

## Writing a Poem on a Road

We like roads and the way they go across the countryside with stands of fall-yellow aspens, making tight turns where we can't see around the bend, to the darkness of pines, gorges, and a rushing river. We like the path that leads to a tiny lake someone said was there, but along the way instead we find a white coral-looking mushroom filling and curling over the tops of fallen logs, and we make our own path, never making it to the lake because we are suddenly lost for awhile, and we don't care.

We like roads for surprise, mystery, connection, solitude, and for their stories. The details surrounding our drive get inside us creating fresh insights, just as the physical details of a trip provide that to us, too. We might notice for the first time the closed evening primroses along the farm road, or watch a lost cow as it walks almost daintily down from a high cliff towards the herd, wonder about an old house that stands too far away from its windbreak. We have chance encounters with animals on roads, and, unfortunately, accidents we see or might have been in ourselves.

Sometimes the walk or drive is painful, sometimes full of happiness. Will it be a lit road or a dark one? Are we trying to find a new path, a new place after a struggle with ourselves? Do we meet someone there? Roads and what and who we see on them might lead to discoveries about ourselves.

This road or trail can be one you know and have a connection with, whether a stretch of the interstate, or a street in your neighborhood, a mountain or desert road you've traveled for years, or it can be a path you've taken for the first time.

To begin, either take yourself in a car or bike or on a walk, writing, using all of your senses. As you move down the road, take notice of animals, birds, blossoms, people, houses, yards or trees, landscape features. Make comparisons freely. Ask questions. Remember a past experience as it fits into your gathering of images. Is there a reason you are traveling this road? What happened last time you were here? What do you anticipate, but then what actually happens? What is coming to the forefront on this day? What do you feel like holding but not letting go of? What one element, or elements, of the landscape speak to you? What does it make you feel like doing on the road?

Write at least a few pages and think of them as rough. Allow yourself to make strange connections, think odd thoughts, and write some bad lines. This is a sketch for what later will be the poem. As you go back and carve out the poem after reading through your sketch a few times, you might also want to think about the archetype of a road, the journey and where it has finally taken you, the infinite feeling of a road and its freedom or limitations, a question that might be or never be answered, a decision you are making, or the depiction of a scene that becomes the essence of that particular place you are traveling through, that finally is also the essence of who you are now, after writing this poem.

Ted Kooser reads his poem: "So this is Nebraska"

<http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/movies/KooserNebraska.html>

Marge Piercy's "More than Enough"

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/171137>

Robert Wrigley's "Chickens on the Road"

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/177086>

Lucas Howl's "Primitive Road"

<http://poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poem/178745>

Kurt Brown's "Road Trip"

<http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/road-trip>