



# Poetry Mentors: Models for Reading and Writing



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## Types of Mentor Texts

IDEA	STRUCTURE	CRAFT
This mentor text's unique or interesting idea inspires a fresh or unique idea from writers.	This mentor text provides a structure writers can "borrow" to write about their own unique ideas.	This mentor text contains well-crafted writing techniques that can be analyzed and imitated by writers.

Adapted from Corbett Harrison's "The 7 Elements of a Differentiated Writing Lesson"

## June 2017

Scholarly journals and successful classroom practice all point to the benefits of poetry instruction. The LiveBinder at the QR code below includes 35+ scholarly and popular articles on the benefits of poetry instruction.



<http://goo.gl/kQtSYC>

## Favorite Poetry Teaching Books

*All books listed are written by poets who teach!*

- Behn, R., & Twichell, C. (1992). *The Practice of poetry: Writing exercises from poets who teach*. New York, NY: HarperPerennial.
- Guernsey, B. (Ed.), (2013). *Mapping the line: Poets on teaching*. Baltimore: Penyeach Press.
- Lasky, D., Luxford, D., & Nathan, J. (2013). *Open the door: How to excite young people about poetry*. San Francisco: McSweeney's Books.
- Lockward, D. (2013). *The crafty poet: A portable workshop*. Nicholasville, KY: Wind Publications.
- Potter, D. (2013). *A poet's sourcebook: Writings about poetry, from the ancient world to the present*. Pittsburgh: Autumn House Press.
- Wormser, B., & Cappella, D. (2000). *Teaching the art of poetry: The moves*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc.
- Wormser, B., & Cappella, D. (2004). *A surge of language: Teaching poetry day by day*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

# Where I'm From



## Inspiration for George Ella Lyon's "Where I'm From"

The following is from George Ella Lyon's website:  
<http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html>

"Where I'm From" grew out of my response to a poem from *Stories I Ain't Told Nobody Yet* (Orchard Books, 1989; Theater Communications Group, 1991) by my friend, Tennessee writer Jo Carson. All of the People Pieces, as Jo calls them, are based on things folks actually said, and number 22 begins, "I want to know when you get to be from a place." Jo's speaker, one of those people "that doesn't have roots like trees," tells us "I am from Interstate 40" and "I am from the work my father did."

In the summer of 1993, I decided to see what would happen if I made my own where-I'm-from lists, which I did, in a black and white speckled composition book. I edited them into a poem – not my usual way of working – but even when that was done I kept on making the lists. The process was too rich and too much fun to give up after only one poem. Realizing this, I decided to try it as an exercise with other writers, and it immediately took off. The list form is simple and familiar, and the question of where you are from reaches deep.

22

I want to know when you get to be from a place,  
five years, ten, twenty?  
What about when you find a place you love?

"But honey, where are you from?"

It is a discriminatory question,  
and it turns up everywhere  
including job applications.

I am from three states  
and six different cities.

I am from Interstate 40.

I am from the neighborhoods  
where people moved every other year.

I am from the work my father did.

I am from the things I hang on my wall  
and the bed I get out of in the morning.

I am from that suspicious minority  
that doesn't have roots like trees.

I have lived here eight years,  
and the mountain I see when I wake up is imprinted –  
like a duck, I know my mother when I see her.

Can you earn being from a place?  
I work, I vote, I help my neighbors, I pay taxes.  
Can I pledge allegiance?

People would do better to ask  
where are you from of Eastman  
or Nuclear Fuels Services  
or the waste management company  
that left the toxic dump in Bumpass Cove.

And if the identity is so precious  
they should ask it of Kroger  
and K-Mart and Long John Silver's.  
But it never goes that far.

I just goes to the property boundary  
when my neighbor steps back and says,  
"Oh. You're not from here are you?"

By Jo Carson



# Where I'm From

By George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins,  
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.  
I am from the dirt under the back porch.  
(Black, glistening,  
it tasted like beets.)

I am from the forsythia bush  
the Dutch elm  
whose long-gone limbs I remember  
as if they were my own.

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,  
from Imogene and Alafair.

I'm from the know-it-alls  
and the pass-it-ons,  
from Perk up! and Pipe down!  
I'm from He restoreth my soul  
with a cottonball lamb  
and ten verses I can say myself.

I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,  
fried corn and strong coffee.  
From the finger my grandfather lost  
to the auger,  
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.

Under my bed was a dress box  
spilling old pictures,  
a sift of lost faces  
to drift beneath my dreams.  
I am from those moments--  
snapped before I budded --  
leaf-fall from the family tree.

I am from \_\_\_\_\_ *specific ordinary item* \_\_\_\_\_, from \_\_\_\_\_ *product name* \_\_\_\_\_  
and \_\_\_\_\_ *another item* \_\_\_\_\_.

I am from the \_\_\_\_\_ *home description: adjective, adjective, sensory detail* \_\_\_\_\_.

I am from the \_\_\_\_\_ *plant, flower, natural item* \_\_\_\_\_,  
the \_\_\_\_\_ *plant, flower, natural detail* \_\_\_\_\_.

I am from \_\_\_\_\_ *family tradition* \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ *family trait* \_\_\_\_\_,  
from \_\_\_\_\_ *name of family member* \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ *another family name* \_\_\_\_\_.

I am from the \_\_\_\_\_ *description of family tendency* \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ *another one* \_\_\_\_\_.

From \_\_\_\_\_ *something you were told as a child* \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ *another* \_\_\_\_\_.

I am from \_\_\_\_\_ *representation of religion, or lack of it* \_\_\_\_\_.

*Further description:* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

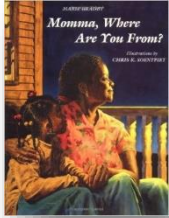
I'm from \_\_\_\_\_ *place of birth and family ancestry* \_\_\_\_\_,  
*two food items representing your family* \_\_\_\_\_.

From the \_\_\_\_\_ *specific family story about a specific person and detail* \_\_\_\_\_,  
the \_\_\_\_\_ *another detail* \_\_\_\_\_,

and the \_\_\_\_\_ *another detail about another family member* \_\_\_\_\_.

I am from \_\_\_\_\_ *location of family pictures, mementos, archives* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ *several more lines indicating their worth* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Read the poem "Where I'm From" by George Ella Lyons. Think about how she shows who she is rather than tells. With or without the framework on the right, compose a poem using this same technique of showing to write about yourself.



# Momma, Where Are You From?

By Marie Bradby

1-2	Momma, where are you from? Where are you from, Momma?
3-4	I'm from Monday mornings, washing loads of clothes in the wringer washer and peach baskets full of laundry to hang on the clothesline strung from tree to tree – the sun bleaching the sheets, the wind whipping them dry.
5-6	I am from beans – green, lima, and pea – picked, strung, snapped, and shelled into pans, then put on the stove to simmer for an hour.
7-8	I am from peddlers, driving a creaky old wagon with a big old horse and calling up and down the street: “Fish-man! Fish-man! I’ve got fresh trout, spots, and croakers today! Fish-man! Fish-man! “When did you get them?” my mother would ask. “They’re real fresh. They came in the dock early this morning.” “All right,” she’d say, “I’ll take some croakers.”
9-10	Calling: “Rag-man! Rag-man! Got any rags to sell? Ten cents a pound!” My mother would give him a bundle of worn-out clothes and later stash the money in the cookie jar.
11-12	Calling: “Ice-man! Ice-man!” If it was real hot, we would get two blocks of ice. Momma would crack it with a pick and give me the chips to suck on.
13-14	Momma, where is that place? Where is that place, Momma?
15-16	It’s where the edge of town met the countryside; where the city sidewalks ended and chickens ran through yards. Where families grew into a neighborhood as close as a knit sweater; where we threw up a hand to everyone we saw. Where I saw Miss Mary passing our house in the morning on her way to work and Mr. Thompson coming home from baking bread all night.
17-18	It’s where the school bus took my older brothers and sister way across town past school . . . after school . . . after school . . . until it came to a school where all the children were brown – some light, some dark, some in-between.
19-20	Where days took their time and morning lay on the rolling hills as long as she pleased. Where I played under a gum ball tree that took up the whole ski. and wondered why Miss Mary cleaned someone else’s house why the sidewalks ended at the edge of my neighborhood, and why my brothers and sister didn’t go to the school right up the street.
21-22	Where afternoons, my brothers delivered newspapers, and I sprinkled and rolled up clothes, while my sister pressed with two flat irons – one to use, the other to heat up on the stove and be ready when the first went cold. Where everything we wore and used was starched and ironed, even dish towels and underwear.
23-24	Where Friday evenings we friend fish outdoors, and my cousins would come over with cherry pie and ice cream. We would sit around tubs of iced sodas in the backyard, and Daddy would say to Cousin Albert, “What’ll you have?”
25-26	Where we children played “One-Two-Three Red Light,” while the adults listened to ball games on the radio – the Washington Senators and the Baltimore Orioles. Where Daddy played his old Duke Ellington and Count Basie records and we danced in the shadows, switching our hips, popping our fingers, and pretending to be adults.
27-28	Momma, can I go there? Can I go there, Momma? Yes. We can travel through roads in my memory: Let’s see. Up the stairs, sliding down the hall, passing beds full of children, heads full of new dreams, nights full of stars.

## **Fifth Grade Autobiography**

by Rita Dove

I was four in this photograph fishing  
with my grandparents at a lake in Michigan.  
My brother squats in poison ivy.  
His Davy Crockett cap  
sits squared on his head so the raccoon tail  
flounces down the back of his sailor suit. 5

My grandfather sits to the far right  
in a folding chair,  
and I know his left hand is on  
the tobacco in his pants pocket  
because I used to wrap it for him  
every Christmas. Grandmother's hips  
bulge from the brush, she's leaning  
into the ice chest, sun through the trees  
printing her dress with soft  
luminous paws. 10  
15

I am staring jealously at my brother;  
the day before he rode his first horse, alone.  
I was strapped in a basket  
behind my grandfather.  
He smelled of lemons. He's died – 20  
but I remember his hands.

## **Poetry**

by Sharon Bryan

It's like tuning slowly  
around our Zenith radio's  
glowing shortwave dial

as I did as a child, listening  
for voices from Madagascar,  
Fiji, and Canary Islands, 5

I could spend hours like this,  
eyes closed, ear pressed  
to the speakers to catch  
snatches of language  
between high-pitched squeals  
and long patches of static, 10

and though I can't understand  
most of the words that do  
come through, it's clear 15

what they say is urgent –  
someone's in love, someone's  
at war, no one's at peace –

so I do my best to get it down,  
just in case I can see one day, how- 20  
ever belatedly, what it all means.

## **The Base Stealer**

by Robert Francis

Poised between going on and back, pulled  
Both ways taut like a tightrope-walker,  
Fingertips pointing the opposites,  
Now bouncing tiptoe like a dropped ball  
Or a kid skipping rope, come on, come on, 5  
Running a scattering of steps sidewise,  
How he teeters, skitters, tingles, teases,  
Taunts them, hovers like an ecstatic bird,  
He's only flirting, crowd him, crowd him,  
Delicate, delicate, delicate, delicate - now! 10

## **The History Teacher**

By Billy Collins

Trying to protect his students' innocence  
he told them the Ice Age was really just  
the Chilly Age, a period of a million years  
when everyone had to wear sweaters.

And the Stone Age became the Gravel Age, 5  
named after the long driveways of the time.

The Spanish Inquisition was nothing more  
than an outbreak of questions such as  
"How far is it from here to Madrid?"  
"What do you call the matador's hat?" 10

The War of the Roses took place in a garden,  
and the Enola Gay dropped one tiny atom on Japan.

The children would leave his classroom  
for the playground to torment the weak  
and the smart, 15  
mussing up their hair and breaking their glasses,

while he gathered up his notes and walked home  
past flower beds and white picket fences,  
wondering if they would believe that soldiers  
in the Boer War told long, rambling stories 20  
designed to make the enemy nod off.

**American Gothic**  
John Stone (1998)

Just outside the frame  
there has to be a dog  
chickens, cows and hay

and a smokehouse  
where a ham in hickory  
is also being preserved

Here for all time  
the borders of the Gothic window  
anticipate the ribs

of the house  
the tines of the pitchfork  
repeat the triumph

of his overalls  
and front and center  
the long faces, the sober lips

above the upright spines  
of this couple  
arrested in the name of art

These two  
by now  
the sun this high

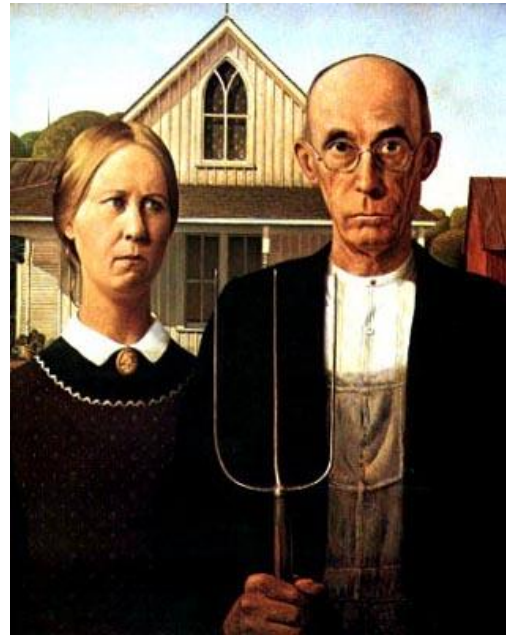
ought to be  
in mortal time  
about their businesses

Instead they linger here  
within the patient fabric  
of the lives they wove

he asking the artist silently  
how much longer  
and worrying about the crops

she no less concerned about the crops  
but more to the point just now  
whether she remembered

to turn off the stove.



American Gothic – Painting by Grant Wood, 1930

5

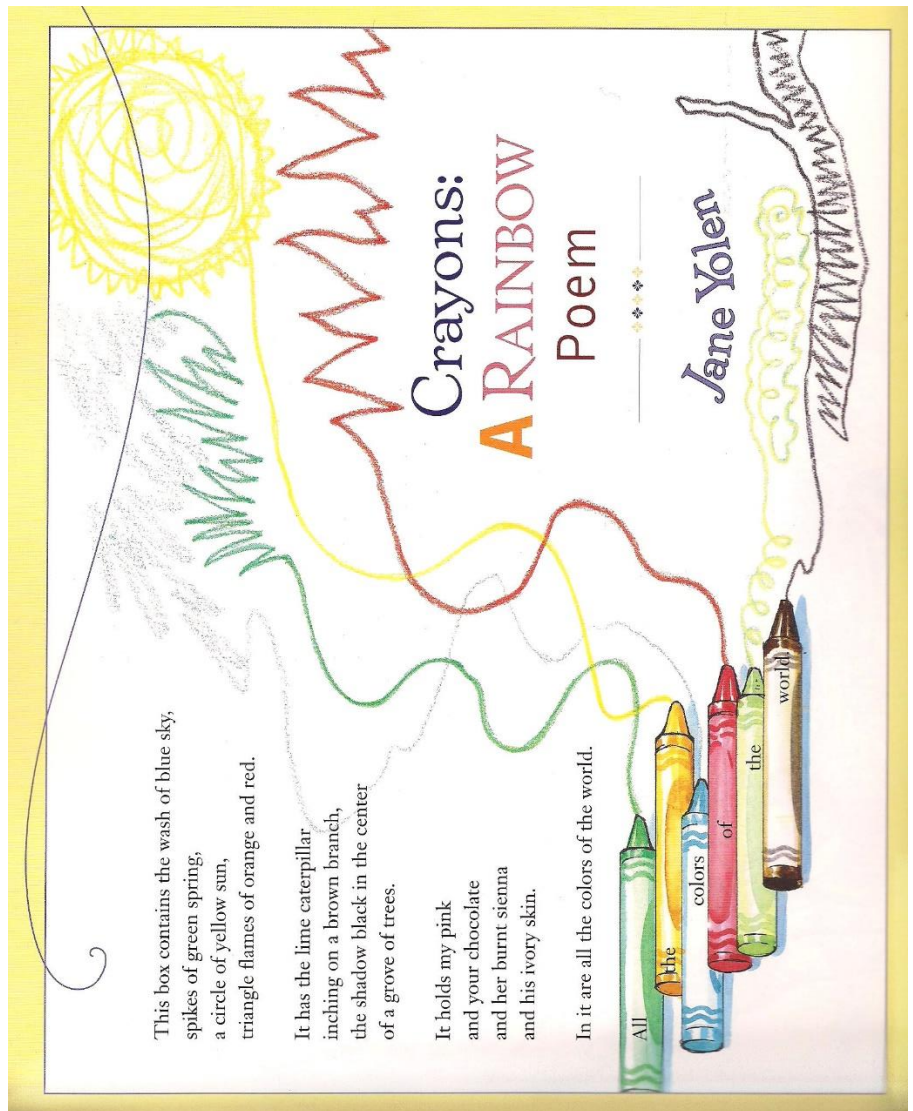
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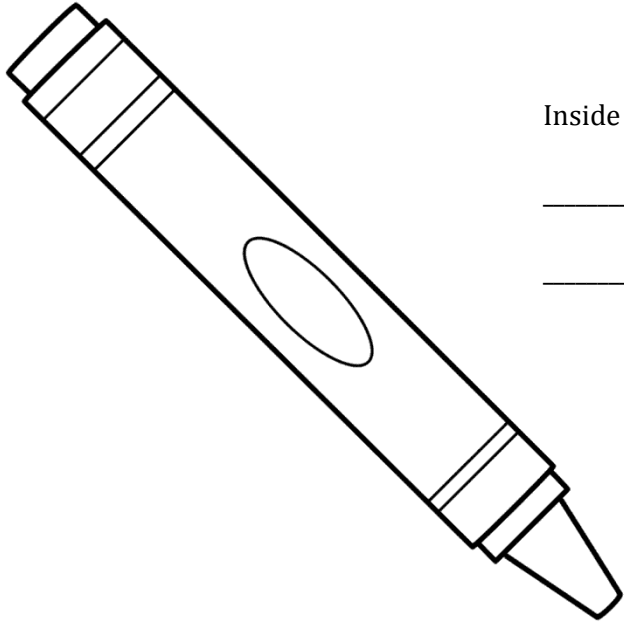
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Inside the box there is *color* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Poetry Minilesson: Using Specific Language – Proper Nouns

### NOTICE

- use of specific language – proper nouns
  - “Zenith radio” [“Poetry”, Bryan, line 2]
  - “Madagascar, / Fiji, and Canary Islands” [“Poetry”, Bryan, lines 5-6]
  - “Davy Crockett cap” [“Fifth Grade Autobiography”, Dove, line 4]
  - “Gothic window” [“American Gothic”, Stone, line 8]
  - Multiple examples of specific historical events in “The History Teacher” by Billy Collins.

### INSIGHTS ON CRAFT

Proper nouns provide your reader with a specific image. In the examples above, the naming of “Madagascar, Fiji, and Canary Islands” in the Sharon Bryan poem makes the exotic locations she is invoking very concrete. A Gothic window gives, with one word, information about the shape and style of architecture being described. You may wish to use a proper noun to instantly sharpen a visual image for your reader. In three words (“Davy Crockett cap”), Rita Dove gives us an easily understood and immediately identifiable image.

## Poetry Minilesson: Using Repetition

### NOTICE

Look at these examples of repetition:

- *come on, come on*  
[“The Base Stealer”, Francis, line 5]
- *crowd him, crowd him*  
[“The Base Stealer”, Francis, line 9]
- 
- *Delicate, delicate, delicate, delicate*  
[“The Base Stealer”, Francis, line 10]

### INSIGHTS ON CRAFT

All the examples of repetition above come from the same poem. However, they are working in that poem to create a sense of urgency. In this case, the persona’s voice speaks urgently, almost pleadingly, to the subject of the poem. Repetition can also work like an echo or a reminder in the way memories return to us over and over. Careful not to overuse this one. Repetition isn’t subtle, so you want to be careful not to overpower other well-crafted portions of your poem with repetition.