

Lancaster County Library
LCL Poetry Collective

May 13, 2026 Workshop with Kim Ports Parsons
“Kitchen Table Poetry”

Kim will lead an interactive workshop centered around the idea that much in our lives, memories, sensory experiences, formative years, personal relationships, social lives, etc., circles around our “kitchen tables,” whatever they may look like, however large, small, cluttered or tidy.

She will begin with a sharing of some “kitchen table poems” of renowned poets, as well as a few of her own published pieces. Participants will have these poems in advance, and are encouraged to read them before the workshop. Other than the poems, folks will just need paper and pen.

There will be some open discussion of the poems. Consider these questions:

How are the poems focused?
How do they make you feel?
How do the poets use concrete details and sensory images?
What memories do the poems stir up for you?
Is there a poem in this group that you can relate to? Why?

After exploring these poems, we will turn to some writing. There will be a free writing exercise, a generative exercise, and some drafting of a possible poem.

Participants will be encouraged to share, discuss, and be inspired by each other’s work.

There will also be some door prizes before we conclude!

Poems to for the workshop, printed on the following pages or links given:

3 by Kim Ports Parsons, “Cool Glass of Water” and “Fixing Thelma’s Hair” from my first collection, *The Mayapple Forest*, and “Inheritance,” published in *Fixed and Free Quarterly*, and in my current draft of my second manuscript

Jacqueline Woodson, “lessens”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/58423/lessons-56d23cc927c21>

Clive Wilmer, “The Kitchen Table”

<https://poetryarchive.org/poem/kitchen-table/>

Robert Hayden, “Those Winter Sundays” (A poem that does not directly refer to the kitchen table, but in my mind’s eye, I see the scene in a small house or cabin, and the table just to the side of the frame.)

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46461/those-winter-sundays>

My favorite kitchen table poem is by Joy Harjo, former US Poet Laureate, “Perhaps the World Ends Here”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49622/perhaps-the-world-ends-here>

Video clip of Joy Harjo performing and reflecting on the same poem here:

<https://www.britannica.com/video/poet-joy-harjo-reads-her-poem-perhaps-the-world-ends-here/-336190>

Cool Glass of Water

A blizzard of fuchsia speckles all down my shirt and Mama's apron,
rivulets of sweat down the left side of her face, and my legs stuck
to the cracked vinyl seat, the kitchen getting hotter by the minute,
but we're grinning like damned fools over eight pint jars of wineberry jam,
made from the berries we picked together while ticks and poison ivy
inched up our trousers, and we sang she's coming round the mountain
and who-knows-what-all at the top of our lungs, hoping to scare away
the snakes. I am ten, and I am spading up the last gobs from the kettle
with the wooden spoon, and I am in love with her, and if I could,
I would drink that memory like a cool glass of water every day of my life.

Fixing Thelma's Hair

Her hair thin enough to show her gray-white scalp,
the skin of her neck soft as a young girl's.
She holds the bag of plastic curlers in her lap.
I stand behind the chair and comb out
the tangles from her kitchen sink shampoo.
Her toes pump up and down like pistons.

We're alone in a breeze ruffling the window
by the fridge. I begin the first row from forehead
to crown, each curler rolled toward me and held down
tight, snapped into place with green plastic.
The neat lines, the damp hair pulled straight between
my fingers, the rhythm and order, they comfort me.

The blur of her constant talk is a radio
left on for company. I interrupt to tease
about all her boyfriends, how she's been stepping
out to paint the town, dancing in her red dress.
She giggles, then sighs. *Oh, honey, I can't hardly
even walk my hip's getting so bad.* Passes me

another curler over her shoulder. When the last
one's in place, we sit at the table and sip
iced tea and try the bourbon balls she's made,
little cookies like a shot of whiskey.
I like the intimacy of a woman
in curlers, swollen feet in old, cracked mules,

tapping the tiles. She tells me the story,
the prickly halo of her head nodding, how she dared
to get a bob in the summer of 1921
on a visit to Aunt Minnie in Arlington,
how she cut off all her fine, long, white-blonde hair,
and when she got home to Shamrock, Texas,

(stanza break)

her mother vowed never to speak to her sister again,
and Granddaddy Riley went out to the shed to get drunk.
Pretty soon, all six of her sisters followed suit. She's a tough one,
energy springing from her like the tight curls off the rollers
as I comb her out. Before I shape the hair and spray its familiar
pattern, I run my fingers through the Miss Clairol gold

and feel the fragile bowl of her skull.
It won't be long before she lays it down.

Inheritance

This old shirt of Mama's is worn thin
and the seams are fraying.
Soon the sleeves will just fall away
like meat cooked long on the bone.

Even though the seams are fraying,
I keep wearing it, working my muscles loose,
steaming my bones in the sunny garden,
pressure cooker of memory.

I keep wearing it, trying to lose myself in work,
the once-red flowers faded to ghostly.
She worked herself like steam through a pressure cooker,
sealing her longest days under Ball jar lids.

Ghost of her once-red lipstick blooms
in my mind, her sigh as she skimmed foam
from the jam pan, sealed the lids, and shelved
her troubles. She stretched beans to a meal.

She sighed, and she skimmed fury.
She weeded out pain, pinned fresh hurts to the line,
conjured and stretched her strength and will.
She believed earnest effort does not go unpaid.

Today I weed and turn up fresh soil, line up
seeds in hopeful rows, feel her hands guide mine.
All her earnest efforts were stitched with pain:
her forbearance, like this shirt, well-worn and thin.