

Poetry in The Post

Langston Hughes,
the busboy, on his
way to becoming a
great poet.

INSIDE

6 Poet's
Choice in
The Post

7 A
Simile
Is ...

14 Poetry in
Motion, but
Punctuated

22 What Do
NASCAR and
Poetry Share?

An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

Poetry in the Post

Lesson: Poetry, whether found or written hard-sought word by word, allows a multitude of voices, expresses many emotions and provides insight into history and contemporary life.

Level: Low to high

Subjects: English, Language arts

Related Activity: Art, History

Whether preparing students to enter the KidsPost poetry contest, to celebrate National Poetry Month (April) or to study the works of particular poets before writing their own poems, this guide provides teachers with activities and background articles from the pages of The Washington Post.

One doesn't usually think of a newspaper as a textbook or resource for poetry study, but they share many of the same characteristics: brevity, conveyance of human experience and a framework for history as well as perspective on contemporary life.

The Washington Post actually offers many resources. Book World, found in the Sunday Post, might first come to mind. Since 1996, "Poet's Choice" has appeared in Book World, an innovative idea for contemporary newspapers but a reminder of the poetry found in the very first American newspapers. In the Style section works of non-fiction, fiction and poetry are reviewed and authors are interviewed. The Metro and Weekend sections have featured poets and provided listings of poetry readings. If one reads carefully enough, one can find the poetic devices, poetry in prose, throughout the pages of the daily Post.

On April 16, 2006, Book World featured poets and poetry in celebration of its tenth anniversary.

Several articles from that issue and previous columns are gathered in this guide for your convenience and inspiration. Suggestions are made for their use, but are only a few of the ways this material might be used in your classroom.

Talk About Poets and Poems

Which poems do students like? Do they know the names of any poets? Mother Goose, Dr. Seuss, or ones written by a poet laureate? Do students like poems that rhyme, that tell a story or paint a picture?

Do any of your students write poetry? In "A Way with Words" (July 8, 2004), The Post reported results of a poetry contest at James F. Oyster Elementary School. All poems were written and recited in Spanish. Jeneffer Lopez, the 11-year-old recipient of first prize stated, "I read poetry and that inspires me to write. I like to write poetry because I can express my feelings. My uncle used to tell me that whenever I couldn't talk to Mom about my feelings, I could write them down in a poem."

Review "The Top Ten Poets" in the sidebar of this guide. This list appeared in the April 16, 2006, Book World. You might provide students with a representative poem of each poet that is listed or form ten groups, one per poet. What qualities make this poem appealing? What idea is the poet presenting? Tone used? Why would they want/not want to read other poems by this poet? If you have formed groups, you might also have students go online to www.poets.org to read more about their poet and his or her works. Introduce their poet to the class through life, poems and critics'

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Poetry Collections

The Best-Loved Poems of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis
Caroline Kennedy, editor

A Family of Poems: My Favorite Poetry for Children
Caroline Kennedy, editor; Jon J. Muth, illustrator

For Laughing Out Loud: Poems to Tickle Your Funnybone
Jack Prelutsky, Marjorie Priceman, illustrator

Poetry Speaks to Children
Editors Elise Paschen, Dominique Raccach, Nikki Giovanni, X.J. Kennedy, Billy Collins, and illustrators Wendy Rasmussen, Judy Love, Paula Zinngrabe Wendland

The Random House Book of Poetry for Children
Jack Prelutsky, Arnold Lobel (Illustrator)

An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

evaluations. Select one poem to represent the poet and explain why it was selected.

With older students, you might share the poets and their works mentioned in this excerpt from Susan Shapiro's article. In her August 30, 2000, book review of *Ah, Poetry, How Do I Love, Shapiro* gives readers a peak into the book's content and which poems and poets inspired other writers. How do your students evaluate the choices?

"For those keeping score, [Wallace Stevens] wins as top inspiration — three of his other poems were chosen by James Tate, Daniel Bin Ramke and Star Black. (William Butler Yeats gets second place.) Many of the featured poets admit to young flirtations with Mother Goose, though nobody officially votes for her. Lawrence Raab and Wanda Coleman, however, salute Lewis Carroll's 'Jabberwocky.' Pulitzer Prize winner W.S. Merwin confesses to early adoration for Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Where Go the Boats?' (Full disclosure: I myself was quite partial in my youth to Stevenson's 'The Shadow.') Two choose popular songs: E. Ethelbert Miller was moved by Leonard Cohen's 'Suzanne,' sung by Judy Collins, while Eleanor Wilner was entranced by 'The Lady Is a Tramp,' by Rodgers and Hart — the sole shared credit here."

Thinking Metaphorically or Like a Simile

After defining and explaining simile and metaphor, give students a copy of "Comparable to What?" Review the ways in which we in our daily life and writers in their works make comparisons. Why are comparisons made?

Students should read or skim articles in the day's newspaper to find an example of each.

After cutting out the examples, they should label each. Students might be asked to answer the following questions:

- What is the comparison?
- When is a direct statement of comparison most effective?
- What quality is emphasized through the simile/metaphor?
- How does the metaphor/simile help readers to understand the subject better?

Explain Simile and Metaphor

Edward Hirsch in the *Poet's Choice* weekly column, explains simile and metaphor with examples. Give students a copy of "A Simile Is" Discuss the difference between the two devices as well as the works used to illustrate the power of using them.

You might put different topics, items or concepts on slips of paper in a container. Have students draw and write their own similes. These might include "first day of vacation," "spoonful of one's favorite ice cream," "walking home" and "ride on the Metro." Share either in groups or with the class. Do other students understand the comparison being made?

You might also have students draw from the container two slips of paper or a slip with two ideas, objects, concepts. Some of these may come from poems that they will read later during a study of poetry. Challenge them to write a metaphor either in prose or poetry form.

Use of simile and literary conceits can also be approached with Robert Pinsky's March 2006 *Poet's Choice* column, "A Stock Idea." Through

The Top Ten Poets

According to Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." For poetry lovers everywhere, a great stopping-off place on the World Wide Web is the official site of the Academy of American Poets. Founded in 1934, the Academy supports "American poets at all stages of their careers" and works "to foster the appreciation of contemporary poetry." Its Web site, poets.org, is a trove of information on famous and lesser-known poets, offering essays, biographical sketches, photos, interviews, audio clips — a total poetry resource. More than a million visitors sign on to the site each month, with the tally of hits resulting in the following top ten list of most popular poets (popularity in this case defined purely by traffic data):

1. Langston Hughes
2. Emily Dickinson
3. Robert Frost
4. Walt Whitman
5. e.e. cummings
6. Sylvia Plath
7. Maya Angelou
8. Dylan Thomas
9. Shel Silverstein
10. William Carlos Williams

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

David Rivard's poem "A Real, Right Thing," students move from stock cars, to similes and speed to stock ideas.

Find a Poem

Give students "It's a Poem. I Found It in The Post." This handout provides students with basic guidelines to write a found poem and a practice exercise. This exercise suggests that students write a haiku. The form of the found poem is left to the teacher to assign.

Focus on Whitman

In 2005, the 150th anniversary of *Leaves of Grass* was honored with readings and recollection of Walt Whitman. D.C. is very much a part of his personal life. Read "Walt Whitman: Celebrating the Poet's History — and Washington's." After students have read this Weekend feature, the following questions for consideration and activities may be used.

- Why did Walt Whitman come to Washington, D.C.? After he succeeded in finding his brother, why did he remain?
- What jobs did he hold while living in D.C.? For which two D.C. newspapers did he freelance?
- Walt Whitman is today a celebrated American poet. Was his poetry appreciated during his lifetime? By whom?
- On The Post NIE site (www.washingtonpost.com/nie), select from lesson plans "Civil War and the Capital City" to review life in Washington, D.C., 1861-1865.
- In the next guide, "Capital Transformed," a street map of downtown D.C. in 1886 is included. Give it to students to locate addresses associated with Walt Whitman.

Review the resources mentioned in The Post feature. Students might also be interested in reading the poems of the article's author, Mary Quattlebaum, author of children's poems.

Address a Poet

Would just the mention of "poem" or "poetry" cause many of your students to look for the nearest exit? Why not ease them into understanding the devices and nature of poetry through automobile reviews. Warren Brown, Post cars columnist, writes a letter to e.e. cummings in "Poetry in Motion, but Punctuated."

If your students have not been introduced to e.e. cummings, you may wish to share one to three of his works before and after reading this article/letter addressed to him. Perhaps, Brown and cummings are both capturing the spirit of experience: "since feeling is first/ who pays any attention/to the syntax of things" (From "since feeling is first" by e.e. cummings).

- Poets make use of such devices as simile, metaphor and allusion. Find an example of each in this prose selection.
- Poetry requires concise expression. Give two examples of sentences that are more like lines of poetry than sentences.
- Why do you think Warren Brown chose to address his letter to e.e. cummings?

Read Book World

In addition to "Poet's Choice in The Post," an essay written especially for this guide by Book World's poetry editor Jabari Asim, "A Decade of Poet's Choice" is

Read It to Me

Audio Archive Anthology, Volume III
American Academy of Poets, \$12,
www.poets.org

More than 20 poets reading from their own works in recordings made over the last 50 years. Includes Gwendolyn Brooks, Allen Ginsberg, Anthony Hecht and Robert Pinsky.

Poetry on Record: 98 Poets Read Their Work, 1888-2006

Shout! Factory, 5 hours, 4 CDs, \$48.98,
www.shoutfactory.com

Begins with Alfred, Lord Tennyson whaling away at "The Charge of the Light Brigade" on one of Edison's wax cylinders. ...

With William Butler Yeats, recording quality achieves the relative clarity of the 1930s. Known for his incantatory delivery and criticized for it, Yeats seems a little put out, saying that the poems he will read gave him "a devil of a lot of trouble to get into verse ... and that is why I will not read them as if they were prose."

There are innumerable small revelations in the manner in which the poets speak their own words, sometimes in an intensifying of sensation, as when Seamus Heaney says "warm thick slobber of frogspawn" in "The Death of a Naturalist" or, in an unexpected stress or lack of it, as when James Weldon Johnson reads "The Creation."

At Blackwater Pond: Mary Oliver Reads Mary Oliver

Beacon Press, 1 hour, 1 CD, \$19.95,
www.beacon.org

According to Mary Oliver, a "poem is meant to be given away, best of all by the spoken presentation of it; then the work is complete." In her first-ever recording, Oliver reads 40 poems, all about nature and its wonderful creatures, in a sweet, neat, compact voice.

Excerpted from Katherine A. Powers,
Book World, April 16

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

included. This article appeared in the anniversary special issue of Book World. Through the excerpts from previous Poet's Choice columns, you meet the poets who have served as editors and you clarify the definition and potential of poetry. Introduce students to the column and honored American poets through this article.

An extension might include reading more works by one or more of the poets and writing a review. Students might be asked to get acquainted with the role of the poet laureate and the current holder of this honorary position. Students might read the works of highly regarded contemporary American poets and nominate their choice for poet laureate.

Review a Collection of Poems

"Poetry for All Seasons" is meant as a resource for teachers and parents of young readers. In "Poetry for All Seasons" from Book World's For Young Readers column, March 26, 2006, Elizabeth Ward also provides an example of how to comment on anthologies of works by one or more authors. Teachers may wish to read from Langston Hughes, another of the Poetry for Young Readers collections, or a Prelutsky work. Ask students to write what they think about the three to four that you read to them and the illustrations that accompany them. Group students to share their opinions and ask each group to select one person's evaluation to share with the class. Do students agree or disagree? Do they support their opinion with an example?

Read "Poetry for All Seasons."

Questions that you may ask include:

- Why is she writing about poets in this column?

- Does Ward consider Langston Hughes an admirable poet? What details bring you to this conclusion?

- What does she say that places this anthology within context?

- How many of Hughes poems are included in the collection?

- Ward focuses on three poems. Explain how she handles commenting on each one.

- Does Ward consider Jack Prelutsky an admirable poet? What details bring you to this conclusion?

- How important is the illustrator to the impact and success of a book?

"Reviews of Poetry" is also provided to give students some guidelines for writing a review of a poem or a collection of poems. Two excerpts from recent reviews are included. The current issue of Book World and daily Style sections may provide additional examples of reviews to serve as models.

Write a Double Dactyl

For teachers who want their students to explore poetry and form further, "The Poet Who Found His Metier" is included. This appreciation piece was written by Michael Dirda on the death of poet Anthony Hecht at the age of 81. Hecht is given credit for having helped to invent the double dactyl, "the amazingly complicated light verse form," as described by Dirda. After reading this selection, you may introduce students to the double dactyl and have them experiment with writing in this form.

This appreciation essay could also inspire an assignment in writing an appreciation piece for a deceased or living poet after some reading and research.

Poetry on the Web

www.poets.org

Academy of American Poets

As one would expect, the site includes poems, poets, interviews and recordings; also find essays on writing, American Poetry magazine and "Poetry Near You."

www.nea.org/readacross/index.html

Read Across America

Among the Teachers' Top 100 Books are several poetry collections. Search the site for "poetry" to find "How I Staged a Poetry Slam," "National Poetry Month — Resources" and more than 20 lessons for integrating poetry into classrooms.

www.rif.org/educators/books/Top40_poetry.msp

Judy Freeman's 40 Favorite Poetry Books for Children

Each book on this Reading Is Fundamental site has a "germ," an idea for using the poems with children.

www.gigglepoetry.com/

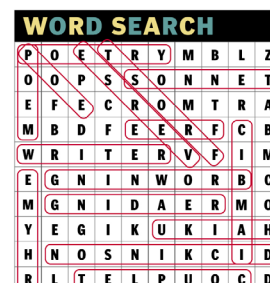
Giggle Poetry

How to for students and teachers as well as plenty of poems, by category, to read, rate and recite.

www.favoritepoem.org/

Favorite Poem Project

A project of the Library of Congress, Boston University and the Poetry Society of America, founded by Robert Pinsky, the 39th poet laureate, in 1997. More than 18,000 Americans shared their favorite poems; videos, books, lesson plans.



An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

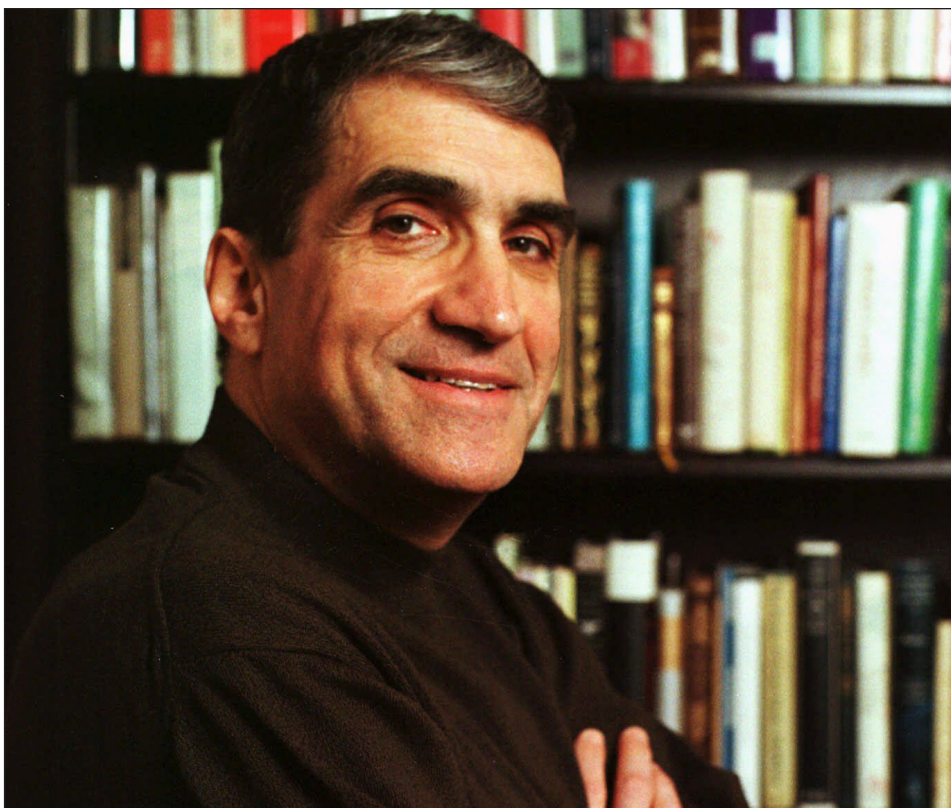
Poet's Choice in The Post

Jabari Asim, Book World's Poet's Choice and children's books editor, provides a brief history of the Poet's Choice column — and insight into the nature of poetry.

Poet's Choice, the only column of its kind in a major American newspaper, was launched on Dec. 3, 1995. It was written by Robert Hass, the nation's poet laureate at the time. The column's mission has always been to share the pleasures of poetry with our Book World readership while tearing down the stereotypes that often intimidate those unfamiliar with the genre. The tone that Hass established also made clear that the nation needs poetry as much as it always has. In his first column he pointed out the seldom-remembered fact that poetry appeared in newspapers "as soon as the newspapers themselves appeared in the young American republic."

Hass introduced poems from a remarkable range of poets, not just from the United States but from all over the world. He included well-known legends such as William Carlos Williams, Langston Hughes and Stanley Kunitz, and younger talents such as Dean Young and Heather McHugh. Hass optimistically noted "a kind of boom under way in American poetry," an observation borne out in subsequent years. (By November 2002, rhyme-spitting, as the young folks call it, occupied center stage as "Def Poetry Jam on Broadway.")

Hass's successor was Rita Dove, another poet laureate with a string of honors to her name. Poetry, in Dove's view, "can be a direct transfusion of hope or calm or compassion — a sort of I.V. for the soul." At the same time, she wrote "a poem can remind us to stop and breathe, just for a moment, and take in the world we walk through." She often emphasized the calming, contemplative function of poetry while showcasing such gifted talents as Linda Pastan, Lucille Clifton and Dennis Sampson.



JULIA MALAKIE — ASSOCIATED PRESS

Washington Post poet columnist Robert Pinsky

Edward Hirsch, an acclaimed poet and professor at the University of Houston, followed Dove in January 2002. His skills as a teacher often came through in his patient, illuminating way of taking a poem apart for readers and showing them how it all came together. "Poetry connects us to what is deepest in our selves," according to Hirsch. "It gives us access to our own feelings ... and engages us in the art of making meaning." Hirsch often addressed the revelatory power of poetry, its ability to make the unseen recognizable and deeply felt. Poets featured during his tenure include A. Van Jordan, Amy Lowell and Kevin Young.

Our current columnist is Robert Pinsky, a former poet laureate who took over Poet's Choice in January 2005. His grand vision of poetry incorporates both the rugged vigor of Whitman and the subtle luminosity of Dickinson, who wrote of verse as a "vital light" enduring through the ages. Pinsky's range is both extensive and robust, tirelessly charting poetry's path through the modern era. Major Jackson, Linda Gregg and Dana Goodyear are among the talents he has introduced to Book World readers. Like his predecessors, Pinsky helps our readers to understand and enjoy poetry as a valuable source of enlightenment, sustenance and uplift.

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Poet's Choice: A Simile Is . . .

• Originally published March 26, 2006

By EDWARD HIRSCH

Special to the Washington Post

A simile is the explicit comparison of one thing to another, using the word “as” or “like” — as when Robert Burns famously declares:

*My luve is like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June:
My luve is like the melody,
That's sweetly play'd in tune.*

The essence of simile is similitude; it is likeness and unlikeness, urging a comparison between different things. “You smell of time as a Bible smells of thumbs,” the Irish poet Medbh McGuckian writes, thus comparing the odor that clings to someone aging to the smell imprinted on a holy book that has been paged through by hundreds of people over the years.

Similes are comparable to metaphors, but the difference between them is not merely grammatical. Metaphor asserts an identity. It says, “A poem is a meteor” (Wallace Stevens). It asserts that A equals B and so relies on condensation and compression. By contrast, the simile is a form of analogical thinking. It says, “Poetry is made in bed like love” (Andre Breton). It asserts that A is like B, and thereby works by opening outward. There is a digressive impulse in similes that keeps extending out to take in new things. “The embrace of poetry [is] like the embrace of the naked body” (Breton).

All good similes depend upon a certain essential heterogeneity between the elements being compared. The simile asserts a likeness between unlike things, but it also draws attention to their differences, thus affirming a state of division. Here is Pablo Neruda thinking in similes in his magisterial early poem “Solo la muerte” (“Only Death”):

*Death arrives among all that sound
like a shoe with no foot in it, like a
suit with no man in it,
comes and knocks, using a ring with
no stone in it, with no finger in it,
comes and shouts with no mouth,
with no tongue, with no throat.
Nevertheless its steps can be
heard and its clothing makes a
hushed sound, like a tree.*

In this sequence, Neruda repeatedly presents a human object but withdraws the human presence from it. He posits a shoe, but takes away the foot that wears it; he presents a suit, but withdraws the man who would inhabit it. Death comes and knocks, but uses a ring without a stone or finger. The progression — death shouts “with no mouth, with no tongue, with no throat” — mimics a process of taking a voice away in stages. These images all incarnate the paradox of a presence — the arrival of death — that suggests a permanent absence. It is left to the reader to decide how aptly and fully they work.

Here is a one-sentence poem that hinges on a single extended simile in

Rosanna Warren’s moving and learned new collection of poems, *Departure*.

*As when her friend, the crack
Austrian skier, in the story
she often told us, had to face
his first Olympic ski jump and, from
the starting ramp over the chute that
plunged
so vertiginously its bottom lip
disappeared from view, gazed
on a horizon of Alps that swam and
dandled around him
like toy boats in a bathtub, and he
could not
for all his iron determination,
training and courage
ungrip his fingers from the railings
of the starting gate, so that
his teammates had to join in prying
up, finger by finger, his hands
to free him, so*

*facing death, my
mother gripped the bedrails but still
stared straight ahead — and
who was it, finally,
who loosened
her hands?*

(The lines from Robert Bly’s translation of Pablo Neruda’s poem “Solo la muerte” can be found in his edition *Neruda and Vallejo: Selected Poems*. Beacon Press. Copyright 1971 by Robert Bly. Rosanna Warren’s poem “Simile” appears in her book *Departure*. W. W. Norton and Co. Copyright 2003 by Rosanna Warren.)

Comparable to What?

Have you ever had to explain a concept and wondered how you could convey it to someone who had never heard of it? Or tried to relate a personal experience, a vacation destination, a sound or the taste of a new dish? How about the feel of playing a sport or the results of a season of play?

A direct statement

Attributes, actions, qualities are stated in order to make a comparison.

Many times it is best to directly state actions and qualities. The reader understands Item A because of what it does and how it moves and what qualities it possesses.

An example written by Kathy Orton, special to The Washington Post: **BOSTON, April 1 — See if you can identify the women's basketball team with these qualities: a dominant post player surrounded by strong front-court players; steady guard play; a highly efficient three-point shooter; strong rebounding and even better shooting; and a chip on its shoulder since receiving a No. 2 seed in the NCAA tournament.**

Sound familiar? No, it's not Maryland. It's last season's Baylor team, the one that won the national championship.

A simile

A simile makes a comparison using the word “like” or “as.”

Other times, a comparison communicates more effectively if Item A is compared to a familiar object, experience, sound or food.

For example: **Kuznetsova moves across the court like a gazelle, a powerful mix of muscle and grace.**

A metaphor

An implicit comparison is made so that something becomes or designates another item.

Sometimes, Item A can most effectively be understood by stating that it is Item B. Through the comparison, the applicable characteristics and qualities shared by Item B and Item A allow the writer to succinctly and directly explain Item A. If Item B is carefully selected, the reader or listener understands the comparison and Item A.

For example, this comment after the George Mason team lost: **Cinderella will not dance the last dance, but this previously unnoticed charmer has no need to fear her homecoming.**

With practice, you will know when to use a simile, a metaphor, a direct statement and when to mix them.

In the following excerpts from articles covering the Patriots vs. Gators Final Four game, put a box around any similes, underline any metaphors and circle any direct, literal comparisons.

1: Lede from “Surprising Ride Comes to an End as Gators Dominate Inside, Out” by Washington Post Staff Writer Dan Steinberg:

INDIANAPOLIS, April 1 — George Mason's basketball team collected as many metaphors as victories during its remarkable three-week trip to the Final Four. The Patriots were kryptonite. They were Cinderella. They were on a magic carpet ride. They were David, registering blow after blow against Goliath.

It was dreamy stuff, and it left the school's Fairfax campus forever changed. But the imagery dissolved Saturday night, and what was left was a basketball game against a Florida squad that was taller, more athletic and more poised than George Mason. So Florida coasted to a 73-58 win and a berth in Monday's national championship game, and the Patriots packed up the metaphors and calmly reflected on the best basketball season their school had ever produced.

2: “Clock Strikes Midnight as the Time of Their Lives Ends” Sports columnist John Feinstein begins his lede:

“With 47 seconds left in the game, Jim Larranaga conceded it was midnight.” Seven sentences later he states, “Midnight officially came for Cinderella a moment later, at 8:07 p.m. EST, and it was difficult for the George Mason players to accept.” (Published Sunday, April 2, 2006)

Name _____

Date _____

It's a Poem. I Found It in The Post

The essence of writing a found poem is to discover your own order, message, tone and theme within the words of others. Rearrange words and phrases that you select from the writing of others. You may drop words, but you may not add words.

The Assignment

Use The Washington Post as your resource to compose a found poem about contemporary life, your perspectives and values. Select parts of headlines, ledes, sentences written by Post reporters or quoted sources. Pull from advertisements or editorials, from any section of the newspaper. Put them together in your own order to convey your own idea.

Clip your source. Be sure to record section and page number.

Get the Idea

Write a haiku using headlines and subheads found on the front page of the April 9, 2006, Metro section. For example, "Blanketed with Friendship" could become your title or "Blanketed friendship" could become the first line of your poem. Or, what would you write if this were the second line of the poem: "Youths lesson in persistence"?

Senate Campaign Is a Yawner No Longer

Oak Hill's Evolution

As the Troubled Juvenile Facility Plans Changes, It's Still a Grim Rite of Passage for Some Youths

New Orleans Students Blanketed with Friendship

Potomac's Lesson in Persistence

Linking People Pays Off in Loudoun

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Celebrating the Poet's History — and Washington's

• Originally published March 25, 2005

By MARY QUATTLEBAUM
Washington Post Staff Writer

*But each man and each woman of
you I lead upon a knoll,*

*My left hand hooks you round the
waist,*

*My right hand points to landscapes
of continents, and a plain public road.*

— Walt Whitman, untitled version of
“Song of Myself”
in *Leaves of Grass*, 1855

In 1855, an itinerant printer and journalist self-published those lines in his first volume of verse — and the raw, rich land of which he wrote found its national poet. Breaking with tidy English verse, Walt Whitman let his long lines roll across the pages of *Leaves of Grass*, lines that embraced carpenters, shoemakers, sewing girls, flax, black bears, buckwheat, ants, even “the alligator in his tough pimples” — all the vast sprawl that was his native country. This year, America celebrates the 150th anniversary of that book with readings aplenty, especially in Washington, Whitman’s home from 1863 to 1873.

Even today’s frantic pace and high-tech gear don’t dull the “jolt of excitement” many people feel when reading works by the 19th-century poet, says David McAleavey, director of the creative writing program at George Washington University. ...

“Few people realize that Whitman lived and worked here for 10 years,” says Martin Murray, founder in 1987 and president of the Washington Friends of Walt Whitman, which spearheaded the festival. Though publishing *Leaves of Grass* in New York, his home state, the poet continued to revise and expand the volume throughout his life, releasing two new editions while in the nation’s capital. “Washington was the time of his

maturity,” says Murray, an economist by profession and Whitman historian by passion, with scholarly papers on the local people and places that formed the poet’s world. (Murray’s work can be read at the academic site www.whitmanarchive.org.) “Whitman’s experience here, especially nursing Civil War soldiers, helped inform his revisions,” Murray says, and spurred essays, newspaper pieces and new poems on the war and President Abraham Lincoln’s assassination.

*I hear the tramp of armies, I hear
the challenging sentry . . .*

*Surgeons operating, attendants
holding lights, the smell of ether, the
odor of blood*

— Whitman, “Drum-Taps,” 1865

Washington was in turmoil when Whitman arrived in December 1862, searching for his younger brother George, a wounded Union soldier, in one of the city’s many makeshift hospitals. Like poets past and present, Whitman had kept day jobs — teacher, journalist, printer, government clerk — throughout his life. But in finding George (slightly injured on the front lines in Virginia), Whitman also found an important calling: nursing. Whitman stayed through the war’s end to tend, on a volunteer basis, “these thousands . . . of American young men, badly wounded, languishing, dying with fever, pneumonia,” as he described in a letter to New York friends.

“The city really is suffused with Whitman’s presence,” says Kim Roberts, local editor of *Beltway*, an online journal with historic essays on prominent area poets, including her own “Whitman in Washington,” and map of attendant sites (www.washingtonart.com, click on “Beltway: A Poetry Quarterly”). None of the poet’s many boarding-house

residences still stands, though his first is now the site of offices for the American Medical Association (1101 Vermont Ave. NW). Roberts combed Whitman’s correspondence, biographies and city directories to pinpoint the houses’ locations. “It was a lot of work,” Roberts admits, “but I like driving or walking past some of those areas and thinking, ‘Walt lived here.’”

The massive government structures where Whitman worked still loom, though. One of the most important is the National Portrait Gallery (Eighth and F streets NW, closed for renovation until 2006), formerly the U.S. Patent Office and a temporary hospital during the war. Here, Whitman cared for the wounded and attended Lincoln’s second inaugural ball in 1865. The “beautiful women, perfumes . . . and waltz” contrasted sharply with “the groan . . . the clotted rag, the odor of wounds and blood” of his previous experience, he wrote in 1865 for the *New York Times*.

After the war, Whitman toiled as a clerk for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, located in the building’s basement. He was soon fired, though, when newly appointed secretary of the interior James Harlan seized upon *Leaves of Grass* and declared its author immoral. Part of Harlan’s larger purge, which included female workers, Whitman was quickly transferred to the Attorney General’s Office (15th and F streets NW, now the site of Hotel Washington). This marked a return for him to the building that housed his wartime job as a copyist for the Army Paymaster. The last year of his Washington working life was spent as a Justice Department clerk at the U.S. Treasury (Pennsylvania Avenue and 15th Street NW).

Whitman’s firing from the Bureau of Indian Affairs galvanized his champions. Abolitionist William O’Connor, a friend since his earliest Washington days,

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defended Whitman in a pamphlet titled "The Good Gray Poet," picked up by newspapers at home and abroad. Whitman himself sometimes burnished his own image. The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* named no author or publisher but did carry a poet-of-the-people likeness: Whitman in work shirt and casually cocked hat. While in Washington, the poet freelanced for two local newspapers, the *Evening Star* and *Morning Chronicle*, and sometimes contributed letters to the *New York Times*. "He especially liked to cover himself," says Friends of Walt Whitman's Murray, with a laugh. Some of Whitman's pieces, which ran without bylines, as was usual then, glowingly describe his own readings in the third person, says Murray, who has carefully analyzed Whitman's writing style to determine authorship.

*If you want me again look for me
under your boot-soles . . .*

*Missing me one place search
another, I stop somewhere waiting for
you.*

— Whitman, untitled version
of *Song of Myself*, 1855

In 1873, Whitman suffered a debilitating stroke and had to leave the city for the care of his family in Camden, N.J. He died there in 1892. To this day, though, the poet can still be found in Washington, especially when your "boot-soles" stroll the same streets and places.

That path has even been traced for you, thanks to Murray, poetry editor Roberts and Mark Meinke, co-authors of a self-guided walking tour published by the Rainbow History Project, of which Meinke is founder and chair. Launched this week, their "Whitman in DC" brochure (available at www.rainbowhistory.org/whitman-web.pdf) presents Whitman sites and poems for the journey. In addition to the aforementioned places, the guide highlights the former Center Market

(Seventh Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW, now the site of the National Archives), where Whitman bought small gifts for hospitalized soldiers. For Ford's Theatre (511 10th St. NW), the guide provides lines from "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," Whitman's great poem of mourning for the assassinated Lincoln.

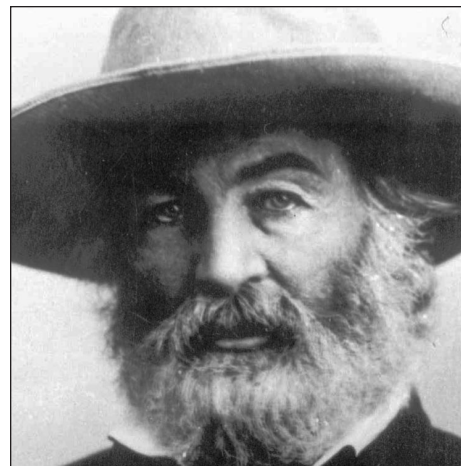
The guide takes walkers down part of Pennsylvania Avenue where in 1865, Whitman, riding the streetcar, met Peter Doyle, the conductor and a former Confederate soldier. Doyle became the poet's dear friend and, many biographers believe, his lover, according to Murray. English professor McAleavey agrees: "Though there is no hard evidence, the tenor of the correspondence" strongly suggests Whitman was gay. McAleavey sees Whitman, in poems celebrating the body, as a "kind of early advocate for gay pride."

*I am with you, you men and women
of a generation, or ever so many
generations hence*

— Whitman, "Sun-down Poem," 1856,
retitled "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," 1860

Whitman can also be found in his influence on the writers that followed him. Ralph Waldo Emerson famously praised his "free and brave thought" in a letter to the poet dated July 21, 1855. And that example still shines. "Whitman broke open the forms and subject matter of poetry," Roberts says. "We can date the beginning of modern American poetry to 'Leaves of Grass.'" For McAleavey, Whitman, "as a spiritual and intellectual guide, is never far from what's important" to the professor's own poetry. McAleavey's tender, humorous "Invention of the Sonnet" joins poems by 38 local writers in Beltway's tribute to Whitman, online through April 1 (and then available in the site's "archives" section).

The national bard makes his influence felt in things modern as well. Bethesda's



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Poet Walt Whitman

Walt Whitman High School bears his name and Freedom Plaza (Pennsylvania Avenue between 13th and 14th streets NW) his words. The Whitman-Walker Clinic honors his role as nurse and the skills of his contemporary, Mary Edwards Walker, an assistant surgeon during the Civil War.

And another Whitman honor may soon come to pass. Murray and the Friends of Walt Whitman have been working toward a city designation of Walt Whitman Way, the one-block strip outside the National Portrait Gallery. A bill is being considered by the D.C. Council. Rather than a monument, a simple plaque noting his popular route seems most appropriate, Murray says, "since Whitman was such a great walker."

How to best find Whitman today? The clue lies in his groundbreaking book. "I loafe and invite my soul," he wrote. "I lean and loafe at my ease." Take a cue from him: Lean and loaf with his verse. With Whitman, you might contemplate "a spear of summer grass," embrace contradictions, "contain multitudes," sing.

Mary Quattlebaum is a frequent contributor to Weekend and author of several books of poems for children, including the forthcoming *Winter Friends* (Doubleday).

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For Young Readers

Sunday, March 26, 2006

Poetry for All Seasons

The American Academy of Poets obviously didn't consult children when it decided in 1996 that poetry deserved the kiss of death as much as black history or crime prevention and gave it its own official month. The result has been a decade of Aprils reinforcing the idea of poetry as broccoli: You'd like it if you'd only try it, kids, and besides, it's good for you! But what is "it"? As National Poetry Month proves annually, poetry is as protean as music. The challenge is to sift through the schmaltz and doggerel to find poems good for any season. Here are three places to start looking:

Langston Hughes, edited by David Roessel and Arnold Rampersad (\$14.95; ages 9-12), is the latest volume in Sterling's estimable, if uneven, "Poetry for Young People" series, which matches individual poets' work with illustrations by notable artists. It has taken a while for Hughes (**at right**), perhaps the greatest African American poet, to get the nod. He clocks in at No. 20, after even such lesser poetic lights as Edna St. Vincent Millay and Rudyard Kipling. But the wait has been worth it. The poems were selected and annotated by two top Hughes scholars, and the pictures were entrusted to Benny Andrews, the 75-year-old painter and printmaker whose sinuous, spiky images are like jazz on paper. Of the 26 poems here, many may be familiar even to kids ("The Negro Speaks of Rivers," the much-quoted "Harlem"), but some less famous efforts are equally piercing. This is the first stanza of "Homesick Blues," unfurling a Southern dialect like a mournful sax: "De railroad bridge's/A sad song in de air./De railroad bridge's/A sad song in de air./Ever time de trains pass/I wants to go somewhere."



Pair this beautiful book with *Langston Hughes: American Poet*, a 1974 biography by Hughes's friend Alice Walker, warmly illustrated by Catherine Deeter and recently reissued in paperback (HarperTrophy, \$7.99; ages 7-10).

Jack Prelutsky is as capable of doggerel as the next man, but he's at his playful, sparkling best in this paperback reprint of 2002's *Scranimals* (HarperTrophy, \$6.99; ages 4-8). Or perhaps it's the solemnly meticulous drawings of Caldecott honoree Peter Sis that do the trick, imbuing Prelutsky's nonsense rhymes about the mixed-up creatures of Scranimal Island with an unexpected gravity: "On a bump beside a road/Sits a lowly POTATOTOAD,/Obviously unaware/Of its own existence there."

Prelutsky also compiled one of the most attractive anthologies of 1997, *The Beauty of the Beast: Poems From the Animal Kingdom*, reissued this month by Knopf (\$19.95; ages 8-up). Divided like a learned nature tome into sections for insects, fish, reptiles, birds and mammals, the book is packed with little jewels of poems by more than 200 animal-loving word wizards, including Basho, Milton, Ted Hughes and Randall Jarrell. But it's watercolorist Meilo So who really makes the book soar, catching the essence of butterfly, bat or basset hound with just a few color-laden swoops of her brush.

Elizabeth Ward
 warde@washpost.com

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Like Walter de la Mare and Edward Lear

• Originally published Dec. 11, 2005

By Robert Pinsky

Special to the Washington Post

Like Walter de la Mare and Edward Lear, and like their descendant Dr. Seuss, Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) wrote poems that both adults and children can return to with pleasure.

Anyone who has read to small children knows that the words “return to” can be full of pain for the adult. Children can attach themselves to maddeningly stupid material. And they love repetition. Reading for the hundredth time about Hush and Brush the Color Kittens, or about Bobby and Martha helping Mother, can make grown-ups all but cry tears of protest and boredom.

Poetry itself involves repetition: that’s what form is, and that is part of why most children like poetry. An artist like Stevenson knows how to counter the repetition with variation. He also knows that good poems are inexhaustible because they confront mysteries. For example:

*When I was sick and lay a-bed
I had two pillows at my head,
And all my toys beside me lay
To keep me happy all the day.*

*And sometimes for an hour or so
I watched my leaden soldiers go,
With different uniforms and drills,
Among the bed clothes, through the hills;*

*And sometimes sent my ships in
fleets
All up and down among the sheets;
Or brought my trees and houses
out,
And planted cities all about.*

*I was the giant great and still
That sits upon the pillow hill,
And sees before him, dale and
plain,
The pleasant land of counterpane.*

I like the way “happy” at the end of the first stanza and “pleasant” at the end of the last stanza mean what they say but also have a slightly blank or melancholy overtone. The words are just a bit — to borrow from the

wonderful sixth line “leaden.” I like the way the child’s body, almost as part of the immobilizing illness, becomes an immense landscape in imagination. Throughout, simple words generate subtle, not-so-simple kinds of feeling. For example, at the end, the poem changes from the imaginary past tense (“was the giant”) to the present tense (“sees” and “sits”). That unshowy change makes the world of imagining large, real and permanent. The sick child in the poem experiences worlds through imagination. The poem itself does something similar.

Cadences and small variations can suggest depths, pointing toward realities and dreams beyond the surface. That is why we can return again and again to short, plain-looking poems by the likes of William Blake and Emily Dickinson. Some gifted children will not feel any great difference in making the transition to those poets from Stevenson and de la Mare. Lucky children familiar with all of these poets will have a great head start in understanding the power of sentences.

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Poetry in Motion, but Punctuated

• Originally published June 6, 2004

By Warren Brown

Washington Post Staff Writer

A letter to poet e e cummings, not the first I've written, but this on test-driving the 2004 Toyota Celica GT-S with "Action Package."

Dear e e:

She being not quite brand new, and perhaps having been abused by drivers before me, was a tad uncooperative in first gear.

She stalled twice, once at an intersection in Northern Virginia and again at a corner in the District of Columbia.

Of course, this was embarrassing.

I thought it was a matter of touch. You know how these things are. No two clutches are the same. No two manual gearshifts mesh quite the same way.

Some, like those in the devilish Dodge Ram SRT-10 pickup truck, require tremendous force of foot and hand. Others, such as those in almost any Honda, are compliant to the point of being the mechanical equivalents of Stepford Wives.

But Celica GT-S (she insists on the suffix) was neither hard nor easy. She simply was untrusting, maybe sensitive. I'll explain.

I went with the heavy foot and quick-shift at first. You know, wanting to get her up to speed and all of that, caring only about how she responded to my input, which I considered expert at the moment. A guy thing. She wouldn't have it.

She started to move. I got excited, prepared to quick-shift to second. But she hesitated, like, "What are you

doing? What do you think I am?" Then, she just quit, stopped cold — left me sitting there with green light turning amber then red at the corner of North Harrison Street and Lee Highway in Arlington.

I cursed her. Then, I begged. She responded to my more humble entreaty. But I was wary of her and tried to avoid doing anything that would upset her further as we proceeded up Lee toward the District.

There were more stoplights, of course; and they caused me tremendous trepidation. It was hard to guess her mood. Should I go hard or soft, quick or slow? I sought a happy medium, gently pressing the clutch with my left foot, but then pushing it in more firmly as my right foot worked the accelerator and right hand found its rhythm on the gearshift knob.

Celica GT-S responded, e e! And, oh, what a joy that was! She is a tight, light, front-drive runner, weighing 2,500 pounds, and extremely well balanced front to rear. She is more sporting than her sister, Celica GT, who is something of a homebody with a mild-mannered 1.8-liter, 140-horsepower engine.

Celica GT-S has way more horses — 40 more, in fact. And corresponding upgrades to her suspension and braking systems make her far more fun on the run. Curiously, although she demands humility and sensitivity from her driver, she displays none of those qualities in demeanor or decorum.

Instead, at first glance, Celica GT-S seems quite the tart — a drag-strip tuner if ever there was one. Her front end is outrageously low and seductive and affixed with come-hither

headlamps, now available as high-intensity lights for both the GT-S and GT.

Her tail is a high, radically winged thing, which is a part of the mostly cosmetic Action Package that enhances her cost but seems to add little to her overall excellent performance.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Besides, her cabin isn't all that, you know. The materials are second-rate, unusual for a car from Toyota. And I don't at all get what's going on with that dash-mounted center console, the top of which is shaped like a cathedral's ceiling. I laughed at that but probably shouldn't have.

We'd gone all the way to the District, having one heck of a spirited romp along George Washington Parkway and over the Roosevelt Bridge, shifting her six-speed gearbox to third as we exited the bridge ramp that leads to E Street NW. And Celica GT-S was okay with that, really okay. But then we got stuck in traffic; and I looked at her center console and laughed and wondered aloud why anybody would have designed a console that way.

You know, e e, there are so many stupid things we say and do to ruin a good time or spoil a relationship; and I surely was being stupid.

Anyway, traffic started to move. I stomped the clutch, snapped the gear lever from neutral to first and slammed the accelerator. Celica GT-S did a face-slap thing, accompanied by what sounded like a squeal, and stopped.

It seemed like an eternity before we got going again. But I apologized. Things slipped back into gear. We're okay now.

**Cheers,
W.B.**

Washington Post Cars Columnist Warren Brown writes the On Wheels column. Brown, has been covering the automobile industry for the Washington Post since 1982. Brown, who joined the newspaper in 1976, has what many people think is a particularly cool job: He gets to test drive all manner of cars, from top-of-the-line Mercedes sedans and the newest sports cars to Volkswagen Beetles and SUVs.

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Poet's Choice

• Originally published Dec. 4, 2005

By ROBERT PINSKY

Special to the Washington Post

Christmas nostalgia can come to even the most secular people, even to a secular Jew like me. The eerie beauty of "O Little Town of Bethlehem" impressed me mightily in grade school, our high voices soaring, in the little town where I grew up:

*O little town of Bethlehem!
How still we see thee lie,
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep,
The silent stars go by;*

*Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The Everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.*

Years later I learned that this is the first stanza of a poem by Phillips Brooks (1835-1893), written on a visit to Bethlehem in 1868.

Brooks was famous in his time for a sermon he delivered on the subject of the Civil War dead. The silent, dark streets he describes in the poem call to mind the silence of the young men missing from little towns all

over the North and the South. The "deep and dreamless sleep" of death permeates the stanza and reflects those years of public, political "hopes and fears" as well as personal ones. The language of the stanza gains power from those invisible hopes and fears and that implicit silence of the dead. Paradoxically, the "everlasting light" of his Christian belief shines in Brooks's "dark streets."

In contrast, Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), in his Christmas poem "The Oxen," chose to write about a folk belief. He treated the legend that the beasts kneel at midnight on Christmas Eve with a wistful, skeptical dignity. The loyalty to old ways manifests itself in the regional dialect terms "barton" (a farmyard) and "comb" (a valley).

The Oxen

*Christmas Eve, and twelve of the
clock.*

*"Now they are all on their knees,"
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.*

*We pictured the meek mild
creatures where*

They dwelt in their strawy pen,

*Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.*

*So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come, see the oxen kneel*

*"In the lonely barton by yonder
coomb*

*Our childhood used to know,"
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.*

The "fair fancy" that "childhood used to know," the meek mild oxen kneeling at midnight, comes ultimately from a world of animal myth — a world older than the religions that incorporate its images. This particular myth, like the stanza by Phillips Brooks, expresses a yearning for peace.

Phillips Brooks's poem "O Little Town of Bethlehem" can be found in the Library of America's "American Poetry: The 19th Century." Copyright 1993 by Literary Classics of the United States. Thomas Hardy's poem "The Oxen" can be found in Thomas Hardy: The Complete Poems. Copyright 1976 by Macmillan London Ltd.)

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The Poet Who Found His Metier

• Originally published Oct. 22, 2004

By MICHAEL DIRDA

Washington Post Staff Writer

Book World's Michael Dirda in his commentary masterfully critiques an author's work, weaves in examples to support his opinions and places the author in context. On October 20, 2004, poet Anthony Hecht died at the age of 81. In his appreciation piece, "The Poet Who Found His Metier," Dirda illustrates inclusion of comment and content, punctuation and flow of idea.

Anthony Hecht, who died Wednesday at the age of 81, was often described as courtly and elegant, both in his person and his poetry.

He wore beautifully cut suits, spoke with meticulous precision and practiced the gentlemanly manners of a better age than ours. He could quote Shakespeare at will — and W.H. Auden (about whom he wrote a superb study), and Elizabeth Bishop, and George Herbert, or virtually any poet of merit in English. He also greatly enjoyed wit and literary gossip, and at his lively Washington dinner parties, presided over by his beloved wife, Helen, one might find distinguished classicists, famous writers and critics, noted scholars and mere journalists. Tony Hecht possessed not only a gift for poetry but also an equal one for friendship.

He seems to have known everyone in the literary world. During conversations — we met in 1982, shortly after he became the consultant in poetry at the Library of Congress — I learned that he had been in school with Jack Kerouac, been friends with Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, studied with John Crowe Ransom at Kenyon. As the years passed, he would frequently send me meticulously typed notes about my weekly reviews in *Book World*, praising some but even more often gently pointing to factual errors or mistakes in judgment. Anthony Hecht believed in criticism as the correction of taste, and he helped correct mine.

That generosity of spirit can be found in all his writing. Much of his oeuvre — and the old word seems right in his case — takes the form of homage. He translated Aeschylus, Horace, Goethe and Baudelaire, composed elegies for departed friends such as the poets James Merrill

and Joseph Brodsky, and regularly evoked in verse the sensual heat and beauty of the Italy he visited throughout his life:

*This is Italian. Here
Is cause for the undiminished bounce
Of sex, cause for the lark, the animal spirit
To rise, aerated, but not beyond our reach,
to spread
Friction upon the air, cause to sing loud
for the bed
Of jonquils, the linen bed, and established
merit
Of love, and grandly to pronounce
Pleasure without peer.*

— From "The Gardens of the Villa d'Este"

Pleasure without peer — that might describe the experience of reading Hecht. His poems are never half-finished or rough-hewn; they are shaped, carefully molded, almost chiseled in their concordant, harmonious beauty. They can be stylishly literary, whether alluding to Byron's love for animals ("a menage that was a menagerie") or deftly parodying — in that anthology standard, "The Dover Bitch" — Matthew Arnold's most celebrated lyric. Yet Hecht might also write about his experiences as a soldier in World War II, or the Holocaust, or even generate a suite of poems about death. Certainly no one is better at showing us "long inventories of miseries unspoken, / appointment books of pain, / attars of love gone rancid, / the pitcher broken / At the fountain" (from "Circles").

Still, Hecht can also celebrate, in one of several beautiful late poems about his wife, "a quarter century of faultless love." This isn't surprising, for although Hecht is properly regarded as a master of the high style, of a classical tact and delicacy, few modern poets can write more sensuously, more gorgeously. Consider these lines from "The Deodand," which depict Parisian women pretending to be harem girls in a painting by Delacroix or Ingres:

*The scene simmers with Paris and women
in heat,*

*Darkened and airless, perhaps with a faint
hum*

*Of trapped flies, and a strong odor of musk.
For whom do they play at this hot
indolence*

*And languorous vassalage? They are alone
With fantasies of jasmine and brass lamps,
Melons and dates and bowls of rose-water,
A courtyard fountain's firework blaze of
prisms,*

*Its basin sown with stars and poissons d'or,
And a rude stable smell of animal strength,
Of leather thongs, hinting of violations,
Swooning lubricities and lassitudes.*

Lest this seem a mere Orientalist fantasy, "The Deodand" then shifts to a horrible vision of the torture meted out during the Algerian war to a young French legionnaire, who is mutilated and made to beg for his food — while dressed in women's clothes as Marianne, the symbol of hated France. One distorting myth replaces another.

For all his intensity and elegiac vision, Hecht is nonetheless often quietly deliciously wry. Sometimes the humor is fairly learned, as in such titles as "The Hanging Gardens of Tyburn" (Tyburn being the site of public executions) and the punning "Le Masseur de Ma Soeur," or in the amazingly complicated light verse form called the double dactyl, which he helped invent. In one poem, Hecht's protagonist neatly describes a painting of Jesus: "Behind / The altar He appears / Two fingers raised / In benediction, in what seems two-thirds / Of the Boy Scout salute, wishing us well."

Over the years, Anthony Hecht received numerous awards for his work, including the Pulitzer Prize. He presented the distinguished Bollingen Lectures at the National Gallery (gathered together as "On the Laws of the Poetic Art"), and he taught for many years at the University of Rochester and then at Georgetown until his retirement in 1993. He was honored by his peers, was a mentor to the young and was an exemplary man of letters and a teacher. But he was, above all, an irreplaceable poet, and readers everywhere will mourn his passing even as they celebrate his lasting, permanent achievement.

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WORD SEARCH

P	O	E	T	R	Y	M	B	L	Z
O	O	P	S	S	O	N	N	E	T
E	F	E	C	R	O	M	T	R	A
M	B	D	F	E	E	R	F	C	B
W	R	I	T	E	R	V	F	I	M
E	G	N	I	N	W	O	R	B	C
M	G	N	I	D	A	E	R	M	O
Y	E	G	I	K	U	K	I	A	H
H	N	O	S	N	I	K	C	I	D
R	L	T	E	L	P	U	O	C	D

Reviews of Poetry

There is not time to read every poem published. How does one decide what and whom to read? Recommendations given by friends and book reviews are two main sources.

When Michael Dirda, a Book World columnist and author of several books, writes “In the years since his death in 1933, Constantine Cavafy has come to be honored as the finest Greek poet of the century. In critical esteem, his reputation in America rivals that of Rilke and Neruda,” the reader wants to learn more about Cavafy (information which Dirda provides in his April 2006 review) and to read Cavafy’s poetry to see if he agrees (Dirda includes lines from Cavafy’s poems). Dirda has helped individuals who are interested in discovering European poets.

The following are excerpted from reviews that appeared in the April 16, 2006, issue of Book World. Read them to meet poets. Study them to learn how to approach the task of writing a review.

Some questions to consider:

- How does The Post subheadline draw the reader to the review and help to prepare the reader for the review?

The headline and subheadline on the Collins’ review reads: American Idyll: An elegiac poet who knows baseball as well as death.

- Why should one include publisher, length and price in addition to book title and author?
- To what extent is it important to have a little information about the reviewer?

- How does the reviewer include the author’s life, past works and time period?

- Does it improve/not improve the review to “hear” lines from the poems?
- Do you know the reviewer’s opinion of the poet? Of his current work?

DISTRICT AND CIRCLE

By Seamus Heaney

Farrar Straus Giroux. 78 pp. \$20

Reviewed by Anthony Cuda

Post subheadline: In his exhilarating 12th book, Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney returns to the poetry of memory and work.

It was in “Digging”—that much-anthologized lyric from his remarkably confident first volume, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966)—that the future Nobel Prize-winner Seamus Heaney first caught the timbre of his own unique music. With an ear tuned to the “squelch and slap/Of soggy peat” and an eye focused on the rough-edged and rustic figures that loomed over his youth in rural Ireland, he struck something solid, and the clear ring of his spade against it soon became his celebrated, signature sound: dense clusters of consonants, athletic jumps and jolts, a delight in verbal heft and clang. Heaney’s themes deepened in the following years, but the expansion of his imaginative scope brought with it a thinning of his verbal density. Now, five years since his last volume and 40 since “Digging,” Heaney returns to the rag-and-bone shop of his earliest creative stirrings with *District and Circle*. The result is a book as original, startling and aesthetically compelling as any since his magisterial 1984 sequence, *Station Island*.

WHITE APPLES AND THE TASTE OF STONE

Selected Poems 1946-2006

By Donald Hall

Houghton Mifflin. 431 pp. \$30

Reviewed by Billy Collins

Since 1995, Donald Hall has been so closely associated with the untimely passing of his wife, the poet Jane Kenyon, that his long life’s work in poetry, arcing over six decades, may be said to have become partially eclipsed by the shadow of her death. His tributes to her in *Without* (1998) and *The Painted Bed* (2002) created for Hall a reputation as a primarily elegiac poet. But Hall, as his loyal readers know, is that and more.

The publication of 226 selected poems in *White Apples and the Taste of Stone* comes, then, as a welcome and needed reminder of the expansiveness and weight of this poet’s output. It is also an opportunity to enjoy the delightful variety of his work and the sheer charm of his voice. This hefty book, accompanied by a CD of Hall reading some of his work, is a physical and literary manifestation of his importance, not only as an authority on grief but as a major figure in the canon of contemporary American poetry.

Hall has long been placed in the Frostian tradition of the plainspoken rural poet. His reliance on simple, concrete diction and the no-nonsense sequence of the declarative sentence gives his poems steadiness and imbues them with a tone of sincere authority. It is a kind of simplicity that succeeds in engaging the reader in the first few lines. “In October of the year,” one poem begins, “he counts potatoes dug from the brown field.” Another opens: “Looking through boxes/in the attic of my mother’s house in Hamden,/I find a model airplane.” Many poems are further stabilized by Hall’s love of storytelling, a narrative exuberance that produces anecdotal poems as well as longer, more complex weavings.

...

Billy Collins’s latest collection of poetry is “The Trouble With Poetry and Other Poems.” He is a former U.S. Poet Laureate.

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A Decade of Poet's Choice

• Originally published April 16, 2006

This year marks the 10th anniversary of Poet's Choice on our pages. The column was hatched, appropriately we think, at a family birthday party in September of 1995. My sister was celebrating a round, stately number of years, and her colleagues — English professors at Howard University — had gathered in my house to raise a glass. One professor, Alinda Summers, approached me and suggested that Book World feature a column by the current Poet Laureate. I was flabbergasted. Why hadn't we thought of that ourselves? We invited Robert Hass to lunch and the rest, as they say, is poetry.

Book World is very proud to publish this ongoing tribute to verse and versifiers; the column is simply unparalleled in any other American newspaper. Over the years, it has featured ancient as well as contemporary masters, the famous and the virtually unknown, the homegrown and the foreign, and it has seen republication in two books by the same name. To honor the distinguished writers who have hosted Poet's Choice, three of whom are former U.S. Poet Laureates, we offer here a bouquet of excerpts — a representative smattering of writing by them and about them in Book World through the years.

— The Editor

ROBERT HASS

From Robert Hass's inaugural column:

So, I was sitting in my new office in the attic of the Jefferson Library, watching the October sun through a handsome open window glisten on the Capitol dome and wondering what a poet laureate could usefully do.

It is difficult

*to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there —*

William Carlos Williams wrote. These are lines that poets know. They help us to remember that what we do matters, especially when we are feeling that the world has not fathomed its importance. But on this particular morning, I remembered that Williams had spent his professional life practicing family medicine in Rutherford, N.J. His lines were a prescription. What I needed to do was apply Dr. Williams's dose to the body politic. In a form, of course — this is a free country — in which people could take it or leave it.

Poetry appeared in newspapers almost as soon as the newspapers themselves appeared in the young American republic. There are famous instances. Our national anthem saw the dawn light as a poem entitled "The Defence of Fort McHenry," published in the *Baltimore American* in September of 1814, and Clement Moore, a professor of Hebrew at the Columbia Theological Union, wandered from his scholarly chores to publish "A Visit from St. Nicholas" — the one American poem, I've read, that almost everyone can recite a little of — in the *Troy Sentinel* on the night before Christmas in 1823. Abraham Lincoln first saw print as a poet in a newspaper, and the few poems Emily Dickinson published in her lifetime appeared in the *Springfield Register*, touched up by the editor for popular consumption, and Henry David Thoreau wrote aphoristic couplets for a country paper. Toward the end of the century another widely loved American poem, Ernest Lawrence Thayer's "Casey at the Bat," was printed in the new paper of his college classmate William Randolph Hearst, the *San Francisco Examiner*.

This chorus of voices — "so many uttering tongues," Walt Whitman wrote — gave a shared language to American readers all through the 19th century. And in Whitman himself, a newspaperman from his teens, there is an attitude toward reading and toward poetry that is hard even to imagine in the last years of the 20th century.

RITA DOVE ON ROBERT HASS

For many years, Robert Hass has buoyed our spirits with a weekly tonic of poetry: Syndicated in newspapers across the country, "Poet's Choice" has become a national respite. I have met lawyers, tennis players and cashiers who read "Poet's Choice" and ask my opinion on the poems selected. Just recently a woman in my ballroom dance class stopped in the middle of a syncopated waltz turn to say how much she enjoyed opening The Washington Post Book World each Sunday for her "little surprise," like biting into a chocolate without knowing which delicious filling — raspberry cream, nougat, coconut? — she'd discover.

Of course, the catch-22 of writing such a column is that we have never been treated to a poem by Robert Hass. A pity, because his is a distinguished literary career: In addition to publishing four volumes of his own poems, he has been an essayist (*Twentieth Century Pleasures*) as well as an editor (of poetry collections by the late Californian Robinson Jeffers and the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer, and of the charming "wedding anthology" *Into the Garden*). We've been treated to selections from his recent haiku translations (*The Essential Haiku: Versions of Basho, Buson and Issa*); as the primary translator of Nobel Laureate Czesław Miłosz, he continues to perform an incalculable service to world literature.

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High time to rectify this omission. To bookend the conclusion of the old year and the flowering of the new, here's a sampling of Robert Hass's poetry. . . . the beginning to his marvelous poem-within-a-poem, "January" (Human Wishes, Ecco):

*Three clear days
and then a sudden storm —
the waxwings, having
feasted on the pyracantha,
perch in the yard
on an upended pine, and face
into the slanting rain.
I think they are a little drunk.*

"I was making this gathering," Hass adds, "which pleased me, the waxwings that always pass through at this time of year, the discarded Christmas tree they perched in, and the first January storm, as if I had finally defined a California season — when Rachel came down the walk and went into the house. I typed out the poem — the birds giddy with Janus, the two-faced god — and then went in to say hello."

ROBERT HASS ON RITA DOVE

When Rita Dove was a young poet living in Europe, she wrote several poems about women saints. They are to be found in her second book, *Museum* (Carnegie-Mellon Univ.). I thought of them when I read a poem from her most recent book, *On the Bus With Rosa Parks* (Norton).

Rosa

*Now she sat there,
the time right inside a place
so wrong it was ready.*

*That trim name with
its dream of a bench
to rest on. Her sensible coat.*

Doing nothing was the doing:

*the clean flame of her gaze
carved by a camera flash.*

*How she stood up
when they bent down to retrieve
her purse. That courtesy.*

This stunning small poem does so much to capture the spirit of the time and of great-souled Rosa Parks in a few words. It made me think how much Rita Dove's poems are about the right to a vivid inner life. One of her most moving poems on this subject comes from her Pulitzer Prize-winning collection, *Thomas and Beulah* (Carnegie-Mellon Univ.), a sequence of narrative poems about an ordinary and remarkable African-American family. Beulah, in this poem, is neither saint nor activist, but a woman in a life full of the demands of nurturing, trying to hold onto some corner of herself that belongs to her.

Daystar

*She wanted a little room for thinking:
but she saw diapers steaming on the
line,
a doll slumped behind the door.*

*So she lugged a chair behind the
garage
to sit out the children's naps.*

*Sometimes there were things to watch
—
the pinched armor of a vanished
cricket,
a floating maple leaf. Other days
she stared until she was assured
when she closed her eyes
she'd see only her own vivid blood.*

*She had an hour, at best, before Liza
appeared
pouting from the top of the stairs.
And just what was mother doing
out back with the field mice? Why,*

building a palace. Later

*that night when Thomas rolled over
and
lurched into her, she would open her
eyes
and think of the place that was hers
for an hour — where
she was nothing,
pure nothing, in the middle of the
day.*

EDWARD HIRSCH

Poetry connects us to what is deepest in ourselves. It gives us access to our own feelings, which are often shadowy, and engages us in the art of making meaning. It widens the space of our inner lives. It is a magical, mysterious, inexplicable (though not incomprehensible) event in language. It is "a revelation of words by means of the words" (Wallace Stevens), a form of "stored magic" (Robert Graves), "a room of marvels" (Andr  Breton). It has a strong kinship to prayer. I consider it a verbal transaction, a bodily art form that opens up our spiritual selves.

It is a great privilege for me to take up Book World's Poet's Choice column, which was so insightfully inaugurated and shaped by Robert Hass over many years, and so handsomely carried forward by Rita Dove. They have set a light tone and a high standard, which I hope to emulate in the weeks and months to come. As a writer and an avid reader — all writers are readers who have spilled over — I have been inspired by many poems over the years and I am eager to share these poems with others. My idea is to introduce and present a broad spectrum of poets and poems from America and around the world.

Poetry is an ancient and international activity — it precedes prose in all literatures, and there has never been a culture without it. This suggests how deeply we need the knowledge — the wisdom — that poetry carries in its body.

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EDWARD HIRSCH ON ROBERT PINSKY

*Air an instrument of the tongue.
The tongue an instrument
Of the body. The body
An instrument of spirit,
The spirit a being of the air.*

— Robert Pinsky, from “Song”

This is my next-to-last Poet’s Choice column. It’s time for me to move on. My regret at leaving the column is tempered by my delight that it will be taken over by Robert Pinsky, one of our very finest poet-critics, whose work I’ve been reading avidly for 30 years. I was lucky to start out with his first book, *Sadness and Happiness* (1975), which brought to contemporary poetry a rich discursiveness, a compelling new way of thinking and a refreshing sense of other people. I’ve followed him through his book-length poem *An Explanation of America* (1980), a remarkable meditation on being a citizen in our republic; *History of My Heart* (1984), which shows him to be an omnivorous thinker working at full power; *The Want Bone* (1990), which initiated a strange new lyricism into his work; *The Figured Wheel: New and Collected Poems: 1966-1996* (1996), an essential gathering that included 21 new poems; and, most recently, *Jersey Rain* (2000), a work of mid-life reckonings. “Now near the end of the middle stretch of road/What have I learned?” he asks in the title poem. “Some earthly wiles. An art.”

By now everyone should know that in 1997 Pinsky founded the Favorite Poem Project during his tenure as poet laureate of the United States (1997-2000). This project, a huge national resource, has culminated in three anthologies, which he has edited with Maggie Dietz: *Americans’ Favorite Poems*; *Poems to Read*; and, most recently, *An Invitation to Poetry: A New Favorite Poem Project Anthology*, which includes a DVD of people from all walks of life saying something about

their favorite poems and then reading them aloud. The original meaning of the word “anthology,” which derives from the Greek, is “a bouquet of flowers,” and these books compose a surprisingly diverse and colorful garden. They give us a strong sense of how single poems reach individual readers.

Here is one of my favorite poems by Pinsky. I once had the life-changing experience of teaching poetry to a group of deaf children, and thus this poem has special relevance to me:

If You Could Write One Great Poem,
What Would You Want It To Be About?

(Asked of four student poets at the Illinois Schools for the Deaf and Visually Impaired)

Fire: because it is quick, and can destroy.

Music: place where anger has its place.

Romantic Love — the cold or stupid ask why.

Sign: that it is a language, full of grace,

That it is visible, invisible, dark and clear,

That it is loud and noiseless and is contained

Inside a body and explodes in air

Out of a body to conquer from the mind.

ROBERT PINSKY ON EDWARD HIRSCH

Edward Hirsch’s justly celebrated poem “Fast Break” (from his book *Wild Gratitude*, Knopf) captures and epitomizes the speed and brilliance of an inspired moment when things go right — in the rhythms of a sport or in the charmed exertions of sentences and lines.

Hirsch’s single long sentence courses sure-footedly to its ultimate goal: the noun “net.” The movement through the couplets, unfettered and purposeful, demonstrates what it describes: the grace of improvisation working through a plan. The elegiac dedication in the subtitle emphasizes charges of mortality

in certain phrases — above all in the past tense of “loved.”

Fast Break

In Memory of Dennis Turner, 1946-1984

*A hook shot kisses the rim and
hangs there, helplessly, but doesn’t drop,
and for once our gangly starting center
boxes out his man and times his jump
perfectly, gathering the orange leather
from the air like a cherished possession
and spinning around to throw a strike
to the outlet who is already shoveling
an underhand pass toward the other
guard
scissoring past a flat-footed defender
who looks stunned and nailed to the
floor
in the wrong direction, trying to catch
sight
of a high, gliding dribble and a man
letting the play develop in front of him
in slow motion, almost exactly
like a coach’s drawing on the
blackboard,
both forwards racing down the court
the way that forwards should, fanning
out
and filling the lanes in tandem,
moving
together as brothers passing the ball
between them without a dribble,
without
a single bounce hitting the hardwood
until the guard finally lunges out
and commits to the wrong man
while the power-forward explodes
past them
in a fury, taking the ball into the air
by himself now and laying it gently
against the glass for a lay-up,
but losing his balance in the process,
inexplicably falling, hitting the floor
with a wild, headlong motion
for the game he loved like a country
and swiveling back to see an orange
blur
floating perfectly through the net.*

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Poet's Choice: A Stock Idea

• Originally published March 26, 2006

By ROBERT PINSKY

Washington Post Staff Writer

What might poetry have in common with NASCAR? The appeal of speed. And since the "SC" in that acronym stands for "Stock Car," we can add the appeal of speed as a challenge met by ordinary means — the stock material, though applied and transformed with extraordinary skills and resources.

David Rivard's marvelous new book, *Sugartown*, moves through familiar material, like the way a good mood and a good memory can make life seem rich and even death nearly acceptable.

Rivard's poems move through such subject matter with an exhilarating, smart pace of association and evocation. The speed of mind, compressing details and emotions, covering the maximum distance in the least time, gives this writing its thrill:

A Real, Right Thing

*Like a green ludicrous tow truck
with yellow stripes & naked chrome
bulldog*

*atop the hood, my pleasure's
obvious*

*watchful wary arrogant & pure
the smell of warm December early
the sixth*

*day the city men come to the park
to gather leaves half-disintegrated
already compost, that smell
there for the asking, those leaves
a few the color of her skin
at the end of summer, sweet present
blown against my lips-*

*Oh, that
was a good moment to be born in,
serendipitous*

*for how the color set off her
collarbone*



HAROLD HINSON — ASSOCIATED PRESS

Could poetry and NASCAR have something in common?

*like a silver belt buckle in a
darkened church
and seeing her face then, so calm in
sleep*

*I'll be in sympathy with a car alarm
forever*

*so long as it never goes off again
and when I die finally it's certain
the house flies*

*will love having this sick man
around.*

The phrase "naked chrome bulldog" is fun to say, but, as the ampersands imply, the poem has no intention of lingering on such moments. Decay, exemplified by the decomposing leaves, will not wait for extended, prosey musings or explanations.

Decay as a reason to seize the day is one of the most traditional notions — a stock idea. Rivard's quickness dramatizes the idea with a fresh urgency and also with fresh images. The idea of being in sympathy even with a car alarm recalls the giddiness of a lover in some Shakespeare comedy, and the afterthought "so long as it never goes off again" has a Shakespearean light irony to it, expressed in an idiom as American and feisty as that Mack bulldog. ("Speak American, OK?" says the crew boss in another Rivard poem, "and then shut the hell up.")

These street-wise, book-wise, eloquent poems have a bracing sureness and scope.