



SPARK!
CREATIVITY @ HOME

POETRY: WRITING ABOUT HOME

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WRITING ABOUT HOME

The essence of poetry is looking again, paying careful attention and tuning yourself into the step-by-step sensory experience of coming to your home. What kind of trees and plants and flowers grow there? What animals do you share your yard and home with? Are there stairs or stepping-stones? Is there a porch or hand-railing along the path? Gardens? Shaded areas, paths, running water? Is there a special place for you, is there a place for your family to sit together? Do raccoons steal your dog's food, do bears eat the neighbor's bird feeder and does a magpie scold you fiercely early in the morning?

We live in a place where we are directly involved with or observing the natural world. When I lived in New York City the only wild animals I saw were rats and squirrels and pigeons. People there can't imagine the opportunities you have to interact with your environment.





WRITING ABOUT HOME CONTINUED

Do you look out your window and see mountains, or the tops of trees, or more buildings? When I lived in a big city, my windows were always sooty from the polluted air, and all I saw from my windows was the backsides of nearby buildings. Sometimes I only had an airshaft to look out of and get air from, and I shared it with hundreds of neighbors and a Chinese restaurant.

We live in the middle of a great Western landscape, with rivers and wildlife and mountain ranges. Lots of outdoor activities make it an exciting place to grow up. The landscape here determines how we look at our world and our place in the world. Some people climb mountains, some hike some camp or hunt some are birdwatchers, but this place encourages all of its citizens to come out and enjoy the beauty. Most children don't get the chance to grow up this close to nature.

Try some in-depth descriptions of your home, your environment. A few samples follow:





MY HOME. 1.

There it sits a big white stucco house with three stories, and vines climb along one wall. There's no fence, instead you climb cement stairs and head toward the front steps my dad painted red. Honeysuckles, peonies, Johnny-Jump Ups, callalilies, all face the street and surround the front porch. In the back yard is a vegetable garden where my father has built a trellis for his tomatoes. In summer, on a hot day, he points up to tomatoes growing eight feet high over our heads. Every winter he pulls the bulbs from his garden and shelters them in the basement root cellar. Every spring he takes them back outside to plant in the moist, crumbling black earth of Minneapolis. My mother collects stale bread and dabs it with peanut butter. When she opens the back door, squirrels and birds wait on the electric line, the clothes line, the fence, the shed and the garage. She tosses the bread onto the rooftops of the buildings, and hundreds and hundreds of feathered and furred critters leap and climb and fly and scabble for the food. The bluebirds are rather pushy, and starlings, ravens and crows all compete for her treat. This is how she starts every day, and each time the look on her face is bright with delight.





MY HOME. 1. CONTINUED

See? she says, they're all waiting for me. They expect me about now. They wait for me. Our old swing-set, gone, torn down years ago just after I swung my highest and then tried to fly, which resulted in a landing on cement and a dozen stitches in my chin. When we were young my father said it wasn't right to keep dogs while living in town, but lately they've accepted a stray who spends most of her time under my mom's bed. She isn't as afraid as she was at first, and doesn't tremble and cower when anyone comes around any more. My mother is her hero. She follows her room to room and sits very close. The front porch is screened in and there's a swing and piles of magazines and hanging plants. We've spent many hours swinging there, each of us taking turns pushing off the floor for momentum, and the dog, Blue, lies just beneath keeping her eyes on my mom.





MY HOME. 2.

We go from the parking lot to a large series of apartment buildings, most of them painted brick red with wide garage doors like open mouths in the faces of the houses. Lots of cars parked everywhere, and bikes, toys, and skateboards litter the alley. Metal porches are attached to every apartment, and they're small, but people put plants out and bicycles and lawn chairs, even little barbeque grills. It's noisy because of all the kids, who are warned constantly to watch out for the cars. You see signs with warnings and the shape of a kid chasing a ball. Drivers don't dare go faster than five or ten miles an hour because children appear so suddenly, out of nowhere. Some of the windows have curtains and some have sheets across the windows, and every building has air conditioning units. When you climb the stairs to come to our door with the big 52B stenciled on it. The carpeting is kind of a dirty maroon color. There's some graffiti on the walls, which is discouraged but shows up, like mushrooms, overnight. There's a little peephole where you can look out into the hall. When you unlock the door and step inside the first thing you notice is the strong smell of laundry detergent. Baskets sit around the living room full of clean clothes, and the window is open and spring breezes float the curtains up like sails.





HOME. 2. CONTINUED

There are photos of us on every wall. The couch is huge and sagging because so many people sit together on it and watch television and play video games. Right at the front door is a huge pile of shoes, because we only wear socks inside. There are lots of videos lying around and toys and books and all the things we always forget to put away. Here's the best part. From my bedroom window in the back of the building I can look past the Clark Fork River and beyond, and from there, standing on my bed, I can see horses.





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