

Poet Laureate Kimberly Blaeser

Grades 8-12

Time Needed: 2 class periods

This is a flexible exercise which can be easily tailored to student challenge levels. It is designed to improve writing skills, listening skills, and critical thinking at all levels.

Objectives:

- Students will take a short time, in a safe place where others are conversing, to listen and transcribe the language they hear as accurately as possible.
- Students will then attempt to compose a short poem based on the language they've recorded.
- Students will explore, discuss, and understand how poets use colloquial language in their writing.
- Students will use critical thinking to engage with Blaeser's work and the world around them.

Watch the Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dd1CfEt0Znw&feature=youtu.be>

Read Kim Blaeser's full poem:

<http://levurelitteraire.com/kim-blaeser/>

For Students:

“Poetry is an act of attention. It asks us to look again, look more closely at things in the world... And if we see and re-see a little deeper, I feel like that is something that can help us come to change.”

- Kim Blaeser

Kim Blaeser describes moments from her youth, listening and absorbing the stories of others. In this exercise, you will do the same thing. Often when we write— whether we're writing poems, essays for school, emails to teachers, or anything else— we write in a very careful, clear, precise way. However, when we speak to our friends, we likely use very different language.

Blaeser's poetry uses a mixture of typical written English, colloquial spoken English, and Ojibwe. Why do you think this is? What effect does this practice have on her poems?

For this assignment, you will take some time to sit down in a safe place where you can hear other people speaking. This could be a busy hallway, lunch with your friends, a visit with relatives, or any other place you can hear idle chatter happening. Do not use television, online videos, radio, or other media where people have pre-recorded their words— you want the most organic dialogue you can find, and that means listening to real people.

For ten to twenty minutes, listen to the words you hear, and write down as much as possible. Don't worry about making sense, capturing every single word, or sounding good! If you hear colloquial language, 'um's or 'uh's, or other types of communication you don't typically see written down, make sure you record that, too.

When you've finished, read over your results. What do you notice about what you've written?

Finally, using only the words you've recorded, try to compose a short poem, around four lines long. This might be very challenging, or it may be easy, depending on what you've recorded. Try your best to write the best poem you can, but don't worry if it comes out strange, silly, or even nonsensical! This part is just an exercise to challenge your writing skills, and give you a chance to play with language.

Questions for Class:

1. Did you notice a difference between the ways people speak and the ways people write? What did you hear that an author would change, if it was part of a book?
2. What did you hear which surprised you?
3. What was it like to try to turn this dialogue into poetry?
4. If your poem was published in a book, what would critics say about it?
5. What are the pros and cons of using this kind of writing in poetry, stories, or essays? What kinds of writing could be helped by organic spoken-style language, and what kinds of writing could be hurt by it?
6. Why do poets like Kim Blaeser use colloquial language in their writing?