



Short on reading time? Stroll out of your comfort zone

One of the things that stops us from reading as much as we would like is simply finding time. We can start a novel and read a few pages here and there when we can. But sometimes we want to conquer a whole work in a short time to get a maximum impact. I'm going to suggest giving poetry a try. In seven years of writing this column, I've only written one on poetry, and I think as we are into the busy holiday season now (yes, we are; don't resist it), it's time to re-consider poetry.

People innately love it. The first literature we expose children to is the nursery rhyme. We can recall favorite song lyrics easily. Poetry isn't estranged from our everyday lives. We just forget to think about it.

Here's why I love poetry. Sometimes in as little as one line, we can feel the impact of a single image that can stick with us forever. Here's an example. A professor at U-M wrote on the board for a class embarking on learning a challenging poem this line referencing Odysseus, "The ocean was so blue, blood could not have been more red." There are all kinds of blue in the world, but blood red is pretty specific. I believe all of us in the room knew exactly what it meant. We all saw the same intense blue because the poet gave us intense red. It was one of those epiphanies where I saw what just the right image can do. Decades later I still think about it.

While it's true that we can read a single image that changes how we see something, what about a whole story in this most compact literary genre? Robert Hayden, one of the finest American poets, was from Michigan. Hayden's **Those Winter Sundays** paints a father's love expressed in small sacrifices like getting up early each Sunday "to make the banked fires blaze," a son's lack of appreciation at the time ("no one ever thanked him"), and the meaning of what it is to put oneself last for love, ending with "What did I know, what did I know / of love's austere and lonely offices." Only Hayden could write such a line and make readers choke up every time they read it. It is a song to hard working fathers everywhere.

And then there's Sylvia Plath. Plath, clinically depressed since youth, attempted suicide several times and writes about it with bravado because she was sure she had come through to the other side -- to life. Or possibly she was afraid she hadn't. She writes her last line of **Lady Lazarus** -- "I rise with my red hair / And I eat men like air." In the context of her later suicide, it's a gut punch.

A local poet, Skip Renker, discusses materialism through a series of images in his award-winning poem, **Your Money**. The first line is “How it longs to be anything else.” What follows is a flashy, funny, ridiculous list of material objects that burns a hole in the human pocket. Clever, witty, and true, the opening line says it all and the rest makes us laugh.

Where do we hide the poetry at the library? Well, we don’t hide anything. We have a lot of poetry on the second floor in the Non-Fiction section (not to mention in the Children’s Wing for kids). Browse. Crack open a collection and read a few lines. See if it’s for you. And why stop with just reading it? Take home David Orr’s **You Too Could Write a Poem** also on the second floor. Why not? Look around your world and put those images into words. Look around someone else’s world and see yours differently -- in only two minutes.

See you at the Library!

Upcoming Events: **Regular Fall programming** has resumed. Toddler Story Time, Pre-K Story Time, Tuesdays after school Unplug and Play, and Thursdays after school Try This for Teens – it’s all back. **Coffee and Crafts** continues on Fridays from 10 – 12 until Christmas. **Movie Night for Adults** starts a new season Friday Oct. 18 at 6:30 with **On the Basis of Sex** about Ruth Bader Ginsberg. Keep track of events on our website Calendar and FB posts.