

Writing Exercise – After Jamaal May’s “There Are Birds Here” (or, What is a “home”?)

Read Jamaal May’s pome “There Are Birds Here” and check out the animated short film adaptation from the USC Film School:

“There Are Birds Here” at the Poetry Foundation:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/56764/there-are-birds-here>

“There Are Birds Here” Animated Short Film:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/video/142665/there-are-birds-here>

Jamaal May wrote the poem “There Are Birds Here” for his home town of Detroit, MI. In the poem, he seems to be speaking to an unnamed “they” & trying to correct some misconceptions &/or misperceptions “they” have about his home town.

Think about what May is saying, and isn’t saying, about his Detroit. How do you think he feels about his home town? How do you know? Try to find specific places in the poem that tell you these things.

Then, we’re going to write our own poems about “home”...

First, let’s define “home” for ourselves...

What does “home” mean to you?

Is it a place? a state of mind? a feeling? a point in time? all of the above? something else entirely?

Start by defining your idea(s) of home. Think of all the words / phrases / images / feelings/ etc. you can to describe your idea of “home” – make a list, as long as you can, to give yourself plenty of raw material.

Then, use that list (& whatever additional language you need) to write a poem/story/essay/etc. about your idea of “home,” or for your “home,” where- or what-ever that might be for you.

Try to address your poem to a specific person or group of people (direct address!), as May does in “There Are Birds Here” – think about what is difficult about “home” for you, what you love about “home” & what most other people might miss, or perhaps do not see or understand, about your “home.” What is unique about your “home”? What is difficult about it? What is amazing about it?