

Women Poets Recovering Pasts, Imagining Futures

Susan Van Dyne

The 1970s and 80s are remembered in part for the political activism of the women's movement. How did women poets imagine a future in which women were not defined by traditional gender expectations? How might poetry reveal new insights on the past, alternative histories and future possibilities ?

We'll read 4 women poets from this period --Adrienne Rich, Elizabeth Bishop, Audre Lorde, and Sharon Olds -- who each examine the shaping forces of family, sexuality and culture on women's lives. What can we see now that might enrich our reading of them after several decades? What tools do these poets give us to recover and revise memory in our own lives?

What do we learn about ourselves as we engage with this work that is both intimate and public?

Our class meets in person for 4 weeks on Tuesdays from 1-3pm, beginning 2/18, 2/25, 3/4, and ending 3/11

These are some of my goals for our course:

- to increase your pleasure and confidence in reading and talking about poetry.
- to understand poetry as a series of choices of language and images that give shape and meaning to lived experience.
- to appreciate how poetry does "cultural work" to change our understanding of the past and to enable us to imagine new futures.

Format:

Each week we'll focus on one poet (and 6-8 poems) through informal lectures and class discussion.

Reading a handful of poems with curiosity and careful attention to details are essential advance preparation for our classes.

Read each poem aloud at least twice before class (where we'll also read aloud). As Ada Limon says, "it's as important to have a poem in your mouth as in your brain."

Making notes for yourself and thinking through our weekly discussion questions before we meet will make our conversations livelier and more useful to all of us.

Week 1: February 18 Adrienne Rich

Selections from The Dream of a Common Language, Poems 1974-77

Power	3
Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev	4
Twenty-One Love Poems	25-36
A Woman Dead in her Forties	53

Week 2: February 25 Elizabeth Bishop

Selections from Geography III, 1976

In the Waiting Room	3
Crusoe in England	9
The Moose	22
Poem	36
One Art	40

Week 3: March 4 Audre Lorde

Selections from The Black Unicorn 1978

The Black Unicorn	3
From the House of Yemanja	6
The Women of Dan. . .	4
Harriet	21
Walking Our Boundaries	38
Outside	61
A Woman/ Dirge for Wasted Children	66
Recreation	81

Week 4: March 11 Sharon Olds

Selections from The Dead and the Living 1983

The Guild	17
The Eye	19
Possessed	33
Burn Center	37
The Moment	42
Late Speech with My Brother	47
The Elder Sister	58
Six-Year-Old Boy	62
Eggs	63
Pajamas	71