



the
NEUSTADT PRIZES

In partnership with



**COLORADO
ACADEMY**

2017 NSK Prize for Children's Literature
Lesson plans to study the work of the
2017 NSK Laureate Marilyn Nelson



Developed by Tom Thorpe &
the Colorado Academy English Department
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A GUIDE TO

the Neustadt International Prize for Literature

The Neustadt Prize is the first international literary award of its scope to originate in the United States and is one of the very few international prizes for which poets, novelists, and playwrights are equally eligible.

THE PRIZE AT A GLANCE

FOUNDED IN 1969

Italian poet Giuseppe Ungaretti won the first Neustadt Prize (then called the Books International Prize for Literature) in 1970. The prize assumed its present name in 1978.

OU & WLT

The prize is based at the University of Oklahoma and is managed by the university's international literary magazine, *World Literature Today*.

Journalists often refer to the prize as the "American Nobel."

THE PRIZE

The prize consists of \$50,000, a replica of an eagle feather cast in silver and a certificate. A generous endowment from the Neustadt family ensures the award in perpetuity.

THE NUMBERS

NEUSTADT/NOBEL PRIZE CONVERGENCES

In the prize's 45-year history, 30 of its laureates, jurors or finalists have gone on to win a Nobel Prize.

Neustadt Laureate	Nobel Laureate	Nobel Finalist
Galileo Ferraris	Henrik Ibsen	Eliezer Sussman
Carl Gustav Jung	Jean-Marie Cocteau	William Faulkner
Ernest Hemingway	Joseph Conrad	Walter Dill Scott
William Faulkner	Joseph Conrad	Walter Dill Scott
Ernest Hemingway	Joseph Conrad	Walter Dill Scott

NEUSTADT LAUREATES SINCE 1970

Since 1970, 37% of the Neustadt laureates have been poets, 35% have been novelists, and 4% have been playwrights.

GLOBAL COVERAGE

Europe (29%), Asia (19%), North America (17%), Africa (13%), Latin America & Caribbean (2%), Oceania (0%), Asia (1%).

THE NEUSTADT AS A NOBEL PREDICTOR

Aside from José Saramago, each of the 30 Neustadt laureates, jurors, and finalists received their Nobel recognition before going on to win the Nobel.

NEUSTADT PRIZE LAUREATES SINCE 1969

Roberto Bolaño	Don DeLillo	Peter Dinklage	Charles Johnson	Adam Johnson	Aravind Adiga
David Almond	Neil Gaiman	Neil Gaiman	Neil Gaiman	Neil Gaiman	Neil Gaiman
Neil Gaiman	Neil Gaiman	Neil Gaiman	Neil Gaiman	Neil Gaiman	Neil Gaiman
Neil Gaiman	Neil Gaiman	Neil Gaiman	Neil Gaiman	Neil Gaiman	Neil Gaiman

A FINAL DOSE OF INTERESTING FACTS

DIVERSITY FROM THE BEGINNING

By only the third awarding of the Neustadt Prize in 1974, the juries of the prize had already totaled 94 jurors from 25 different countries. Their nominated finalists wrote in 15 different languages!

"It is a prize in the mythical Oklahoma of Justice's dream and has been awarded to the author from a remote and mysterious country in Latin America nominated by a great writer from the United States. There is a certain affinity in the work of the books. Although the award is international, the prize for Literature is the one great international prize for highly deserving writers who are not yet well known."

— Gabriel García Márquez, 1972

TRANSPARENCY AND INTEGRITY

There's nothing veiled about the Neustadt Prize. The identities of both the jury and the finalists are made public before the announcement of the prize at the "Neustadt Festival," which is traditionally held in September or October.

MANY NEUSTADT-ASSOCIATED AUTHORS HAVE GONE ON TO RECEIVE THE NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE, BUT 1984 NEUSTADT JUROR ELE VIKIENIS IS THE ONLY ONE TO WIN THE NOBEL PRIZE PRIZE. AUTHOR OF NOVELS AND ESSAYS, HIS HUMANITARIAN GOAL WAS FOR THE WORLD TO REMEMBER AND LEARN FROM THE HIDEOUSNESS OF WHICH HE WAS A SURVIVOR.

TO DATE, ONLY FOUR COUNTRIES (CANADA, COLOMBIA, INDIA, AND POLAND) HAVE BEEN REPRESENTED BY MORE THAN ONE NEUSTADT LAUREATE.

www.neustadtprize.org

About the NSK Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature:

Since 2003, the NSK Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature has fulfilled its mission to enhance the quality of children's literature by promoting writing that contributes to the quality of their lives. The NSK Prize is a biennial award made possible through the generosity of Nancy Barcelo (N), Susan Neustadt Schwartz (S), and Kathy Neustadt (K) and sponsored by the University of Oklahoma and *World Literature Today*. Candidates for the award are nominated by a jury of children's literature writers, illustrators, or scholars, and the jury also selects the winner of each biennial prize. Laureates receive a cash award, a silver medallion, and a certificate at a public ceremony at the University of Oklahoma and are featured in a subsequent issue of *World Literature Today*. To date, winners of the NSK Prize have included Mildred D. Taylor (2003), Brian Doyle (2005), Katherine Paterson (2007), Vera B. Williams (2009), Virginia Euwer Wolff (2011), Naomi Shihab Nye (2013), and Meshack Asare (2015).

The Neustadt/NSK Scholar Program at Colorado Academy:

Colorado Academy hosts an annual writing competition for Upper School students, whereby winners are selected through a process of positive elimination, modeled after the Jury deliberation process for the Neustadt prizes. Members of the English and history Departments at CA collaborate to select two to four CA Neustadt Scholars based on submissions modeled on and/or connected to the work of the Neustadt/NSK laureate for that year. The CA Neustadt Scholars attend the Neustadt/NSK Festival at the University of Oklahoma, their work is published in various journals by Colorado Academy and *World Literature Today*, and they participate in workshops with the winning authors and/or jurors.

Background information on the 2017 NSK Neustadt Prize laureate, Marilyn Nelson:



Poet Nathan L. Brown, the former Oklahoma Poet Laureate, claims that “If a poem does its *job*, you will want to read it over and over again.” Marilyn Nelson’s material does this, and readers will find any of her poems hard to read just once. Her poetry captures so much of what it means to experience life and be engaged in the world around us. From the pain of a young black girl “not from the South” learning about Emmett Till to the clumsiness that all young people experience in learning more about their identity, Nelson uses humor and honesty to hold the reader enrapt.

Since she was a child, Marilyn Nelson has fled “... into the arms of poetry”, and her poetry takes the reader into those moments. In the representative text cited for the NSK Award, *how i discovered poetry* (Speak 2014), Marilyn wrote her way through the memories of transfer after transfer that her family experienced (note: her father was in the last class of the Tuskegee Airmen); she writes poems that show how Marilyn came to understand young love, Jim Crow laws, and the humanity that she encountered and observed as “time streak[ed] past”. In *how i discovered poetry* Marilyn channels the innocent voice of “young” Marilyn asking the questions that only children can:

“These are our people./I ask myself who is not my people.”

“A me with another name?/How different could I be, and still be me?”

From teaching a classmate a lesson on the playground for saying “that name she learned... down South” to cloaking her emotions in fresh comparisons and beautiful word choice, Marilyn forces the reader to identify what we all have in common and what connects us to one another.

“Marilyn Nelson is an important author who has used her works to advocate for race relations and women’s empowerment,” stated Robert Con Davis-Undiano, *World Literature Today*’s executive director, who oversees the prize. “Her engaging, lyrical style builds awareness around sensitive issues through human, and even humorous, storytelling that both children and adults can relate to.” If poetry, as Robert Frost claimed, is “... when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found its words,” readers of Marilyn Nelson’s work must be prepared to access the full gamut of emotion.

As a poet, children’s book author and translator, Ohio-born Nelson is a powerful American literary voice. Marilyn Nelson is a professor emerita from The University of Connecticut, has written or translated more than a dozen works, and she has been recognized with the Newbery Honor, the Robert Frost Medal, the Coretta Scott King Honor, the Pushcart Prize and more. Other notable honors have included serving as the poet laureate of the State of Connecticut, fellowships with the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Poetry Society of America’s distinguished Frost Medal. She is also a three-time finalist for the National Book Award.

A note about this guide

- The lesson plans in this guide celebrate the work of Marilyn Nelson by having students analyze first then write their own poetry.
- Students are guided through a technical process of understanding form and function in an effort to help them enjoy *reading* poems and to put them on the path towards *writing* poems.
- One simple assumption is made about poetry that is core to this guide: poems express big and complex ideas in simple, beautiful language.
- These lessons are teacher friendly and organized to include the following:
 - An introduction to a “technical” aspect about poetry
 - One, or more, of Marilyn Nelson’s poems are included and are to be used as a model; there are discussion points/topics for each
 - Students are guided through a brainstorming or idea-generating exercise
 - The end goal for each is to inspire students write, edit/revise and publish their pieces

All Lessons are aligned to meet the following Common Core Standards

Anchor Standards for Reading (RL.9-10, RL.11-12)

- Key Ideas and Details: 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. 3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
- Craft and Structure: 4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. 5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole. 6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: 7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. 9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
- Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity: 10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Anchor Standards for Language (L.9-10, L.11-12)

- Knowledge of Language: 3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
- Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: 4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate. 5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Lesson #1 - Identity Portraits/vignettes

To write this series of poems (3 in total), the writer needs to think back to his/her childhood and recall small, subtle moments that were impactful in terms of his/her identity. The farther away the memory is, the better the writer *may* know the event. For Marilyn Nelson, many of her memories were framed by her family's move from base to base along with the consistent theme of race. To that point, Nelson's language and ideas forces the reader to grapple with the fact that a person's race can mean something different to the people around her than it meant to her. Read and discuss the following poems.

Poems from *how i discovered poetry* (Speak 2014)
by Marilyn Nelson

“Bad Name”

(Smoky Hill AFB, Kansas, 1954)

The dishes washed and dried, my homework done,
and *Amos 'n' Andy* still an hour away,
I kneel with crayons at the coffee table,
drawing and coloring. Round head, round eyes,
half circle eyebrows, and half-circle mouths.

Segregation means people are kept apart
and *integration* means they're together.

TV is black-and-white, but people aren't.

There's a bad name mean people might call you,
but words aren't sticks and stones. At school today,
James told Mrs. Liebel he didn't say
that name at me. He said he said, “Don't be
a *noogie-hitter*.” That's when you just poke
the tetherball instead of punching it.

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Discussion points/topics:

- The first 5 lines are about what?
- The word “*Segregation*” shifts the tone of the poem from what to what?
- What does she mean by “TV is black-and-white, but people aren't”?
- Why do you think she “knew” just to “poke” and not “hit” the tetherball?

“Making History”

(Smoky Hill AFB, Kansas, 1955)

Somebody took a picture of a class
standing in line to get polio shots
and published it in the *Weekly Reader*.
We stood like that today. And it did hurt.

Mrs. Liebel said we were Making History,
but all I did was sqwunch up my eye and wince.
Making History takes more than standing in line
believing little white girl lies about pain.
Mama says First Negroes are History:
First Negro Telephone Operator,
First Negro Opera Singer at the Met,
First Negro Pilots, First Supreme Court Judge.
That lady in Montgomery just became a First
by sqwunching up her eyes and sitting there.
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Discussion points/topics:

- That lady from Montgomery is Rosa Parks.
- Students may choose to learn more about the Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, TN. Rosa Parks and many other Civil Rights leaders trained at this “incubator” to plan for the Montgomery bus boycott.
- Rosa Park’s response to James Blake, the bus driver who told her to exit the bus, when he threatened to call the police to have her removed was, “You *may* do that.” The word *may* gives permission and was an intentional word choice by Ms. Parks. At the Highlander Center, Rosa and other Civil Rights leaders were trained in the language of protest and non-violent, civil disobedience. This is an example of how she used that training.

“Your Own”

(Mather AFB, California, 1957)

Our new house, Officer’s Quarters 42,
connects to other quarters and mowed yards
connecting to wheat fields and wilderness
waiting to be explored by kids and dogs.
Sometimes we don’t come in until we’re called
by someone’s mom. The say *Mom*, not *Mama*.
Hazel, Charlotte, Jeannie, Tommy, and Charles:
as soon as we hear the School’s Over bell
we flock together like migrating birds,
catching grasshoppers, gathering bouquets,
or just plain running into breathlessness.
I don’t know why Mama looked sad tonight
while I was washing up, or why she said,
“Be careful: Don’t like them more than your own.”
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- Why is Mama sad? and what is her warning?

- In a recent interview on National Public Radio, singer songwriter Aimee Mann states, “I think it is hard to be a person... it's hard to have perspective on your own problems, it's hard to break out of the habits and dynamics of your childhood. ... And people aren't really naturally born with the skills to negotiate it. So I have a lot of compassion for people. Everyone's struggling in some way.” How does this quote fit with what made *Mama* “sad”? Is her sadness a result of having compassion for others or the struggle to which Mann refers? Be specific, make connections to specific lines of the quote and the poem.

Identity portrait assignment: write a series of three (3) poems from memories that contribute to your identity -

Techniques/characteristics for these poems include and are not limited to:

- Lists, specifically fresh lists of interesting details
- Varied structure, sentence fragment can work!
- Figurative Language - metaphor, simile, personification
- Hyperbole - “hundred balloons of happiness”
- Sentences that begin with strong verbs: waiting, collecting, drawing
- Paradoxes - “They say Mom, not Mama.”
- Phrases - First Negroes, Making History, Your Own
- Repetition
- Dialogue without punctuation
- Sound devices like alliteration or end rhyme - “connects to.../ connecting to...”
- Collective nouns: somebody, someone
- Other languages
- a strong title taken from the poem
- Strong last lines

You will write a first draft of the three portraits and then peer edit with a classmate. On the “rough draft day” a peer will annotate your draft and you will do the same for another student. You will then write a second and final draft of each portrait using the feedback you received; plan to read one aloud, but hand in all three (with the brainstorming and rough draft of each!).

Important items to remember:

1. Write three (3) different portraits of three (3) different memories that you believe contribute to your identity.
2. Follow the length of the models, approximately 14-15 lines.
3. Choose a memory you know well and that is distant enough for you to have reflected on it
4. *Style* (see the list of techniques) is BIG in this assignment; as always avoid sentimentality and clichés, include fresh comparisons.
5. Experiment with the devices listed above and include lots of sensory detail.

Lesson #2 - Ballads & “A Wreath for Emmett Till” by Marilyn Nelson

A ballad is a form of poetry that alternates lines of usually four and three beats, often in quatrains rhymed ABAB, and tell a story. Characteristics of ballads:

1. Begin *in medias res*, in the middle of things: starts in the middle of time and can go to the past or the future.
2. Tells a narrative or story, ballads as poetry of the common people
3. Reflect the oral tradition and stories passed from generation to generation
4. Stanzas and verses that [typically] follow a pattern or rhyme scheme: ABAB or ABCB, not free verse, commonly in 4-line stanzas, or quatrains.
5. Often [not always] use repetition of words and phrases and contain a refrain or chorus
6. Employ dialect/colloquial language reflecting the function of poetry of the common people.
7. Include characters or images of humans as stereotypes, archetypes, two-dimensional, or not well-rounded characters (e.g. - lovers, soldiers, knights, ladies, villains)
8. often something sad/bad happens (tragedy) with an objective or neutral tone, and may include supernatural elements

Directions:

1. read aloud the following excerpt from *A Wreath for Emmett Till* by Marilyn Nelson:

A Wreath for Emmett Till Sonnet # IV
Emmett Till's name still catches in my throat,
like syllables waylaid in a stutterer's mouth.
A fourteen-year-old stutterer, in the South
to visit relatives and to be taught
the family's ways. His mother had finally bought
that White Sox cap; she'd made him swear an oath
to be careful around white folks. She'd told him the truth
of many a Mississippi anecdote:
Some white folks have blind souls. In his suitcase
she'd packed dungarees, T-shirts, underwear,
and comic books. She'd given him a note
for the conductor, waved to his chubby face,
wondered if he'd remember to brush his hair.
Her only child. A body left to bloat.
© 2005 Houghton Mifflin Company

2. Background on the book - A wreath of sonnets is a sequence of sonnets (usually 15) interlinked by beginning a new sonnet with the last line of the preceding sonnet. Marilyn Nelson wrote a wreath (or crown) of sonnets to help young readers understand and grapple with:
 1. the murder of Emmett Till

2. Mamie Till Mobley's choice to have an open casket and publish the horrific images of her son's corpse, and
 3. the atrocities of lynching and the role they played in our nation's history.
3. Students may want to research or need to be provided with background information about the Emmett Till. Some possible key topics: Was Emmett Till's death necessary? what do you think about Mamie's choice to show the photo? Was this an event that change the course of history? What do we do with events that change the course of history? What role did the media play in making Emmett Till's death a decisive event?
 4. Have students listen to other examples of ballads [in music]; they should read the lyrics while listening:
 - Bob Dylan's "The Death of Emmett Till" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-0vClQa1Hw>)
 - Bruce Springsteen's "Wreck on the Highway" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YSr1ZT0PkE>)
 - Johnny Cash's "Streets of Laredo" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_dptdG-Zfuo)
 5. Return to the characteristics of a ballad and prepare students to begin writing. Go over the characteristics, make connections to what they just heard in the example [that are music not prose]. Make sure they understand the basic ideas of what makes a poem a ballad: in media res, story of the common people, rhyme scheme, quatrains, etc.
 6. Students choose from one of the following quotes as prompts for their ballad.
 - "Some white folks have blind souls..." (Marilyn Nelson from *A Wreath for Emmett Till*)
 - "Bye-bye baby" (what Emmett Till was accused of saying to the white women)
 - Whistling (what Emmett Till was accused of doing to the white women)
 - "Know your surroundings..." (what Emmett Till's mother wished she would have instilled in Emmett to keep him safe while in the South...)
 7. After students write a draft of their ballad, switch with a peer who gives them feedback about the images, ideas, and fresh comparisons in their ballad. Then get feedback about what characteristics of a ballad it meets. Students take feedback, edit and revise.
 8. Students read their pieces aloud in class. Classmates respond with reactions to the images, ideas, and fresh comparisons.

Additional resources: http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/readers_guides/nelson_wreath.shtml

Lesson #3 - A poem about a process/“how to do” or “how not to do” something...

In this assignment, write a brief poem (14-ish lines) in which a process is revealed that tells the audience how to do – or how *not* to do – something that is considered important and worthwhile, or frivolous and fun! Use “Darkroom” by Marilyn Nelson as an example. In this poem Marilyn uses details (“frothy crinoline”, “curling iron curls”) to create imagery in a poem where photos are developed (“watching magic happen”) about photos that “...Mama will put in the photo album.”

Poem from *how i discovered poetry* (Speak 2014)
by Marilyn Nelson

“Darkroom”
(Mather AFB, California, 1957)
Tonight with Daddy in the dark bathroom,
I held my breath, watching science magic.
From white paper bathed in developer,
Jennifer and I on the piano bench
in a cloud of crisp, frothy crinolines
and other Easter finery emerged:
our hands in white gloves folded in our laps,
our patent Mary Janes and crossed anklets,
our temporary curling-iron curls.
After the stop bath and fixer, we hang
with clothespins on a line over the tub,
living colors reduced to black-and-white,
a lived moment captured in memory
Mama will put in the photo album.

Writing your own process/how to poem:

Identify the **tone** - In this poem, have some fun telling the reader how to survive a family holiday meal with the strange cousins, how not to embarrass yourself during middle school (is that possible?), how to be the “teachers pet” or how not to be “the company man/woman”. Or, you can be more serious and personal and describe the process of dealing with difficulties like sadness, tragedy, heartbreak, or loss. The key is NOT merely to give directions to a mechanical process (like buying new shoes or sharpening knives).

The **elements** are important to make this poem clear, and so is some sort of (1) overarching theme; and (2) deliberate structure, format, or stanzas. It never hurts to take creative or intellectual risks, but make sure your final piece fits your audience. In writing this poem, you will need to keep in mind the following:

- **purpose:** what do you hope to accomplish with this piece? Do you want to instruct, to explain how something is done, to criticize or condemn, to help the reader accomplish a task, to satisfy the reader’s curiosity, to amuse or entertain, to tell a story, or . . .? Determine your **purpose** before you begin writing, and then, while writing, make sure that your content, style, and tone suit your purpose effectively. Be consistent.
- **organization:** have you **organized** your ideas effectively? Is the chronology of your piece easy to follow? Have you used transitions to help your writing flow smoothly and to make clear your movement from one idea or step to another?
- **topic:** have you chosen a topic that is interesting? common enough to be intriguing? Have you avoided a technical or mechanical process and focused instead on some kind of process important, amusing, or compelling to you and your reader?
- **content:** have you included salient detail and vivid imagery to make your piece interesting to read? Have you included all steps in your process? Do you have a strong lead and even stronger ending?
- **voice:** if you are writing a humorous piece, have you taken on the persona of someone else— usually someone a bit clueless? Have you gotten loud enough and used enough exaggeration? If you are writing a more serious piece, does your voice coincide with the seriousness of your topic?

Steps to complete this poem:

1. choose a topic
2. brainstorm or free write about your topic
3. choose “big” and powerful images
4. begin to compose your poem
5. share with a peer or an “editor” for feedback
6. edit, revise, and publish (share with the class)

Lesson #1 - Identity Portraits/vignettes

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by Marilyn Nelson

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There's a bad name mean people might call you,
but words aren't sticks and stones. At school today,

James told Mrs. Liebel he didn't say
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Discussion points/topics:

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and published it in the *Weekly Reader*.

We stood like that today. And it did hurt.

Mrs. Liebel said we were Making History,
but all I did was sqwunch up my eye and wince.

Making History takes more than standing in line
believing little white girl lies about pain.

Mama says First Negroes are History:

First Negro Telephone Operator,

First Negro Opera Singer at the Met,

First Negro Pilots, First Supreme Court Judge.

That lady in Montgomery just became a First
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Discussion points/topics:

- That lady from Montgomery is Rosa Parks.
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“Your Own”

(Mather AFB, California, 1957)

Our new house, Officer’s Quarters 42,
connects to other quarters and mowed yards
connecting to wheat fields and wilderness
waiting to be explored by kids and dogs.

Sometimes we don’t come in until we’re called
by someone’s mom. The say *Mom*, not *Mama*.

Hazel, Charlotte, Jeannie, Tommy, and Charles:
as soon as we hear the School’s Over bell
we flock together like migrating birds,
catching grasshoppers, gathering bouquets,
or just plain running into breathlessness.

I don’t know why Mama looked sad tonight
while I was washing up, or why she said,

“Be careful: Don’t like them more than your own.”

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Lesson #2 - Ballads & “A Wreath For Emmett Till” by Marilyn Nelson

A Wreath for Emmett Till (Houghton Mifflin Company 2005)
by Marilyn Nelson

Sonnet # IV

Emmett Till's name still catches in my throat,
like syllables waylaid in a stutterer's mouth.
A fourteen-year-old stutterer, in the South
to visit relatives and to be taught
the family's ways. His mother had finally bought
that White Sox cap; she'd made him swear an oath
to be careful around white folks. She'd told him the truth
of many a Mississippi anecdote:
Some white folks have blind souls. In his suitcase
she'd packed dungarees, T-shirts, underwear,
and comic books. She'd given him a note
for the conductor, waved to his chubby face,
wondered if he'd remember to brush his hair.
Her only child. A body left to bloat.

Lesson #3 - A poem about a process/“how to do” or “how not to do” something...

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Tonight with Daddy in the dark bathroom,
I held my breath, watching science magic.
From white paper bathed in developer,
Jennifer and I on the piano bench
in a cloud of crisp, frothy crinolines
and other Easter finery emerged:
our hands in white gloves folded in our laps,
our patent Mary Janes and crossed anklets,
our temporary curling-iron curls.
After the stop bath and fixer, we hang
with clothespins on a line over the tub,
living colors reduced to black-and-white,
a lived moment captured in memory
Mama will put in the photo album.

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