



This in-class activity was developed in conjunction with Lightbox interviews with [Jamaal May](#) and [David Yezzi](#). For more information, please see www.lightboxpoetry.com.

The Mind's Ear

In his Lightbox interview, David Yezzi writes, “Performing poetry is really an act of generosity. The audience wants to hear you. They’ve gone out of their way, so it’s important to be heard. You only have one chance to get the poem across, so slow down. Speak loudly and clearly, breathe, articulate.” In this in-class activity, we’ll consider what strategies poets employ when they read poems out loud and get to practice sharing our own work.

Preparation

Each writer should bring a few copies of a poem they have written during the class.

Part I

Silently read three of the following poems on the page. As you read, think to yourself, “How would this sound if it were read out loud? What elements of how the poem appears on the page help inform your thinking? What assumptions are you making about patterns of speech that inform your thinking?” Share some of these initial thoughts as a class.

[Gwendolyn Brooks, “We Real Cool”](#)

[Elizabeth Bishop, “The Fish”](#)

[T.S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”](#)

[Jamaal May, “I Do Have a Seam” \(PDF\)](#)

[David Yezzi, “Mother Carey’s Hen”](#)

Part II

Now, as a class, listen to the verbal performances of these poems, which you can find here:

[Gwendolyn Brooks, “We Real Cool”](#)

[Elizabeth Bishop, “The Fish”](#)

[T.S. Eliot “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”](#)

[Jamaal May, “I Do Have a Seam”](#)

[David Yezzi, “Mother Carey’s Hen”](#)

Together, discuss: what surprised you when hearing these performances? Looking back at the text of the poem, what do you think might account for the choices the reader made that were different from what you expected? What, if anything, was changed in the poem when it was read



aloud? How would you evaluate the reader's performance? Do you think something more was expressed or communicated from when you read the poem itself?

Part III

Now, break up into pairs or small groups. Switch poems and take a few minutes to think about how you might read the poem you've received aloud. Read your partner's poem aloud, paying careful attention to how the form and structures on the page might prompt you to read it aloud in particular ways. Then share and discuss with your group about the choices you made as a performer of that poem. After each poem gets a reading by a performer who is not the poet, each writer can read his or her own poem out loud, employing strategies—emphases, pauses, varied tones—before reflecting, as a group, about how the poem sounded differently in its two performances.

Part IV (optional)

In class or at home, reflect on how the process of hearing the poem read aloud, and the process of carefully thinking about reciting the poem in public yourself, has offered some strategies for how you might revise the poem.