

Senior Division, Nonfiction

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Can't Help But Notice (an excerpt)

The things that make poetry work—pattern, detail—are the things that make *me* work. I have, in a sense, a genetic advantage, just as a broad-shouldered swimmer or a basketball player with a seven-foot wingspan might in their respective pursuits. A broad-shouldered swimmer can teach someone else to swim, but they can't teach them to swim broad-shoulderedly. Everyone's stuck with the shoulders they've got. How do I teach students to do something that comes so naturally to me that I couldn't stop it if I tried? How do I teach them to notice? They write a bird into their poems, and I ask, *what kind of a bird is it?* "Bird" is a pretty large category of things, and a house sparrow or a black-capped chickadee can have a quite different effect on a poem than a chicken or a toucan or a flamingo or a buzzard might.

They describe the sky as "blue," and I ask them if they mean "cerulean" or "azure" or "slate."