

## Poem Series

Academic Level: High School, College, and Beyond.

### Lesson Overview:

After reading *Air in the Air* by Brandon Rushton, students will revisit “Milankovitch Cycles,” “The New Century Springboard,” “Alternative Terms for Tomorrow,” “A Rhombus,” “No Known Natural Predators,” “Before the Experts Mislabeled the Beyond,” “Sound Barrier,” “Puddle Jumper,” “All Night After Erasing the Equations,” “The Dark Horse Accompanies a Friend Away from Pentecost Camp,” “Ergonomics of the Later Land,” and “The Dark Horse that Directed the Lightning.”

### **Lecture 1:**

#### ***Useful definition(s):***

Conceit: (From the Latin term for “concept”) An extended metaphor that is unconventional or complex in nature

Metaphor: A literary comparison which draws attention to the similarities or differences between two or more unrelated things without the use of the words “like” or “as.”

Personification: The literary application of human-like traits to inanimate objects, animals, and beings without sentience

**Lecture 1:**

Brandon Rushton's *Air in the Air* characterizes the landscapes as sentient beings that encompass so much of the vastness of life and experience. Fittingly, the opening poem, "Milankovitch Cycles" alludes to the presence and importance of Milankovitch cycles, which define how fluctuations in Earth's movements affect the climate. Several of Rushton's poems function as biopsies of nature and the inner lives of humans. Rushton fills the collection with "bodied" poems. That is, poems that use language to transpose humanoid characteristics to the natural landscape. Several poems make direct allusions to the body and personify the inanimate objects of nature with more character than is present within the humans who appear in some poems.

Rushton illustrates the eternal nature of environmental changes many do not consider. Nature, because it communicates a sense of eternal life, resists Rushton's catalogue of the vastness of its body. The speaker within several of his poems is as an interpreter of the natural world to the reader, and though the speaker feels they can adequately comprehend and convey its meaning to the masses, there will always be much lost in translation. Although they display a reverence for the Earth, it must also resist their direct involvement. Though, the speaker also describes the desert as a sort of mediator between the divine and the mundane, utilizing the juxtaposition of the animate and the inanimate to characterize the connectedness of the world. However, Rushton characterizes the world's vibrancy as a setting which lives and adapts because the people inhabiting these spaces form community with one another and must also change their lives. Rushton depicts the world as a sentient being with agency. These methods both show the

Earth as a bountiful place that directly opposes the Western canon's characterization of nature as a passive recipient of humanity's actions.

### **After Lectures:**

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Consider Rushton's use of personification in *Air in the Air*. Write a reading response no longer than 3 pages analyzing how Rushton uses personification to complicate the reader's initial understanding of their world and values.
2. Using another work by any other author, discuss how Rushton's use of imagery complicates modern audience's understanding of nature.

#### Classroom Activity:

1. Students will create a collage of images from various sources that corresponds to a theme in *Air in the Air*. Students will then write a reflection describing their choices in sources and organization in junction with their understanding of *Air in the Air*.
2. Students will complete a free-write that fills in the gaps between stanzas of any poem of their choosing in *Air in the Air*. Students should aim to follow or mimic Rushton's unique choices in diction and form.

#### A Critical Paper Assignment

1. Students will complete a close reading of any poem in *Air in the Air* with a focus on the themes and literary devices Rushton uses.
2. Students will perform an analysis of two poems from *Air in the Air* using any school of thought or theory as a framework.

3. Students will analyze *Air in the Air* by comparing Rushton's works to determine how he continues or complicates the traditions of the pastoral.

#### Creative Writing Project

1. Students will create an original poem that must use the titles of the poems in *Air in the Air* within its stanzas. Students will then write two pages for the poem explaining their choices in diction, metaphor, and form. Students are encouraged to question how their poems follow and stray from Rushton's methods in *Air in the Air*.