

THE POETRY WORKSHOP

A poetry workshop gives a poet some honest, positive, constructive suggestions on how to enhance a poem-in-progress. It also reinforces the parts of a poem that “work,” that make ideas and the sensory images used, clear to the reader. By paying attention to what the workshop readers say and argue about, the poet knows if they have understood the main idea of the poem and if the authentic voice of the poet has been heard.

At TPS workshops, a procedure is followed that facilitates free and open discussion of each poem presented. First, copies of all poems to be discussed are circulated to all those present (about 20 copies). The chairman tells each poet when to read.

The poet reads the poem without preamble, explanation, commentary or apologies. The poet should speak clearly, and project a voice that everyone can hear.

The poet then remains silent while the group holds a discussion among themselves. Their comments are not directed at the poet. Everyone should remember that the poet owns the poem, and the critiquing group will only offer comments and suggestions which they feel will enhance the poem. All decisions are entirely in the hands of the poet. When poets first come to a workshop, they are hesitant to lay their soul, displayed on the printed page, for everyone to see. The group will respect that as they offer suggestions.

The members of the group respond according to what they have heard and seen within the poem. Remember: *Critiquing a poem is not criticizing it.* One brings to the poem all that one knows and believes about poetry. Everyone who speaks comments on what seems to “work” in the poem for them. They try to offer ideas that will make it even better than it is. Comments may touch on words, images, concepts expressed, rhythm, shape, sounds, structure, literary devices, or points yet unimagined. By listening closely, the poet will discover how the poem has been received by the group.

When receiving feedback on poetry, remember: **The poet owns the poem.** The poet must ultimately decide whether opinions expressed enhance the poem and might affect its revision and editing.

When the discussion is over the poet may respond, remembering that there is never any need to defend or apologize for one’s work.

At its best, “workshopping” is a vigorous process of give and take. Poetry deals in ideas, images and emotions and is most alive when it evokes a passionate response in hearts and minds.

The process of giving and receiving honest feedback on a wide range of poetry is an invaluable learning experience. It is a unique opportunity for expanding your horizons, honing your appreciation of poetry in general, and becoming the best poet you can be. At the same time, you are helping others to do likewise. Participants all contribute to poetry as a living art.