



## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

### Poetry on Buses overview

#### **Poet Planner & Community Liaisons**

4Culture staff began planning the project by hiring poet and teaching artist Roberto Ascalon to serve as the project's Poet Planner, and members of the local Russian, Somali, Spanish and Vietnamese speaking communities served as Community Liaisons. Together they identified local poets, expert in poetic traditions of their native languages, to co-host eight workshops at meeting locations central to each community. The communities were selected by the language needs identified in King County's Language Tiers and relate to 4Culture and Metro Transit's commitment to increase accessibility to communities with limited English proficiency. Not only did the liaisons help shape the workshops but they were key to making sure people in their communities were invited and encouraged to participate.

"I jumped on board whole-heartedly," said Roberto Ascalon, "to see how we can build communities in a poetic way. The theme writing home literally hits home. Working with it, we craft images from our daily lives and memories of home, whether it is overseas or in Burien. It opens up the program to non-English speakers; it's a great way to showcase this region's rich cultural diversity and to honor these communities."

#### **Call for Poems**

King County residents were asked in summer 2014 to submit poems on the theme "writing home" that contain 50 words or less.

#### **Innovative Workshops**

Eight workshops were held to encourage participants to submit poems. Facilitated meditative visualization exercises conjured concrete sensory details, such as the sights, sounds and smells of home. Using a simple free-writing technique, participants wrote poems alongside each other.

The workshops showcased the rich poetic traditions of King County's population. Participants heard lyricists recite the Vietnamese Lục bát form backed by karaoke, explored the deep symbolism of goats and camels in Somali poetry, and clapped out and sang Spanish verses to the rhythm of the Son Jarocho poetic form. The workshops offered a unique opportunity for multi-generational participants to write poems together and explore their own poetic traditions.

Staff from King County Metro were on hand at the workshops to introduce and educate attendees about their local community's transit options and connections.

## Poem Selections

A panel of judges, including Kathleen Flenniken, the 2012-2014 Washington State Poet laureate, a youth poet from Youth Speaks Seattle, and poets from each language community, selected the 365 poems to be displayed. "The selection panel was unlike any I've been part of and I loved the process," said Flenniken. "I relied on our native speakers to evaluate and interpret those poems I could only read in translation. I learned about form in Vietnamese and Somali poetry and experienced again the role of sound in good poems of any language. Our ninth-grade panelist had equal say, and this democratic process freed me from playing gatekeeper. I championed the poems that spoke to me. It was a joyful day."

## Program Launch

Poetry on Buses was launched at the historic Moore Theatre in Seattle on a rainy evening last November. 850 people packed the theatre to experience this free all-ages party. It was a celebration in poetry and music, to roll out the Rapid Ride Poetry buses, launch the online program, and recognize the project's many co-creators. The evening featured readings by 36 poets in five languages represented by the program, music by the Love City Love arts collective and introductions by rising star performer Hollis Wong Wear.

"The public gets significant exposure to poetry through this program," said Bob Virkelyst, Supervisor of Marketing and Service Information, King County Metro Transit. "The poems reach 55,000 riders daily on RapidRide buses. We are pleased to provide a creative conduit for people to express themselves; people of all cultures and all walks of life. We're pleased to partner with Titan, our transit media provider, to bring poems that enrich, deepen and add culture to the transit experience."

## Poetry Locations

The poems are located on 113 RapidRide buses, 4 dedicated Poetry Buses (no ads), 30 Rapid Ride Stations, and a new poem is launched at poetryonbuses.org every day for 365 days. Each week, a poem is featured with a portrait of the poet and audio of the poet reading his or her poem in their native language.

## Program Impact

The theme "writing home" has resonated with the local community, resulting in deep ownership of the program and unique expressions of home. "When I thought of home" says Ahn Phan reflecting on the workshop exercises, "I loved my parents even more for all the hard work they did when we were young." Her recollections led her to write the poem memories capturing a moment from her childhood days in Vietnam. Phan served as Poetry on Buses Community Liaison encouraging many in the local Vietnamese community to attend workshops and submit poetry.

After being published in the Poetry on Buses project, poet, writer and editor Anna Goren, brought the Poetry on Buses theme into her creative writing class for female inmates at the King County Correctional Facility. "It naturally resonated for the women, as they considered the homes they have lost, and the ones they will build. In their poetry, they have built a sanctuary," said Goren.

"Poems, relationships and a whole host of possibilities grew out of our new program framework" said Benzikry-Stern. "I'd love to see this framework experimented with in other cities."

### Selected Local Press

- Florangela Davila, "A Bus Ride In King County Now Also Delivers Volumes of Poetry," NPR Affiliate KPLU, November 17, 2014
- Anna Goren, Poetry on Buses Rebooted to Reflect Diverse Ridership, the Seattle Globalist, November 13, 2014
- LaVendrik Smith "King County Wants You To Have A Poetic Experience On the Bus", The Seattle Times, November 14, 2014
- Gemma Wilson, Mobile Verses, City Arts, Monday, October 27, 2014
- Marta Zekan, Poetry on Buses, a 4Culture and King County Metro project, is back! King FM Arts Channel, July 2014.