

Introduction to “Surprise! Welcome Home”

At one point recently, I had the intention of teaching to summer school students present because they wanted to enrich their educations if not their lives the best and most loved poetry that I could gather into one 30-day course. I had a collection of *wonderful* poems on topics ranging from the usual love / broken hearts to technology to the historical context of poems to identity to choices facing people. That course would have been memorable enough to stick with the students for a lifetime!

Unfortunately, I made the mistake of including the word “poetry” in the title of the course, so not enough students signed up and the course was canceled. (Their loss but it hurt me more than them.)

The poem “Surprise! Welcome Home” would have been the first poem taken up on that elusive first day of summer class. It would have set the tone for a summer of love . . . of poetry. It used humor to encourage the students to see that they were not going to lose out on fun; they were going to experience a new kind of enjoyment. Poetry --- that mysterious art form which had brought them so much grief in the past --- would finally come to lie and speak to them, and they would never again quake involuntarily when they heard the word.

In hindsight, I have concluded that I should have avoided using the word “poetry” in the title because people who want to avoid the plague and are offered a course called “How to Avoid the Plague” will only see the word “plague” and will avoid such an instructive and important course like the . . . uh . . . plague. I should have called my poetry course “Verbal Gymnastics” or “Rhythmic Robotics” or “Cooking with Words” or something like that.

(Ironically enough, I soon after tried to offer a similar course to teachers, one which would have provided my district’s pedagogues a terrific selection of poems with which I believe would have empowered them to increase their students’ appreciation for poetry --- one which would have cost the District nothing as I would have provided class sets of the poems involved --- but that course received not much enthusiasm from the people in charge, so here I sit, dreaming of the day --- in this life or the next --- when I will *finally* get to share my favorite poems with *somebody*. In the meantime, pretend that you are in my summer class and enjoy this poem.