

PRESENTING THE POEM:

First Love

BY CARL LINDER

SETTING THE STAGE: At recess I watch you guys out front, playing four square or shooting hoops, and I know you've learned how to read every crack and ripple in that patch of asphalt. I think lots of guys have similar patches of asphalt. Carl Linder wrote a poem about his.

SOME FEATURES TO NOTICE:

- How the diction is specific to the sport—it's the language of basketball—and gives the poem its authority
- The strong verbs
- How the title, the last line, and the verbs combine to make this a love poem

RESPONSE STANCE: Please go back into "First Love" on your own and consider two questions: How does the title fit the poem? How does the title connect with the poem's conclusion? Write a few notes for yourself.

BENEDICTION: As people who exist in that timeframe known as *before sixteen*, you have your own first loves—each of you—that isn't a boy or a girl. Think about the poem you've yet to write about your own first source of excitement and self-confidence and comfort and love.

First Love

Before sixteen
I was fast
enough to fake
my shadow out
and I could read
every crack and ripple
in that patch of asphalt.
I owned
the slanted rim
knew
the dead spot in the backboard.
Always the ball
came back.

Every day I loved
to sharpen
my shooting eye,
waiting
for the touch.
Set shot, jump shot,
layup, hook—
after a while
I could feel
the ball hunger-
ing to clear
the lip of the rim,
the two of us
falling through.

—Carl Linder