

**Elizabeth Hoover
Teaching Statement**

As a writer, I use my work to learn more about the issues and stories that I find compelling and troubling, engage in conversation with other discourses, and explore ambiguity. My commitment to craft enables me to write poetry that both sings and says. My journey as a teacher has followed a parallel path. In my cases, my students are empowered to use their writing to engage with issues shaping their community and their world while simultaneously developing an understanding of the writing craft.

My students become researchers when I encourage them to use poetry to drive their critical thinking. As a poet, I constantly research, albeit in idiosyncratic ways. While I use traditional resources like reference books and archival documents, I also collect photographs, explore new neighborhoods, and visit museums. I encourage my students to develop their own research approach while modeling my own in the class. In an Introduction to Poetry course, my students and I used historical maps on a walk around Downtown Harrisonburg, discovering how a vibrant African American community was reduced to fields of parking lots. We also visited an exhibit at the Institute for Visual Studies on urban redevelopment and spoke with the curator who discussed the environmental impact of such projects. The students documented their discoveries and crafted poetic responses. Their final project was a collaborative poem that required them to imagine an ideal city, which they presented at an event capping a series of community conversations about urban planning initiatives. I require this kind of research because it allows students to see they don't have to wait for inspiration to strike; through purposeful investigation they can generate material in conversation with other discourses.

My orientation as a socially engaged writer can't obscure the fact that, as a writing teacher, I am also charged with teaching basic craft concepts. I integrate these principles into the curriculum while reinforcing the idea that poetry is a way to engage in conversation with other disciplines. For example, I developed a writing exercise based on the idea of the artists' sketch. We first visit the museum to look at sketches by famous artists and discuss what the purpose of sketching is. Then we walk "sketching" by writing ten or so lines describing the movement of a bee or how light falls on a building. Like artists sketches, some of these lines will never leave their notebooks, but it allows them to play with new approaches to generating language. This gives the students a sense that poets are part of a greater artistic community—one that includes visual artists, musicians, and performers.

I am constantly reminded how important craft concepts are and how easy it is to lose sight of them when emphasizing content. After my students returned from our research walk Downtown, their poems were full of clichéd abstractions that described the past as "paradise" and the present as "hell." In order to encourage the students to return to concrete precise language, I wrote the adage "show don't tell" on the board and we discussed its implications at length. We wrote poems that showed and never told, and I asked if anyone wanted to revise what was on the board. A student took the chalk and drew a carrot through "don't" adding the word "and" above it. This action allowed the students to see they can develop their own aesthetics that reflect what they value. It also de-centered the authority in the classroom, suggesting that everyone—not just the professor—has the authority to raise a question, propose an idea, or suggest a change in approach. In addition, it demonstrated to the students that revision can be about fundamentally re-imagining assumptions, not just "fixing" awkward language.

Their revisions were infused with precise concrete language that conjured the visual landscape of their city. This prompted lively discussions in class about poetry's place in civic dialogue. While some students leave my class vehemently denying that poetry has any purpose beyond personal expression, they can make their argument in a more substantial way because they were challenged over a semester. Others leave my class with a vision of poetry as a living and socially relevant art and are empowered to see their work as vital to their own community.