



Denver Center
Theatre Company

Inside Out

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behind *the* broken WORDS

Oct. 11 - Nov. 21 • Ricketson Theatre

Behind the Broken Words is a celebration of 19th- and 20th-century poetry and drama. In an evening that's both thematic and theatrical, the audience hears thoughts on love and war, men and women, life and death, told through the words of some of the most brilliant minds the world has known. There is the absurdity of an artist who paints in the dark so as not to confuse art with reality. The horrific indignity of a man tarred, feathered and about to be hung. Listening openly is key, because it allows the audience to experience the words as they have never been heard before. From familiar selections to those never heard, Roscoe Lee Browne and Anthony Zerbe bring forth a performance of great theatre and ideas. ■



Roscoe Lee Browne (left) and Anthony Zerbe

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The writers and their WORKS

e.e.cummings

e.e.cummings (born Edward Estlin, 1894 -1962) was an American poet and painter who first attracted attention, in an age of literary experimentation, for his eccentric punctuation and phrasing. His spirit of New England independence and self-reliance led to his use of Yankee colloquialisms in his verse and his legal name change to lower case letters. In addition to painting, he wrote a play (*him*) and 12 volumes of poems, which were alternately satirical, tough, tender and whimsical.

“The Very Latest School in Art” is a short dramatic sketch in which “an unconsciousist painter and a kindly critic of ye olde schoole exchange ideas,” according to cummings.¹ Published in *Vanity Fair* magazine, October 1925, the artist refuses to confuse reality with art — except when it comes to payment.

“in Spring comes” (circa 1935) shows the poet’s interest in nature and his view that it is always just being born. He believed in a cycle of growth and rebirth that provides man a means for spiritual renewal and development within his lifetime. ■

In addition to painting, he wrote a play (*him*) and 12 volumes of poems, which were alternately satirical, tough, tender and whimsical.

Ferlinghetti is highly capable of turning from a satiric tone to one of lyricism when he borrows from Yeats:

“Let us arise and go now to the Isle of Manisfree---.”

Lawrence Ferlinghetti Recognized as one of the most influential and important poets of the Beat generation, Ferlinghetti was born in Yonkers, New York in 1919. His father died shortly before he was born and his mother was committed later to a mental hospital, leaving the young boy to be raised by a female relative in France. His education was exceptional; boarding school, BA from the University of North Carolina, MA from Columbia and a doctorate from the Sorbonne in Paris, yet his free spirit was never broken.

He spent his youth hitch-hiking and hopping freight trains with friends, settling in San Francisco in the early 1950s.

With Kenneth Rexroth and Peter Martin, he opened City Lights bookstore, the predominant gathering place for the Beats. They began *City Lights* magazine in 1953 and in 1955, formed a publishing company to feature the works of writers, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder. The works of these authors, along with Ferlinghetti’s, espoused the Beat philosophy “Turn on, tune in, drop out,” which rejected the American values of the 1950s. To this day, Lawrence Ferlinghetti continues to operate the bookstore and write a weekly column for the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Selections from his “Junkman’s Obligato”(1958) are used three times in this presentation. Designed to be read aloud with jazz accompaniment, the poem uses devices of alliteration, internal rhyme, punning, allusion and parody. He borrows from T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and the cultural chatter of *The New York Times Book Review* and *Life* magazine. “The whole gamut of American culture echoes itself through the junkman.”² Ferlinghetti is highly capable of turning from a satiric tone to one of lyricism when he borrows from Yeats:

“Let us arise and go now to the Isle of

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

The writers and their WORKS

Seamus Heaney

Seamus Heaney was born in Londonderry, Northern Ireland in 1938. He trained to be a teacher at St. Joseph's College of Education in 1961-62 and continued in the profession while he wrote poetry. In 1966 his first collection, *Death of a Naturalist*, was published. His poems evoke the historical awareness of Ireland back to the Viking raiders, drawing on myth and aspects unique to the Irish experience. Some focus on everyday life in the countryside while others examine the troubles of the Protestant-Catholic conflict in Northern Ireland. In 1982 he left Ireland to become a professor of modern poetry and creative writing at Harvard; in 1988 he became Professor of Poetry at Oxford, dividing his time between both universities. Between 1966 and 1994 he published 11 volumes of poetry and/or essays and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995.

"Digging" appeared first in 1966 in *Death of a Naturalist*. In it Heaney remembers his turf-digging grandfather and his potato-picking father. He reflects on the choice of two voices from his culture, agriculture and militarism; in the end he rejects them both. His pen may rest "snug as a gun" in his hand, but he will use it as a tool for exploration and excavation instead of aggression, "yielding warmth (like his grandfather's turf for fire) and nourishment (like his father's potatoes)." ■

Between 1966 and 1994 he published 11 volumes of poetry and/or essays and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995.

...he was a poor student except for English poetry, of which he had a vast knowledge.

Dylan Thomas (1914-1953) was an extraordinary individualistic writer who is ranked among the great 20th-century poets. Born in Swansea, Wales, the son of an intimidating teacher-father and a pious mother, he was a poor student except for English poetry, of which he had a vast knowledge.

Feeling constrained by his country and his family, he moved to London where his first book, *18 Poems*, was published in 1934 and brought him instant fame. Four other successful volumes later, he was known unfortunately more as a drunken boor than as a serious poet. But Thomas had a spirited love of life, which is shown in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (1940), a collection of stories about his youth in Wales.

Though he found work with the British Broadcasting Corporation and as a film scriptwriter, he could not support his family; he drank heavily and borrowed money from friends. In 1949 he returned to Wales where his daily visits to the pub allowed him to capture the characters and subject matter for *Under Milk Wood*, a voice play, which brought him critical acclaim in America in 1953.

"In My Craft or Sullen Art" (1944) reflects Thomas' introspection and the emotional impact of World War II. He sees himself as the solitary poet disdaining reward, yet wondering about the permanence of his works. He is depressed at the way matters are, both personally and professionally, yet he continues to write, though no one pays attention. The poem expresses isolation and altruism in the Romantic tradition and is a fragment of a troubled life. ■

Dylan Thomas

The writers and their WORKS

William Butler Yeats

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), an Irish poet and dramatist, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923. He led the Irish Literary Revival movement of the late-19th/early-20th centuries, stimulating a new appreciation of Irish literature. He also helped found the Irish Literary Theater in 1898, which later became the Abbey Theater.

Yeats was born in Dublin, lived much of his childhood in London and spent many holidays in Sligo, a county in western Ireland. It was Sligo, which inspired much of his poetry. In 1896 he began to read ancient Irish poets and translations of Gaelic sagas. The old Irish tales, legends and facts of Ireland's roots influenced his view of history and of life.

"The Song of the Wandering Aengus," written in 1893, was inspired by the legend of the Celtic goddess Danu. Aengus was the Master of Love, described by Yeats as "God of Youth, beauty and poetry."⁴ The hazel wand Aengus holds comes from the Irish Tree of Life or Knowledge. And the "glimmering girl" refers to Maud Donne, the beautiful Irish nationalist leader, who became the love of his life. He met her in 1889 and associated her with apple blossoms. Though both were married to others, he proposed to her, which she refused. Yeats pursued and wooed her until his death.

Yeats was desperately homesick in London, 1890. When days were difficult, he went to Bedford Park for solace. The setting reminded him of Sligo and the tiny island of Innisfree located in Lough Gill. It was there that Yeats longed to lead the solitary life seeking wisdom, much as Henry Thoreau did at Walden Pond. This was the inspiration for the poem, "The Lake of Innisfree" written in 1893.

The old Irish tales, legends and facts of Ireland's roots influenced his view of history and of life.

"The Second Coming" was written in 1919 and prophesies the arrival of a new god as expressed in Christian doctrine. It blends Christ's prediction of this coming in Matthew XXIV and St. John's description of the beast of the Apocalypse in Revelations. The falcon of the second line represents man and present civilization both of whom are out of touch with God. Since the poem was written a year after the end of World War I and during the Russian revolution, it may be Yeats' expression of the world to come. ■

His major plays protest war and greed and study the nature of love, but all with a humorous touch.

Jean Giraudoux (1882-1944) was the most prominent French playwright between the two world wars. He was born in Belloc, near Limoges in France, and spent much of his life working for the French foreign service. Giraudoux took plots from classical history and drama, the Old Testament Apocrypha, French fairy tales and his own imagination. His major plays protest war and greed and study the nature of love, but all with a humorous touch. In many of his works, the prime mover of the action is a pure, young unattached girl who represents honesty, justice, hope and unselfishness.

Amphitryon 38, "Prologue" (1929) is the legend of Jupiter (or Zeus) who seduces the beautiful Alcmene (Alcmene) by assuming the form of her husband, Amphitryon, a Theban general. In the "Prologue," Jupiter and Mercury discuss the stratagem of the seduction. In the play Giraudoux examines the issue that ideals (Gods) may be harmful to humanity and that humanity must find its own ideals within reality. Alcmene is that ideal because she is the liberated, unfettered spirit who defines the world of reality through her imagination. In that respect, she is superior to Mercury and Jupiter who display hostility toward mankind. Nevertheless, as incompetent and ridiculous as they seem, they are the agents of destiny and impose the will of fatality on mankind. ■

Jean Giraudoux

The writers and their WORKS

Joe Henry

Joe Henry is a lyricist, poet and novelist who has been honored by the Colorado Council on the Arts, the National Wildlife Federation and the National Conservation Society. Born in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1960, the ex-professional hockey player and prize-fighter has spent most of his years “working in the weather—on construction sites, cattle ranches and merchant vessels around the world.”⁵ By 1979 he entered the lyric writing field and wrote the words for John Denver’s “Windsong,” “The Wings that Fly Us Home” and “A Baby Just Like You,” among others. Henry’s other songwriting partners and vocalist interpreters include Peter Yarrow, Bill Conti, Emmylou Harris, Donna Fargo, Roberta Flack, Bobby Darin and Trisha Yearwood. In 1996 Anthony Zerbe dramatized selections from Henry’s novel *Lime Creek* at the Denver Center Theatre Company.

The selection from *Lime Creek* concerns a young rodeo rider leaving his mountain homeland for the battlefields of war (presumably Vietnam) and the visceral reactions he has toward his wounded comrades and the slaughter around him. ■

...the ex-professional hockey player and prizefighter has spent most of his years “working in the weather---on construction sites, cattle ranches and merchant vessels around the world.”⁵

His father died when he was barely a year old, so his mother, headmistress of a grammar school, educated Derek and his siblings.

Derek Walcott (1939) won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992. Born in Castries, St. Lucia, an island in the Caribbean, he is descended from a white grandfather and a black grandmother on both maternal and paternal sides. This heritage has allowed him to have a unique perspective on racial matters. His father died when he was barely a year old, so his mother, headmistress of a grammar school, educated Derek and his siblings. Before he was out of his teens, he founded the St. Lucia Arts Guild, where his early plays were produced. After completing graduate work at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica, he accepted a Rockefeller fellowship to study theatre in New York in 1958.

Finding few opportunities for serious black dramatists and actors in the United States, he moved to Trinidad, where he wrote a newspaper column and founded the Trinidad Theater Workshop in 1959. Since then his volumes of poetry and play collections have appeared at regular intervals. He now lives on St. Lucia and travels elsewhere only when necessary.

Walcott’s works express the differing elements of the rich social milieu of the West Indies. In its history he includes the experience of slavery, indentured servitude and the integration of Renaissance, African and Asian cultures. His style has been shaped by the masters of Western literature, yet he rewrites that tradition in a West Indian vernacular.

In *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1970), Makak (monkey) is a black man, a charcoal burner who journeys from his mountain home to find his selfhood. Makak becomes the representative of all downtrodden and impoverished blacks who long to be redeemed, and of the transformation that comes in the form of a dream. ■

Derek Walcott

The writers and their WORKS

W.H. Auden

W. H. (Wystan Hugh) Auden (1927-1972) is best known for the remarkable variety of his works: ballads, blues, limericks, sonnets, nonsense verse, oratorios, free verse, librettos and dramas. He was born in York, England, and attended Oxford University, where he was the leader of a group of Communist writers. He divides his career into four periods.

- From 1927-32 his works fuse material from Icelandic sagas, Old English poetry, Marx, Freud and schoolboy humor. He thought of poetry as a kind of psychoanalytical therapy.
- From 1933-38, his work warned of the evils of capitalistic society, but also the rise of totalitarianism. During this time he married Erika Mann, daughter of the German novelist Thomas Mann, in order to provide her with a British passport.
- In the third period (1939-46), Auden became an American citizen and his works take on a more religious and intellectual perspective.
- In 1948 he won a Pulitzer Prize for *The Age of Anxiety*, a social-psychological work. The fourth period began in 1948 when Auden left New York to spend part of the year in Austria. There he began to write opera librettos, the most notable being the collaboration with Igor Stravinsky on *The Rake's Progress*. He also revised some of his poems, organized them chronologically and made them more accessible.

"Musée des Beaux Arts" was written in 1939 after Auden saw the special Breughel alcove in the Royal Museum in Brussels. He concentrates on Peter Breughel, the Elder, a Flemish painter of the early

"Advent" is the first part of *For the Time Being* (1944) subtitled "A Christmas Oratorio." It is essentially a choric dialogue on man's condition: "the emptiness and apathy of a society in the grip of winter and war." ⁶

Renaissance. Besides the mention of "Icarus," he also refers to two other Breughel paintings: "The Numbering at Bethlehem" and "The Massacre of the Innocents." The famous opening line illustrates how suffering can be captured by artists while it is ignored by those closest to it. ■

After leaving the Communist Party in 1944, he went to Paris as an expatriate, living there until his death.

Richard Wright (1908-1960), novelist and short story writer, was among the first black writers in the United States to protest white treatment of African-Americans, notably in his novel *Native Son* (1940). The grandson of slaves, he grew up in poverty and was shifted from one relative to another. Leaving Mississippi for Chicago at an early age, he received the opportunity to write through the Federal Writers' Project. He became a Communist in 1932 and in 1937 went to New York City where he became the Harlem editor of the *Communist Daily Worker*. He first gained public attention with a volume of novellas, *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938) which explored the inhumane treatment of African-Americans. This was followed by *Native Son*, a novel set in Chicago. The book became a best seller and a successful Broadway play staged in 1941 by Orson Welles. In 1945 his autobiographical *Black Boy* appeared; it was a moving account of his childhood and young manhood. After leaving the Communist Party in 1944, he went to Paris as an expatriate, living there until his death. Though Wright is best known for his prose, his poetry deserves examination. "Between the World and Me" (1935) is a description of a tar-and-feather lynching. The images of a splendid dawn and the horror of the crime are juxtaposed; the listener/reader is led to feel the pain of the witness as well as the victim in a world so familiar to Wright. ■

Richard Wright

The writers and their WORKS

Edmond Rostand

Edmond Rostand (1868-1921), French poet and dramatist, is best known for his play *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Though he studied law, he was not happy until he began to write poetry and plays. *Les Romanesques* (*The Romantics*, 1894) was the first to be produced, but it was *Cyrano*, written in 1896-97, that was the peak of Rostand's work. Written at the end of the 19th century in an Age of Realism, *Cyrano* is a romantic play and expresses sentiments that are simple yet eternal: romantic love, love of country and the desire to be loved for who you truly are.

In this selection, *Cyrano*, (expert swordsman, versatile poet, philosopher and scientist with an enormous nose) expresses the philosophy of the Romantic hero—he will disdain patronage in favor of independence. He is the noble idealist who fights against the reality of ordinary life. ■

Though he studied law, he was not happy until he began to write poetry and plays.

Alfred de Musset

Alfred de Musset (1810-1857) was a French Romantic poet, dramatist and fiction writer. He was a contemporary of Victor Hugo, but his works never attained the same recognition. His poems are generally love lyrics and his autobiographical novel gives an account of his affair with the female author, George Sand.

Fantasio (1833-34) is a drama about a poet figure who lives his poetry instead of writing it. He is the spirit of art who has no tolerance for boredom and banality and will use his imagination to alter reality by “rearranging the clouds or disposing of the prince.”⁷⁸ ■

His poems are generally love lyrics...

She graduated in 1917 and supported herself by writing short stories and acting with the Provincetown Players.

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950), a United States poet and dramatist, became the feminine personification of romantic rebellion and bravado of the 1920s. Her first recognition came when “Renascence” was published in 1912. This poem brought Millay to the attention of a benefactor who made it possible for her to attend Vassar College. She graduated in 1917 and supported herself by writing short stories and acting with the Provincetown Players. In 1923 she married the businessman Eugen Boissevain and lived on a farm in the Berkshires. Her poetry collections include *A Few Figs from a Thistle*, *The Harp Weaver and Other Poems*, *Fatal Interview* and *Wine from These Grapes*. She also published three verse plays: *Two Slatterns and a King*, *The Lamp and the Bell* and *Aria da Capo*.

Aria da Capo (1921) means a song of great dimension or to sing (or play) to the end of the composition. The play begins as a harlequinade with the traditional figures of Pierrot and Columbine exchanging wisecracks. Their foolery is interrupted by the Masque of Tragedy who tells them to leave the stage. The two simple shepherds, Thyrsis and Corydon, who represent the world of labor, enter to play a pastoral scene, but it develops into one expressing separatism, territorialism, suspicion, selfishness, hatred, cunning, and eventually murder. The play is an allegory in which a silly “game” is transformed into a grotesque reality of nationalism, politics and greed.

Conversation at Midnight (1935) is really a dialogue among seven men of differing backgrounds and beliefs who meet for an evening of conversation and drinking. In it may be heard the poet's views on war and the false talk of disarmament; the problems of religious, economic and political faith and a closing diatribe on advertising as “the death of words.” Midnight arrives, and the “metaphor of darkness—fear, ignorance, indecision—gives point to the title of the volume.”⁷ ■

Edna St. Vincent Millay

The writers and their WORKS

Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Nobel laureate poet (1913), writer and philosopher was the ambassador of Indian culture to the rest of the world. He was born to a wealthy family in Calcutta and wrote primarily in Bengali. He is probably the most prominent figure in the cultural world of the Indian subcontinent and the first Asian man to be awarded the Nobel prize. Even though he is mainly known as a poet, his multi-faceted talent encompassed different branches of art, such as novels, short stories, dramas, articles, essays, paintings, etc. His songs, popularly known as *Rabindrasangeet*, have an eternal appeal to all Bengalis. A social reformer, patriot and humanitarian, he wrote the national anthems of both India and Bangladesh.

His poem from *Poems Old and New* (1932) was written in Bengali and translated into English in 1942. It is a hymn to nature which reiterates the belief that politics, war and conquerors come and go, but everyday goodness remains. ■

...the first Asian man to be awarded the Nobel prize.

Roger McGough

Roger McGough (1937) is a British writer who has authored children's fiction, plays, screenplays and poetry. His children's books include: *Mr. Noselighter* (1977), *Sky in the Pie* (1983), *The Stowaways* (1986) and *Stinkers Ahoy* (1985). His poems include *The Mersey Sound* (1967), *Watchwords* (1969) and *Melting into the Foreground* (1987). "Politicians" is found in *The Mersey Sound* but is titled "M66". Published in 1967 and written in the style of e.e. cummings, it is a satiric jibe at government and the so-called establishment. ■

...a British writer who has authored children's fiction, plays, screenplays and poetry.

...is best known for his children's books: *Charlotte's Web* (1952), *Stuart Little* (1945), and *The Trumpet of the Swan* (1970).

E.B. (Elwyn Brooks) White (1899-1985) is best known for his children's books: *Charlotte's Web* (1952), *Stuart Little* (1945), and *The Trumpet of the Swan* (1970). He was a reporter and free-lance writer before joining *The New Yorker* magazine as writer and contributing editor in 1927. In 1935 he published, with William Strunk, Jr., the first edition of *The Elements of Style*, which became a standard style manual for writing in the English language. Other works include *Points of My Compass* (1962), *Letters of E.B. White* (1976) and *Poems and Sketches of E.B. White* (1981). He was awarded a Pulitzer Prize special citation in 1978.

"I Paint What I See" (1933) is in the poet's words: "a ballad of Artistic Integrity on the Occasion of the Removal of Some Rather Expensive Murals from the RCA building in 1933." It depicts a dialogue between the socialist painter Diego Rivera and the capitalist Nelson Rockefeller, grandson of John D. Rockefeller, who commissioned the murals. ■

E.B. White

The writers and their WORKS

T.S. Eliot

T. S. (Thomas Stearns) Eliot (1888-1965) was born in St. Louis, Missouri, but spent most of his life in England. He was allowed the widest education available: from Smith Academy in St. Louis he went to Milton School in Massachusetts and then Harvard in 1906. Eliot was to pursue four careers: editor, dramatist, literary critic and philosophical poet.

His first important publication and the first masterpiece of 'modernism' in English poetry was "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufock" (1917). It was a poetic revolution in that Eliot sought a diction that might be spoken by an educated person, being "neither pedantic or vulgar."¹⁰ In 1922 he published *The Waste Land*, which reflects the fragmented experience of the 20th century. As a playwright he wrote such poetic dramas as *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) and *The Cocktail Party* (1950). A hit musical, *Cats*, was based on his *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939) and opened in 1981. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufock" was assembled from fragments of verse Eliot had written in 1911.

"Prufock" presents notations of an urban scene and a trivial social world, but each reader brings his or her experience and personal interpretation to it. Still, an unmistakable element is a sense of boredom at the phoniness of predictable social rounds and the feelings of dehumanization. The Voice of the poem intones on the subjects of decisions and indecisions, disasters and recoveries. "By the time we reach the end of the poem it is impossible to say whether we have made any progress—from the opening lines."¹¹ ■

**Eliot was to pursue four careers:
editor, dramatist, literary critic
and philosophical poet.**

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NOTES

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| 1. cummings, p. 115. | 7. Brittin, p. 102. |
| 2. Smith, p. 83. | 8. Affron, p. 153. |
| 3. Vendler, p. 29. | 9. White, p. 38. |
| 4. Jeffares, p. 61. | 10. <i>Encyclopedia Britannica</i> , p. 452. |
| 5. ascap.com , p. 2. | 11. Bergonzi, p. 17. |
| 6. Fuller, p. 149. | |

ACTIVITIES

I. POETRY

- Define poetry.
- What makes a poem poetic?
- Make a list of words to describe something poetically.
- Why do you think poetry is an art form?
- How does poetry contribute to civilization?
- Can you think of any things that use poetic language besides a poem? (Storytelling, the Bible, etc.)
- Besides Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who were some other “Beat” poets? What does “Beat generation” mean?
- What is the Nobel Prize for Literature? How are the winners selected? Which of our poets won the prize?
- Name four styles of poetry used in the play.
- How do the styles differ?
- Write a poem using one of the styles
- Now write a poem on the same subject using a different style.
- How do the different styles reflect the society in the time and country they were written?
- How does the style of the poem affect your emotional experience of the piece?
- Make a list of themes that the poems are about.
- Discuss some of these themes.

II. A METAPHOR GAME

The development (or encouragement, or recognition) of figurative language – ways of measuring the world and expressing shades of meaning through imagery – both adds breadth and depth to the work and extends the ability to explain thoughts and ideas.

Although everyone makes use of comparative language and sound effects in everyday speech, many, especially children, hardly use them in their writing. The game is intended to recall the uses to mind; there is no necessity for a poem to employ them but they are useful and being aware of them is important, if only to stop them being lost or censored in the journey between spoken and written.

Start with blown up black and white pictures as unrecognizable as possible. Once these have been displayed or as they are passed around, players should write down what they think the picture represents. Then the subject of the picture is revealed and written down. This also provides for each picture a noun and a list of nouns. For example:

A COW is a COOKER or
A BALLOON

Now, how could COWs be said to resemble, say COOKERS? Where is the similarity, and what other words will help to show the similarity? Are there any verbs or adjectives that will help? How could the sentence continue?

The HOT COW is a STEAMING OLD BROWN COOKER.

The COW is a WOBBLY BALLOON, HELD DOWN BY THE ROPE AROUND ITS NECK.

The choice of nouns is not important, discovering limits is useful. If a comparison is ridiculous, overstretched or impossible this is all to the good. Words can be discarded or substituted freely until connections are found. The metaphors can be treated as riddles everyone can help solve. Discussion should always involve the recognition of metaphor in everyday speech, including the validity of such statements as “He’s a pig.” or “She’s as happy as a lark.”

III. PRESENTS GAME

Players are asked to make three lists of three words each – three adjectives, three nouns, three verbs. If suitable, they can swap lists. They are then asked to fit words from their list into the following:

I’m going to give you an **ADJECTIVE NOUN** made out of **ADJECTIVE NOUN** and **ADJECTIVE NOUN**. It can **VERB** and **VERB** and can even be **VERB** and...

IV. WHAT’S IN THE BOX? GAME

Players are asked to first imagine a box, its shape, color, etc. and then write down both the description and where they found it. At this point they could be asked how they found it, what sort of day it was, how they managed to open the box or any other supplementary question that would enhance the story or description. The next key question is *what is in the box?* The answer to this could be limited by restricting possibilities to words beginning with a particular letter. Obviously the more amazing or ridiculous the answer the more fun. Further questions could discover what happens after the box is opened. The responses to the questions can then be compiled to make the poem.

ACTIVITIES

C O N T I N U E D

V. THE GREAT ESCAPE GAME

This game starts in the room and tries to get as far away as possible with wild combinations and fantasy.

The escape takes three steps:

Players list up to six items in the room.

They describe the items with a single suitable adjective.

They select an item outside the room that could also fit the description. For example:

Chair – fourlegged – dog

Cupboard – metal – car

Light bulb – transparent – rain

The players then create the poem by including and linking as many of the new ‘outside’ items as possible.

VI. THE AMAZING PUSHPOEM MACHINE – THE CARD GAME

Use or create an alphabet pack of 50 cards (no Z). The pack can of course be varied to provide more “easy” letters. Q is normally treated as “?” (free choice) and X as “ex” or “ecs”.

There are many games and variations that can be played, but in the usual version, group players are dealt a number of cards (three to six) or, for short simple versions, players could choose one or two letters themselves or use their initials. In any case, the players use one card/letter at a time to develop group or individual work by placing one word after another.

The cards decide the first letter of each word of the poem – the players are free to choose any word beginning with the letter. A simple variation allows the use of any word which contains the letter. The order of play of the cards decides the order of words in the poem – the players can decide on the structure of the poem, number of words to a line, etc., even whether it should rhyme.

The conventional order of play is clockwise and, under strict rules, players should only be able to call for full-stops or new lines after they have played their word.

VII. ART GAME

Visit a postcard shop or art gallery to acquire a varied selection of postcards of paintings – naturalistic, surrealist, even abstract.

Deal them out to the players, suggesting that they write about what they see, what they think is happening.

Ask them to pay close attention to how the people, animals, objects in the paintings feel, why they are acting as they are, and to describe the landscape in terms of what the images show and suggest, rather than just what they represent.

VIII. ORDINARY LANGUAGE ABOUT ORDINARY THINGS

This is Just to Say

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

The Locust Tree in Flower

Among
of
green

stiff
old
bright

broken
branch
come

white
sweet
May

again

ACTIVITIES

C O N T I N U E D

Between Walls

the back wings
of the

hospital where
nothing

will grow lie
cinders

in which shine
the broken

pieces of a green
bottle

Begin the class by having the students read the three William Carlos Williams poems, examples of poetry written in ordinary language about ordinary things. Discuss what they think of such short poems with such short lines.

Read “This is Just to Say,” which has a theme children find irresistible – apologizing for something you’re really secretly glad you did. Apologizing will likely be a new note in their poetry and they will enjoy it. They’ll enjoy, too, asserting the importance of their secret pleasure against the world of adult regulations. They apologized, and were pleased about, breaking things, taking things, forgetting and neglecting things, eating things, hitting people and looking at things.

Next, go on to “The Locust Tree in Flower,” concentrating in that poem on its form: the use of one-lines, and the disjointedness – the poem isn’t a sentence but a series of individual words used somewhat like brushstrokes in a painting: each word adds something to

what one sees, but it is not until near the end that one knows what the whole picture is. To make sure the class understands how this works, have them do a class collaboration. Write words on the blackboard they call out to be lines for the poem. Take an informal vote on each word (line). If you don’t like it, ask for another. Next, ask them to write poems of their own. The poetry idea is to write a poem about something you see, with one word in every line. Have them try and not make the poem a sentence but make it jagged like “The Locust Tree in Flower.” The one-word-at-a-time brushstroke technique frees one from the burden of complete sentences and helps one to see and write about things sharply and freshly.

Collect and read a few of the poems. Then read “Between Walls.” Concentrate on the “un-beautifulness” of the broken glass bottle and how Williams thinks it is beautiful anyway. With this poem, even more so than the other two, you can point the class away from “highly poetical” things, like palaces and snowcapped mountains, as the only proper ones to write poetry about. It can help them to look for what was beautiful to them in the things they really saw. The idea is to write a poem about something not supposed to be beautiful but which you really secretly think is, the way Williams thinks the glass behind the hospital is beautiful. Ask for examples to be sure they are thinking about really plain things.

(These exercises contribute to Colorado Content Standard #1, #2, #4 and #6 for Reading and Writing. Students read and understand a variety of materials. Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences. Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.)

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