

# Poetry

“It is difficult  
to get the news from poems  
yet men die miserably every day  
for lack  
of what is found there.”

--William Carlos Williams

1. Write the quote from the previous slide.
2. What does it mean that poetry isn't the news?
3. What does it mean that "men die miserably everyday for lack of what is there?"
4. Look at the following **four reasons to study poetry**. These are ways to *begin to appreciate* poetry. Put these notes (and example lines or phrases from the accompanying poems) in your notebook.
5. Enjoy!

# 1. Pleasure

One reason to study poetry is for the pleasure of it. Poetry intoxicates – it awakens and appeals to the senses.

Emily Dickinson said:

*“If I feel physically as if  
the top of my head  
were taken off,  
I know  
that this  
is poetry.”*



“Song of Smoke” Kevin Young

To watch you walk  
cross the room in your black

corduroys is to see  
civilization start –

the wish –  
*whish-whisk*

of your strut is flint  
striking rock – the spark

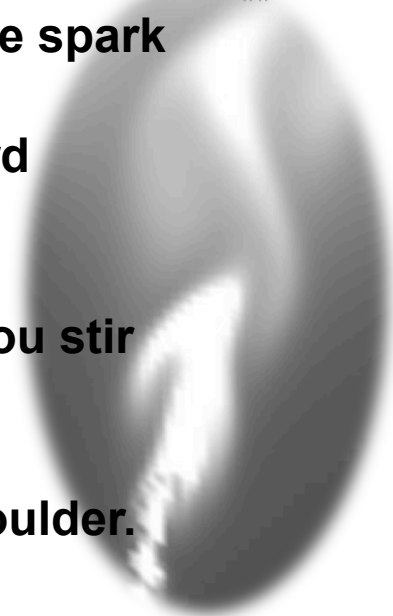
of a length of cord  
rubbed till

smoke starts – you stir  
me like coal

and for days smoulder.

I am no more

(continue next slide)



**“BURN”**

**DICTION:**

**smoke, flint,  
spark, rubbed,  
stirred like coal,  
smoulder, iron,  
burn, chimney**

# 1. Pleasure

a Boy Scout and, besides,  
could never

put you out – you  
keep me on

all day like an iron, out  
of habit –

you threaten, brick –  
house, to burn

all this down. You leave  
me  
only a chimney.



# 1. Pleasure

Sound devices are pleasurable to hear and to speak. Read sentences with sound devices in them out loud or mouth them to feel the words...the poet intends it.

Get ready. Read clearly, positively, and happily. Get into the sounds; ham it up. Hint: pause a little at the ends of the lines and a little more where there is white space between groups of lines. How does that effect the meaning of the poem?

“The Word Plum” by Helen Chasin

*the word plum is delicious*

*pout and push, luxury of self-love, and savoring murmur*

*full in the mouth and falling like fruit*

*taut skin  
pierced, bitten, provoked into juice, and tart flesh*

*question  
and reply, lip and tongue  
or pleasure*

## 2. Truth

- Another reason to read poetry is because it is in touch with the world in a way no other art form is.
- You can...
  - learn the truth of people's lives.
  - Get in touch with your own self-knowledge.
- When life is joyful, poetry is there to say it.
- When life is beyond words, poetry is there to say it. For example:

*“Coal has entered their skin.  
A fine black salt drifts  
back into their meals.  
Every day the mills are fed  
tiny wafers of their flesh.”*

- from “The Miners of Revloc,”  
Ed Ochester



# 2. Truth

- When life is joyful, poetry is there to say it.
- When life is beyond words, poetry is there to say it. *For example:*

**Buffalo Bill's  
defunct**

**who used to  
ride a watersmooth-silver  
stallion**

**and break onetwothreefourfive  
pigeonsjustlikethat**

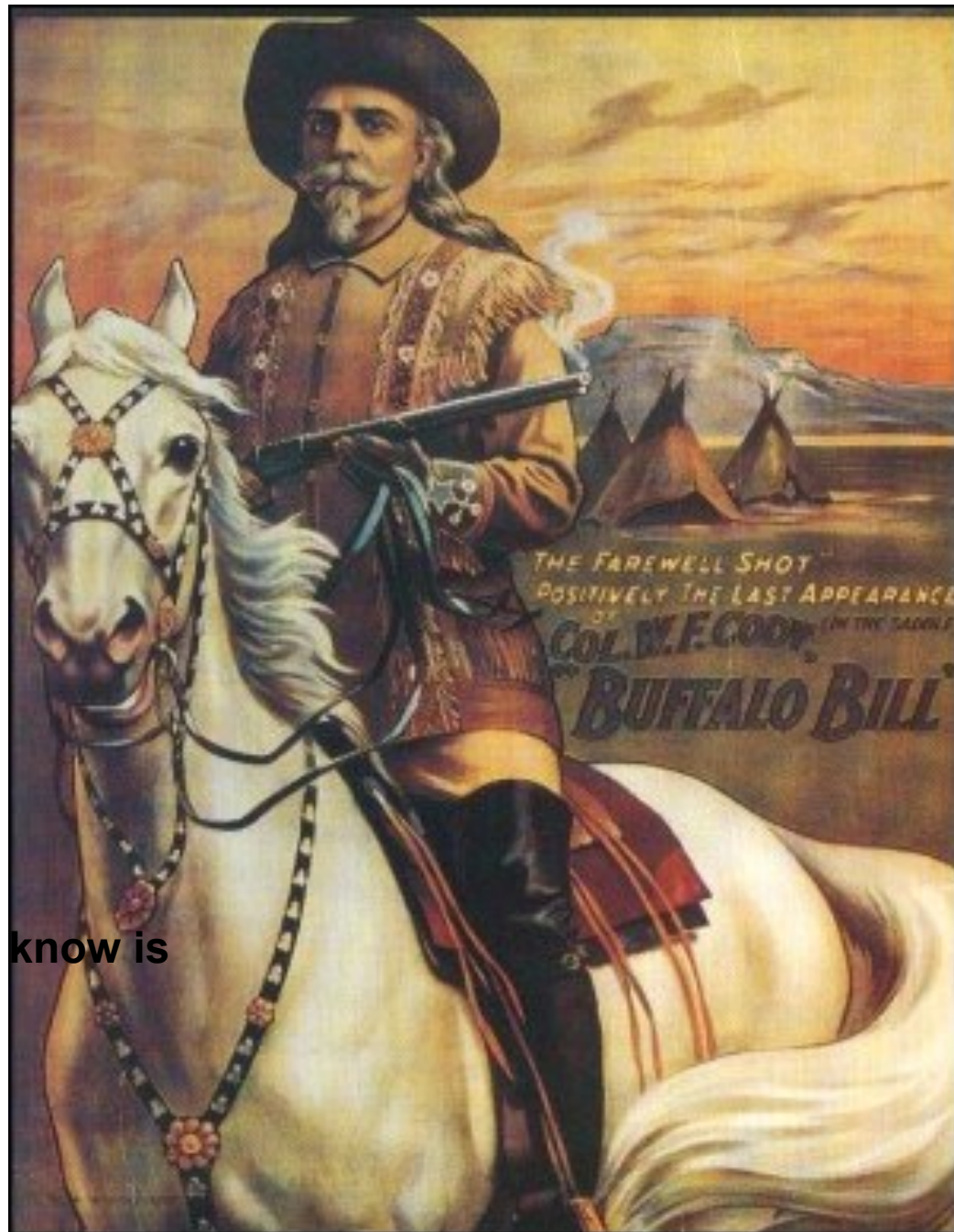
**Jesus**

**he was a handsome man**

**and what I want to know is**

**how do you like your blueeyed boy  
Mister Death**

- e.e.cummings



# 2. Truth

Looking into other people's lives this intimately can be very hard. This bears the stamp of experience. The best poetry doesn't turn away from life but looks it straight in the face. In "Butcher's Son" notice how the little details carry a great deal of weight:

- *Amy stares down at her dress*
- *The speaker stares at the theater across the street*
- *The details hurt: the cat pawing the kidney, the cooler of meat*
- *Without it all being said directly, you know what is meant.*



## **"Butcher's Son" by Joe Heithaus**

*Nothing to do with blood. Nineteen,  
I cut off my left pinky and he laughed, held  
my bleeding hand over the chopping block  
beside four sides of beef on hooks.*

*He's a butcher today he must have thought, his own  
missing pointer scratching his head. He smiled,  
walked me to the sink, the light at the door  
was gray, the cat pawed a kidney behind the screen.*

(continue next slide)



*I thought of all this at my wedding when he held up my hand after the mass – four fingers and stump, the gold ring, Amy staring down at her dress. It was '69, Vietnam, Nixon president, we drove away in a big black Electra and talked about my buddies overseas who couldn't be there, his insistence we bring a cooler of steaks on the honeymoon.*

*When I remember those days, I hate him. That fucking back room, the sawdust I've swept every day since I turned sixteen. Joey, help Mrs. Benson, sharpen this knife, and she'd whisper, What a sweet man your father is. I'd fake a smile, look out the window at the theatre across the street.*

*We're closed today, I'm putting my black suit back on, scrubbing the stains from my hands.*



# 3. Poetry Can Help You

## It's a possibility!

- Help you see your life more clearly
- Help you compare your outlook or experiences to others'
- Help comfort you.
  - Solace.
  - Kinship.
  - People have formed communities, taken action, or decided to take part all based on what they have found in poems.

*Mid-term Break*

*by Seamus Heaney*

I sat all morning in the college sick bay  
Counting bells knelling classes to a close,  
At two o'clock our neighbors drove me home.

In the porch I met my father crying~  
He had always taken funerals in his stride~  
And Big Jim Evans saying it was a hard blow.

The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram  
When I came in, and I was embarrassed  
By old men standing up to shake my hand

And tell me they were "sorry for my trouble,"  
Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest,  
Away at school, as my mother held my hand

*(continue next slide)*

# 3. Poetry Can Help You

In hers and coughed out angry tearless sighs.  
At ten o'clock the ambulance arrived  
With the corpse, stanced and bandaged by the  
nurses.

Next morning I went up into the room. Snowdrops  
And candles soothed the bedside; I saw him  
For the first time in six weeks. Paler now,

Wearing a poppy bruise on the left temple,  
He lay in the four foot box as in a cot.  
No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.

A four foot box, a foot for every year.

# 3. Poetry Can Help You



***O CAPTAIN! my Captain! our fearful trip is done;***

***The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won;***

***The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,***

***While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:***

***But O heart! heart! heart!***

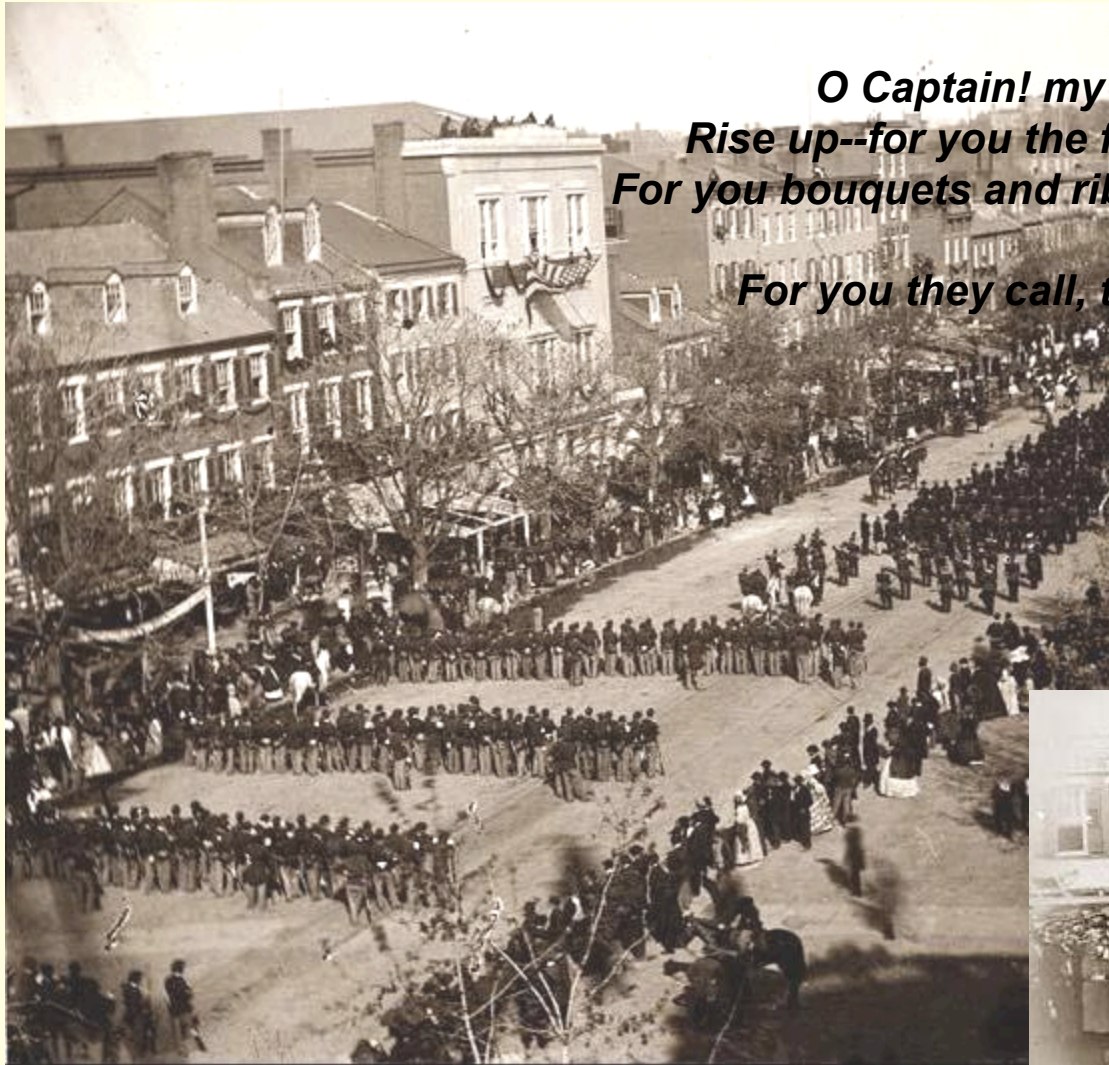
***O the bleeding drops of red,***

***Where on the deck my Captain lies,***

***Fallen cold and dead.***

**Walt Whitman wrote this poem after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. He saw America as a ship without a Captain, a ship that doesn't know where to go.**

# 3. Poetry Can Help You

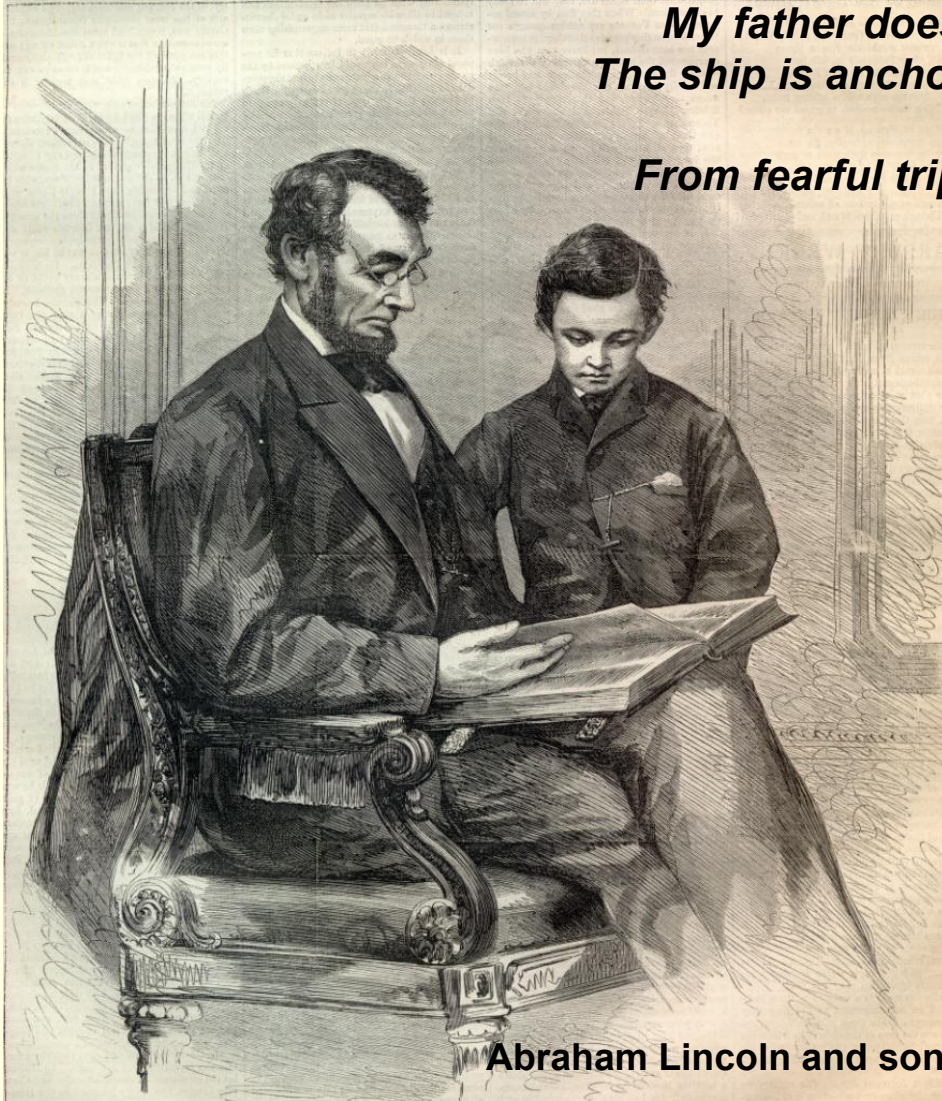


*O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;  
Rise up--for you the flag is flung--for you the bugle trills,  
For you bouquets and ribboned wreaths--for you the shores  
a-crowding,  
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces  
turning;  
Here Captain! dear father!  
This arm beneath your head!  
It is some dream that on the deck  
You've fallen cold and dead.*



# 3. Poetry Can Help You

*My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,  
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will.  
The ship is anchored safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,  
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;  
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!  
But I, with mournful tread,  
Walk the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.*



Abraham Lincoln and son



Tad Lincoln in Union uniform,  
son of President Abraham Lincoln

Are You  
Paying  
Attention?

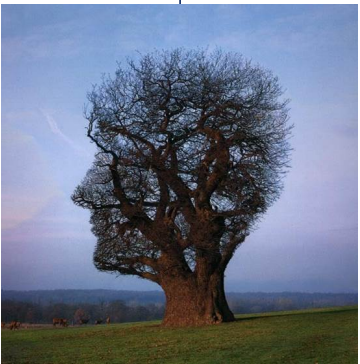
# 4. Poetry is a Way of Paying Attention

## 7 Things Mindful People Do Differently



1

Approach everyday things with curiosity  
—and savor them



Forgive their  
mistakes—  
big or small

2

3

Show gratitude for  
good moments—and  
grace for bad ones

Practice  
compassion and  
nurture connections

4

5

Make peace with  
imperfection—  
inside and out

Embrace vulnerability  
by trusting others—  
and themselves

6

7

Accept—and  
appreciate—that  
things come and go

- It's a way of bridging your **own hopes** and designs with those of all **humanity**...of recognizing your connection to the human experience.
- It's a way of **being involved**.
- Recognizing this makes *yours a fuller life*.
- It gives you pleasure, truth, help, and **a reason to speak**.



## 4. A way of paying attention, of seeing your own life more clearly

### **“Getting Through” by Deborah Pope**

*Like a car stuck in gear,  
a chicken too stupid to tell  
its head is gone,  
or sound ratcheting on  
long after the film  
has jumped the reel,  
or a phone  
ringing and ringing  
in the house they have all  
moved away from,  
through rooms where dust*

*is a deepening skin,  
and the locks unneeded,  
so I go on loving you,  
my heart blundering on,  
a muscle spilling out  
what is no longer wanted,  
and my words hurtling past,  
like a train off its track,  
toward a boarded-up station,  
closed for years,  
like some last speaker  
of a beautiful language  
no one else can hear.*





# 4. Poetry is a Way of Paying Attention



**Are You  
Paying  
Attention?**

From “On the Pulse of the Morning”  
Maya Angelou, 1993  
Bill Clinton’s Inauguration

*...Lift up your eyes upon  
The day breaking for you.  
Give birth again  
To the dream.  
Women, children, men,  
Take it into the palms of your hands.  
Mold it into the shape of your most  
Private need. Sculpt it into  
The image of your most public self.  
Lift up your hearts  
Each new hour holds new chances  
For new beginnings...*