

**THE NEED FOR A BRIDGE**  
**BY JOYCE WILSON**  
**DISCUSSION QUESTION ANSWERS**

**I**

**These poems are inspired by local history. What do you learn about the history of this area and its struggles?**

*The bridge over the Fore River has challenged and frustrated those who must cross it and live near it since 1800. Yet people need bridges, and this one is the topic of many conversations, complaints, and worries. Maintaining the bridge requires local and national participation, funding, provides jobs, and determines the character of the area.*

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

*See Notes, page 25: Five (timber 1800, swing 1812, bascule 1934, vertical lifts 1985 and 2017).*

**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?**

*The Sagamore Bridge (Cape Cod), the Pilgrim Monument (Plymouth).*

*Samuel Woodworth wrote a poem about "The Old Oaken Bucket" (Scituate).*

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

*The Fore River Bridge is over the Fore River (not Four or For) and is near the Back River. These bridges are named having to do with their location and relation to each other. Some bridges are named after famous statesmen (George Washington Bridge after the first president) or cultural figures (Longfellow Bridge after the poet). Sometimes a bridge is named to commemorate someone who has died (Zakim Bridge after Leonard Zakim). The Triboro Bridge was recently renamed to commemorate Robert F. Kennedy.*

**What is the difference between a building and a monument?**

*A building is something that is constructed for a purpose. A monument is a structure erected as a memorial to venerate an outstanding achievement or death.*

**II**

**Many kinds of writing occur in these poems: description, argument, comparison, biography, spots writing, travel writing, nature writing. Where do these occur?**

**DESCRIPTION** ("The Ferry" p. 1) etc.

**ARGUMENT** ("The Engineer" p. 4; "The Foreman" p. 9, "The Captain" p. 19)

**NARRATION** ("The Salesman" p. 13, "the Baker" p. 17)

**BIOGRAPHY, SPORTS WRITING** ("The Player" p.12)

**COMPARISON, SIMILE, EXTENDED METAPHOR** ("The Provider" p. 16) seeing bridge as parents

**NATURE WRITING** ("The Naturalist" p. 21)

**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?**

*"The Pilot: Laws and Regulations" and "The Operator: the Facts" are based on details from a Boston Globe article (see Notes, page 26).*

**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?**

*The journalist, the foreman, the librarian, etc, are imaginary. The provider is more abstract as a persona and relying on the image of the parents more than the occupations that inform the minds of the other narrators.*

**Which poem gives a brief biography of a real person?**

*"The Player: His Crossing Pass" is about the shipyard employee and soccer player Malcolm L. Goldie.*

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**III**

A sonnet is a poetic form, usually with 14 lines and fixed meter and rhyme (see Shakespearean, Petrarchan, etc). The new American sonnet follows one of these forms but does not use strict rhyme. Which of the poems here are sonnets?

*“The Journalist”* (skipping over the first quatrain, Shakespearean with rhyming couplets); *“The Dreamer,”* (Shakespearean); *“The Engineer,”* *“The Foreman,”* *“The Lurker,”* and *“The Operator”* (American sonnets in non-rhyming iambic pentameter).

R. M. Rilke’s poem *“Archaic Torso of Apollo”* (online) ends with the line “you must change your life.” The poem *“The Lurker”* (NFB 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.

Rilke’s poem describes the stone statue in physical detail, then shifts its view from the statue to the audience looking at it, ending with “for here there is no place/ that does not see you. You must change your life.” Rilke’s poem looks to the statue’s place in a museum full of visitors who come to view the art it represents. In a sense, the whole world is watching the statue, even though it is standing still in a gallery. The question posed suggests that the influence of Greek culture on the rest of the world is an important influence.

*“The Lurker”* on the bridge has a cynical view of the bridge and its need of repair. When he hears the news report from a car on the bridge, about the march of the civil rights demonstrators across the bridge in Selma, Alabama, he faces the implication that this movement is projecting its message far beyond the city and state in which it takes place. He realizes that the need for civil rights is being felt all over the world, and that if he holds a cynical view against it, he might find himself on the wrong side of history.

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

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?

**William Wordsworth**, *“Composed upon Westminster Bridge”* ---this sonnet praises city of London asleep as a part of nature;

**Walt Whitman**, *“Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”* ---sees a nation coming into being as he crosses over the water from borough to borough of a city;

**Hart Crane**, *“Proem: To the Brooklyn Bridge”* ---individual freedom and myth intersect in this tribute;

**Thomas Hardy**, *“The Harbour Bridge”* ---sees setting for sociology of a region of England where a man and woman meet and depart from each other;

**Marianne Moore**, *“Granite and Steel”* ---records another look at the Brooklyn Bridge and the poets relationship to NYC;

**Richard Wilbur**, *“A Simile for Her Smile”* ---romantic feelings emerge when driver and his passenger are stopped on a bridge.

Views of bridges change from the importance of the bridge as a setting or background to a place that has particular value and creates its own feelings; as a thing of man-made beauty to an example of hardship and change; as a fixture in a city to a juncture connecting other worlds.