

READING COMPANION

Two Minutes of Light, by Nancy K. Pearson

Sample poem:

Skimmers

For now, my stepfather
is content, throwing
stones at the pond skimmers.

The water quickly knits
a flush tunnel. The bugs go under.
I am a mechanical creature

following his lead.

We took the old road
to this brackish hole.

The good road,
the one with the hay over the mud,
was taken by the faithful.

I tell him I am falling.
He tells me I am walking
in the woods. The punk

misfit sleeps on a log,
the four wheelers have deflated
the silent float of weeds.

Van Camps cans, Trojan wrappers,
the plucked blackberry carry the sound
of yellow teeth. The firs

at the pond know when
to free their leaves: lie down
under here, love.

Here is a teeth grove.
He smiles, legs straddled
over me.

Over there now,
the Jesus bugs sail free.

Questions to consider:

1. How do elements of the wild or the natural world appear in these poems, and how do they change throughout the book? What is the relationship between these wild beings and the narrator, in this collection?
2. Many of these poems contain places (cities, bodies of water). What is the significance of these places? Find at least three examples, with different meanings.

3. This collection deals with themes of survival and trauma. Does the speaker's view of survival change through the collection? How? Consider a poem from the beginning of the collection ("Cat") and a poem toward the end ("Lucky Stars").
4. What are some themes in *Two Minutes of Light*, in addition to trauma and survival? Which poems highlight these themes?
5. How does Pearson use stories and imagery from nature to parallel or tell personal stories? What are the benefits of doing so? Consider "Elsewhere" and "At the Boneyard."
6. Why do you think the collection is called *Two Minutes of Light*? How does Pearson use the symbolism of those two minutes in "Winter Solstice, 4th Floor"?
7. What effect does using imagery of beautiful, free wild animals and places have in this collection, juxtaposed with abuse and human suffering? Consider "Hiking the Appalachian Trail."
8. *Two Minutes of Light* focuses a lot of attention on the question, "By what small margins do we survive?" Which small margins does Pearson highlight in this collection?

Writing prompts:

1. Use Pearson's title "Love Song, Salt" and write your own love song to an inanimate, everyday object.
2. In "Chasing after the Wind," Pearson plays with repetition of words and changes the placement of those words to use them in unexpected ways. Try using this technique in a poem of your own.
3. Tell a story through a description of an animal or plant, as Pearson does in "Halfway to Flight."
4. Start a poem playing on a cliché or idiom, as Pearson does in "Lucky Stars," and then take it in an unexpected direction.

Other Perugia books that could pair with this collection:

- *Girldom*, Megan Peak
- *Grayling*, Jenifer Browne Lawrence
- *Lamb*, Frannie Lindsay
- *Red*, Melanie Braverman

Areas of study in which to teach this title:

- Gender Studies
- Women's Studies
- American Studies
- Creative Writing/Poetry

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