

PRESENTING THE POEM:

Watermelon

BY NORA BRADFORD

1 **SETTING THE SCENE:** Nora, a seventh grader, took William Carlos Williams seriously. As a poet she looked for ideas in things. Here, she found one in the first watermelon feast of the season on her family’s back deck.

2 **SOME FEATURES TO NOTICE:**

- The specific, observed details that evoke a sensory response and create the mood of summer
- Strong, sensory nouns, adjectives, and adverbs
- Nora’s use of color words: *reddest*, *green*
- How she invents a form and sticks with it, apart from a purposeful shift in the last stanza

3 **RESPONSE STANCE:** Please go back into this sensory poem and mark the language you can *perceive*—words and phrases you can see, feel, taste. Would you also mark the diction—the choices of language—that you like and want to talk about?

4 **BENEDICTION:** Say it with me again: “The Red Wheelbarrow” . . .

For Nora, so much depends on a red slice of watermelon, its *green rind*, and a dog with *mighty jaws*. What does so much depend on for you, in your world of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell? Go home and look, listen, taste, feel, and sniff. Take notes on your perceptions. As poets, find where *your* acts of imagination are hiding.

Watermelon

I watch Mom cut five slices,
then take the largest and reddest.
When I sink my teeth into solid juice,
the melon squirts its fireworks.

I swallow a seed—
that’s one I won’t spit
into the bowl
beyond the deck railing.

When I finish the delightful redness
I throw the green rind to Hobo,
who waits his turn.
He grabs the crust in his mighty jaws

and runs away
with its sweetness.

—Nora Bradford

All 150 lessons follow an instructional pattern that reflects Nancie’s approach to teaching a poem a day.

1 **Setting the Scene** provides the concise context Nancie uses to introduce a poem and help her students anticipate its subject, meaning, form, or language.

2 **Some Features to Notice** lists key poetic devices, structures, and background information to help teachers guide students as they read and respond to each poem.

3 **Response Stance** prompts help students read purposefully, identify key textual evidence, and speak as critics about their experience of reading a poem.

4 The **Benediction** invites students to shift perspective and move from critical readers to engaged writers—to look in specific, resonant ways at their lives and feelings as sources for poems of their own.

All 200+ poems from professional and student poets adhere to four selection criteria. These are poems Nancie:

- loved, so she can demonstrate enthusiasm when she shares them with her students;
- found memorable and believes that students will, too;
- thinks adolescents will identify with, relate to, and appreciate; and
- believes demonstrate the range of poetry, so students might begin to understand and act on their own potentials as writers.

