

COLLEGE GUILD
PO Box 6448, Brunswick ME 04011

POETRY CLUB-2, UNIT 1
WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

William Carlos Williams, 1883 – 1963, was a Puerto Rican-American poet, one of the early imagists. His work was clearly focused on creating an image, a picture, a scene in all its details. He closely observed. His poems have been called meditative. Some have said Williams thought such detailed perception was necessary for a fuller understand of one's experience. Williams is known as an experimenter, and innovator. (In the assignments below you will have a chance to be an innovator, too.)

The Red Wheelbarrow is one of his most frequently published poems. Williams didn't title this poem. Instead he designated it as XXII, the 22nd poem in the book *Spring and All*. Notice his lack of capitalized letters, and that the poem is just one sentence, and the only punctuation mark is at the end.

XXII

so much depends

upon

a red wheel

barrow

glazed with rain

water

beside the white

chickens.

1. Do you agree with Williams' view of perception as being necessary to life, and that a poem can lead to a fuller understating of one's experience? Explain.
2. Do you think titling the poem "The Red Wheelbarrow" would have been more effective than just numbering it? Why or why not?
3. Why is his lack of capitalization important to the poem, (or is it)?
4. Write a poem, using details to capture an image.

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.

5. Explain whether you think this could be a love poem?
6. How do the line breaks contribute to the impact of this poem?
7. Write a poem about a fruit, an animal, something out in nature, and use line breaks like Williams has.
8. How did it feel to write a poem that way?

THE GREAT FIGURE

Among the rain
 and lights
 I saw the figure 5
 in gold
 on a red
 fire truck
 moving
 tense
 unheeded
 to gongs clangs
 sirens' howls
 and wheels rumbling
 through the dark city

9. How has Williams done an effective job picturing the fire engine going through the dark city? Select particular lines or images that appealed to you.

10. What do you think Williams wanted to accomplish by writing this poem?

11. Write a poem centered on a number, can be any number, any place – a phone number, a street number, an age, a date on the calendar. Try to capture it in concrete details so the reader can really be present with you.

What follows is the last verse in a longer poem Williams wrote:

There is a bird in the poplars –
 It is the sun!
 The leaves are like little yellow fish

Swimming in the river,
 The bird skims above them –
 Day is on his wings.
 Phoenix!
 It is he that is making
 The great gleam among the poplars
 It is his singing
 Outshines the noise
 Of Leaves Clashing the wind

12. How effective is Williams’ metaphor using the bird for the sun? Point out lines in which he uses this extended metaphor.

13. The phoenix is a bird that rises from its own ashes. Why is that word appropriate in the poem?

14. Write a poem using an extended metaphor. To get started make a list of nouns and then another list of nouns of what each noun is like, for example Williams’ “a sun is like a bird”. Or “my love is like a red, red rose”. You can chose a car, a house, the moon, and the stars, whatever you like. Then write a poem building on one of these metaphors. This might be hard, but you can do it! The more you write like this, the more you will want to do it!

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes