

POEM 4 Assignment Sheet: Walk Poem / variations

For draft due date and proper formatting, please see original syllabus.

Assignment: Over Spring Break, take a walk—preferably somewhere you've not walked before, **but be safe!**—and write a poem based on your observations. Try to avoid preconceptions about "what you will find or see." Stay open. Listen to all your senses, not just your eyes. Listen, smell, feel.

Options:

You may write the poem on-the-go (as you walk), or you may write it when you get home, or some combination (i.e., bring a small notebook with you).

Instead of taking a walk, get on a bus or take a drive in your car. Take the Buffalo subway, get in a cab, or have someone else drive you around.

Note the meter and rhythm of your body in motion, or the bus- or car-rhythm: are you dawdling? galloping? sauntering? stopping-and-going? Feel free to imitate that rhythm in line- and stanza-breaks, as well as the sounds of the words within your poem. Let the poem **BE** the event.

Note how your mind is moving, which is different from how your mind moves when you're seated. Try to imitate this motion.

Choose one color to write about, and be on the look-out for only that color: Where do you see it? What impressions does it give you?

Record "snippets" of conversation and sounds you hear along the way: incorporate them in your poem.

Write one sentence per block, or only write at corners, or if you are off the path, find "markers" that tell you when to write.

Take a book with you. Every 100 steps or 5 minutes, open the book and write down the first sentence you see: incorporate that sentence into your poem.

Bring a tape recorder and talk into it, or just turn it on and transcribe what you hear into your poem.

Let someone else do the walking: Sit on a bench in a lobby or busy place of transit; record what you hear.

Be on the look-out for written language on the sides of trucks, on signs, scraps of paper blowing in the wind, etc. Incorporate these into your poem.

Poetics:

Type a one-page reflection on your walk poem, and staple a copy to each copy of your poem. Address the following:

- What is the process/criteria of your poem (see options above)?
- What did you learn about your body, mind, and imagination after writing your poem?
- How is a "walk poem" different from the other poems you've been writing?

Suggestions:

Read Padgett's entry on "walk poems" prior to going on your walk/ride (see syllabus).

Seek out examples of walk poems in the library and on the internet (google search: "walk poems," "subway poems," etc.).

A poem is not "about" an event; it **is** an event. Try to keep this in mind as you're writing your poem—think of the poem as an event, an organic process like the movement of a body, vehicle, tree, etc.

We talked a little in class about poetry slams, which operate on the notion that poetry is not just written: it's spoken and physical. Consider these dimensions of your "walk poem" as you walk and write: How is this a kinetic (versus static) event, involving the motion of your body, mind, imagination, voice, and the motion of the world around you?

Feel free to share ideas, discoveries, and suggestions on our listserve, and feel free to email me with questions, comments. Happy Trails!

Some Walk Poems: Walking in the world is much more dangerous for a woman than a man, so it's no surprise that there's less of a tradition of "walk poems" for women, but here are some examples—men and women—off the top of my head...

Pablo Neruda, "Walking Around"

Paul Blackburn (just about any of his poems; subway poems)

Dante, Divine Comedy

Alice Notley, Descent of Alette

Frank O'Hara, "The Day Lady Died"