



Celebrate This Kansas

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Celebrate this sky, this land beyond the measured time
that tilts the seasonal light. Dream the return of the stars,
the searing rise of heat or fall of storm crossing through
the secret-holding cedars and witness rocks for thousands of years.
This air we breathe belonged to those who spoke languages forgotten
as the glaciers cusping the ridges. These fields we walk once rushed
in ocean long after, long before what we know as mapped time.
This rain was once a man's last breath, this heat what warmed
a weathered rock enough for a woman to rest on with her baby,
these fossils once love songs of memory and longing after the beloveds die.
Everything we know of Kansas comes from this: rivers aching east
after scouting out and winding their mark through the horizons of grass,
skies mirroring orange to black, moon to sun, hail to pale breeze,
ready to give everything to us like any true heart.
All we see, the ghost and angel of the land's lightest touch,
a trail through the prairie, a hard rain in the woods -- beyond naming
and yet named Step into where you already are, where once
the grandmothers and grandfathers sang out their stories of
weather and loss, wars and births. The bones of this land and the feathers
of this sky compose this Kansas that knows us better than we know ourselves,
that is always ready with wind, shimmer, falling grasses and stone roots
to show us what it means to live where the earth and stars converge.

The following are suggested questions/activities that teachers might use in conjunction with this poem and the Kansas Sesquicentennial celebration January 28th -29th. Please feel free to adapt or change any of the activities and/or questions to meet your classroom needs.

Questions:

The author asks us (the reader) to do at least 4 separate things in her work. Can you identify them?
(Celebrate, Dream, Breathe, and Walk)

What are we to celebrate?

What are we to dream?

What is the author asking us to do by breathing?

What is the author asking us to do as we walk?

The author states that "Everything we know of Kansas comes from this. . ." Does it?

What do you "know" about Kansas and how did you come to "know" it?

If you were to draw or paint the images of this poem, what images would you draw? What images might you add to the poem?

How would your images enhance or expand others understanding of the poem?

The Kansas motto is "Ad Astra per Aspera" (To the stars through difficulties). How is the motto reflected in the poem? What are the "difficulties" mentioned in the work?

The author draws a conclusion near the end of the work, what do you think she means?

Activities:

Have several students come to the board/butcher paper as a group and draw some of the images the author depicts. Make sure images are not duplicated. Continue until all of the images are on the board/butcher paper. Ask the remaining students to add images of Kansas to the collage created. Allow student to critique the collage. Does it present a realistic picture of our state?

Have student create a visual timeline from the images described in the poem (i.e. oceans, fossils, glaciers, . . .)
Have student draw a representation of the image and then place them in the appropriate historical order.