

A Sense of Nature

In a world that bombards you with electronic images and information, nature brings you back to your senses—sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste.

Wherever you live, nature is there: in the sight of geese flying south against a winter sunset; the sound of your heartbeat; the scent of orange blossoms at a city park; the crunch and tartness of an apple; the rough bark of an oak tree that you pass on your way to school.

In every age and culture, poets have captured the ordinary wonder of the natural world, using the power of imagery. You can tap into this power, too. Just fire up your senses and pay extra attention to familiar places.

- **Hearing** Use your hearing to scan your surroundings. Even in a city filled with traffic noise, you can hear the sound of nature in the

patter of rain and the whistling of the wind.

- **Sight** What plants, animals, landforms, and weather are part of your everyday world? Even if you swear you can't draw, sketch images that catch your eye. The simple act of drawing will reveal details you never noticed before.

- **Touch and Smell** Did you ever notice the scent of a freshly mowed lawn, run your fingers under a cooling stream, or realize that a skunk must have visited your backyard during the night? The contrasting textures and subtle (or not so subtle!) scents of the natural world are everywhere.

Some people become so fascinated by nature that they write about it, photograph it, paint it, or spend their lives studying it. The next time nature signals for attention, how will *you* respond?

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- 🔗 View a video interview with poet and author Pat Mora.
- 🔗 Listen to tips on how to read poetry aloud.



Poems for the Earth



Comprehension Coach



MI MADRE

by Pat Mora

I say feed me.

She serves red prickly pear on a spiked cactus.

I say tease me.

She sprinkles raindrops in my face.

5 I say frighten me.

She shouts thunder, flashes lightning.

I say comfort me.

She invites me to lay on her firm body. **1**

I say heal me.

10 She gives me *manzanilla*, *orégano*, *dormilón*.

I say caress me.

She strokes my skin with her warm breath.

I say make me beautiful.

She offers turquoise for my fingers, a pink blossom for my hair.

15 I say sing to me.

She chants lonely women's songs. **2**

I say teach me.

She endures: glaring heat

numbing cold

20 frightening dryness.

She: the desert

She: strong mother.

1 Word Choice

How does the poet's use of repetition and rhythm affect the sound of the poem?

2 Form Sensory Images

Which words appeal to your senses? What do these words help you see and feel?

Key Vocabulary

endure v., to survive

In Other Words

Mi Madre My Mother (in Spanish)
manzanilla, orégano, dormilón an herb for soothing, an herb for cooking, and an herb for sleeping (in Spanish)

Orange Light on the Four Peaks, 2003, Stephen Morath. Acrylic on canvas, collection of the artist.



- 3 Representations: Poetry and Art** In addition to the cactus, what details from the poem do you sense in the painting? How does the impact of the painting differ from the impact of the poem?



About the Poet

Pat Mora (1942–) is an influential writer of both children's and adult literature who is committed to linking languages and cultures. A native of El Paso, Texas, Mora's writing often focuses on the theme of feeling alienated by living near borders. She is also an educator and the founder of Children's Day/Book Day, an annual family reading event.

HARD QUESTIONS

by Margaret Tsuda



Why not mark out the land
into neat rectangles
squares and clover leaves?

Put on them cubes of
varying sizes
according to use—
dwellings

singles/multiples
complexes

commercial/industrial.

Bale them together with
bands of roads.

What if a child shall cry
“I have never known spring!
I have never seen autumn!”

What if a man shall say
“I have never heard
silence fraught with living as
in swamp or forest!”

What if the eye shall never see
marsh birds and muskrats?

Does not the heart need
wildness?

Does not the thought need
something
to rest upon
not self-made by man,
a bosom

not his own?

4 Form Sensory Images

Note the difference between the images in the second and fourth stanzas. How do these images deepen your understanding of the poem?

5 Structure

What form is this poem written in?

Key Vocabulary

commercial *adj.*, having to do with buying and selling goods and services

industrial *adj.*, having to do with manufacturing

In Other Words

dwellings houses

complexes groups of buildings

Bale Tie

fraught filled

bosom place of comfort and security

Down Eighteenth Street, 1980, Wayne Thiebaud. Oil and charcoal on canvas, gift of Edward R. Downe, Jr., 1979, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.



**6 Representations:
Poetry and Art**
Examine the shapes in this painting. Which objects are made with lines and angles? Which are made with curves? How do the images in the visual medium of this painting compare to the images in the verbal medium of the poem?



About the Poet

The poetry of **Margaret Tsuda (1921–)** is only part of her lifelong interest in the arts. She studied art and art history in college and also worked as a textile designer. An accomplished painter living in New York, Tsuda provided her own illustrations for her two poetry collections, *Urban River* and *Cry Love Aloud*.

There Will Come Soft Rains

by Sara Teasdale



There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

And frogs in the pools singing at night,
And wild plum trees in tremulous white;

5 Robins will wear their feathery fire
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire; 7

And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.

Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree
10 If mankind perished utterly; 8

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn,
Would scarcely know that we were gone.

7 Form Sensory Images

Identify words and phrases in the previous three stanzas that appeal to the five senses. What feelings do these images evoke?

8 Tone

How do stanzas 4 and 5 differ from stanzas 1–3 in terms of the speaker's tone, or feeling?

Key Vocabulary

tremulous *adj.*, timid, fearful
perish *v.*, to die

In Other Words

whims wishes, desires
utterly completely
scarcely hardly, barely

Forest, 2004, Yvette Molina. Oil on aluminum, courtesy of Ruth Bachofner Gallery, Santa Monica, California.



**9 Representations:
Poetry and Art**

What aspect of the poem does this painting emphasize? How does the impact of this painting compare to the impact of the poem?



About the Poet

Sara Teasdale (1884–1933) was born in St. Louis, Missouri, and moved to New York City in the early 1900s. Her work is known for its traditional verse forms and strong focus on language and emotion.

Fire and Ice

by Robert Frost



Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice. **10**

From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.

5 But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice. **11**

Snow Storm, Maurice de Vlaminck (1876–1958). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon, France.



10 Form Sensory Images

How does visualizing the world ending in fire or ice add to your understanding of this poem?

11 Rhyme Scheme

What is the effect of the rhyme scheme and rhythm? How well do you think both elements go along with the poem's message?

12 Representations: Poetry and Art

Describe this painting by using words from the poem.

Key Vocabulary

suffice v., to satisfy



About the Poet

Robert Frost (1874–1963) is one of the most widely read and celebrated poets in American history. Much of his inspiration came from his love of country life in New England. He won four Pulitzer Prizes and read one of his poems at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy. He believed a poem “begins in delight and ends in wisdom.”

ANALYZE Poems for the Earth

1. **Explain** How does each speaker view the relationship between humans and nature? Be sure to cite examples from the poems.
2. **Vocabulary** Why do you think the speaker in “There Will Come Soft Rains” feels that nature would not care if humans **perished**? Which poem suggests that nature would care? Explain.
3. **Compare Representations: Poetry and Art** Which of the four images best suits the poem it accompanies? Explain your opinion to a partner.
4. **Focus Strategy Form Sensory Images** Describe a sensory image that stays in your mind after reading the four poems. Refer to specific words and phrases in the poem that help you form this image.

[Return to the Text](#)

Reread and Write According to the four speakers, what deserves our care and respect? Write a paragraph in which you summarize each speaker’s answer to the question.