

Poem as an Act of Attention

By: Claire Hong

Education level: Elementary, junior high, and/or high school

Genre: Poetry, Fiction, Nonfiction, Hybrid

Time frame: 30+ minutes or self-paced

Objective: Students will consider scale in their poems and decide how they want to move between small and large sensory details and concepts. They will consider the potential of poetry to give attention to what others may not notice or perceive.

Prior knowledge and skills: None

Required materials: Paper and pen/pencil for writing their poems; a handout of the poem example and/or a digital display of the poem.

Literary model: Kimberly Blaeser's "The Way We Love Something Small"

Sequence of activities:

- 1) Read the poem "The Way We Love Something Small" by Kimberly Blaeser as a class:
<https://poets.org/poem/way-we-love-something-small> (5 minutes)
Optional: You can read the "About this Poem" section for further context.
- 2) Watch and listen to Blaeser read the poem and describe these series of poems at the Poetry Center:
<https://voca.arizona.edu/reading/kimberly-blaeser-january-30-2025> (5 minutes)
- 3) Discussion Questions: What do you notice about this poem? What does it look like or sound like? What stands out to you? How does it make you feel? What does it make you think about? Do you have a favorite part? (5 minutes)
- 4) Poem Options: (10+ minutes)
 - Write a poem that focuses on one small moment from your life that stands out to you. See what larger realizations you may arrive at through describing this moment with sensory details.
 - Write a poem that moves back and forth from small to large. We can also think of this as moving from specific to vague/mysterious. Play with scale and see what you want to express. For example, "the translucent claws of newborn mice" (small, specific) followed by "a ghosted threshold of being" (large, vague).
 - Write a poem that gives attention to something you care about or love that others may not notice.
- 5) Optional: take time to define some the following terms Blaeser uses with the class. (5 minutes)

Threshold: the plank, stone, or piece of timber that lies under a door; gate, door; end, boundary; the place or point of entering or becoming

Anishinaabe: A Native American/Indigenous community, also referred to as Ojibwe, located in Canada and in the midwestern United States. Kimberly Blaeser is Anishinaabe and is an enrolled member of the White Earth Nation in Minnesota.

Aesthetic: a particular theory or conception of beauty or art: a particular taste for or approach to what is pleasing to the senses and especially sight

Haiku: A Japanese verse form most often composed, in English versions, of three unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables. A haiku often features an image, or a pair of images, meant to depict the essence of a specific moment in time.