

Seattle City Council

Public Safety, Civil Rights, and Arts Committee Meeting
Tuesday, 2 P.M., August 16th, 2005

Words' Worth

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Anna Maria Hong**

Today's poet is **Claire Gearen**

Claire Gearen teaches, writes, and paddles canoes around Lake Union. With students from Kenya, Sudan, Taiwan and Burma as well as Laurelhurst and Beacon Hill, she enjoys traveling the world in the classrooms of Seattle Public Schools.

A Toast

by Claire Gearen

Power to the People Propelled Boats!—
A lazy day by the canal will show
What little effort a sunset night out
Takes in a one-hundred-plus engine's glow.

Loud motors chug by, their hum precursor
To the Mt. Fuji wake that will intrude on
Your quiet as you think of Po, Basho, or
That more obscure observer of nature, Buson.

Yet watch the rowboat calmly glide along;
There you will recall the feeling and words
To that Basho poem about the frog pond,
How Frog plopped in, and the sound echoed, heard.

Yes. Cheers to the people-powered dinghies!
And those in them! They hold oars, not martinis!

To Sophomores Reading Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself"

by Claire Gearen

He writes long lines. Yes. And they don't rhyme.
The poem is fifty pages long. That's true.
At one point, he calls the scent of B.O.--*Ew!*--

His own B.O.—finer than prayer. I'm
Aware of this. And I know about his
Strange capacity to love everyone:
Woman, child, men. In bathing, splashing fun
Twenty-eight hold his eyes a long time. Quiz:

Who else has given you permission
To be your whole self, Unhindered
By work, by school, by tradition, by din
Of people eager to reign you in the herd?

“Unscrew the locks from their doors. Unscrew
The doors themselves from their jambs,” He says, be you.

Sidewalk Games

by Claire Gearen

Black feather on concrete un-buries
Past play. Step on a crack; break your momma's
Back. My mom says to count to ten. One, two, three,
Four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Stinkfish!
Dandelion weed: pick it, choke it. Sing
Momma had a baby and its head popped
Off. After noon leave hopscotch for rope swing.
Skip to tunes that trade like new mint. Opt
To cash in all your store of words that rhyme
For all their store. Meet friends at the park. Then
Meet friends at the store. Neighborhood voices chime
To music child poets make. Though, children

Now have grown, and silent streets hold faint trace
Of sidewalk games gone by, and it slows the place.

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