form of nursery rhymes and other children’s books of rhyming verse, and most adults recall these experiences as mostly positive. A sizable majority of adult readers also studied poetry in school, usually in high school.

What seems to distinguish people who continue to engage with poetry from those who do not is the breadth of their experiences with poetry. Current poetry users are more likely to have been read other types of poetry beyond the more traditional nursery rhymes and books like Dr. Seuss. Once in school, they were exposed to poetry at more grade levels and had opportunities to interact with poetry through more learning activities than solely reading poems.

Interestingly, while the extensiveness of current poetry users' in-school experiences stand out, non-users with more limited in-school experiences are more likely to name teachers as people they associate with their early experiences with poetry. Current poetry users are more likely to name family members, notably their parents. And, perhaps in keeping with their family tradition of sharing poetry, current poetry users are more likely to read poems to their own children.

The picture that is emerging of poetry users' experiences is one of comprehensiveness and inclusion. As general readers, poetry users' preferences are spread across different types of reading materials and across genres. Their early experiences are marked by more opportunities for exposure to poetry. In this section, we continue to explore differences between current and former poetry users, but we move beyond people's early experiences with poetry to look at their more recent experiences and poetry habits. What kinds of poetry do people read? Where do they read or listen to poetry? What roles do libraries, book clubs, and the Internet play in fostering participation? We also examine the role of poetry as social capital – that is, we look at the transmission of poetry across one's social network.

THE CLASSICS OR CONTEMPORARY POETRY: WHICH DO PEOPLE CHOOSE?

We asked both current poetry users and former poetry readers about the type of poetry they first listened to or read – classics or contemporary.¹⁸ Fifty-five percent of current and former poetry readers first read classic poetry. Their responses are shown in Table 25.

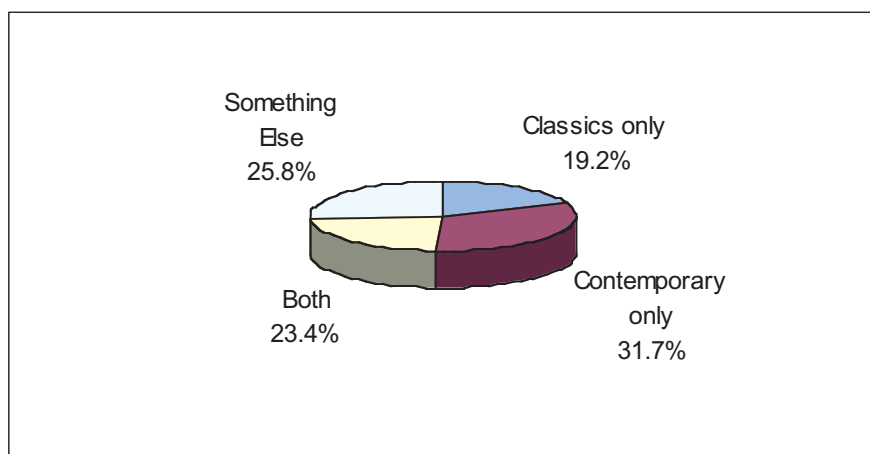
Table 25: Types of Poetry First Read by Current and Former Readers

Percentage of Respondents who First Read Classic or Contemporary Poetry			
	Current Poetry Users	Former Poetry Readers	Total
Classics	55.4	53.8	55.0
Contemporary	46.9	37.1	44.8
Something else	11.3	10.5	11.1

Current poetry users were then asked about the type of poetry they now read. More than half of all current poetry users read or listen to contemporary poetry. About one-third of current poetry users restrict their involvement to contemporary poetry, and about one quarter read or listen to both contemporary poetry and the classics. These data are depicted in Figure 11.

¹⁸ The question wording was, "When you first read or listened to poetry, what type of poetry did you read or listen to – classics which would include poets who wrote up through the end of World War II, that is before 1945; or, contemporary poetry which includes poets who have been writing since about 1945? Respondents could indicate that they read or listened to both classic and contemporary poetry or could provide an open-ended response.

FIGURE II: CURRENTLY READ TYPES OF POETRY



Over a third of current poetry users define the type of poetry that they read as “something else.” We asked respondents to specify what they meant by “something else.” Their responses were reviewed by project staff and the data were coded for those responses that appeared most frequently. Many of their responses did not fit into any category; however, there were four that repeatedly came up in the pool of ‘other’ responses: personal, friend’s or relatives’ poetry; modern poetry; children’s poetry; and inspirational poetry. While modern poetry could clearly be classified as contemporary poetry, the other categories and verbatim responses did not fit into either designation – classic or contemporary.

We looked at the relationship between respondents’ first type of poetry and their current choice for poetry. These data are shown in Table 26 below where the percentages in each cell are the proportion of respondents who said “Yes” to both categories. Reading across the rows in Table 26, we find that respondents who first read classic poetry are significantly more likely to currently read classics than they are to read contemporary poetry or to define the type of poetry they read as “something else.” In comparison, people who first read either contemporary poetry or “something else” are significantly more likely to read either contemporary poetry or some other type of poetry than they are to read classics. The data suggest that there is tendency to continue reading the type of poetry an individual first read.

Table 26: Relationship between First Type and Current Type of Poetry Read

TYPE OF POETRY READ FIRST	Type of Poetry Currently Read		
	Classics Percent	Contemporary Percent	Something Else Percent
Classics	54.8**	57.2	13.9
Contemporary	44.0	70.5**	11.3**
Something else	34.1	39.6**	36.7**

** Significant at $p < .01$.

READING POETRY

To help us understand how the experiences of current and former poetry users may differ, we asked both groups of readers about their sources for poetry.¹⁹ The pattern already observed for current users’ general reading habits repeats for their poetry reading habits. Current users read avidly across multiple sources and genres. Across the board, current readers cite sources for poetry with significantly higher frequency than do former readers. This tendency may reflect current users’ sustained engagement with poetry. However, it is also possible that by sampling poetry from a greater number of sources, current poetry readers increase the likelihood that they will find poetry that they enjoy thereby ensuring their continued participation with this art. These data are shown in Table 27.

Table 27: Current and Former Poetry Readers’ Sources for Poetry			
Percentage of Respondents Reading Various Sources for Poetry			
	Current Poetry Readers	Former Poetry Readers	Total
Collected poems by an individual poet**	76.6	56.1	71.8
Anthologies of poetry**	57.9	39.9	53.6
Poetry magazines**	20.4	11.1	18.0
Reviews or commentaries about poetry**	19.3	10.5	17.2
Other types of publication**	13.8	2.73	11.2

** Significant at p < .01

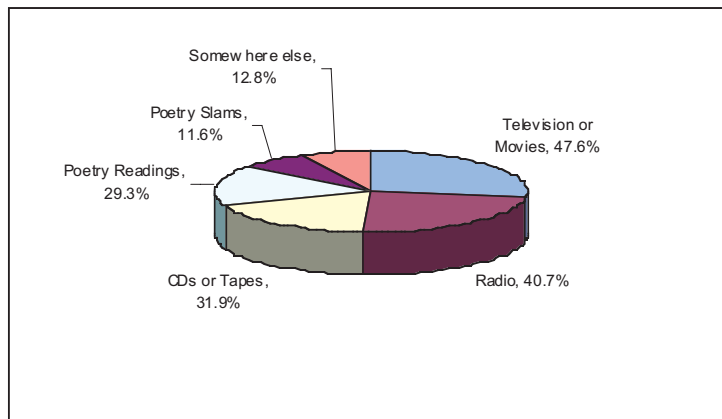
As seen in Table 27, most poetry readers, both current and former, turn to collected poems by an individual poet as their source for poetry (72 percent). This would seem to indicate that people connect with an author and are drawn to read more from his or her work. Fifty-four percent of current and former poetry readers obtain their poetry from anthologies – a source that people may turn to in order to discover new works by a familiar poet, discover new poets, or because they may be attracted to the theme around which the anthology is organized. Poetry magazines, and reviews or commentaries are read at very low rates.

LISTENING TO POETRY

Current poetry listeners were asked about their sources for poetry. Figure 12 shows that television and radio predominate suggesting that media that can accommodate people’s schedules may appeal to listeners. (We note that reading poetry inherently accommodates people’s schedules since the reader determines when to engage with poetry). Television, movies, the radio, and CDs are all media that can be accessed from one’s home or car, providing listeners with access to poetry as it is convenient for them. In comparison, poetry readings and poetry slams are structured events whose schedules listeners must be able to accommodate in order to attend.

¹⁹ Current readers were asked, “Have you read poetry in – anthologies; collected poems by an individual poet; poetry magazines?” The introduction to the question was modified for former readers, “Although you don’t currently read poetry, I have some questions about where you might have read poetry when you read it as [an adult/a youth]. The text fill was based upon answers to earlier questions.

FIGURE 12: POETRY LISTENERS' SOURCES FOR POETRY



ACCESS TO POETRY: LIBRARIES, BOOK CLUBS, AND THE INTERNET

Libraries, books clubs and the Internet may present opportunities for promoting poetry. Libraries and the Internet make poetry accessible, free of charge, to anyone who is interested. Book clubs and libraries, as social networks, afford those with less interest in or knowledge of poetry the opportunity to engage with others with deeper interest. To what extent do libraries, book clubs and the Internet encourage access to poetry?

LIBRARIES

Over 70 percent of the reading population has library cards, and poetry users are significantly more likely than are non-users to be library cardholders. About one-third of current poetry users report reading books of poetry at, or borrowing books of poetry from the library. Table 28 summarizes the findings on the use of the library to access poetry.

Table 28: Library Use			
Percentage of Respondents Using the Library for Poetry			
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
Do you currently have a library card?**	72.6	61.5	71.8
Have you borrowed books of poetry from or read poetry at the library?	36.3	n/a	36.3
Have you borrowed from or listened to CDs, tapes or videos of poetry at the library?	11.4	n/a	11.4
Have you attended a library program related to poetry?	7.1	0.5	5.7

** Significant at $p < .01$.

Few current or former poetry users have attended an event related to poetry at a library, but this question does not take into account how often there are poetry events at libraries or how well publicized they are. Similar findings hold for events at bookstores. While poetry users attend at much higher rates (8 percent compared to less than 1 percent of former poetry users), less than ten percent have attended a reading or other poetry-related event at either a library or bookstore.

Book Clubs

While book clubs seem a logical avenue for reaching poetry’s audience, the data indicate that very few readers (6 percent) belong to book clubs. Of those readers who are book club members, about third read poetry with their group.

The Internet

According to the Pew Internet Survey, 63 percent of the population has access to the Internet. The population of readers has a much higher access rate, with 83 percent of readers indicating they have access to the Internet, with no significant difference in access rates of poetry users and non-users. But, when asked if they use the Internet for poetry-related information, not surprisingly, significant differences emerge with current poetry users being significantly more likely to use the Internet for poetry-related information than do former poetry readers.

Table 29 summarizes the findings on Internet use and poetry. It is worth noting that while poetry users (and other readers) are more likely than the general adult population to have access to the Internet, only a small percentage use the Internet for poetry-related information. Only slightly more than one-third of the poetry users with Internet access used the Internet to find, read or listen to poetry and fewer used the Internet to obtain information about poetry events.

Table 29: Internet Use by Poetry Users and Non-Users			
Percentage of Respondents Using the Internet for Poetry			
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
Do you have access to the Internet?	81.3	78.8	80.7
Have you used the Internet to find, read, or listen to poetry? ²⁰ **	36.5	4.8	29.6
Have you used the Internet to find information about poetry events?*	13.6	1.2	10.9

** Significant at p < .01.

²⁰ This question and the following one about using the Internet to find information about poetry events were only asked of current and former poetry users who reported having access to the Internet.

SHARING POETRY

PURCHASING POETRY

We asked all respondents, regardless of whether they read or listen to poetry, about poetry purchases they made over the past five years. We asked these questions of non-users because they may have bought poetry products for someone other than themselves. Books are more popular purchases than are CDs or other audiovisual media among both poetry users and non-users. Thirty-nine percent of all readers bought books of poetry within the last five years; 12 percent bought CDs, tapes or videos of poetry. As expected, poetry users are significantly more likely to purchase poetry products than are non-users with nearly half of all current users buying books of poetry in the last five years. As seen in Table 30, while non-users buy poetry at significantly lower rates than do current users, they are still consumers of poetry.

Table 30: Poetry Purchases in the Last Five Years			
Percentage of Respondents Purchasing Poetry			
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
Have you purchased books of poetry or magazines of poetry either for yourself or someone else?**	48.0	12.3	39.3
Have you purchased CDs, tapes or videos of poetry, either for yourself or someone else?**	14.8	2.8	11.9

** Significant at $p < .01$.

The more interesting finding is not that people are buying poetry, but that they buy most often for others. Over the past five years, 21 percent of people who purchased poetry bought books for themselves and no one else, and 24 percent bought CDs exclusively for themselves. In comparison, more than 40 percent of poetry book purchasers bought books for someone else and did not buy any for themselves in the past five years. Similarly, 38 percent of the respondents who purchased poetry audiovisual media, bought solely for someone else. Table 31 shows the purchasing habits of poetry users and non-users over the past five years. Eighty-three percent of the non-users who made any poetry purchases in the last five years bought exclusively for someone else. It is worth noting that, while the numbers are very small, some non-users did purchase poetry for themselves in the past five years.

Table 31: For Whom Did People Purchase Poetry

Percentage of Respondents Purchasing Poetry for Themselves, Someone Else, or Both				
		Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
Books or magazines of poetry	<i>Yourself</i>	22.3	5.5	21.0
	<i>Someone else</i>	37.7	83.5	41.2
	<i>Both</i>	40.0	11.0	37.8
CDs, tapes or videos of poetry?*	<i>Yourself</i>	25.1	0.0	23.7
	<i>Someone else</i>	34.9	85.7	37.9
	<i>Both</i>	40.0	14.3	38.5

* Significant at $p < .05$

Table 32 shows the frequency with which people purchase poetry. There are no differences between poetry users and non-users with respect to how often they make poetry purchases. Sixty-two percent of book purchases and 65 percent of audiovisual purchases were made within the last year.

Table 32: Frequency of Poetry Purchases

FREQUENCY	How often have you purchased books or magazines of poetry?			How often have you purchased CDs, tapes videos of poetry?		
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
A few times a month	5.9	0.0	5.5	6.3	9.5	6.5
Once a month	3.4	5.5	3.6	5.7	0.0	5.3
A few times a year	37.0	31.9	36.6	33.6	33.3	33.6
Once in the past year	16.8	12.1	16.4	19.0	33.3	19.8
A few times in the last five years	22.7	16.5	22.2	22.5	14.3	22.0
Once in the last five years	6.7	15.4	7.4	7.7	9.5	7.8
Something else	6.6	14.3	7.2	5.2	0	4.9

Not only do people share poetry by purchasing it for others, they also lend their own books of poetry to others and share individual poems. We asked all current and former poetry users about their experiences with shared poetry over the last five years. These data suggest that the unit of measure for poetry is the individual poem. Both former and current poetry users were more likely to have shared or received individual poems than they were to have shared or received books of poetry.

Over the past five years, 66 percent of all readers received poems either through email or by someone copying out a poem and giving it to them; and, 45 percent shared poems with others in this manner. Sharing books of poetry follows a similar pattern although the number of people who shared books over the past five years is much smaller. More people received books of poetry from other people than lent out books of their own. Twenty-five

percent of all current and former poetry users lent out one of their own books, but 33 percent received books of poetry from others. On all measures, current poetry users were significantly more likely to give and receive poetry than were former users.

Table 33 summarizes the findings on the social exchange of poetry. Interestingly, while the numbers are small, some non-users who had neither read nor listened to poetry in the last five years shared poetry during that time period. Of particular interest are the nearly 40 percent of non-users who received individual poems and over 20 percent who shared individual poems during the last five years. It appears that while these perhaps small exchanges of poetry are not sufficiently salient for someone to self-identify as a poetry user, they take place nonetheless, suggesting that poetry continues to be part of people’s social lives even when they do not consider themselves poetry users.

Table 33: The Social Exchange of Poetry			
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
Have you lent one of your own books of poetry to a friend, relative or co-worker? **	31.1	2.7	25.0
Has anyone - either a friend, relative or co-worker - given you a book of poetry? **	39.7	7.4	32.8
Have you shared poems with friends, relatives or co-workers? ** ²¹	51.5	22.5	45.3
Has anyone shared poems with you? **	72.8	39.2	65.6

* Significant at $p < .01$.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The poetry habits and behaviors of current poetry users are consistent with their general reading habits and early experiences. Current readers and listeners sample broadly from a variety of sources for their poetry. While, in general, poetry users tend stick with the type of poetry they first listened to or read, there is also some evidence that over time, poetry users gravitate toward contemporary poetry.

This chapter underscores poetry’s value as social capital. Current and former poetry users buy poetry for others and share poems with friends, relatives and co-workers. Most notably, adult readers who do not self-identify as poetry users show evidence of recent involvement with poetry. While the numbers are small, around 15 percent of non-users purchased poetry for themselves within the last five years and larger numbers have shared poetry during that time frame.

Libraries, book clubs, and the Internet remain fairly untapped resources for poetry.

²¹ The introduction to the questions about sharing poems stated, “Sometimes people share poems by emailing them, copying them, or writing them out.”



INTENSITY OF ENGAGEMENT WITH POETRY

Early in the design phase of this project, we conducted qualitative research to help us understand some of the important elements of people's experiences with poetry. One of the key distinctions that emerged between people with varying levels of involvement with poetry was the intent with which they sought it out. To help us identify intentional poetry users, we asked all current and former users whether they had, at some point in their lives, made a conscious decision to pursue poetry either as a reader or a listener.²² Overall, 68 percent of current and former poetry users decided on their own to engage with this art form. The average age at which they made that decision is 16.5 years, around the time that most indicate that they first encountered poetry.

INTENSITY INDICATORS

As a preliminary exploration of the intensity of current users' engagement with poetry, we looked at the frequency with which they read or listen to poetry. These data are shown in Table 34.

Table 34: Frequency of Current Poetry Users Engagement with Poetry		
Percentage of Current Users who Read or Listen to Poetry		
	How often do you read poetry? Is that..	How often do you listen poetry? Is that...
At least once a week	16.9	10.3
A few times a month	21.4	14.9
Once a month	14.2	13.4
A few times a year	37.0	46.2
Once in the past year	6.2	10.7
Something else	3.4	3.3

Simply from examining the frequency with which people have used poetry in the past year, it is clear that there are different levels of poetry use in the population. There are those that read or listen to poetry at least weekly, and those who happen upon poetry maybe once a year or less. However, what the frequency data cannot tell us is whether users intentionally engaged with poetry or whether they happen to come across it while doing something else.

In an attempt to capture the varying intensities of people's involvement with poetry, we created a scale based upon three questionnaire items. The first variable was respondent type (current poetry readers, current poetry listeners, both current readers and listeners, former poetry readers, non-poetry readers). We assumed that people who both read and listen to poetry are higher intensity users than those who choose to do one but not the other. Former poetry readers are considered higher intensity users than those non-users who have never read poetry.

²² The question asked, "Did you ever decide on your own to read or listen to poetry?"

Respondents were then grouped based on whether or not they decided at some point in their lives to read or listen to poetry. Those who made a decision to pursue poetry are considered higher intensity users than those who did not.²³ Finally, the frequency with which poetry is read or listened to was taken into account. The resulting indicator variable has six intensity levels for current poetry users and five for non-users. Descriptions of each of the intensity levels and the distribution of respondents across levels are shown in Table 35.²⁴

Table 35: Distribution of Respondents Across Intensity Levels			
INTENSITY LEVEL	Description	N	%
Intensity Levels for Current Users			
1	Intentional current poetry user who reads or listens at least a few times a month.	201	19.7
2	Incidental current poetry user who reads or listens at least a few times a month.	28	2.7
3	Intentional current poetry user who reads or listens at least a few times a year.	273	26.7
4	Incidental current poetry user who reads or listens at least a few times a year.	48	4.7
5	Intentional current poetry user who read or listened within the last five years but not more often than once in the last year.	132	12.9
6	Incidental current poetry user who read or listened within the last five years but not more often than once in the last year.	91	8.9
Intensity Levels for Former Poetry Readers			
7	Intentional former poetry reader who read between 6 and 10 years ago.	15	1.4
8	Incidental former poetry reader who read between 6 and 10 years ago.	20	1.9
9	Intentional former poetry reader who read more than 10 years ago.	48	4.7
10	Incidental former poetry reader who read more than 10 years ago.	128	12.5
Intensity Level for Non-Poetry Readers			
11	Non-poetry readers who have never read or listened to poetry.	40	3.9

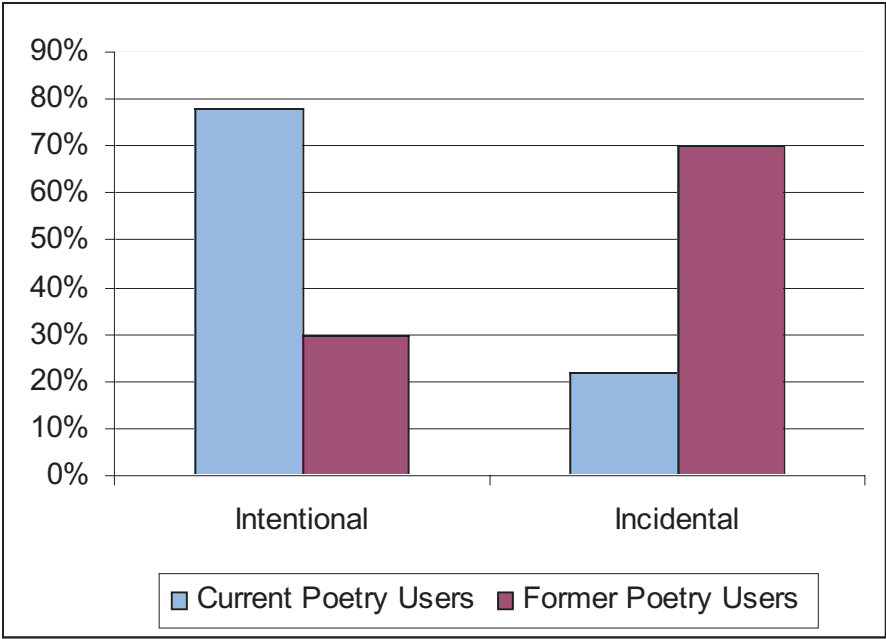
²³ Current and former poetry users were asked, “*Did you ever decide on your own to read (or listen to) poetry?*” This question was used as an indicator of intentional poetry use. For analytical purposes, respondents who said “yes” are considered intentional users and those who said “no” or “don’t know” are considered incidental users.

²⁴ In consultation with The Poetry Foundation, we initially attempted to distinguish between poetry readers and poetry listeners with the assumption that poetry readers are more intense users than are listeners. However, the resulting cell sizes were too small to have analytical relevance.

While the distribution of respondents across intensity levels is interesting, the use of all three variables -- respondent type, intent and frequency -- results in several cells (e.g., intensity levels 2, 4, 8 and 9) with few respondents thereby limiting the analyses that can be done based on this more complex model of intensity. As a result, we restricted our subsequent analyses to intent, grouping respondents based on whether they had ever decided, on their own, to listen to or read poetry. In this section of the report, we look at the demographic characteristics of poetry users and non-users as a function of the intent of their involvement with poetry.

Current poetry users, regardless of the frequency with which they read or listen to poetry, are overwhelmingly intentional in their involvement with poetry. Seventy-eight percent of the current poetry users said that at some point in their lives they decided to read or listen to poetry. Fewer than a third of all former poetry readers ever intentionally pursued poetry. This suggests that while few former poetry readers felt that their early experiences with poetry were negative, those experiences were not sufficiently positive to encourage these readers to seek out poetry on their own. Figure 13 shows the distribution of intentional and incidental poetry users.

FIGURE 13: DISTRIBUTION OF INTENTIONAL AND INCIDENTAL CURRENT AND FORMER POETRY USERS



DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF INTENTIONAL AND INCIDENTAL POETRY USERS

Table 36 summarizes the demographic characteristics of intentional and incidental current poetry users. Table 37 summarizes the characteristics of intentional and incidental former poetry readers. We analyzed these data separately for current and former poetry users in order to better isolate the effects of intent alone.

Among current poetry users, intentional and incidental users are remarkably similar to one another. Significant differences between the two groups are restricted to gender and race. Women are significantly more likely to decide on their own to read or listen to poetry, whereas men are significantly more likely to engage with poetry without ever having made a conscious decision to do so. White Americans are more likely to be incidental poetry users and Black Americans are more likely to be intentional consumers.

Table 36: Demographic Characteristics of Intentional and Incidental Poetry Users			
Percentage of Intentional and Incidental Current Poetry Users in Demographic Categories			
		Intentional	Incidental
GENDER	Male**	35.7	47.2
	Female**	64.3	52.8
AGE	18-24	11.2	16.1
	25-34	15.8	12.7
	35-44	21.1	14.8
	45-54	23.1	23.8
	55-64	11.9	16.8
	65-74	9.5	7.5
	75 and older	7.4	8.4
RACE	White**	83.6	93.8
	Black**	16.4	6.2
EDUCATION	Less than college	56.3	54.5
	College and above	43.7	45.5
MARITAL STATUS	Not married	46.3	42.6
	Married	53.8	57.4
EMPLOYMENT STATUS	Employed	67.4	72.7
	Not employed	32.7	27.3

** Significant at $p < .01$.

Similarly, former poetry readers are a homogenous group even when intent to read poetry is taken into account. Intentional and incidental former poetry readers are demographically similar to one another on all characteristics except for gender. As seen with current users, women are more likely to report that they decided on their own to read poetry and men are more likely to say that they did not.

Table 37: Demographic Characteristics of Intentional and Incidental Former Poetry Readers

Percentage of Intentional and Incidental Poetry Readers in Demographic Categories			
		Intentional	Incidental
GENDER	Male*	31.4	46.3
	Female*	68.7	53.7
AGE	18-24	1.6	4.4
	25-34	13.0	12.4
	35-44	17.8	22.4
	45-54	24.3	19.8
	55-64	26.5	18.4
	65-74	14.1	15.0
	75 and older	2.7	7.6
RACE	White	90.1	95.4
	Black	9.9	4.6
EDUCATION	Less than college	61.6	57.8
	College and above	38.4	42.2
MARITAL STATUS	Not married	30.3	24.9
	Married	69.7	75.1
EMPLOYMENT STATUS	Employed	69.7	68.7
	Not employed	30.3	31.3

* Significant at $p < .05$

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Current poetry users are overwhelmingly intentional in their pursuit of poetry. Nearly 80 percent of current users say that they decided on their own to read or listen to poetry. In comparison, most former poetry users engaged with poetry incidentally or perhaps because they were required to do so. By and large, former poetry users' involvement with poetry was not the result of a conscious decision on their part.

In general, women are more apt to say that they decided on their own to read or listen to poetry. This is true of women who continue to read poetry and of those who read poetry in the past but who no longer do so. African Americans' participation with poetry, at least among current users, most often results from their having decided to participate. Although this study did not collect information that would help us understand these patterns, it does seem possible that these findings reflect upon social and cultural perceptions of poetry. Men may be disinclined to acknowledge that they chose to read or listen to poetry if poetry is seen as a predominantly feminine activity. African Americans' rich oral traditions may make poetry more acceptable and valued within the African American community.



PERCEPTIONS OF POETRY, POETS AND POETRY READERS

PERCEPTIONS OF POETRY

Do current and former poetry users have different perceptions of poetry? Are former users more likely to hold negative views of poetry, and if so, do their views constitute significant barriers to participation? *Poetry in America* asked all respondents to listen to a series of 13 statements about poetry and indicate whether they thought each statement was always, usually, sometimes or never true. These questions, placed near the beginning of the questionnaire, were intended to draw out people's spontaneous reactions to poetry. Six of the statements were positive, such as, "Poetry keeps your mind sharp," and "Poems help you understand yourself." Five of the statements were negative, such as, "Poetry is boring," and "Poetry is a waste of time." Two of the statements were neutral: "When you read a poem, you like to talk to somebody about it," and "You like to be alone when you read poetry." In the tables below, "always," "usually," and "sometimes" are combined in a single "true" answer.

POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF POETRY

Table 38 shows that as one might expect, poetry users are more likely to have positive perceptions of poetry than are non-users. Current poetry users are significantly more likely than non-users to agree with each of the positive statements shown in Table 38. On average across the six statements, 90 percent of current users thought the positive statements were true compared to 62 percent of non-users. Agreement among current users was fairly uniform, ranging from 82 percent of current users believing that poetry helps you understand yourself to 95 percent who agree that poems help you appreciate the world around you. Agreement among non-users was more varied. Much like current poetry users, the fewest non-users (43 percent) agreed with the statement that poems help you understand yourself, and a sizable majority (71 percent) agreed that poems help you appreciate the world around you.

Well over half of non-users thought that all but one of the positive statements was true, indicating that the overall perception of non-users is similar to but weaker than the perception of users. The statement that garnered the highest percentage of both users and non-users indicating true is "poems make you laugh."

²⁷ We asked, "What benefits, if any, [do/did] you personally get from reading or listening to poetry?"

Table 38: Positive Perceptions of Poetry by Strata

Percentage of Current Poetry Users and Non-Users Endorsing Positive Statements		
	Poetry Users	Non-Users
Poems help you appreciate the world around you.**	95.1	70.7
Poems make you laugh.**	94.7	80.5
Poems help you understand other people.**	90.4	58.7
Poems provide comfort at difficult times of your life.**	88.3	56.4
Poetry keeps your mind sharp.**	86.8	60.4
Poems help you understand yourself.**	81.8	42.6
Average for six positive statements	89.5	61.6

** Significant at $p < .01$.

NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF POETRY

Table 39 shows that non-users have stronger negative perceptions of poetry than do current users. Non-users were significantly more likely to endorse each of the negative statements than were current poetry users, and on average, 17 percent more non-users agreed with the negative statements. Somewhat surprisingly, a sizable number of current poetry users endorsed each of the negative statements. More than half of the poetry users felt that four of the five negative statements were true, with an overall average for the five statements of 55 percent. However, the two negative statements that poetry users most frequently agreed with were “*Figuring out a poem’s meaning is difficult*,” and “*Reading poetry is hard work*.” Not all poetry users would agree that these statements reflect negative attitudes toward poetry.

Table 39: Negative Perceptions of Poetry by Strata

Percentage of Current Poetry Users and Non-Users Endorsing Negative Statements		
	Poetry Users	Non-Users
Figuring out a poem’s meaning is difficult for you.*	78.7	84.4
Reading poetry is boring.**	56.4	81.2
Poems are irrelevant to your daily life.**	53.8	76.4
Reading poetry is hard work.*	60.8	67.8
Reading poetry is a waste of time.**	25.9	48.6
Average for five negative statements	55.1	71.7

* Significant at $p < .05$

** Significant at $p < .01$

PERCEPTIONS OF POETS AND POETRY READERS

We asked all respondents a series of questions that tapped into their perceptions of poets and of poetry readers. These questions asked about poets’ and poetry readers’ physical characteristics, personality traits, and their status within the culture.²⁵ Respondents first answered questions about poets and then answered the same questions about poetry readers. Each question was presented as a forced-choice; that is, respondents were asked to choose among two or three alternatives. However, although “both” or “neither” were not offered as specific response options, respondents could answer as such and interviewers recorded these answers. For analytical purposes, we did not distinguish between responses of “both” or “neither,” and they are grouped together in the tables that follow.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF POETS AND POETRY READERS

Tables 40 through 42 show respondents’ perceptions of poets’ and poetry readers’ physical characteristics. In general, adult readers do not ascribe particular physical characteristics to poets or poetry readers. In Tables 40 through 42 below, the majority of respondents indicated that both poets and poetry readers could be male or female, were of no particular age, and no particular race. However, when adult readers do ascribe physical characteristics to poets and poetry readers, they have very different perceptions of what these groups look like. Among those respondents who chose a particular physical characteristic to describe most poets, the image of poets that emerges is fairly stereotypical. They agree that poets are more likely to be old or middle-aged, white men. In comparison, the only physical characteristic that was attributed to poetry readers with significant frequency was gender. Poetry readers are more likely perceived to be women.

Table 40: Gender		
Do you think poets/poetry readers are more likely to be men or women?		
	POETS Percent	POETRY READERS Percent
Men**	30.9	7.3
Women**	14.0	45.4
Both/Neither**	53.6	45.7

** Significant at $p < .01$.

²⁵ We asked about poets’ and poetry readers’ gender, age, and race; intellectual style, garrulousness, and extraversion; whether they are people one would like to meet, and whether they are respected.

Table 41: Age		
Do you think poets/poetry readers are more likely to be old, middle-aged or young?		
	POETS Percent	POETRY READERS Percent
Old**	13.6	4.7
Middle-aged**	18.0	12.6
Young*	3.5	5.8
No particular age**	64.4	76.5

** Significant at $p < .01$.

Table 42: Race		
Do you think poets/poetry readers are more likely to be White, Black or Asian ²⁶		
	POETS Percent	POETRY READERS Percent
White**	17.8	7.3
Black	0.4	0.4
Some other race*	1.1	2.4
No particular race**	79.4	89.1

* Significant at $p < .05$

** Significant at $p < .01$

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF POETS AND POETRY READERS

Adult readers are more willing to ascribe social characteristics to both poets and poetry readers, as evidenced by the smaller percentage of people who chose “both or neither” when asked about social traits compared to the percentage who chose these options when asked about physical characteristics. There is a tendency to be more willing to make specific attributions to poets rather than poetry readers. For each of the social characteristics asked about, respondents answered “both or neither” significantly more often for poetry readers than they did for poets.

Poets and poetry readers are thought to be similar on a number of social characteristics – both groups are considered more likely to be creative than logical, and more likely to be quiet than talkative. However, poets are considered significantly more likely to exhibit both of these traits. Poets also are significantly more likely to be thought of as loners than are poetry readers, whereas poetry readers are significantly more likely to be considered sociable. These data are shown in Tables 43 through 45.

²⁶ There were no responses of “Asian” for poets and one person indicated that poetry readers are more likely to be Asian. This response is included in the “Some other race” category.

Table 43: Intellectual Style		
Do you think poets/poetry readers are more likely to be logical or creative?		
	POETS Percent	POETRY READERS Percent
Logical**	5.4	9.9
Creative**	72.0	58.4
Both/Neither**	21.3	30.7

Table 44: Garrulousness		
Do you think of poets/poetry readers as more likely to be talkative or quiet?		
	POETS Percent	POETRY READERS Percent
Talkative**	16.6	23.3
Quiet**	54.0	35.8
Both/Neither**	27.7	39.5

** Significant at $p < .01$

Table 45: Extraversion		
Do you think of poets/poetry readers as more likely to be sociable or loners?		
	POETS Percent	POETRY READERS Percent
Sociable**	24.1	35.2
Loners**	42.5	22.1
Both/Neither**	31.9	40.9

** Significant at $p < .01$

CULTURAL STATUS OF POETS AND POETRY READERS

Adult readers were most willing to make specific choices when asked questions that address the cultural status of poets and poetry readers. When answers of “both” or “neither” were given, they were more often in response to questions about poetry readers than about poets.

In general, both poets and poetry readers are esteemed within the culture. Both are more likely to be people whom adult readers would like to meet, and both are much more likely to be respected than disrespected. About two-thirds of our respondents thought that both poets and poetry readers are people who are generally respected; and, slightly more respondents would like to meet poets (70 percent) than would like to meet poetry readers (66 percent). These data are shown in Tables 46 and 47.

Table 46: Interest in Meeting		
Do you think poets/poetry readers are more likely to be people you would like to meet or people you would like to avoid?		
	POETS Percent	POETRY READERS Percent
Meet	70.3	66.3
Avoid	8.3	7.9
Both/Neither**	18.7	23.7

** Significant at $p < .01$

Table 47: Respect		
Do you think poets/poetry readers are more likely to be respected or disrespected?		
	POETS Percent	POETRY READERS Percent
Respected	75.3	73.1
Disrespected*	4.8	2.8
Both/Neither**	18.1	22.8

** Significant at $p < .01$

When significant differences are evidenced between poets and poetry readers, they tend to reflect more ambivalence toward poetry readers than toward poets. A significantly higher percentage of adult readers feel that poetry readers, but not poets, are likely to be both people they might like to meet and might like to avoid. The same pattern was found when respondents were asked if poets and poetry readers are more likely to be respected or disrespected.

While 75 percent of adult readers agree that poets are respected, a small percentage thought that they are disrespected. Respondents were significantly more likely to say that poets are disrespected than are poetry readers.

PERCEPTIONS OF POETS AND POETRY READERS BY STRATA

In this section, we explore how perceptions of poets and poetry readers may vary with people's experiences with poetry. In particular, we were interested in the relationship between experience with poetry and a tendency toward stereotyping. For these analyses, we considered responses of "both or neither" as evidence of a non-stereotyped view – that is, people who recognize that poets and poetry readers have a variety of physical and social characteristics were considered less stereotyped in their views than respondents who ascribed specific traits to either of these groups. We hypothesized that as experience with poetry increases, stereotyping decreases. As a result, we expected current poetry users to more frequently respond with "both or neither" than do non-users.

Within the non-user group, our hypothesis predicts that former readers hold less stereotyped views than those who have never read poetry. We further hypothesized that this pattern would be more pronounced for responses to questions about poets than about poetry readers. It seems possible that by virtue of being readers, all respondents, regardless of their experiences with poetry, would recognize that poetry readers are diverse group.

PERCEPTIONS OF POETS

Table 48 summarizes the responses of current poetry users and non-users to questions about poets. In general, we found support for our hypothesis that stereotypes of poets decrease as experience with poetry increases. We found significant differences between current poetry users' and non-users' perceptions of poets for six of the eight characteristics measured. Non-users are significantly more likely to say that poets are white men who are creative and loners. They are also significantly more likely to say that poets are people they would like to avoid. In comparison, current poetry users are significantly more likely to say "both or neither" when asked to described poets' gender, intellectual style, garrulousness, and extraversion. They are significantly more likely to say that poets are people they would like to meet. Current poetry users and non-users do not differ in their perceptions of poets' age, or that poets in general, are respected.

Table 48: Perceptions of Poets by Poetry Users and Non-Users

Percentage of Poetry Users and Non-Users Endorsing Characteristics of Poets			
		Poetry Users	Non-Users
GENDER	Men**	27.5	41.6
	Women	13.7	15.1
	Both/Neither**	57.6	40.7
AGE	Old	12.2	17.8
	Middle-aged	18.0	17.8
	Young	3.6	3.0
	No particular age	65.7	60.7
RACE	White*	16.0	23.4
	Black	0.5	0.3
	No particular race	82.5	74.6
INTELLECTUAL STYLE	Logical	5.6	4.6
	Creative**	69.9	78.4
	Both/Neither**	23.6	14.4
GARRULOUSNESS	Talkative	15.3	20.7
	Quiet	52.2	59.7
	Both/Neither**	31.2	17.0
EXTRAVERSION	Sociable	24.0	24.7
	Loner**	39.1	52.9
	Both/Neither**	35.6	20.6
CULTURAL STATUS	Meet**	75.1	55.7
	Avoid**	5.2	18.0
	Both/Neither	18.2	20.4
	Respect	73.6	80.6
	Disrespect	5.0	4.1
	Both/Neither	19.5	13.3

* Significant at $p < .05$ ** Significant at $p < .01$

Table 49: Perceptions of Poets by Former and Non-Poetry Readers

Percentage of Former and Non-Poetry Readers Endorsing Characteristics of Poets			
		Former Poetry Readers	Non-Poetry Readers
GENDER	Men	43.2	39.8
	Women**	14.5	21.3
	Both/Neither	42.4	38.9
AGE	Old	18.2	16.4
	Middle-aged	17.1	22.4
	Young	2.7	4.3
	No particular age	61.9	56.9
RACE	White	23.0	28.1
	Black**	0.0	1.8
	No particular race*	77.0	70.2
INTELLECTUAL	Logical*	4.2	7.6
	Creative*	81.6	74.5
	Both/Neither	14.2	17.9
GARRULOUSNESS	Talkative**	18.7	35.1
	Quiet**	63.4	49.6
	Both/Neither	17.9	15.3
EXTRAVERSION	Sociable**	23.7	32.7
	Loner	54.6	49.6
	Both/Neither	21.6	17.7
CULTURAL STATUS	Meet*	60.4	52.4
	Avoid**	17.7	27.2
	Both/Neither	21.9	20.4
	Respect	82.0	83.5
	Disrespect*	3.6	7.0
	Both/Neither*	14.4	9.6

* Significant at $p < .05$ ** Significant at $p < .01$

Our hypothesis was not supported when we looked at former poetry readers' and non-poetry readers' perceptions of poets (Table 49). While former poetry readers tend to endorse "both or neither" options at higher rates than do non-poetry readers, these differences are only significant for two of eight attributes. Former poetry readers are significantly more likely to say that poets are of no particular race and that they are both respected and disrespected. Further, the data suggest that non-poetry readers, while more likely to choose a specific trait to describe poets, often choose the trait that counters the usual stereotype. To illustrate, if we accept that the stereotype of poets is that they are old, white men who are creative, quiet loners, then non-poetry readers' perceptions go against the stereotype on all but one of these attributes. Non-poetry readers are significantly more likely than former readers to say that poets are black women who are logical, talkative, and sociable. These data suggest that people who have never read poetry at all may be so unfamiliar with the art form that they are unaware of the stereotypes attached to it as well.

PERCEPTIONS OF POETRY READERS

Table 50: Perceptions of Poetry Readers by Poetry Users and Non-Users			
Percentage of Poetry Users and Non-Users Endorsing Characteristics of Poetry Readers			
		Poetry Users	Non-Users
GENDER	Men	6.8	9.0
	Women	43.7	50.6
	Both/Neither**	48.4	37.3
AGE	Old	4.3	6.1
	Middle-aged	13.0	11.3
	Young	5.9	5.5
	No particular age	82.4	82.2
RACE	White	6.3	10.4
	Black	0.5	0.1
	No particular race	92.5	88.1
INTELLECTUAL	Logical	9.9	10.0
	Creative**	55.4	67.5
	Both/Neither**	33.9	21.0
GARRULOUSNESS	Talkative	22.9	24.7
	Quiet**	32.8	45.2
	Both/Neither**	43.0	28.3
EXTRAVERSION	Sociable	34.3	37.9
	Loner**	19.6	30.1
	Both/Neither**	44.7	28.3
CULTURAL STATUS	Meet**	69.0	57.9
	Avoid**	5.3	15.8
	Both/Neither	24.0	22.9
	Respect*	71.1	79.4
	Disrespect	3.2	1.5
	Both/Neither**	24.7	17.3

* Significant at $p < .05$

** Significant at $p < .01$

Table 50 summarizes poetry users' and non-users' responses to questions about their perceptions of poetry readers. We found support for the hypothesis that increased experience with poetry is associated with a decreased tendency to stereotype poetry readers. Non-users' and current poetry users' perceptions of poetry readers differed significantly for six of eight measures. Non-users are significantly more likely than users to describe poetry readers as creative, quiet, loners whom they would prefer to avoid. (A higher percentage of non-users said they would prefer to avoid poetry readers than would prefer to avoid poets). Despite their lack of interest in meeting poetry readers, non-users are also significantly more likely than current users to say that poetry readers

are respected. In comparison, current poetry users are significantly more likely to say that poetry readers are of no particular gender, have no particular intellectual style, are neither talkative nor quiet, can be both sociable and loners, and are both respected and disrespected. They are also significantly more likely to want to meet poetry readers.

Table 51 shows the same data for former poetry readers and non-poetry readers.

Table 51: Perceptions of Poetry Readers by Former and Non-Poetry Readers			
Percentage of Former and Non-Poetry Readers Endorsing Characteristics of Poetry Readers			
		Former Poetry Readers	Non-Poetry Readers
GENDER	Men	9.5	8.7
	Women	51.7	54.8
	Both/Neither	38.8	36.5
AGE	Old	5.8	7.7
	Middle-aged*	10.6	15.4
	Young	5.5	6.0
	No particular age*	78.1	70.9
RACE	White**	9.0	18.5
	Black	0.2	0
	No particular race**	90.9	81.5
INTELLECTUAL	Logical**	8.9	16.8
	Creative	69.0	66.4
	Both/Neither	22.1	16.8
GARRULOUSNESS	Talkative**	22.3	40.2
	Quiet*	47.1	40.2
	Both/Neither	30.6	19.7
EXTRAVERSION	Sociable	36.0	55.5
	Loner*	31.9	25.5
	Both/Neither	32.2	19.1
CULTURAL STATUS	Meet	59.4	62.5
	Avoid**	14.7	25.0
	Both/Neither**	25.8	12.5
	Respect**	79.7	87.2
	Disrespect	1.3	2.6
	Both/Neither**	19.0	10.3

* Significant at $p < .05$

** Significant at $p < .01$

Former poetry readers are less stereotyped than non-poetry readers in their perceptions of poetry readers as evidenced by the frequency with which they endorsed “both or neither” options. Former poetry readers selected “both or neither” more often than non-poetry readers did for all measures, and were significantly more likely to choose these options to describe poetry readers’ age, race and cultural status. However, overall our hypothesis was not supported. Non-poetry readers are significantly more likely to stereotype poetry readers with respect to their physical characteristics and are significantly more likely to describe poetry readers as middle-aged and white. However, former poetry readers are more apt to exhibit stereotyped perceptions of poetry readers’ social characteristics. Former poetry readers are significantly more likely to describe poetry readers as quiet loners. Lastly, while non-readers are significantly more likely to say that poetry readers are respected, they also have significantly less interest in meeting them.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Adult readers’ reactions reflect both positive and negative attitudes toward poetry. Not surprisingly, current poetry users are more likely to attest to poetry’s rewards than are non-users, although non-users agree that there are benefits that result from reading or listening to poetry. While non-users appear to recognize poetry’s rewards, they agree in larger numbers that poetry is boring and irrelevant to their lives.

In general, adult readers do not attribute specific physical characteristics to poets or poetry readers, but when they do, their attributions are consistent with the stereotype that poets are old (or middle-aged), white men. The social characteristics that they connect with poets are also fairly stereotypical – poets are creative, quiet, loners. Despite these tendencies to stereotype poets, we found scant evidence that poets are marginalized or held in low regard. Adult readers are far more likely to say that they would like to meet poets rather than avoid them, and fully two-thirds feel that poets are respected.

In general, adult readers hold more stereotyped views of poets than they do of poetry readers. Adult readers are more likely to ascribe physical and social characteristics to poets than to poetry readers, and the characteristics that they do attribute to poets are consistent with the stereotypical image of the poet as a quiet, creative loner, most likely to be an older white male.

We tested the hypothesis that the tendency to stereotype poets and poetry readers decreases as experience with poetry increases. This hypothesis predicts that current poetry users will have less stereotyped perceptions than non-users, and within the non-user group we expected former poetry readers to have less stereotyped perceptions than non-poetry readers. Our hypothesis was partially supported. Current poetry users hold less stereotyped perceptions of poets and poetry readers than do non-users. Former poetry readers show a tendency to stereotype poets and poetry readers along social dimensions. Non-poetry readers are more willing than former readers to go against stereotype.



BENEFITS AND BARRIERS

At a very abstract level, we found that current poetry users hold more positive views of poetry and less stereotyped impressions of poets and poetry readers. Current poetry users also noted several positive benefits – a deeper appreciation of the world around them, a better understanding of oneself and others, comfort in difficult times, and sheer enjoyment. Non-users shared these impressions of poetry’s benefits but endorsed them at lower rates. In this section, we continue to explore the perceived benefits of reading poetry. When asked to describe in their own words the benefits they receive from reading or listening to poetry, what do current and former poetry users say? Does poetry contribute to the public good? And finally, if broadening and deepening participation in poetry are one’s goals, what are the major obstacles that must be overcome to achieve those objectives?

THE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL VALUE OF POETRY

PERSONAL BENEFITS OF POETRY

All respondents who had ever read poetry, that is, all respondents except those who had never read or listened to poetry were asked about the benefits they receive from poetry.²⁷ These questions were open-ended, allowing respondents to use their own words to describe poetry’s rewards without constraining them with a set of limited response options. For analytical purposes, we then coded their verbatim responses into categories which are shown in Table 52 below.

²⁷ We asked, “What benefits, if any, [do/did] you personally get from reading or listening to poetry?”

Table 52: Detailed Categories of Personal Benefits by Strata

Percentage of Current and Former Poetry Users Citing Benefits of Poetry			
	Poetry Users	Former Poetry Readers	Total
Relaxation*	25.6	8.0	21.3
Entertainment/Enjoyment*	23.6	12.7	20.9
Mind expanding and makes you think*	22.5	7.2	18.8
General understanding/Enlightenment*	11.5	3.6	9.6
Helps you understand others*	10.6	4.0	9.0
Provides solace and comfort*	11.3	4.0	9.0
Inspiration	9.1	4.0	7.8
Emotional release	5.6	4.0	5.2
Helps you understand yourself*	5.6	1.6	4.6
Education	4.0	5.2	4.3
Appreciation of language	4.7	2.8	4.2
Spiritual connection	1.7	0.8	1.5
Some other benefit	8.9	4.8	7.9
No benefits*	9.2	31.6	14.7

* Significant at $p < .05$

Current poetry users cite a variety of benefits that they derive from reading or listening to poetry. While former poetry readers also identify a number of benefits, they do so much less frequently than do current users. Of the twelve²⁸ categories of benefits mentioned by respondents, seven were endorsed by a significantly higher proportion of current poetry users. The only response that was endorsed at a significantly higher rate by former poetry readers was “no benefits.” When former readers do cite specific benefits, they are most likely to say that they enjoyed reading poetry or that it was entertaining. In comparison, more than half of the current poetry users cited intellectual and emotional benefits from reading poetry.

The differences between current and former users’ perceptions of poetry’s rewards can be seen more easily when similar categories are combined to create four aggregate categories of benefits: (1) “Enjoyment” which includes entertainment and appreciation of language; (2) “Well-being” which includes relaxation, solace and comfort, emotional release, spiritual connection, and inspiration; (3) “Understanding” which includes mind-expanding, understanding the self, understanding others, general understanding, and education; and (4) “No benefits.” The distribution of responses after recoding is shown in Table 53. Even at the aggregate level, former poetry readers are more likely to say that they obtained “no benefits” from reading poetry.

²⁸ “Some other benefit” and “no benefits” are excluded from this analysis.

Table 53: Aggregate Categories of Personal Benefits by Strata

Percentage of Current and Former Poetry Users Citing Benefits of Poetry			
	Poetry Users	Former Poetry Readers	Total
Understanding	54.2	25.7	48.1
Well-being	53.2	24.8	47.1
Enjoyment	28.2	18.6	26.1
No benefits	9.2	31.6	15.3

* Significant at $p < .05$

SOCIAL BENEFITS OF POETRY

In our introduction, we identified four public mandates for the arts: defining the human experience, improving the quality of life for both those who create and those who appreciate art, educating and invigorating the citizenry, and enhancing people's lives by creating art works that produce deeply meaningful experiences. By focusing primarily on the experiences of individuals, *Poetry in America* sheds some light on the last of these four mandates -- poetry's ability to improve the lives of individuals by providing them with meaningful experiences. The questionnaire also includes two questions that directly address the social benefits of poetry. First, we asked all current and former users their opinion about the amount of poetry being read today,²⁹ and then asked a follow-up question of those respondents who said that they thought people should read more poetry. The follow-up question addressed the possible benefits that could result from increased readership.³⁰

Overall, 64 percent of adult readers thought that in general, people should read more poetry. Current poetry users are significantly more likely than non-users to hold this view. Nearly two-thirds of the current poetry users (72 percent) think that people should read more poetry compared to 45 percent of non-users. The data in Table 54 reflect the responses of 653 participants who thought that people should read more poetry. With one exception, poetry users and non-users are similarly distributed across response categories, that is, they did not differ in their perceptions of the benefits that would accrue from people reading more poetry. Current poetry users are significantly more likely to mention an appreciation of language as one of the social benefits that results from reading poetry. More than half of the respondents who thought that people should read more poetry felt that people would gain insight or understanding from doing so; only 10 percent of them thought that people would be comforted by reading poetry.

²⁹ The question we asked was, "In general, do you think people today should read more poetry, less poetry, or do you think people read the right amount of poetry?"

³⁰ The follow-up question asked, "In your opinion, what benefits would result from people reading more poetry?"

Table 54: Social Benefits of Poetry

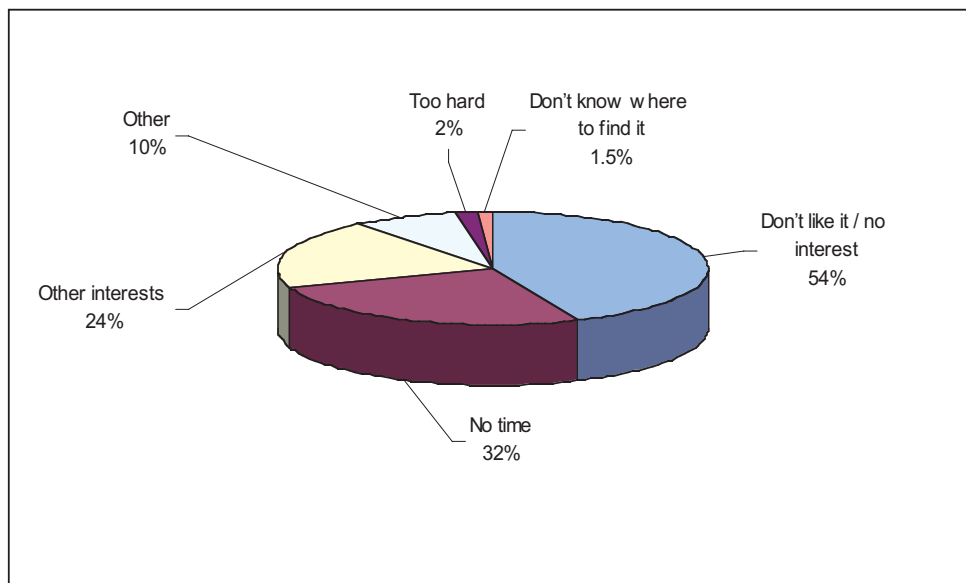
Percentage of Current and Former Poetry Users who Indicated that People Should Read More Poetry			
	Poetry Users	Former Poetry Readers	Total
Gain insight or understanding	55.8	50.0	55.0
Keep their minds sharp	26.8	29.8	27.3
Improve creativity	17.9	19.1	18.1
Gain appreciation for language**	20.2	10.6	18.8
Connect with other people	30.2	25.5	29.6
Improve society	25.8	18.1	24.7
Provide comfort	10.4	9.6	10.3

* Significant at $p < .01$

BARRIERS TO POETRY

What keeps people from reading poetry? For former poetry readers, it seems likely that their negative perceptions of poetry, poets, and poetry readers coupled with the few if any benefits they derive from reading poetry, constitute significant barriers to their participation. To help us understand the obstacles that keep people from engaging with poetry, we asked all former poetry readers, “What prevents you from reading poetry now?” Their responses are shown in Figure 14.

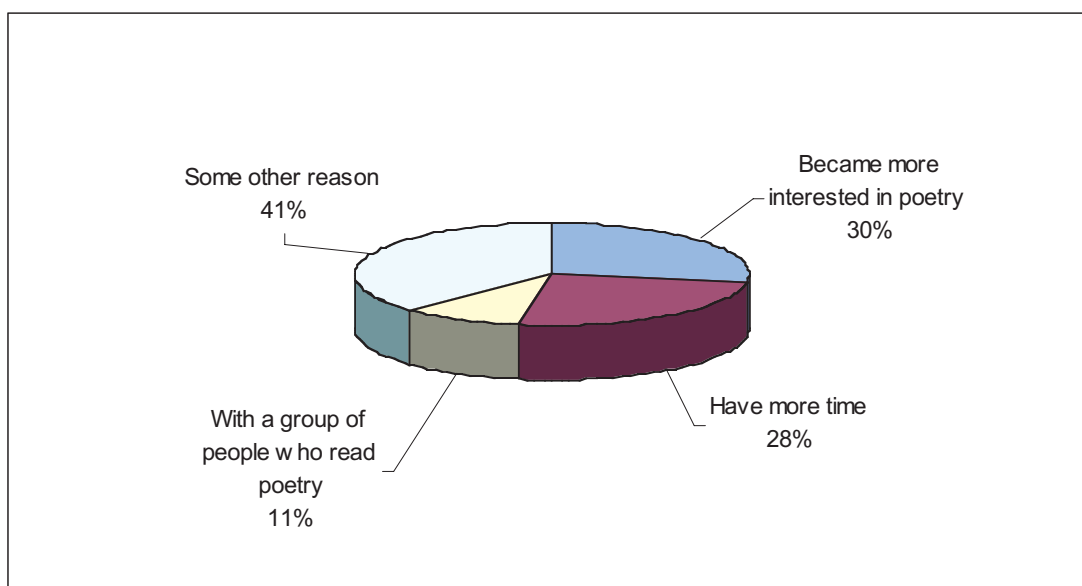
FIGURE 14: PERCENTAGE OF FORMER POETRY READERS CITING BARRIERS TO POETRY



The most frequently cited barrier, “Don’t like it/no interest,” needs to be understood in the context of former readers’ negative perceptions of poetry, reported earlier. More than 80 percent of former poetry readers found poetry difficult to understand. More than 80 percent also found poetry boring. Evidently, the main reason former poetry readers don’t read poetry now is that they don’t like it, and the most likely reasons that they don’t like it are that they find it abstruse and lifeless. Despite their general lack of interest, less than half of former readers think that poetry is a waste of time, suggesting that at least some of their experiences with poetry were rewarding. The other barriers they reported, “no time” and “other interests,” indicate that former readers feel they have little free time, and what little they have, they prefer to spend it pursuing other interests.

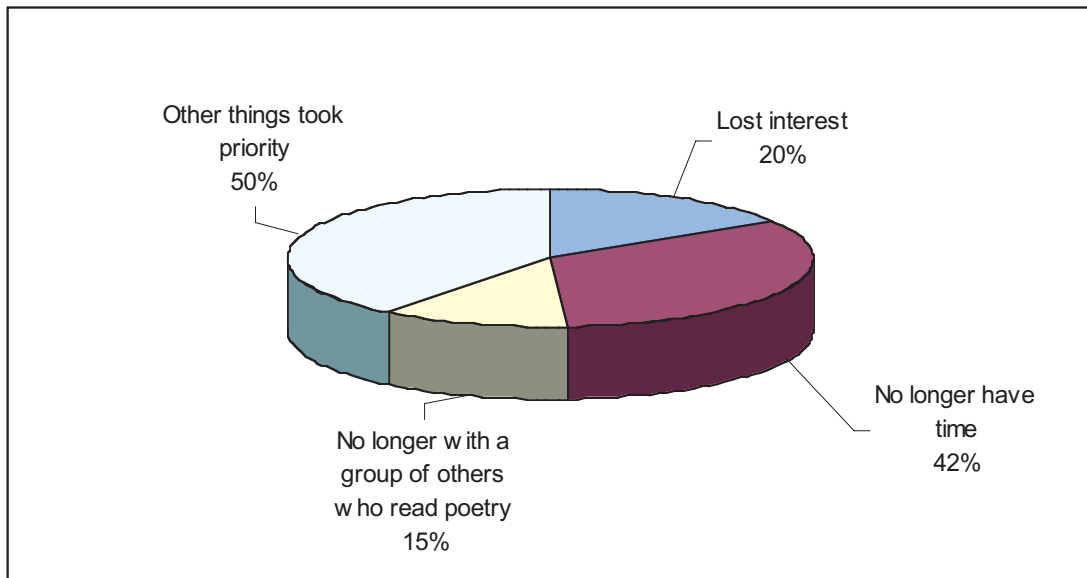
We also asked current poetry users if they read poetry as much now as they have in the past.³¹ Fifty percent of current poetry users read poetry less frequently now than they used to, 38 percent read about the same amount, and 12 percent read poetry more frequently. Those respondents who read more or less frequently than they have in the past were asked about the factors that might underlie this change. Figure 15 shows the responses of current poetry readers who read more frequently now than they have in the past, and Figure 16 shows the responses of those who read less frequently. Many of the reasons for reading poetry more frequently could not be easily classified. Of those that could be, increased interest and more available free time topped the list. The most frequently cited reason for reading poetry less often now than in the past was shifting priorities, although lack of time also topped the list.

FIGURE 15: REASONS FOR READING POETRY MORE FREQUENTLY



³¹ “Would you say you currently read poetry more frequently, less frequently, or about the same as you used to?”

FIGURE 16: REASONS FOR READING POETRY LESS FREQUENTLY



SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Adults who read or listen to poetry as well as those who once read poetry but no longer do so recognize that poetry offers both personal and social rewards. Current poetry users cite numerous personal benefits with most finding that poetry offers both intellectual and emotional rewards. Former poetry readers, while crediting poetry with many of the same benefits, do so at much lower rates and are more apt to say that they personally received no benefits from reading poetry. Of those former readers who did find poetry rewarding, most championed poetry for its entertainment value and were less inclined to note intellectual or psychological benefits.

Interestingly, despite finding little that was rewarding in their own experiences with poetry, a fairly high percentage of former poetry readers thought that in general, people should read more poetry. More than half of them felt that society would benefit intellectually – would gain insight and understanding – from reading more poetry.

For a little more than half of former readers, the greatest barrier to their participation is their lack of interest in poetry. This segment of the population may not be persuaded easily to give poetry another try. However, there is a large subgroup within the population of former readers who may be more amenable to poetry. Nearly half of former poetry readers cited other reasons for their lack of participation, most often identifying lack of time and other interests as major barriers.

Time or lack thereof appears to be a significant barrier to both deepening and broadening participation. Current users who have decreased their level of participation in recent years often point to a diminishment in the amount of free time they have available as one of the reasons for their reduced participation.

If poetry is made more widely available, is its audience likely to increase? Programs such as Poetry in Motion, which places poetry placards on public transportation, have the potential to increase poetry's audience by incidentally exposing people to poetry who might not seek it out. Are such programs effective? *Poetry in America* explored the ways that incidental exposure might influence participation with poetry. We asked all participants about coming across poetry in newspapers, on billboards, on public transportation, at public events and at private ceremonies. We also asked them about their experiences coming across poems in non-poetry books and magazines. We sought to answer four research questions: (1) How many people have been incidentally exposed to poetry? (2) When people happen across poetry, do they read or listen to it? (3) Does incidental exposure generate interest in poetry? (4) Do current poetry users and non-users react differently to incidental poetry?

Of the 1,023 adults who participated in *Poetry in America*, all but 9 have been incidentally exposed to poetry. Not surprisingly, poetry users are significantly more likely than non-users to experience poetry incidentally at all opportunities. On average, all respondents indicated 5.5 situations in which they have been exposed to poetry, with poetry users reporting an average of 5.8 instances and non-users reporting an average of 4.8. These differences should be interpreted with caution as they may simply reflect pre-existing differences in the salience of poetry for both of these groups. Because of their interest in poetry, current poetry readers and listeners may be more apt to notice poetry in unexpected places than are non-users.

Table 55 shows the proportions of poetry users and non-users who have come across poetry in newspapers, on billboards, on public transportation, at public events and at private ceremonies. Poetry is most often experienced at private ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, with eighty percent of non-users and more than ninety percent of poetry users reporting that they've been exposed to poetry at one of these private occasions. While it appears that public transportation has the lowest levels of effective exposure, this is merely an artifact of the small number of respondents who commute via public transportation. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents who commute by train, bus or subway report that they have seen or heard poetry on public transportation suggesting that programs like Poetry in Motion are effectively reaching large numbers of commuters.

Table 55: Incidental Exposure to Poetry

Percentage of Respondents Reporting Incidental Exposure			
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
In a newspaper**	71.3	53.4	67.0
On a billboard**	45.3	30.6	41.7
On public transportation**	32.5	13.4	27.8
At a public event**	49.0	30.2	44.4
At a private ceremony**	92.1	81.0	89.4
In some other place**	27.8	9.7	23.4

*Significant at $p < .05$

** Significant at $p < .01$

More interesting than the overall rates is that while non-users are exposed at lower rates, they are still exposed to poetry. Ninety-nine percent of all adult readers, including those adults who said that they have never read or listened to poetry, indicate that they have been incidentally exposed to poetry in at least one unexpected place. These numbers suggest that programs that enhance poetry's accessibility to the general public are likely to be successful in terms of the number of people they are able to reach.

Respondents who reported seeing or hearing poetry in unexpected places were asked a series of follow-up questions about whether they had read or listened to the poem when they came across it, whether they had liked the poem, whether they had found it easy or difficult to understand, and whether reading or listening to that particular poem made them want to seek out more poetry. Responses are summarized in Table 56. Eighty-one percent of the respondents who reported any incidental exposure to poetry said that they read or listened to the poem when they came across it. Current poetry users (86 percent) are significantly more likely to read a poem when they happen across it than are non-users (67 percent).

Of the respondents who read or listened to a poem when they happen across one, 75 percent liked the poem, 79 percent found it easy to understand but only 33 percent said their incidental exposure prompted them to seek out additional poetry. In fact, incidental exposure seems to reinforce existing poetry behaviors. Poetry users are significantly more likely to like a poem, find it easy to understand, and to feel encouraged to read more poetry as a result of having been incidentally exposed. Thirty-eight percent of the current poetry readers and listeners reported that incidental exposure prompted them to seek out more poetry whereas 12 percent of non-poetry readers felt similarly inspired. These findings are summarized in Table 56.

Table 56: Reactions to Poems in Unexpected Places

Percentage of Poetry Users and Non-Users who Engage with Poetry when They Are Incidentally Exposed to It			
	Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
Read or listened to the poem**	85.7	66.6	81.6
Liked the poem**	77.0	68.0	75.3
Found the poem easy to understand*	80.2	73.0	78.8
Wanted to read more poetry as a result**	37.6	12.2	32.7

* Significant at $p < .05$

** Significant at $p < .01$

Poetry often appears in books and magazines that are not devoted to poetry. We asked magazine and book readers about their experiences with poetry that happens to be in other materials that they read. Overall, 70 percent of magazine readers have seen poetry in the magazines that they read. Poetry users are significantly more likely (76 percent) to come across poetry in magazines than are either former poetry readers (59 percent) or non-poetry readers (38 percent). Table 57 shows the reactions of poetry users and non-users to poems that they find in magazines. Not surprisingly, current poetry users are more likely to say that they always or usually read poetry when they come across it in magazines. What is surprising is the fairly high percentages of former and non-poetry readers who also read the poems. Ninety percent of former poetry readers and 75 percent of non-poetry readers at least sometimes read the poems that they find in magazines.

Table 57: Reactions to Poetry in Non-Poetry Magazines

Percentage of Magazine Readers who Read Poetry When They Find it in Magazines				
	Poetry Users	Former Poetry Readers	Non-Poetry Readers	Total
Always read the poems	24.6	7.1	15.6	21.5
Usually read the poems	30.2	17.9	0.0	27.6
Sometimes read the poems	42.6	65.2	59.4	46.4
Never read the poems	2.6	9.8	25.0	4.1

Sixty-four percent of fiction and non-fiction readers happen across poetry in the books that they read. As seen with magazine readers, current poetry users are more likely to come across poetry in other kinds of books. Seventy-one percent of current poetry readers, 45 percent of former poetry readers and 40 percent of non-poetry readers have been incidentally exposed to poetry through fiction or non-fiction books. Their reactions are summarized in Table 58.

Table 58: Reactions to Poetry in Non-Poetry Books

Percentage of Book Readers who Read Poetry When They Find it in Books				
	Poetry Users	Former Poetry Readers	Non-Poetry Readers	Total
Always read the poems	50.9	41.3	36.0	49.1
Usually read the poems	26.2	20.0	4.0	24.9
Sometimes read the poems	22.6	33.2	56.0	24.5
Never read the poems	0.3	5.5	4.0	1.1

Remarkably high proportions of readers, regardless of whether they identify as poetry readers, read poems when they appear in works of fiction or non-fiction. Just under half of all participants in *Poetry in America* always read poems that appear in non-poetry books. Ninety-six percent of adults who identify as non-poetry readers at least some of the time read poetry that they happen across in books that they read.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Without influencing people’s intent to read poetry in the future, incidental exposure encourages participation with poetry. Nearly all adult readers find poetry in unexpected places and most of them read it, at least occasionally, when they do happen across it. Poetry’s role in private ceremonies, its use to mark special or solemn occasions, places poetry in front of large numbers of people. Placing poetry in other kinds of reading materials such as newspapers, magazines, and fiction or non-fiction books creates opportunities for non-users and current users to engage with this art form. And, apparently when readers are given the opportunity to read poetry, when they do not have to deliberately seek it out on their own, most of them choose to read it much of the time.

11 OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPOSURE TO POETRY

If people are willing to read or listen to poetry when they happen across it, where are the opportunities for incidental exposure? Commute time may present an ideal opportunity to expose people to poetry. Sixty percent of adult readers commute regularly for work or school. A slightly higher percentage of current poetry users (62 percent) commute than do non-users (54 percent).

Respondents who regularly commute for school, work, or other reasons were asked how many minutes they spend commuting each day round trip, and what mode of transportation they use. Then they were asked to report how frequently they do each of the following activities during their commute: listen to music; listen to sports radio, public radio or talk radio; listen to audio books; read; and talk on the phone.

In the tables that follow, all percentages can be read as the percentage of all commuters. For example in Table 59 below, seven-tenths of one percent of all commuters walk or bicycle less than ten minutes round trip each day. The row total for this first row shows that 3.4 percent of all commuters walk or bike to work. The column total shows that 10.4 percent of all commuters travel for less than ten minutes round trip.

Table 59 below shows that of the 60 percent of participants who commute, 85 percent drive their own car, and an additional 5 percent commute by carpool. Six percent of commuters use public transportation. Over a third (37 percent) of commuters travel for 30 to 59 minutes; nearly three-fourths (74 percent) travel for 30 minutes or longer.

Table 59: Time Spent Commuting by Mode of Transportation

Percentage of Commuters						
MODE	Minutes					TOTAL
	Less than 10	10 to 29	30 to 59	60 to 120	More than 120	
Walk or Bicycle	0.7	0.3	1.5	0.8	0.1	3.4
Carpool	0.7	0.5	1.5	1.0	1.1	4.8
Drive own car	9.0	15.2	31.4	19.8	9.3	85.1
Public Transportation	0.0	0.3	1.8	2.7	1.2	6.1
Other	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.6
TOTAL	10.4	16.3	36.5	24.5	11.7	100

Table 60 shows the kinds of activities people engage in while commuting. The percentage of people who reported reading is very small; however, this question was only asked of people who commute by public transportation or carpool. People who drive their own cars, bike, or walk to work were not asked if they read during their commute.

Table 60: Participation in Activities during Commute			
Percentage of Commuters Engaging in Activities during their Commute			
	Current Poetry Users	Non-Users	Total
Listen to music*	92.8	97.5	93.6
Listen to talk radio	70.9	72.9	71.3
Listen to audio books*	31.5	21.6	29.3
Talk on the telephone	67.4	67.2	67.3

* Significant at $p < .05$.

Listening to music is the most common activity that respondents engage in during their commute, with 94 percent of commuters reporting that they listen to music. Non-users are significantly more likely to listen to music while commuting than are current poetry users. Seventy-one percent of commuters listen to talk radio including sports radio, public radio or other talk radio, with poetry users and non-users being equally likely to listen to talk radio. Of the commuters who take public transportation or carpool, 73 percent read while commuting with no measurable differences among poetry users and non-users. Current poetry users are significantly more likely to listen to audio books than are non-users, although compared to other activities, only a small percentage of commuters engage in this at all.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Radio may be the best opportunity for placing poetry in front of a large number of people during their commute. High percentages of both poetry users and non-users listen to some form of talk radio during their commute. Increasing poetry’s presence on the airwaves may have an effect similar to that found for incidental exposure in books, newspapers and magazines. People who would not ordinarily seek out poetry may engage with it and enjoy it when it is incorporated into another activity in which they already choose to participate.

In 1997, Robert Pinsky was named the 39th Poet Laureate of the United States. Shortly after his nomination, Mr. Pinsky started the “Favorite Poem Project,” to celebrate poetry’s role in Americans’ lives. During a one-year submission period, the project received around 18,000 letters and emails from people wishing to share their favorite poem.

Poetry in America includes a series of questions that asks respondents about their favorite poems. In addition, we asked all current and former poetry readers, regardless of whether they have a favorite poem, if they can recall the title of any poem, the name of a poet, and a few lines of poetry. Our rationale for including these questions is three-fold:

1) “The Favorite Poem” project continues to collect similar information from people who are interested in poetry and who are sufficiently motivated to make the effort to submit their poems. While the sheer volume of submissions suggests that poetry plays an important role in many Americans’ lives, the sample is not scientific. *Poetry in America* builds upon the “Favorite Poem” project by asking similar questions of a scientific, random sample of adult readers.

2) Early in the project design phase, stakeholders identified questions of the type asked in the favorite poem section as key measures of poetry’s marginality. Over time, the expectation is that more people will be able to accurately recall the name of a poet and a poem, and to recite lines of poetry. Additionally, as The Poetry Foundation and other arts organizations work to invigorate poetry’s presence in American culture, we would expect to see increasing representation by contemporary poets. Thus, the responses to the favorite poem questions in the *Poetry in America* study serve as a baseline against which literary and cultural organizations can effectively measure poetry’s changing role in American culture.

3) In 1997, the NEA asked similar questions on the 1997 SPPA. The 1997 SPPA did not define poetry and included these questions as a validity check to determine what respondents had in mind when they answered questions about this art form. On *Poetry in America*, we provided respondents with a specific definition of poetry and instructed them to include only professional published poetry in response to the favorite poem series of questions. Responses to these questions provide a check on how well our definition and instructions to respondents constrained their responses.

REMEMBERING POEMS, POETS AND LINES OF POETRY

Table 61: Recall of Poems, Poets and Lines of Poetry			
Percentage of Respondents Recalling Poems, Poets and Lines of Poetry			
	Current Poetry Users	Former Poetry Readers	Total
Have a favorite poem*	35.6	15.7	31.3
Recalled a poem*	39.8	21.5	35.0
Named a poet*	64.2	47.6	60.7
Remembered lines of poetry*	47.2	30.4	43.6

* Significant at $p < .05$.

All current poetry users and former poetry readers were asked the favorite poem questions. Of the participants who were asked this series, 31 percent have a favorite poem. There was some variation in the named poems with no single poem being nominated as a favorite by more than thirteen respondents. Overall, 125 different poems were nominated as respondents’ favorites. The titles of people’s favorite poems and the frequency with which they were nominated are shown in Appendix B.

We asked all current and former poetry users who did not have a favorite poem if they could remember the title of any poem. Thirty-five percent said they could recall the title of a poem even if it was not their favorite. There was slightly more variability among these titles than among the favorite poems, although “The Raven” and “Trees” topped both lists. In response to “Do you remember the title of any poem?” 130 different poems were named, some of which were nursery rhymes and books like Dr. Seuss. Appendix C shows the poems and the frequency with which they were recalled by respondents who did not have favorite. Overall, 55 percent of all current and former poetry readers either had a favorite poem or said that they could recall the title of a poem.

Sixty-one percent of current and former poetry users recalled the name of poet, and 44 percent could recite lines of poetry. Current poetry users were significantly more likely to recall the titles of poems, the names of poets, and lines of poetry.

For comparison purposes, we compared the poets’ named by a subset of our sample with the 25 most popular poets listed by the Academy of American Poets. The Academy of American Poets’ list reflects the frequency with which specific poets are queried on their website. Because using the Internet to search for poetry-related information is correlated with intensity of engagement with poetry, we chose as our comparison group, current users who indicated that they decided on their own to read or listen to poetry (our high intensity group). Table 62 shows the frequency with which the Academy’s top 25 poets were mentioned by our high intensity poetry readers.

Table 62: Frequency with which Top 25 Poets were Named by High Intensity Poetry Users

Percentage of High Intensity Poetry Users who Named Top 25 Poets		
Ranking by the Academy of American Poets	Poet	Poetry Users
1	Langston Hughes	2.2
2	Emily Dickinson	2.8
3	Robert Frost	12.8
4	Walt Whitman	2.8
5	e.e. cummings	1.2
6	Sylvia Plath	1.6
7	Maya Angelou	7.2
8	Dylan Thomas	0
9	Shel Silverstein	4.0
10	William Carlos Williams	0
11	W.H. Auden	0.3
12	Gwendolyn Brooks	0
13	T.S. Eliot	0.6
14	Robert Creeley	0
15	Pablo Neruda	0.6
16	Edgar Allan Poe	14.3
17	Billy Collins	0
18	Elizabeth Bishop	0
19	Henry Wadsworth Longfellow	5.3
20	Sharon Olds	0
21	Ezra Pound	0
22	Ted Kooser	0
23	Louise Glück	0
24	Robert Lowell	0
25	William Shakespeare	3.1

* Significant at $p < .05$.

ACCURACY OF RECALL

In addition to asking respondents if they could name a poem, we asked if they could name the poet who wrote that particular poem and whether they could recall one or two lines from that poem. When respondents could not name the author and recall specific lines from a named poem, they were asked if they could name any poet and recall lines of poetry from any poem. As a validity check, we verified and scored 100 percent of the responses to this series of questions by searching for the poem on various Internet websites that are devoted to poetry. Respondents received points for naming a poet, poem and/or lines of poetry that exist as professional, published poetry. They received additional points if the lines recalled were from a poem written by the named poet. These data are summarized in Table 63.

Table 63: Accuracy of Recall of Poems, Poets and Lines of Poetry

Percentage of Respondents Matching Poems, Poets and Lines of Poetry			
	Current Poetry Users	Former Poetry Readers	Total
Did Not Recall Valid Poetry			
No valid responses	29.0	43.3	31.3
Recalled Valid Poetry but Did Not Match on Any Measures			
Title of a Poem**	10.8	6.6	10.2
Name of a Poet	23.0	26.4	23.6
Lines of Poetry	4.0	4.2	4.0
Recalled Valid Poetry and Matched on Two Measures			
Poet and Poem**	12.8	4.5	11.4
Poem and Lines	5.8	6.4	5.9
Poet and Lines	5.6	4.7	5.5
Recalled Valid Poetry and Matched on All Three Measures			
Poet, Poem and Lines**	9.0	4.0	8.2

* Significant at $p < .01$

In reading Table 63, it is important to keep in mind that the table reflects the accuracy with which respondents could match poets to poems and to lines of poetry. By adding together percentages at different scoring levels, the accuracy of recall for poets, poems and lines of poetry are determined. For example, to calculate the accuracy with which respondents remembered the names of poets, one would add together the respondents who could only remember the name of poet with those who remembered the poet and one of his or her poems, those who remembered the poet and some lines of poetry that he or she had written, as well as those who remembered all three – poets, poems and lines. Table 64 provides these summary statistics. Current poetry users are significantly more likely to recall with accuracy across all three measures.

Table 64: Summary Statistics for Accuracy of Recall

Percentage of Current and Former Poetry Users Recalling Poems, Poets and Poetry			
	Current Poetry Users	Former Poetry Readers	Total
Remembered the title of a poem*	38.4	21.5	35.7
Remembered the name of a poet*	50.4	39.6	48.7
Remembered lines of poetry*	24.4	19.3	23.6

* Significant at $p < .05$

In reading Table 63, it is also important to keep in mind that scores in the top half of the table reflect lower levels of accuracy than scores in the bottom half. Respondents in top half either did not recall professional poets or published poetry, or when they did recall legitimate poets and poems, were unable to match the name of a poet to a poem or to lines of poetry. Scores in the lower half of the table reflect higher degrees of accuracy and include respondents who matched across two or all three measures.

As seen in Table 63, despite providing respondents with a definition of poetry and clear instructions to include only professional published poetry in their responses, nearly a third provided answers that could not be validated. This may reflect limitations of our validation procedures as we were limited to poetry that is available on the Internet. For comparison purposes, we examined responses to a similar question that was included on the 1997 SPPA. On the 1997 SPPA, 191 respondents who reported that they had read a poem in the last 12 months were asked “*What was the name of a poem you read, or the name of a poet?*” Fifty-two respondents indicated that they didn’t know or could not remember the name of poet or a poem resulting in 139 verbatim responses which we verified by searching for the title of the poem or the name of the poet on the Internet. Fourteen respondents (10 percent) named a book or magazine in which they had read poetry but did not name the poet or the title of the poem; seven named personal acquaintances (5 percent); and four (3 percent) remembered the topic of the poem but not the title or the poet. Of the remaining 62 responses, 18 (29 percent) could not be verified resulting in 44 verified poems or poets from 139 reports (32 percent).

While the proportion of unverifiable poetry is comparable on both the 1997 SPPA and *Poetry in America*, a significantly higher percentage of participants in the *Poetry in America* study accurately recalled either the title of a poem, a poet, or lines of poetry than did participants in the 1997 SPPA (69 percent compared to 32 percent). While it is likely that the inclusion of a definition of poetry along with explicit exclusion criteria helped *Poetry in America* respondents focus on the kinds of poetry that were of interest in this study, participants also had spent an average of 24 minutes thinking about poetry prior to responding to the favorite poem series of questions. It is likely that people’s ability to recall poets and poetry improves the longer they think about the topic.

To further explore what may account for the accuracy of recalled poetry, we looked at the relationship between how respondents studied poetry in school – either by reading, memorizing, reciting, or writing poems – and the accuracy with which they recalled information during their interview. Our analyses excluded respondents who said “don’t know” or “refused” to any of the school questions, resulting in over 600 respondents who provided a substantive response (yes or no) to questions about how they studied poetry in school. Among these respondents, a significant relationship was found such that those respondents who memorized poetry in school recalled more poetry-related information (poets, poems, and/or lines of poetry) during their interview. Reading, reciting, and writing poetry in school were not associated with subsequent recall.

Lastly, we asked all current and former poetry readers who either had recalled either the title of a poem, the poet’s name, or lines of poetry why they remembered that particular poem or poet. Initially, we coded their verbatim responses into fourteen separate categories; however, this resulted in ten categories that each accounted for fewer than ten percent of the responses. For analytical purposes, we then aggregated some categories creating the ten categories shown in Table 65.

Table 65. Reasons for Remembering a Particular Poem or Poet			
Percentage of Respondents who Remembered a Poet or Poem			
	Current Poetry Users	Former Poetry Readers	Total
Felt inspired by or felt connection with the meaning or subject of the poem	32	24	31
Reminded me of school/my youth	15	23	16
Associated a person or particular event with the poem	12	8	12
Poet is famous or known to the respondent	11	8	11
Language is particularly beautiful	6	3	6
Read, listened to or memorized the poem	3	2	3
Top of mind	3	7	3
Other	10	13	11

The responses of current and former poetry users are fairly evenly distributed across categories with no differences between groups. Adults appear to be unaware of the relationship between memorizing a poem and later recall with few citing memorization as the reason they remembered a particular poem. Instead, both current and former poetry users most often mention the personal connection they felt with a poem as the reason they can still bring it to mind.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The accuracy data presented in this chapter should be interpreted with a degree of caution. Respondents may have felt under pressure to come up with the name of a poet, a poem, or recite lines of poetry within the time constraints of a survey interview. Our ability to verify the information that they provided was limited to poetry that is available over the Internet. As a result, it is possible that some information that was coded as invalid does exist as professional, published poetry but we were unable to find it during our coding and scoring operations.

It is somewhat encouraging to note that nearly 70 percent of current poetry users can recall some aspect of a poem – its title, author or some lines of poetry, and more encouraging to see that more than half of former poetry readers can do the same.

The findings also suggest that through the act of memorization, poems become a part of us. Although it may be many years since the poem was memorized, it remains in memory and can be brought to mind later on.

13 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Poetry in America gathered a wealth of previously unavailable information about people's experiences with poetry. To help us synthesize the findings, we return to the research questions that guided this study.

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF POETRY'S CURRENT AUDIENCE?

At first blush, it seems that poetry's audience is made up of mostly literary readers – mainly women with advanced degrees. But, if we dig a little deeper, the picture becomes more detailed. Poetry's current audience includes active, engaged adults who tend to participate in a whole host of leisure and social activities. Poetry's current audience includes voracious readers who read broadly and for whom poetry is but one of many genres that they enjoy. If we dig deeper still, the picture that emerges is more encompassing. Who reads and listens to poetry? When we include all the many ways in which people are incidentally exposed, the answer becomes almost all adult readers also participate with poetry.

WHAT FACTORS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH PEOPLE'S ONGOING PARTICIPATION WITH POETRY?

Poetry appears to be a lifelong passion, most often beginning during people's teenage years, but often beginning in childhood, and continuing into adulthood. Three factors appear to distinguish current poetry users from former ones. First, people who continue to participate with poetry tend to have a breadth of early experiences not seen among former poetry users. People who remain poetry users in adulthood have parents and other family members who read poetry to them when they were young. They were read the traditional kinds of child-friendly fare, like nursery rhymes and books like Dr. Seuss, and they were read other types of poetry as well. People who remain poetry users into adulthood have more extensive in-school experiences with poetry as well. They study poetry at more grade levels and they experience poetry in a multitude of ways while studying it in school. People who remain poetry users do more than simply read poetry in school – they write it, memorize and recite it. Years down the road, those who memorized poetry can often still remember it.

Second, people who continue to use poetry into adulthood have a person in their past, usually a family member and most often a parent, whom they connect with their burgeoning interest in poetry. Poetry users may have studied poetry in school, but it is their family experiences that are most memorable. Early in the design phase of this project, we spoke with poetry enthusiasts and heard over and over again about the influence of one impassioned person who shared their love of poetry.

Third, perhaps as a result of their early experiences, people who continue to engage with poetry at some point in their lives make a conscious decision to do so. Perhaps it is at this turning point, when a young person decides on his or her own to pursue poetry, that a person begins to self-identify as a poetry reader.

WHAT ARE PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS OF POETRY, POETS AND POETRY READERS?

Both current and former poetry users recognize that reading poetry can be hard work. They acknowledge that figuring out a poem's meaning can be difficult. Where they seem to diverge is in their perceptions of the results of those efforts. People who choose to read poetry feel rewarded by their efforts. They gain an appreciation of the world around them, they feel a connection to other people. They feel comforted in difficult times and they gain insights into themselves. They relax. People who discontinue their involvement with poetry seem to recognize these rewards but did not feel that they personally experienced them. More often, they felt that they received no benefits from the effort they put into reading poetry and as a result it often felt irrelevant to their daily lives.

While it seems that the stereotype of poets – poets are quiet, creative, old, white men who tend to be loners – persists, it persists mainly among people who once read poetry but no longer do so. People with more experience with poetry tend to avoid stereotyping, recognizing diversity among poets that precludes classification. People with no experience with poetry other than incidental exposure, though few in number, tend to go against the stereotype when they describe poets.

People who read poetry recognize that the population of poetry readers is diverse as well and tend to avoid stereotyping poetry readers. Among people who do not read poetry, the perception is that poetry is the hobby of quiet, creative women.

WHAT HINDERS THOSE PEOPLE WITHOUT A STRONG INTEREST IN POETRY FROM BECOMING MORE ENGAGED WITH THIS ART FORM?

When asked, people who don't currently read poetry usually say they simply don't like it. Perhaps, people don't like poetry because their experiences with it are limited and they haven't had the opportunity to find poetry that they like. Most people who do not become lifelong poetry users were read nursery rhymes and books like Dr. Seuss, but don't remember being read other types of poetry. Their in-school experiences were fairly limited, and most of them first read classic poetry, poetry which may be less accessible and which may seem less relevant to teenagers than might contemporary poetry.

It seems likely that people's perceptions of poetry are the greatest barriers to participation. Few people are inclined to invest some of their precious free time in an activity that they think is effortful and unrewarding.

WHAT STEPS MIGHT BE TAKEN TO BROADEN THE AUDIENCE FOR POETRY IN THE UNITED STATES?

Based on the findings from *Poetry in America* we offer seven suggestions for broadening and also deepening participation with poetry.

DEVELOP PROGRAMS FOR PARENTS

Parents are already reading poetry to their children. Nearly all parents read nursery rhymes and books like Dr. Seuss to their children and in turn, their children grow up and read these types of poetry to their own children. It seems likely that many parents, particularly if poetry was not a part of their family life, don't know what to read after Dr. Seuss. Developing a graduated series of poetry that parents can share with their children may be one successful strategy for involving a new generation with poetry.

DEVELOP PROGRAMS FOR TEACHERS

Next to parents, teachers are most often cited as early influences and they are more often cited by former poetry readers than by those who continue reading poetry into adulthood. Teachers are under increasing pressure to teach to national standards, and so finding ways to increase poetry's presence in schools will be challenging. Nonetheless, encouraging teachers to do more than have students read poetry seems to be particularly important. Incorporating more poetry activities into the classroom is probably not enough to create sustained interest in poetry. Teachers need help finding contemporary poetry that speaks to the teens' issues. During the qualitative phase of this project, we heard from many former poetry readers who talked about the frustration they felt when called upon in school to tell the class what a poem meant. Many remembered struggling to figure out a poem's meaning, a sentiment that was echoed by survey respondents. It seems likely that by encouraging students to talk about what they got out of a poem, without pressuring them to uncover a poem's one true meaning, they are more likely to experience two of poetry's rewards – a better understanding of themselves and of others.

HELP LIBRARIES AND BOOK CLUBS FOSTER PARTICIPATION

Libraries are untapped as resources for promoting participation with poetry. Adult readers tend to be library cardholders suggesting that they utilize their local libraries. Few, however, use their libraries for poetry. A large number of readers can be reached by partnering with libraries to develop and promote programs related to poetry.

While few adult readers belong to book clubs, these groups are natural venues for reading and exploring poetry. Bookstores and libraries often host reading clubs that people can drop in on without being a formal member of the group.

INCREASE POETRY'S PRESENCE ON THE INTERNET

Adult readers have access to the Internet at rates higher than what is seen in the general population. Currently, few poetry users turn to the Internet to access poetry or to find information about poetry events. However, as the Internet evolves, ever increasing numbers of people are using it, and the Internet is increasingly becoming the source for all kinds of information. There is no reason why poetry should be the exception. Websites devoted exclusively to poetry will most likely be visited by people who already are involved with poetry. But, even if relatively few poetry users visit poetry websites, poems are shared. Surprisingly high percentages of people who do not identify as poetry readers were sent poems via email or because someone copied them out for them. The Internet can deepen participation for current poetry users who will use it to search for poetry, and their social networks will broaden participation.

The use of the Internet for poetry has broader applications beyond developing websites devoted to poetry. Poetry is already part of solemn and special occasions. Placing poetry at sites devoted to these kinds of private ceremonies can help make people more aware of poetry's role in commemorating important events.

CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCIDENTAL EXPOSURE

If it is sufficient to have more people engaging with poetry without converting them to intentional users, then creating more opportunities for incidental exposure will broaden participation. Adult readers, regardless of whether they identify as poetry readers, will read poetry when it appears in magazines and books. Similarly, television and radio present opportunities for large numbers of people to listen to poetry. Here, the idea is not to create programs specifically about poetry as these are likely to attract only those who are already interested in the art form. Instead, incorporate poetry into the programs that people are already listening to and watching. Many people listen to talk radio during their commute and this seems like a natural entry point for poetry.

CHALLENGE PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS

The findings from *Poetry in America* challenge people's perceptions in two important ways. First, the image of poetry readers that emerges from the data is one that can face down negative stereotypes. Poetry is not the purview of quiet, introspective women. Second, it seems that poetry's audience is in the throes of an identity crisis. There are many adult readers who simply do not self-identify as poetry readers. The findings from *Poetry in America* ask those readers who think that they don't read poetry to think again. Readers are exposed to poetry in books and magazines. They encounter it in public places and at private events. More importantly, when readers come across poetry, they engage with it and, the data suggest, many of them may like it.

EVALUATE ALL PROGRAMS

All too often, new initiatives are put in place without plans for their evaluation. Without evaluation, we are left with only our instincts to tell us what works for whom and what doesn't. We strongly recommend that new initiatives that are born of the *Poetry in America* findings be subject to rigorous evaluation. The survey itself, while currently a snapshot in time, can be part of ongoing evaluation efforts by periodically taking another look at poetry's role in our culture.

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Appendix A: Statistical Model Details

Appendix B: Favorite Poems

Appendix C: Titles of Poems Other than Favorites Remembered by Respondents

Appendix A

This appendix provides details of statistical models generated in several sections throughout the report, specifically in the demographic, leisure time and formative experiences sections. In addition to these statistical models, chi-square and t-tests were used as appropriate throughout the report to identify significant differences between groups, most often differences between poetry users and non-users.

Four models were generated in to accommodate our analyses using ordinary least squares (OLS) and logistic regression models. OLS models are used when the outcome of interest (the dependent variable) is continuous, such as a unit of time. Logistic models are used when the dependent variable is categorical, such as a yes or no answer. The models are as follows:

1. Which factors predict poetry user status (using a logistic model)?
2. Which factors predict leisure time (using an OLS model)?
3. Which factors predict whether a parent decides to read Dr. Seuss or nursery rhymes to their children (using a logistic model)?
4. Which factors predict whether a parent decides to read poetry to their children (using a logistic model)?

For simplicity in the analyses, demographic variables were collapsed into dichotomous variables as follows:

Education:	0=Less than college; 1=Bachelor's degree or greater
Marital Status:	0=Not married; 1=Married
Race:	0=Black; 1=White ¹

¹ Due to the small size of the other racial categories, these were omitted from the analysis

Model 1: Summary of Multiple Logistic Regression Model Predicting Poetry User Status (n=879²)

Parameter	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	P-value	Point Estimate	95% Wald Confidence Limits	
Intercept	-2.8082	0.4317	<.0001			
Sex (0=Female)	0.2575	0.169	0.1276	1.294	0.929	1.802
Age	0.0162	0.00554	0.0034	1.016	1.005	1.027
Education Attainment (1=Bachelor's or more)	-0.5	0.1759	0.0045	0.607	0.43	0.856
Marital Status (0=Not Married)	0.6459	0.1805	0.0003	1.908	1.339	2.718
Race (0=Black)	0.5907	0.2963	0.0462	1.805	1.01	3.227
Family Income	-0.0306	0.0394	0.437	0.97	0.898	1.048
Employment Status (0=Not Employed)	0.1118	0.1933	0.563	1.118	0.766	1.633

² Cases with responses for these questions of *Refused* or *Don't Know* are not used in this analysis

Model 2: OLS Model predicted amount Respondents' Free Time (n=879)

Variable	Model 1	Model 2
	Regression Coefficient (standard error)	Regression Coefficient (standard error)
Intercept**	7,092.08** (1,036.54)	-3,520.88 (3,749.48)
Poetry User Status (0=Non-user)	-421.39 (1,328.24)	780.06 (1,450.84)
Sex (0=Female)		-2,397.53 (1,463.81)
Age		194.57** (47.23)
Education Attainment (1=Bachelor's or more)		-3,198.69* (1,499.29)
Marital Status (0=Not Married)		-2,197.71 (1,465.09)
Race (0=Black)		-1,829.10 (2,201.11)
Family Income		-195.98 (355.01)
Employment Status (0=Not Employed)		4,251.38* (1,678.01)

*p<.05; ** p<.01

Model 3: Summary of Multiple Logistic Regression Model Predicting whether a parent reads Dr. Seuss or other nursery rhymes to their children

	Model without Controls (n=663)						Model with Controls (n=575)					
	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	P-value	Point Estimate	95% Wald Confidence Limits		Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	P-value	Point Estimate	95% Wald Confidence Limits	
Intercept	-0.9736	0.2260	<.0001				-1.2734	1.1082	0.2505			
Poetry User Status (0=Non-user)	-0.7311	0.3136	0.0197	0.481	0.260	0.890	-0.5268	0.3791	0.1647	0.590	0.281	1.241
Read Dr. Seuss as a child (0=No)	-1.9186	0.3321	<.0001	0.147	0.077	0.281	-1.6010	0.4208	0.0001	0.202	0.088	0.460
Read Poetry as a child (0=No)	0.1172	0.3747	0.7544	1.124	0.539	2.343	0.1855	0.4471	0.6782	1.204	0.501	2.892
Sex (0=Female)							1.6146	0.3819	<.0001	5.026	2.378	10.623
Age							0.00462	0.0144	0.7478	1.005	0.977	1.033
Education Attainment (1=Bachelor's or more)							-0.4163	0.4045	0.3034	0.659	0.298	1.457
Marital Status (0=Not Married)							-0.3111	0.3826	0.4161	0.733	0.346	1.551
Race (0=Black)							-0.7780	0.4616	0.0919	0.459	0.186	1.135
Family Income							-0.0606	0.0951	0.5241	0.941	0.781	1.134
Employment Status (0=Not Employed)							0.0422	0.4402	0.9236	1.043	0.440	2.472

Model 4: Summary of Multiple Logistic Regression Model Predicting whether a parent reads poetry to their children

	Model without Controls (n=659)						Model with Controls (n=571)					
	Regression Coeffiction	Standard Error	P-value	Point Estimate	95% Wald Confidence Limits		Regression Coeffiction	Standard Error	P-value	Point Estimate	95% Wald Confidence Limits	
Intercept	1.0677	0.1959	<.0001				1.3775	0.6326	0.0294			
Poetry User Status (0=Non-user)	-1.5304	0.1796	<.0001	0.216	0.152	0.308	-1.4647	0.2040	<.0001	0.231	0.155	0.345
Read Dr. Seuss as a child (0=No)	-0.00929	0.2120	0.9651	0.991	0.654	1.501	0.0697	0.2527	0.7826	1.072	0.653	1.759
Read Poetry as a child (0=No)	-0.9302	0.1911	<.0001	0.394	0.271	0.574	-1.1293	0.2182	<.0001	0.323	0.211	0.496
Sex (0=Female)							1.0265	0.2141	<.0001	2.791	1.835	4.247
Age							-0.0118	0.00782	0.1325	0.988	0.973	1.004
Education Attainment (1=Bachelor's or more)							-0.2604	0.2123	0.2201	0.771	0.508	1.169
Marital Status (0=Not Married)							0.0233	0.2192	0.9154	1.024	0.666	1.573
Race (0=Black)							-0.0631	0.3044	0.8357	0.939	0.517	1.705
Family Income							0.0910	0.0532	0.0868	1.095	0.987	1.216
Employment Status (0=Not Employed)							-0.3647	0.2381	0.1256	0.694	0.435	1.107

Appendix B: Favorite Poems

TITLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
THE RAVEN	13	6.2%
FOOTPRINTS	10	4.7%
TREES	9	4.3%
STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING	8	3.8%
THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED	7	3.3%
HOW DO I LOVE THEE	6	2.8%
THE RHYME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER	6	2.8%
THE CREMATION OF SAM MCGEE	5	2.4%
THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH	5	2.4%
ANNABELLE LEE	4	1.9%
IF	4	1.9%
THE ROAD NOT TAKEN	4	1.9%
PHENOMENAL WOMAN	3	1.4%
THE HIGHWAYMAN	3	1.4%
TIGER TIGER BURNING BRIGHT	3	1.4%
CASEY AT THE BAT	2	0.9%
DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT	2	0.9%
HIAWATHA	2	0.9%
I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS	2	0.9%
INVICTUS	2	0.9%
JABBERWOCKY	2	0.9%
ODE TO A GRECIAN URN	2	0.9%
SARAH CYNTHIA SYLVIA STOUT	2	0.9%
THE CHILDREN'S HOUR	2	0.9%
THE HOUSE BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD	2	0.9%
WINTER	2	0.9%

TITLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
A BROUGHAM OF ADAM	1	0.5%
A WORKER READS HISTORY	1	0.5%
ALLIGATOR PIE	1	0.5%
APPLE TREE DREAMS	1	0.5%
BEAR AND THERE	1	0.5%
BLACK SHOE	1	0.5%
BLOOD OF THE ROSE	1	0.5%
CHARLES HAROLD PILGRIMAGE	1	0.5%
CLOUDS	1	0.5%
COTTON CANDY ON A RAINY DAY	1	0.5%
DADDY	1	0.5%
DON'T STAND BY MY GRAVE AND WEEP	1	0.5%
EPHRAIM'S POEMS	1	0.5%
GENERATION WEBSITE	1	0.5%
GOD IS TODAY	1	0.5%
GOD'S PROTECTION	1	0.5%
HALF HANGED MARY	1	0.5%
HEY DIDDLE DIDDLE	1	0.5%
HOW I WALK	1	0.5%
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO UP IN THE AIR	1	0.5%
HUMPTY DUMPTY	1	0.5%
I AM AN ISLAND	1	0.5%
I HEAR AMERICA SINGING	1	0.5%
I SAID A PRAYER FOR YOU TO DAY	1	0.5%
I SING THE BODY ELECTRIC	1	0.5%
I TAKE MASTER CARD -CHARGE YOUR LOVE TO ME	1	0.5%
I WILL	1	0.5%

TITLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
IF ONLY	1	0.5%
I'M BEING EATEN BY A BOA CONSTRICTOR	1	0.5%
I'M SPENDING CHRISTMAS WITH JESUS CHRIST THIS YEAR	1	0.5%
IN FLANDERS FIELDS	1	0.5%
IN THE VALLEY I GROW	1	0.5%
INTIMATION OF MORTALITY	1	0.5%
JASON AND MEDEA	1	0.5%
JUDGE TENDERLY ME	1	0.5%
L'ENNVOI	1	0.5%
MAN & A WOMEN	1	0.5%
MISPLACED	1	0.5%
MY BLUE CAR	1	0.5%
MY POOR DOG STRAY	1	0.5%
NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS	1	0.5%
NO	1	0.5%
NOTHING GOLD CAN STAY	1	0.5%
OH CAPTAIN MY CAPTAIN	1	0.5%
ONCE I HAVE NEVER TRAVELED	1	0.5%
ONE	1	0.5%
ONE PERFECT ROSE	1	0.5%
OVER THE HILL TO THE POOR HOUSE	1	0.5%
PAUL REVERE'S RIDE	1	0.5%
RELUCTANT	1	0.5%
RICHARD COREY	1	0.5%
RIDE A COCK HORSE	1	0.5%
ROSES ARE RED VIOLETS ARE BLUE	1	0.5%
SELF-PITY	1	0.5%

TITLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
SONNETS	1	0.5%
STAR STRUCK LOVERS	1	0.5%
STILL I RISE	1	0.5%
TABLEAU	1	0.5%
TALE OF TWO HEARTS	1	0.5%
THE BALL POEM	1	0.5%
THE BIRD THAT FLIES	1	0.5%
THE BLOWING OF THE TREES	1	0.5%
THE COLD WITHIN	1	0.5%
THE GIVING TREE	1	0.5%
THE GOOPS	1	0.5%
THE GRINCH THAT STOLE CHRISTMAS	1	0.5%
THE ILLIAD	1	0.5%
THE KISS	1	0.5%
THE LADY OF CHAILLOT	1	0.5%
THE LAMENT	1	0.5%
THE LION AND THE GLOVES	1	0.5%
THE LOVE OF MY CHILDREN	1	0.5%
THE PANTHER	1	0.5%
THE PRINCE IN THE SAND	1	0.5%
THE PROPHET	1	0.5%
THE PUFFINS	1	0.5%
THE RAINBOW	1	0.5%
THE RED WHEELBARROW	1	0.5%
THE SLING	1	0.5%
THE SPECTRUM OF LOVE	1	0.5%
THE TELLTALE HEART	1	0.5%

TITLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
THE TOLLING OF THE BELLS	1	0.5%
THE VAMPIRE	1	0.5%
THE WALNUT TREE	1	0.5%
THE WRECK OF THE HESPERUS	1	0.5%
THERE WAS AN OLD WOMAN LIVED UNDER A HILL	1	0.5%
TIL I RISE	1	0.5%
TO AN ATHLETE DYING YOUNG	1	0.5%
TO HIS COY MISTRESS	1	0.5%
TOULOUSE	1	0.5%
TRAVEL	1	0.5%
TWO	1	0.5%
UNDER THE VILLAGE CHESTNUT TREE	1	0.5%
UNDONE	1	0.5%
WALDEN'S POND	1	0.5%
WE ARE OF TWO WORLDS	1	0.5%
WHEN THOU PASSES THROUGH	1	0.5%
WHEN YOU WHERE OLD	1	0.5%
WIND THROUGH MY HAIR	1	0.5%

Appendix C: Titles of Poems Other than Favorites Remembered by Respondents

TITLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
THE RAVEN	26	11.9%
TREES	11	5.0%
WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS	7	3.2%
THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED	6	2.8%
MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB	5	2.3%
THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE	5	2.3%
FOOTPRINTS	4	1.8%
IF	4	1.8%
ODE TO A GRECIAN URN	4	1.8%
THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH	4	1.8%
BEOWULF	3	1.4%
CROSSING THE BAR	3	1.4%
INVICTUS	3	1.4%
JABBERWOCKY	3	1.4%
PAUL REVERE'S RIDE	3	1.4%
THE RHYME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER	3	1.4%
GREEN EGGS AND HAM	2	0.9%
HIAWATHA	2	0.9%
LEAVES OF GRASS	2	0.9%
RAISIN IN THE SUN	2	0.9%
STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING	2	0.9%
THANOTOPASIS	2	0.9%
THE CREMATION OF SAM MCGEE	2	0.9%
THE ILLIAD	2	0.9%
THE ROAD NOT TAKEN	2	0.9%
THE WASTELAND	2	0.9%

TITLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
A COLD WINTER NIGHT	1	0.5%
A MIDNIGHT DANCE	1	0.5%
A PHENOMENAL WOMAN	1	0.5%
A POEM LOVELY AS A TREE	1	0.5%
A SHADOW	1	0.5%
A SHIP WRECK	1	0.5%
A TRIBUTE TO FRIENDSHIP	1	0.5%
A WINTERS DREAM	1	0.5%
A WINTER'S LEAP	1	0.5%
AMERICAN SOLDIER	1	0.5%
ANGER	1	0.5%
ANNABELLE LEE	1	0.5%
AS I RISE	1	0.5%
BARBARA FREECHIE	1	0.5%
BELLS	1	0.5%
COMPLAINING JACK	1	0.5%
CRUCIFIXION	1	0.5%
DADDY	1	0.5%
DAFFODILS	1	0.5%
DAISY'S DO TELL	1	0.5%
DIGGING	1	0.5%
DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT	1	0.5%
DONNA ONESHUCKS	1	0.5%
EL DORADO	1	0.5%
ELEGY WRITTEN IN COUNTRY CHURCH YARD	1	0.5%
EUGENE ONEGIN	1	0.5%
FIRE AND ICE	1	0.5%

TITLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
FOREVER YOUNG	1	0.5%
FORGET IT	1	0.5%
FOX IN SOX	1	0.5%
HICKORY DICKORY DOCK	1	0.5%
HOW DO I LOVE THEE	1	0.5%
HOWL	1	0.5%
HUG O WAR	1	0.5%
I DO I DONT	1	0.5%
I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS	1	0.5%
I LOVE TO WATERFOWL	1	0.5%
I RISE	1	0.5%
I SING THE BODY ELECTRIC	1	0.5%
I THINK ITS ON THE CAT'S FEET	1	0.5%
JACK AND JILL	1	0.5%
LITTLE JACK HORNER	1	0.5%
ME, CAN I EXPLAIN IT? CAN YOU?	1	0.5%
MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM	1	0.5%
MINSTREL MAN	1	0.5%
MORNINGSIDE	1	0.5%
MY LIFE HAS NO CRYSTAL STAIRS	1	0.5%
NEVER MORE	1	0.5%
NOT FORGOTTEN	1	0.5%
NOTHING GOLD CAN STAY	1	0.5%
ON BEING A CHAMPION	1	0.5%
PAINE	1	0.5%
PARADISE LOST AND PARADISE REGAINED	1	0.5%
PATTERNS	1	0.5%

TITLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
PHENOMENAL WOMAN	1	0.5%
PIT AND THE PENDULUM	1	0.5%
POEM TO A MULE	1	0.5%
PRISONERS OF WAR WORDS UNSAID	1	0.5%
RAISIN IN THE SUN	1	0.5%
RICHARD COREY	1	0.5%
RIVER WITHOUT A SOURCE	1	0.5%
ROSES ARE RED	1	0.5%
SATURDAY NOT GOING TO SCHOOL	1	0.5%
SCREEN DOOR SUMMER	1	0.5%
SO RAVERTUSRTUM	1	0.5%
SOMETHING GRAY	1	0.5%
SOMETHING THERE IS THAT DOESN'T LOVE A FENCE	1	0.5%
SONG OF SOLOMAN	1	0.5%
SONNET #5	1	0.5%
ST IVES	1	0.5%
THE ARROW	1	0.5%
THE BALLAD OF DAN MCGREW	1	0.5%
THE CHAMBERED NAUTILUS	1	0.5%
THE CHILDREN'S HOUR	1	0.5%
THE CHILDS FIRST GRIEF	1	0.5%
THE COW JUMPED OVER THE MOON	1	0.5%
THE DEAD HORSE	1	0.5%
THE FALCONER	1	0.5%
THE GREEN SILK BUG	1	0.5%
THE HIGHWAYMAN	1	0.5%
THE HOUSE BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD	1	0.5%

TITLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
THE LONG ROAD	1	0.5%
THE PATH NOT TAKEN	1	0.5%
THE PURIST	1	0.5%
THE REASON	1	0.5%
THE ROSE THAT GREW FROM CONCRETE	1	0.5%
THE TAPESTRY OF MY LIFE	1	0.5%
THE WAY IT IS NOW	1	0.5%
THERE ONCE WAS A MAN FROM MARS	1	0.5%
TIGER, TIGER BURNING BRIGHT	1	0.5%
TO AN ATHLETE DYING YOUNG	1	0.5%
TO GRANDMOTHERS HOUSE WE GO	1	0.5%
TOMMY ATKINS	1	0.5%
TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS	1	0.5%
UNDER SPREADING THE CHESTNUT TREE	1	0.5%
UNTITLED	1	0.5%
VATOS	1	0.5%
WHAT IS A MOTHER	1	0.5%
WHEN LAST AT THE COURT BLOOMED	1	0.5%
WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE	1	0.5%
WILD NIGHTS, WILD NIGHTS	1	0.5%
WOODWORKER	1	0.5%
YERBA MORA	1	0.5%
YOU MAKE ME DO DUMB SHIT	1	0.5%