

# How I Discovered Poetry

By Marilyn Nelson

It was like soul-kissing, the way the words  
filled my mouth as Mrs. Purdy read from her desk.  
All the other kids zoned an hour ahead to 3:15,  
but Mrs. Purdy and I wandered lonely as clouds borne  
by a breeze off Mount Parnassus. She must have seen  
the darkest eyes in the room brim: The next day  
she gave me a poem she'd chosen especially for me  
to read to the all except for me white class.  
She smiled when she told me to read it, smiled harder,  
said oh yes I could. She smiled harder and harder  
until I stood and opened my mouth to banjo playing  
darkies, pickaninnies, disses and dats. When I finished  
my classmates stared at the floor. We walked silent  
to the buses, awed by the power of words.

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