

# Exploring Our Values Through Poetry

A UUA Tapestry of Faith Curriculum By Karen Harris  
Facilitated by Rev. Susan M. Smith, 3<sup>rd</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays at 1 pm

*Poetry can be an accessible and profound tool in our spiritual practice as we journey toward becoming more conscious as human beings and as Unitarian Universalists. This program utilizes poems that are concerned with elements of the spiritual life: acute observation, conscious and continuous inquiry, the unveiling of reality, hope and hopelessness, the afterlife, and the tenderness of the human condition.*

Oct 20 – Workshop 1: Listening and Speaking with Poetry: An Introduction

Nov 17 – Workshop 2: Surprised By Beauty

Dec 15 – Workshop 3: Keenly Observing Nature

Dec 29 – Workshop 4: Who and What Guides Us?

Jan 19 – Workshop 5: Finding Our Mission

Feb 16 – Workshop 6: Conscious Love: Better than any Fairy Tale

Mar 15 – Workshop 7: Difficult Times

Mar 29 – Workshop 8: On a Lighter Note

Apr 19 – Workshop 9: Faith for the Journey

May 17 – Workshop 10: You and Me

May 31 – Workshop 11: Transformation

June 21 – Workshop 12: To Tell the Tale



Participants will also have an opportunity to participate in Poetry Sunday and a Poetry Slam during summer 2020. Dates to be determined.

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*The poem is a little myth of (our) capacity of making life meaningful. And in the end, the poem is not a thing we see—it is, rather, a light by which we may see—and what we see is life. — Robert Penn Warren*

Unitarian Universalism has always embraced poetry as a call to worship.

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Poetry, Czeslaw Milosz asserts, "enables us to look at a thing and identify with it, strengthening in that way its being" (*Book of Luminous Things*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and

Company, 1996). In this program, that "being" is our being—as individuals, as members of a UU community, as members of the human race, as members of the planet and universe.

As with any curriculum, there is a set of assumptions and beliefs that inform and inspire this one. All of the following are born of the author's experience.

### **Poetry is a uniting and a connecting force.**

Poetry—even very sad poetry—is a good remedy for loneliness, because it reminds us that our experience, no matter how extraordinary, in some way mirrors another's. In this way, we are not solitary beings. The poems featured in this program are from all over the world and represent different cultures, cosmologies, genders, races, and times in history. Yet striking similarities are evident in the poems' emotional terrain. In recognizing this, we recognize our own compassion for others and ourselves. Even discovering that others have some of the same questions as we do can be extraordinarily powerful and comforting.

Poetry asks the best questions...great, big questions: How do we live? What do we love? What deserves our faith? Who are we, and where do we fit in this universe? How do we keep our hope alive? Both poetry and UUs are tireless seekers—of sense, justice, meaning, reason, hope, and sometimes just the plain old company of a good laugh.

### **Reading poems aloud is powerful. Discovering poems together is powerful.**

Poetry read aloud is immediate, communitarian, and powerful. Robert Pinsky, poet and two-term national Poet Laureate, says it best:

... poetry is a vocal, which is to say a bodily, art. The medium of poetry is a human body: the column of air inside the chest, shaped into signifying sounds in the larynx and the mouth.... Moreover, there is a special intimacy to poetry because, in this idea of the art, the medium is not an expert's body, as when one goes to the ballet: in poetry, the medium is the audience's body...

From *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide*, by Robert Pinsky (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999)

**Rev. Susan says:** You need not have participated in previous sessions to join the class at any point during the year. We attempt to make of this a safe but brave space where people can share deeply and frankly and where no one will share what they have heard without permission. This course is appropriate for teens and adults. A completely voluntary “love offering” of \$5 is collected at each class, but do not let this be a barrier to your participation.