

THE NEED FOR A BRIDGE
BY JOYCE WILSON
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I

These poems are inspired by topics of local history, such as the Quincy Shipyard, the Hingham Shipyard, construction for the war effort, types of travel, immigration, migration of birds, tankers on the seas. What do you learn about the history of this area and its struggles?

How many types of bridges have been over the Fore River?

Can you think of a local bridge, building, roadway in your area that could be the subject of a poem? What would you like to express in your poem?

What is important about naming the bridges? Think of other bridges you know. What inspired their names? Can their names be changed?

What is the difference between a building and a monument?

II

Many kinds of writing occur in these poems: description, argument, narration, biography, sports writing, comparison (simile and extended metaphor), nature writing. Where do these occur?

A found poem is a poem that is made up of language found elsewhere (from a lecture, overheard speech, newspaper, catalogue, etc.) Which poems are found poems? What makes them poems?

Each of these poems is told in the persona of an imaginary person. Consider the point of view of the narrator of the poems. What does the poem tell you about the narrator?

Which poem gives a brief biography of a real person?

III

A sonnet is a poetic form, usually with 14 lines and fixed meter and rhyme (see Shakespearian, Petrarchan, etc.). How many of the poems are sonnets?

R. M. Rilke's poem "Archaic Torso of Apollo" (online) ends with the line "you must change your life." The poem "The Lurker" (*The Need for a Bridge*, page 11) also uses that line to portray the psychology of the narrator. How will he change his life? What did he hear on the bridge that convinced him that it was time to change? Compare the two poems.

Besides addressing topics of local history, the poems also chronicle a history of poetry about bridges.

William Wordsworth, "Composed upon Westminster Bridge"

Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"

Hart Crane, "Poem: To the Brooklyn Bridge"

Thomas Hardy, "The Harbour Bridge"

Marianne Moore, "Granite and Steel"

Richard Wilbur, "A Simile for Her Smile"

What do these poems say about the changing views about bridges? Can you find the corresponding poems in *The Need for a Bridge* and discuss how they influenced each other?

For more suggested answers, contact
Joyce Wilson at The Poetry Porch
www.poetryporch.com