

# Poetry Should Ride the Bus

## Saraiya Kanning

**Grade Level:** Middle-High School

**Time Frame:** 55 - 60 minutes

**Objective:** Students will draw inspiration from Ruth Forman's "Poetry Should Ride the Bus" to write their own personifications of poetry.

**Prior Knowledge and Skills:** Grade level reading and comprehension

**Required Materials:** Paper, pencil, and "Poetry Should Ride the Bus" poem and reading by Ruth Forman (provided below)

### Sequence of Activities:

#### Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)

The teaching artist can use this time to introduce themselves, what inspires them to write poetry, and perhaps even share some writing of their own. Students can also introduce themselves. In addition to sharing their names, students can answer/share their response to the following (or another fun question the teaching artist invents):

*Tell me about your dreams and aspirations!  
Imagine a world without limits. What would you be? Who would you be?*

Following introductions, facilitate a relaxed, informal, low stakes discussion on the following questions, reminding students there is no such thing as a "right/wrong" answer. We're sharing our opinions, in so far as we are comfortable to do so.

*Do you like poetry, why or why not?  
What makes a poem a poem?*

#### Literary Model and Discussion (15 minutes)

Sometimes, poetry is best experienced through listening. Poets often give readings where they share their work aloud with an audience. In fact, some poets are also performers, and hearing them read their poetry is quite a different experience from reading it silently to yourself. I love to hear poets read, so I've chosen one of my favorite audio files to share with you. First, listen to the link (without reading the poem). Listen to it twice if you like it. Then, read the poem itself (below the link).

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6hztae\\_5GE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6hztae_5GE)

## **Poetry Should Ride the Bus**

By Ruth Forman

poetry should hopscotch in a polka dot dress  
wheel cartwheels  
n hold your hand  
when you walk past the yellow crack house

poetry should wear bright red lipstick  
n practice kisses in the mirror  
for all the fine young men with fades  
shootin craps around the corner

poetry should dress in fine plum linen suits  
n not be so educated that it don't stop in  
every now n then to sit on the porch  
and talk about the comins and goins of the world

poetry should ride the bus  
in a fat woman's Safeway bag  
between the greens n chicken wings  
to be served with Tuesday's dinner

poetry should drop by a sweet potato pie  
ask about the grandchildren  
n sit through a whole photo album  
on an orange plastic covered La-Z-Boy with no place to go

poetry should sing red revolution love songs  
that massage your scalp  
and bring hope to your blood  
when you think you're too old to fight

yeah  
poetry should whisper electric blue magic  
all the years of your life  
never forgettin to look you in the soul  
every once in a while  
n smile

### Questions for Discussion:

- How did you experience the reading by Ruth Forman? What lines or words caught your attention the most?
- Did you prefer listening or reading the poem silently yourself?

- Why do you think “poetry should ride the bus”? Use your imagination for a moment here: what would happen if poetry rode the bus? What would it see/hear/feel?

### **Individual Brainstorm (10 minutes)**

Give students 10 minutes to freely journal on the below questions. Encourage them to write down all thoughts that come to them, without restraint. No idea is too silly. We’re just generating ideas here – let those ideas flow freely. What they write in this space can run the gamut from humorous to serious to magical and beyond.

*Imagine poetry as a being, walking about in our world.  
Where should it go to learn something about this world?  
What should it do or experience?*

If needed, the teacher can spin spur-of-the-moment examples to help students feel inspired to think spontaneously:

Poetry should eat at Burger King  
Poetry should get a covid booster  
Poetry should cross the border  
Poetry should bake cookies  
Poetry should \_\_\_\_\_

Encourage students to come up with at least 5 lines of “Poetry should \_\_\_\_\_.”

### **Writing (20 minutes)**

Students can then pick a line from their journaling exercise and expand upon it. For example, if poetry should bake cookies, how should it learn, who should it join, where should it bake, what kind of cookies should it bake, what should it do with the cookies? Encourage them to add details, get specific, and bring poetry to life. Poetry is at large in the world – imagine this scenario to its fullest.

Once they’ve finished expanding one of their “Poetry should \_\_\_\_\_” lines, invite them to do one or two more, in the same way as Ruth Forman.

*TIP: If students are still feeling stuck, ask them to think of a place that is important to them, a place that is significant in their life. Now take poetry to that place. Show it around. Who does it meet? What does it see? How does it feel? What does it hear?*

### **Extension Activity/Art:**

Create a drawing inspired by Ruth Forman’s poem and reading. Think out of

the box here and give poetry a form (is it human, animal, object?) What does it look like as it walks into the bus, for example? Or stands on the porch steps...You could even draw a scene through poetry's "eyes" – what does the view look like?

### **Optional Sharing**

If time allows, students can practice reading their poems aloud. Some students might like to explore the performative aspect of a reading, considering which words to emphasize or whether they want to incorporate body language/movements. They could also use this opportunity to think about line breaks: how they might space or split lines to indicate how they want the poem to be read aloud.