

“One Today,” delivered by Richard Blanco, the inaugural poet.

Annotate your copy of the poem with notes on meaning, craft, and personal connection/response.

One sun rose on us today, kindled over our shores,
peeking over the Smokies, greeting the faces
of the Great Lakes, spreading a simple truth
across the Great Plains, then charging across the Rockies.
One light, waking up rooftops, under each one, a story
told by our silent gestures moving behind windows.

My face, your face, millions of faces in morning’s mirrors,
each one yawning to life, crescendoing into our day:
pencil-yellow school buses, the rhythm of traffic lights,
fruit stands: apples, limes, and oranges arrayed like rainbows
begging our praise. Silver trucks heavy with oil or paper –
bricks or milk, teeming over highways alongside us,
on our way to clean tables, read ledgers, or save lives –
to teach geometry, or ring-up groceries as my mother did
for twenty years, so I could write this poem.

All of us as vital as the one light we move through,
the same light on blackboards with lessons for the day:
equations to solve, history to question, or atoms imagined,
the “I have a dream” we keep dreaming,
or the impossible vocabulary of sorrow that won’t explain
the empty desks of twenty children marked absent
today, and forever. Many prayers, but one light
breathing color into stained glass windows,
life into the faces of bronze statues, warmth
onto the steps of our museums and park benches
as mothers watch children slide into the day.

One ground. Our ground, rooting us to every stalk
of corn, every head of wheat sown by sweat
and hands, hands gleaning coal or planting windmills
in deserts and hilltops that keep us warm, hands
digging trenches, routing pipes and cables, hands
as worn as my father’s cutting sugarcane
so my brother and I could have books and shoes.

The dust of farms and deserts, cities and plains
mingled by one wind – our breath. Breathe. Hear it
through the day’s gorgeous din of honking cabs, buses
launching down avenues, the symphony of footsteps, guitars,
and screeching subways, the unexpected song bird on your
clothes line.

Hear: squeaky playground swings, trains whistling,
or whispers across café tables, Hear: the doors we open
for each other all day, saying: hello, shalom,
buon giorno, howdy, namaste, or buenos días
in the language my mother taught me – in every language
spoken into one wind carrying our lives
without prejudice, as these words break from my lips.

One sky: since the Appalachians and Sierras claimed
their majesty, and the Mississippi and Colorado worked
their way to the sea. Thank the work of our hands:
weaving steel into bridges, finishing one more report
for the boss on time, stitching another wound
or uniform, the first brush stroke on a portrait,
or the last floor on the Freedom Tower
jutting into a sky that yields to our resilience.

One sky, toward which we sometimes lift our eyes
tired from work: some days guessing at the weather
of our lives, some days giving thanks for a love
that loves you back, sometimes praising a mother
who knew how to give, or forgiving a father
who couldn’t give what you wanted.

We head home: through the gloss of rain or weight
of snow, or the plum blush of dusk, but always – home,
always under one sky, our sky. And always one moon
like a silent drum tapping on every rooftop
and every window, of one country – all of us –
facing the stars
hope – a new constellation
waiting for us to map it,
waiting for us to name it – together

After reading and annotating the poem, answer the following questions and be prepared to discuss this poem in class.

You can find the video of Mr. Blanco reading his poem during the 2013 inauguration at this link:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/22/us/politics/inaugural-poem-one-today.html? r=0>

1. Underline what you think are the poem's most important words. Explain why you think these particular words and images are important to the poem's meaning.
2. In the first and seventh stanzas, the speaker makes reference to geographical places. What do these places suggest? What do they mean to Americans?
3. Throughout the poem we find many references to labor and work. Identify (highlight/underline) these lines and phrases. What kind of work does the speaker in the poem honor and respect? What are these lines saying about America and Americans?
4. This poem was first read on Martin Luther King's Birthday celebration in Washington. Explain the allusion entailed in "the 'I have a dream' we keep dreaming"?
5. The sixth stanza begins "Hear" and goes on to catalog the ordinary sounds of a day. What do the multilingual versions of "Hello" suggest about the America that Mr. Blanco is describing? Why do you think he calls out "buenos dias / in the language my mother taught me"? What do these lines suggest about the poet's relationship with that language?
6. Identify lines in the poem that reflect the occasion for which the poem was written. How do the lines you have chosen suggest issues surrounding the inauguration of a president?