



MINDFUL POETRY MOMENTS

created by
THEWELL

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: "Small Kindnesses"*

Poet: Danusha Laméris, read by Haleh Liza Gafari

Written: 2019

In "Small Kindnesses," the speaker thinks about all the nice little gestures that strangers show to one another, and how truly valuable they are to all of us.

DAY 1: What are your first impressions of this week's poem? How does it make you feel?

DAY 2: This poem appreciates "these brief moments of exchange," small kindnesses given to one another, even if it's just saying "bless you." Today, think about some small kindnesses you've received from someone recently.

DAY 3: The poem mentions a few "small kindnesses" we DO for others like moving your legs to let someone walk by, helping someone pick up their spilled groceries, and smiling at others. As you listen, think of other small acts of kindness you DO for other people.

DAY 4: The poem mentions a few "small kindnesses" we SAY to others like, "Here, have my seat," "Go ahead—you first," and "I like your hat." As you listen, think of other small acts of kindness you have SAID to someone else.

DAY 5: The poet describes these small kindnesses as "the true dwelling of the holy." As you listen today, think about how doing small kindnesses for others makes you feel.

ABOUT THE POET

DANUSHA LAMÉRIS is a poet and essayist from Northern California. Her first book, *The Moons of August*, won the 2013 Autumn House Press Poetry Prize and was a finalist for the 2015 Milt Kessler Poetry Book Award. She is also the author of *Bonfire Opera*, a finalist for the 2021 Paterson Poetry Award and a winner of the 2021 Northern California Book Award.

POETRY PROMPT

Make a list of small kindnesses like the ones in this poem. Describe both the feelings of giving kindness to others and what it feels to receive it.

BONUS: If you're writing with others, trade one item from your list with another person, and use that in your own poem!

*"Small Kindnesses" From "Bonfire Opera" by Danusha Laméris, © 2020. Used by permission of the University of Pittsburgh Press and the author, Danusha Laméris.





Small Kindnesses

BY DANUSHA LAMÉRIS

I've been thinking about the way, when you walk
down a crowded aisle, people pull in their legs
to let you by. Or how strangers still say "bless you"
when someone sneezes, a leftover
from the Bubonic plague. "Don't die," we are saying.
And sometimes, when you spill lemons
from your grocery bag, someone else will help you
pick them up. Mostly, we don't want to harm each other.
We want to be handed our cup of coffee hot,
and to say thank you to the person handing it. To smile
at them and for them to smile back. For the waitress
to call us honey when she sets down the bowl of clam chowder,
and for the driver in the red pick-up truck to let us pass.
We have so little of each other, now. So far
from tribe and fire. Only these brief moments of exchange.
What if they are the true dwelling of the holy, these
fleeting temples we make together when we say, "Here,
have my seat," "Go ahead—you first," "I like your hat."



