

“Poem in Your Pocket” Blogpost Assignment Guidelines

- 1) For each “Poem in Your Pocket” blogpost, find a poem from John Brehm’s edited book, [*The Poetry of Impermanence, Mindfulness, and Joy*](#) that resonates with you wherever you are on your mindfulness journey as an educator and a human being. (And, yes, the poems have to be from this book.) You’ll be making four posts between now and the end of the semester, so you’ll need four poems total.
- 2) On the day that the post is due, write the poem at the top of (or toward the top of) your blogpost, and follow it with a meditative reflection that describes how and why the poem resonates with you on your mindfulness journey. The reflection part of your post should be somewhere between 250-350ish words. I’m less concerned with length than substance.
- 3) I don’t want you to adhere to the following prompts slavishly, but if you’re not sure where to start in writing your meditative reflection, they might prompt your thinking:
 - Why does this poem resonate with you? What is its restorative power?
 - How does it serve as a guide or companion for you wherever you are on your current mindfulness journey?
 - Why and how does it have the potential to sustain you and others as teachers?
 - How does this poem invite you to be mindful? That is, what about it makes you come to a complete stop and pay attention with intention, non-judgmentally? How do you feel in the spaciousness of that moment?

I want to emphasize that ***this isn’t a traditional poetry explication exercise***. In his poem, [“An Introduction to Poetry,”](#) Billy Collins despairs at what happens when someone (probably a teacher) kills a poem: “...all they want to do/is tie the poem to a chair with rope/and torture a confession out of it./They begin beating it with a hose/to find out what it really means.”

This assignment is precisely the opposite of that.

In fact, as I said in my blogpost, it’s an opportunity to let poetry *find* you and to mindfully explore what it feels like *to be found*.

Posts are due on your blogs on **4/2, 4/23 4/30, and 5/7**. They will be graded for completion only. You’ll get full credit if you make your post on time, include a poem from the book, and write a thoughtful meditative reflection as described in item #2 above.

On the following page, you can read an example of a meditative reflection that I published in a poetry anthology edited by Sam Intrator and Megan Scribner called [Teaching with Heart: Poetry That Speaks to the Courage to Teach](#).

IN PRAISE OF IRONING

by Pablo Neruda

*Poetry is pure white.
It emerges from water covered with drops,
is wrinkled, all in a heap.
It has to be spread out, the skin of this planet,
has to be ironed out, the sea's whiteness;
and the hands keep moving, moving,
the holy surfaces are smoothed out,
and that is how things are accomplished.
Every day, hands are creating the world,
fire is married to steel,
and canvas, linen, and cotton come back
from the skirmishings of the laundries,
and out of light a dove is born--
pure innocence returns out of the swirl.*

Most days, teaching can feel like ironing, like busywork that must be done well enough to go unmentioned. We take attendance, issue hall passes, and write letters of recommendation. Our life-work might appear to be, at least from the outside, just a mundane combination of subjects to be mastered, lessons to be covered, and students to be taught and passed to the next grade. And because everyone has been to school, it all seems ordinary unless a movie director romanticizes the experience, or things go poorly. The rest seems unremarkable.

What I want to say is that there is also beauty in this routine.

I've had my own share of little triumphs to sustain me, but I just can't hold my breath from shining moment to shining moment. I wouldn't have made it this far in teaching without also loving the ironing, the quiet pleasure of huddling over a draft with a student to make the writing sing.

In his poem, Pablo Neruda restores a pile of damp garments to purity in the space of thirteen lines, and every time I read it, I wonder: *Is it possible to approach my teaching from a position of praise and questioning, just as Neruda approached the world?*

Our teaching and all that makes it familiar and viable aren't mere happenstance; our hands have labored together to make this reality. The best we can do is keep them "moving, moving," because on the luckiest and most ordinary of days, we are "creating the world."