The Poetry Reader's Companion

Sample Pages

Free sample - three real pages from the companion: The Companion Method (p.3), The Poem on Arrival (p.9) and Sitting With It (p.10). Blank apparatus only - no poem is printed in these pages; bring one of yours. Print at 100% on US Letter or A4.

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The Companion Method

Journal p.3. The whole practice on one page - four moves, two rules. Every later page exists to serve one of these moves.

1. Read it aloud.

A poem is a score for a voice. Before you write anything, read the poem aloud once - your own voice, at speaking pace, stumbles and all. Notice where the breath ran out and where the line turned; the Arrival page has a field for exactly that. A poem you have only read silently is a poem you have half met.

2. Copy the line by hand.

One line - the one that stopped you - copied out by hand in the ruled space on the Arrival page. Not the whole poem, and not your neatest hand: handwriting slows a line down to the speed at which it can actually be noticed. You will remember the line you copied long after the lines you merely read have merged into the poem's general weather.

3. Live with it a day.

Close the journal. For one day the poem rides along - in the kitchen, on the walk, at the sink - and you do nothing about it at all. The second spread page, Sitting With It, is written after that day, never before: what stayed, what shifted, what it quietly connected to. The day is not a delay in the method. The day is the method.

4. Come back.

A poem is finished with you when it is finished, not when you are. Come back next season, next year, next decade: each return is stacked in The Poem Returned To (pp.37-38), where the same lines meet a different reader - you, older. The poems that earn it move to Poems by Heart (pp.33-36) and are learned properly, line by line.

THE TWO RULES

The pencil rule: hand-copied lines are written in pencil, always. A copy is a working note - allowed to be imperfect, allowed to be corrected. It is a record of your meeting with the line, never a forgery of the printed page.

The no-homework rule: nothing in this companion is assigned, graded or owed. There are no streaks, no scores and no overdue poems. If a spread waits a month half-finished, it has not failed; it is sitting with the poem, which is the entire point.

A spread takes about ten minutes across two days. The day in the middle is the journal working, not you slacking.

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The Poem on Arrival

Spread Page 1 (journal pp.9, 11, 13 ... one per poem) - filled in at the first meeting, before analysis gets to it. First impressions are evidence; write them before they are argued away.

Poem title:

Poet:

Where I found it (book / anthology / read aloud to me / sent by):

Date met: _____ **My age, roughly:** _____ **Read-aloud done: [ ] yes**

PART A - FELT, BEFORE UNDERSTOOD

What the poem did before you knew what it meant - the weather of it, in plain words. Feeling first is not sloppiness; it is the order poems actually arrive in:

PART B - THE LINE THAT STOPPED ME (copy it by hand, in pencil)

Copy the line exactly as printed, then - underneath, in your own words - why this line, of all of them:

PART C - READ ALOUD: BREATH & VOICE NOTES

Wher

Where the line turned (the word everything pivots on):

How it wants to be read (fast / slow / hushed / like an argument):

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Sitting With It

Spread Page 2 (journal pp.10, 12, 14 ... one per poem) - written after the day of living with the poem, not before. If the day hasn't happened yet, this page waits. It is good at waiting.

PART A - WHAT STAYED

After a day of carrying it: the line, image or turn that is still with you, uninvited:

PART B - WHAT SHIFTED

What reads differently now than it did on arrival - a meaning that moved, a sympathy that changed sides:

PART C - WHAT IT CONNECTED TO

Anoth

PART D - THE VERDICT (tick what applies - more than one is allowed)

[ ] Keep it - entered in the Commonplace Verses (with the poet and source credited, always) [ ] Return to it - first return due: _____ [ ] Learn it by heart - moved to Poems by Heart [ ] Send it to someone - to: _____ , because: _____ [ ] Let it go - met, heard, and honestly not for me

This free sample holds three real pages of The Poetry Reader's Companion (42 pages: the front matter and the Companion Method; twelve per-poem spreads - The Poem on Arrival and Sitting With It; Poems by Heart, with line-check grids, a recitation log and the Shelf of Honour; The Poem Returned To; Poet Pages; Collection & Anthology Logs; Seasonal Poems; Commonplace Verses, with the credit rule printed on the page; and the Annual Poetry Review with the Poetry Awards - US Letter, A4 and tablet editions). No poems and no lines by any real poet are printed anywhere in the companion: it is blank apparatus, and the poems are yours. Full companion at pagelyra.vercel.app

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