

## **Event Title: Connecting Community Through Poetry**

**Event Description:** Poetry is a great connector for creating community locally and globally. Join current and former poets laureate and other writers who create their own fields for poetry in public schools, in youth detention centers, buses, community centers, libraries, universities, publishing, editing and guest editing, and in their own front yards. Poetry walks in tandem with many purposes including social justice advocacy, education, bridging distances and healing. We learn from our literary ancestors, our contemporaries on this panel, and others who connect their poetry with activism and create community.

**Event Category:** Artistic & Professional Development

**Event Organizer:** Angie Trudell Vasquez. Bio in the Event Participants section.

**Event Moderator:** Margaret Rozga

**Margaret Rozga** served as inaugural artist/scholar in residence at the UW Milwaukee at Waukesha Field Station where she hosted workshops and write-ins and curated the campus exhibit, *Our Field Station & the Earth*. As 2019-20 Wisconsin Poet Laureate, she offered workshops on writing social justice themed poems, edited an anthology, *On the Front Lines / Behind the Lines*, and co-edited with Angie Trudell Vasquez *Through This Door: Wisconsin in Poems*, an anthology that included work by all seven previous Wisconsin poets laureate and other Wisconsin poets.

### **Event Participants:**

**Angie Trudell Vasquez** is the Poet Laureate of Madison, WI (20-24). She holds a MFA in Creative Writing from the Institute of American Indian Arts. Finishing Line Press published her third collection of poetry, *In Light, Always Light*, in 2019, and her fourth, *My People Redux*, in January 2022. She has a small press Art Night Books that focuses on justice. In 2019 she co-guest edited the Spring edition of the *Yellow Medicine Review*, and is a Macondo Fellow or Macondista.

**Raul Sanchez** is the former City of Redmond Poet Laureate. He teaches poetry both in English and Spanish through the Seattle Arts and Lectures (WITS), and Jack Straw Cultural programs. He volunteered for PONGO Teen Writing at the Juvenile Detention Center. His second collection is called "When There Were No Borders."

**Maiah A Merino**, a Chicana Poet, co-edited The Yellow Medicine Review's Spring 2022 Journal: Miracles & Defining Moments. Her work appears in The Yellow Medicine Review and The Raven Chronicles. She is a 2021/2022 Writing the Land Poet, and recipient of the 2021 Artist Gap Award.

**Gregory Luce**, author of five poetry collections, has organized community poetry events including Arlington Poets in Solidarity With Ukraine (May 2022). He serves as the Board Chair of Day Eight, a Washington DC-based non-profit founded to support local artists in writing about their work.

**Opening Remarks and Housekeeping Announcements:** Welcome to this session, **Connecting Community Through Poetry**. We know you have many choices, so many thanks for being with us. A few reminders before we begin:

- For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let the session organizer, Angie Trudell Vasquez know, and she'll get a printed copy to you.
- Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear.
- Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
- Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone's use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

I'm Margaret Rozga, Margaret is my formal and my publishing name, but informally I'm usually called Peggy. I'll serve as moderator of this panel. Angie Trudell Vasquez is the session organizer, Raul Sanchez, Maiah Merino, and Gregory Luce are our panelists whose bios are on the website and who will in a few minutes introduce themselves.

First to introduce the thinking and experience that led to this panel: Session organizer Angie and I got to know each other a dozen years ago when we were among those protesting the proposed legislation by then newly elected Governor Scott Walker, cutting benefits and curtailing collective bargaining rights for state employees. Some Democratic state senators left the state to prevent a quorum and thus prevent passage of this law. A protest group began singing protest songs in the state Capitol, The Solidarity Sing-Alongs. Walker issued an order prohibiting

singing in the Capitol and people were arrested for singing. I created a Facebook group, Poets for First Amendment Protection, and started collecting poems for a poetry anthology we'd sell to raise bail money. The chapbook anthology *Turn Up the Volume* raised about \$1200.

Angie and I joined together on several other social justice fund-raising anthologies, most notably *Cries For Justice: Poems for Dontre Hamilton*, an African American young man killed by Milwaukee police. Angie published this chapbook through her small press. She also published the book we co-edited during my term as Wisconsin Poet Laureate, *Through This Door: Wisconsin in Poems*, which included all seven past Wisconsin poets laureate, local poets laureate and other poets who represented the geographic and racial diversity of Wisconsin. I had thought poetry was something done for love, but I learned in these projects that poetry could also make money.

This was one of the ideas that led to this panel, and some of the panelists will talk about fund-raising projects, but we wanted also to show many ways poetry can build and support community. Our panelists have an amazing array of ways they've engaged community through poetry to share with you. So let's meet them.

### **Participants Initial Remarks:**

**Angie Trudell Vasquez:** Connecting people through poetry has been my mission since I started sharing my work. I will talk about my early days of editing and publishing through my own small press, Art Night Books, and later collaborating with others to address the needs of the community by publishing thematic collections and holding readings across the state and online. I will also talk about guest editing, co-editing and judging local poetry contests. As the current city of Madison Poet Laureate, I will talk about my collaboration with librarians, art professors and their students, scientists and dancers. I will share highlights from the Bus Line Poetry celebration. In 2022 I was the poet-in-residence for the public libraries and collaborated with visual artists, scientists and dancers. I will talk about the community Ekphrastic poetry project based on my poem, "Tree Friends," which was translated into Spanish by co-panelist, Raul Sanchez. This Ekphrastic poetry project for the entire city became a mural. "Tree Friends," is a poem based on science, eco-poetics and our shared human responsibility to take care of Earth. Last, I will talk about how I established a Youth Poet Laureate for the city, my monthly mentoring of the Youth Poet Laureate Cohort, the anthology

we will produce, and my work with Art Lit Lab, Woodland Pattern, and Latino/a East High school students.

### **Raul Sanchez:**

The last three years have been challenging due to the limitations imposed by the pandemic. I was forced to think about how to engage with the public in a new way or through non-traditional ways.

I installed an old curio cabinet, refurbished, and dedicated to hold up to 20 poems for the neighbors or anyone walking by. Now it is known as the “Poetry Pole on 39th In exchange the neighbors have left many notes of gratitude as well as poems of their own. I created the “Poetry in the Park” bi-weekly event at the Meadowbrook Pond in NE Seattle which is dedicated to Theodore Roethke. It runs from April - September. King 5 TV’s show Evening has featured both the Poetry Pole and the Poetry in the Park events. Let’s not forget Public Art. Such as the poem at the Lake City Memorial Triangle corner of Sand Point Way and 124th Ave NE in remembrance of the tragic event that took place March, 2021. Poems as Public Art also in the city of Shoreline “Voices in the Forest” Poems on display in several parks and several languages. I curate a bi-monthly community reading in my neighborhood. Communicating with others has helped me believe that POETRY is the only way Humans can relate to each other by expressing what we feel and desire for humanity and for ourselves in more than one language.

### **Maiah Merino:**

I will talk about three projects where greater connections between self and other happened, the discovery of voice and self on the page and cultural connections supported community members in feeling more at home in themselves and within their communities.

In the first project with new or soon to be new moms and parents through “Families of Color Seattle”, I facilitated 5 senses exercises to help with co-regulation in new parenting, while also engaging in written exercises and group poems. The second project was a 4-week long session with a youth group at El Centro de La Raza here in Seattle, to talk about and explore El Dia de Los Muertos, creating cultural arts and exploring a poetic style called “calaveritas” (little skulls) poems, which are a silly-lyrical style created specifically for The Day of the Dead. Finally, a community I am honored to be a part of is *The Yellow Medicine Review*,

an Indigenous journal produced twice yearly in the Spring and Fall. I co-edited the Spring 2022, “The Miracles Issue”. The process of producing the Call and all of the pieces involved gave me such inspiration, as each writer claimed their own definition of what a miracle is, as new writers joined the community as it all unfolded before and between us.

**Gregory Luce:**

I will talk about three examples of my experience in using poetry to create and connect community. In January 2017 I assisted then Arlington County Poet Laureate Katherine A. Young in organizing and presenting Arlington Writers Resist, in connection with the national Writers Resist movement that arose in the wake of Donald Trump’s election. I acquired the venue, helped recruit readers, arranged for a photographer to document the event, and co-hosted. 50-60 people attended. In 2022, shortly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I worked with the current Arlington Laureate, Holly Karapetkova, to stage Arlington Poets in Solidarity With Ukraine, a reading that drew top poets from all around the Washington, DC, area, and approximately 30 attendees. We raised over \$2000 for UNICEF’s work in Ukraine. In addition, in 2017 I co-created the DC Poet Project, sponsored by DC-based arts nonprofit Day Eight, in which each year through a series of competitive readings, selects a winner who receives a cash prize and publication of a chapbook. The project is aimed at culturally underserved communities in Washington, DC, and draws dozens of budding poets and many more viewers and listeners from around the region.

**Moderator Questions:**

- When and how did you find and connect with partner groups? Schools? Libraries? Prisons? Other arts organizations (music; visual arts)
- What difficulties, if any, did you have finding venues for your events and activities, and how did you solve those difficulties?
- What publicity did you find particularly effective?
- Was food a part of your events?
- What follow-up with co-sponsors, participants, and/or audience?