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**MINDFUL
POETRY
MOMENTS** created by
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2023 Playlist: Our Stories, Our Narratives

CURATED BY
YALIE SAWEDA KAMARA, CINCINNATI AND MERCANTILE LIBRARY POET LAUREATE
RIMEL KAMRAN, INAUGURAL CINCINNATI YOUTH POET LAUREATE

Week 1, April 3-7
Poem: "My First Memory (Of Librarians)"
Poet: Nikki Giovanni

Week 2, April 10-14
Poem: "Pronunciation"
Poet: Leora Kava

Week 3, April 17-21
Poem: "Old Friends"
Poet: Freya Manfred
Poem: "Possible" (grades 6-12 alternative)
Poet: Carlina Duan

Week 4, April 24-28
Poem: "Remember"
Poet: Joy Harjo

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This poetry lesson was created by The Well offering students and teachers alike the chance to pause and reflect on poetry's ability to encounter ourselves, the world, and the mystery of each other.

Poem: "My First Memory (Of Librarians)"
Poet: Nikki Giovanni, read by Yalie Saweda Kamara
Published: 2007, HarperCollins Publishers

Yalie Saweda Kamara selected this simple, heart-warming poem for Mindful Poetry because the poem is a gorgeous tribute to those who introduce us to a world of language and literacy.

DAY 1: For your first day of listening, settle in and notice what stands out to you.

DAY 2: Poets use descriptive details to help readers visualize a scene. For example a "creaky" wood floor and "heavy" oak chairs. As you listen today, notice what visual images come to your mind.

DAY 3: This poem includes the line "the anticipation in my heart." Today, center your awareness on what feels to you like anticipation in your heart.

DAY 4: As you listen today, imagine someone who greets you with a welcoming smile.

DAY 5: On our final day, notice if you hear something that feels new to you or stands out in a way that you hadn't quite heard before.

ABOUT THE POET

Poet Nikki Giovanni was born in Knoxville, Tennessee and grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio. Since 1987, she has been on the faculty at Virginia Tech, where she is a University Distinguished Professor. Learn more about Nikki Giovanni at nikki-giovanni.com

POETRY PROMPT

Write your own poem based on a first memory related to books, stories and/or libraries. Here are some ideas: your first memory of a librarian or a teacher, your first book, your first visit to a library or book store.

Use as many sensory details as possible: what did you see, smell, hear and feel?





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My First Memory (Of Librarians)

BY NIKKI GIOVANNI

This is my first memory:

A big room with heavy wooden tables that sat on a creaky
wood floor

A line of green shades—bankers' lights—down the center
Heavy oak chairs that were too low or maybe I was simply
too short

For me to sit in and read
So my first book was always big

In the foyer up four steps a semi-circle desk presided
To the left side the card catalogue
On the right newspapers draped over what looked like
a quilt rack
Magazines face out from the wall

The welcoming smile of my librarian
The anticipation in my heart
All those books—another world—just waiting
At my fingertips.



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RESPONSE/PRACTICE

Write your own poem based on a first memory related to books, stories and/or libraries.

Here are some ideas:

- your first memory of a librarian or a teacher,
- your first book,
- your first visit to a library or book store.

Use as many sensory details as possible. What did you see, smell, hear and feel?



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Poem: "Pronunciation"

Poet: Leora Kava, read by Leora Kava

Published: 2022, Academy of American Poets

The poet explains that this poem began after she finished clearing weeds from her great-grandmother's grave—her mala'e—which sits next to her family's house in Tonga. She says "I did not grow up speaking Tongan, and this poem documents one of the moments I felt able to reconcile the pull of my desire to learn Tongan with the push of feeling inadequate as a Tongan descendent because of my lack of verbal language. Everyday acts of care, like sweeping the mala'e, became lessons that helped my body better pronounce an understanding of the land and culture that hold my ancestors and raised my family."

DAY 1: Today, take in the language of this poem. Notice what sounds familiar and what sounds foreign to you.

DAY 2: This poem honors the poet's ancestor - her great-grandmother - and her native language and culture. Listen today to hear about her ancestors, language, and culture.

DAY 3: The poem asks us to "trust the body to open in our language." Today, see if you can feel an openness in your heart, mind and body to receive the wisdom of this poem.

DAY 4: Tonga is a country in the southern Pacific ocean made up of 170 small islands. As you listen today, imagine such a place.

DAY 5: What will stay with you from this poem? What images, words or ideas have you gained from listening this week.

ABOUT THE POET

Leora Kava is a hafekasi poet of mixed Tongan and pālangi descent.

POETRY PROMPT

What simple things do you do each week as acts of self or family care? Do you make your bed? Listen to music? Play with friends? Or help make dinner or assist a sibling with homework?

Write a poem that elevates simple actions into beautiful gestures of being human.



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Pronunciation

BY LEORA KAVA

For now, we speak only in brooms:
sweeping sand across the teeth
of concrete slabs, we brush and repeat
each stone syllable of the clearing
where our great grandparents are buried.
Some words for memory are always here,
sounded out by the ant feet
hefting sand grit and glitter homes, fan-light
over the blue tongues of plastic flowers—
the weeds will try to cover all the other ways
of saying history.
But our pronunciation begins with the clearing we make in our
bodies first:
where the broom handle widens the oh's
in the mouth of our hands,
how we shake open the throat
to settle each pile of leaves before burning them.
Trust the body to open in our language
with the rhythm of weight—
one hand pushing sand,
the other pulling syllables
in one last sway
as we close the gate of the mala'e
so the trees can better hiss-hush at the edge of the ancestor
speaking in all our names.

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Poem: "Old Friends"

Poet: Freya Manfred, read by Rimel Kamran

Published: 2018, Red Dragonfly Press

"Old Friends" is a poem about friends who we have known for awhile. Even when we are young, we usually remember our earliest friends.

DAY 1: On our first day, let's just listen. What stands out to you about this poem?

DAY 2: The poem compares old friends to spring rain, sunshine and frosted leaves. Today consider what that means in this poem.

DAY 3: A line in the poem refers to the 'window of my soul.' Where is the window of your soul? Is it your heart, your eyes, or your belly? Can you feel it?

DAY 4: Do you have someone you can ask anything and always will listen to you? Think about them as you listen today.

DAY 5: Bring your friends to mind as you listen. Feel gratitude for them. Maybe later, tell them how much you appreciate their friendship.

ABOUT THE POET

Poet Freya Manfred is the author of *Swimming With A Hundred Year Old Snapping Turtle* (Red Dragonfly Press, 2008).

POETRY PROMPT

Think of your oldest or closest friend. Write a poem about them and use elements from nature to describe their character, personality and what they mean to you.



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Old Friends

BY FREYA MANFRED

Old friends are a steady spring rain,
or late summer sunshine edging into fall,
or frosted leaves along a snowy path—
a voice for all seasons saying, *I know you.*
The older I grow, the more I fear I'll lose my old friends,
as if too many years have scrolled by
since the day we sprang forth, seeking each other.

Old friend, I knew you before we met.
I saw you at the window of my soul—
I heard you in the steady millstone of my heart
grinding grain for our daily bread.
You are sedimentary, rock-solid cousin earth,
where I stand firmly, astonished by your grace and truth.
And gratitude comes to me and says:

"Tell me anything and I will listen.
Ask me anything, and I will answer you."

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Poem: "Possible"

Poet: Carlina Duan, read by Yalie Saweda Kamara

Published: 2021, University of Wisconsin Press

"Possible" leads us to think about all that is possible in stories, in language, in writing and as humans.

DAY 1: Today, let's settle in to listen to this poem. What are some of the first things you notice about "Possible?"

DAY 2: In this poem, the poet writes about starring or circling words that are unfamiliar to her. What words or phrases are unfamiliar or new to you?

DAY 3: Today, let the words of "Possible" wash over you like a wave. Notice what happens when you allow yourself to receive the poem.

DAY 4: The poem describes things that make the narrator possible, like libraries, books, and cartilage. What makes you possible?

DAY 5: On our last day with this poem, consider what you would tell someone else about it. How would you describe it?

ABOUT THE POET

CARLINA DUAN is a writer-educator from Michigan, and the author of the poetry collections *I Wore My Blackest Hair* (Little A, 2017) and *Alien Miss* (Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2021). Among many things, she loves river walks, snail mail, and being a sister.

POETRY PROMPT

"Possible" takes place on a rainy day, a time that might feel to some like there are less things possible due to rainy weather.

Set a poem on a rainy day or in the rain. Consider what things are possible, either from experience, imagination, or fantasy. Consider what makes you possible.



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Possible

BY CARLINA DUAN

now my dress smells like rain & all day long: I've been eager to get back to my book. a novel about a young couple making pasta & falling into one another's skin. an Irish novel, with names of cities that clunk around in my mouth – cities I'd never heard of but now ride my skull like pleasant, individually-wrapped candies, words with strange cactus-like shapes, words I star: Sligo. Carricklea. I turn the page. my mind goes: stick, stick, stick, my brain goes hungry for more. today I run through the rain in my wooden clogs & pleasure at the sound: thump, thump, thump, the entire green world of a street flashing down an open sewer drain. So *alive!* I think, then remember what else makes me possible: public libraries. cartilage. a good hardcover. a prayer I overhear my cab driver mumble while passing by a full school bus. goose bumps I get from reading my old journal, one sentence, another: *My heart is a skull zone* (did I really write that?) – & oh, I am possible again. I am a fragrant, silly self. today, I thank the worms who eat the dirt who break down the soil who make the lilacs possible and young, forever purpling, forever cradled in my palms as I cross Blakemore Avenue and it rains, rains, rains, and I think about eating up the alphabet, which has made a city into a word into a sound: *Sligo*, which slides, slinky-like, into my brain, the dear alphabet which has made me into a woman who will cross the street and love the lilacs and treasure the strange turn of the day, the strange turn of a word, a sentence, a curve and a stroke of black ink that – thank you – brought me here.

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Poem: "Remember"

Poet: Joy Harjo, read by Rimel Kamran

Published: 1983, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

The theme of this month's poems is *Our Stories, Our Narratives*. Cincinnati Youth Poet Laureate Rimel Kamran selected this poem by Joy Harjo because it gives us a way to think about our own identity and story by remembering all the ways the world has celebrated our very being.

DAY 1: On our first day with this poem, let's just listen. Notice what stands out to you as you first hear it.

DAY 2: Harjo asks us to remember how nature is an "alive poem." As you listen today, experience your own body as an "alive poem."

DAY 3: Today notice your breath moving in and out while taking in the poem. Take special notice of your breath on each mention of the word "remember."

DAY 4: Today think about how you would describe this poem to someone who has not heard it.

DAY 5: "Remember" talks about how language is a dance. As you listen today, imagine the language itself dancing.

ABOUT THE POET

Harjo was appointed the new United States poet laureate in 2019. Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1951, Harjo is a member of the Mvskoke/Creek Nation and is the author of several books of poetry. She is a current Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

POETRY PROMPT

Create your own Remember poem using aspects of your own life. See if you can include elements from nature, your family's history, your day-to-day life, and the world around you.



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Remember

BY JOY HARJO

Remember the sky that you were born under,
know each of the star's stories.
Remember the moon, know who she is.
Remember the sun's birth at dawn, that is the
strongest point of time. Remember sundown
and the giving away to night.
Remember your birth, how your mother struggled
to give you form and breath. You are evidence of
her life, and her mother's, and hers.
Remember your father. He is your life, also.
Remember the earth whose skin you are:
red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth
brown earth, we are earth.
Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their
tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to them,
listen to them. They are alive poems.
Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She knows the
origin of this universe.
Remember you are all people and all people
are you.
Remember you are this universe and this
universe is you.
Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you.
Remember language comes from this.
Remember the dance language is, that life is.
Remember.

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