MORE TO EXPLORE

The following link will bring you to the Mitchell College 2016 Common Read library guide which includes a number of helpful resources about and/or relating to Citizen: An American Lyric.

http://mitchell.libguides.com/Citizen

Watch the author discuss her works, get acquainted with the featured artists and dive deeper into the topics stirred up by this book.

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*Adapted from Reading Guide for GVSU's 2015-2016 Community Reading Project By Maureen Wolverton and Jennifer Jameslyn
Rules of Thumb for Reading Poetry

L.S. Klatt, Poet Laureate of Grand Rapids, Michigan

Some people love poetry; some people are intimidated by it. In order for the reading of poems to be more accessible, less intimidating, here are some rules of thumb to keep in mind.

1. **A poem is like a teabag;** if you want the flavor you have to let it steep. A good rule of thumb is to read a poem slowly, repeatedly, and meditatively.

2. **Don’t worry if not all poems inspire you.** When reading a collection of poetry, focus on those poems that resonate with you.

3. **Poetry is different from prose** … it does not necessarily deliver its message in a straightforward way and yet it is still expressive. … By reading a poem out loud, we can better appreciate the rhythm and rhymes that we might miss when we read it silently to ourselves.

4. **Poems often communicate through images.** Images, by evoking the senses, can make us feel things the poet wants us to feel. Often these can be quite complicated emotions.

5. **Poetry is a performance where language plays.** Poets play with words … [celebrating] the relationship of one word to another, one sound to another.

Preparing to Read – Before reading, consider the following:

- How do you feel about reading poetry? What experiences do you have reading poetry? Writing poetry?
- Review Klatt’s “Rules of Thumb for Reading Poetry” on the previous page. Take note of Klatt’s points about poetic language.
- The opening quote reads: “If they don’t see happiness in the picture, at least they’ll see the black.” (Chris Marker, Sans Soleil) What tone does that quote set? What ideas, thoughts and/or feelings does the cover art conjure up as you examine just the book’s cover?

As You Read – Take notes as you explore the text:

- The book is divided into sections rather than chapters. Why do you think the author organized it this way? Do you sense any themes within these segments?
- Find a passage in each chapter to read aloud. How does this change your perception?
- Why do you think the author includes so much artwork and visual imagery in the book? What emotions and feelings do these images conjure up for you?

Looking Forward – Be ready to talk further about these questions when you return in August:

- How do you feel after reading this book? Specifically, how did the arrangement of poetry, prose and image impact you?
- “[C]itizen is one of the best books I’ve ever wanted to not read” ([Jonathan Farmer, Slate]). What is the value of engaging a topic that makes you uncomfortable?
- How do the topics in Citizen reflect current issues? What recent news stories relate to this book?

What is your own relationship to race?

*We will be exploring this question further as we begin our ongoing community conversation during Welcome Week.*

“Poetry belongs to everybody. Poetry is most alive in places like Ferguson and places of fear.”

- Sandra Cisneros