

Moving Poetry

Hong Kong Children's Poems

Edited by

Shirley Geok-lin Lim

and

Page Richards

With the assistance of Sonal Srivastava

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Preface

This volume proposes three interrelated goals. The first is to encourage, record, and disseminate the imaginative work of young Hong Kong school children. The second is to produce accompanying materials to the poems that explain the Moving Poetry project in terms of its efficacy for teaching creative and language abilities. The third is to offer strategies for teaching creative writing, particularly poetry, to children in urban, multilingual, and multicultural societies like Hong Kong. However, the constraints of space made it impossible for us to fully engage the last two goals. *Moving Poetry*, in its present form, therefore, serves more as a collection of poems by young Hong Kong children than as a pedagogical textbook for elementary and secondary teachers. The introduction and the afterword do not attempt to develop the materials or to explicate in full the process of teacher training, individual workshop strategies and teacher-student interactions, and relations between the training and strategies and the poems that now appear in this anthology. Rather, we have privileged the poems composed by the children.

We were careful never to write for the children. The young poets possess their own words, images, ideas, and feelings. Revising their drafts, we did note those images that most moved us. We quoted with relish those parts of their language that we found original,

pleasing, and surprising; and we suggested revision (and deletion) of excess lines, awkward choices of vocabulary, and infelicities that we recognized from our own poetic practices.

This collection represents only a small percentage of the poems from the workshops. Selection is subjective, perhaps reflecting more of our aesthetic positions and values than the individual poems do. We read all the children's poems. Many lovely ones have not been included. The poet or subject may already have been heavily over-represented, or the poem was too similar in thought or image to another.

We added necessary punctuation. Occasionally, we changed tense endings for subject-verb agreement or consistency. This revising for "proper grammar" was undertaken sparingly; we always wanted to remain faithful to the writer's voice. Our major revision was pruning. A few poems are shorter. We took the responsibility of "editing," that is, dropping weak lines. The majority of poems, though, appear exactly as they were submitted. With two or three, we rearranged the stanzas (not the words). We respected the poems' autonomy. These poems are the poems the children wrote.

Moving Poetry was co-organized by the University of Hong Kong and the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR), with the support of the Language Fund. We thank the project's Steering Committee and Chairman Mr. Victor Cha, the Department of English at the University of Hong Kong, the university administration, and the University's 90th Anniversary Secretariat for their support of the project. We are grateful to the participating poet-teachers

Louise Ho, Timothy Kaiser, Agnes Lam, Dino Mahoney, Mani Rao, Venus Tsang, Eliza Wong, and Wong Ho-Yin. Our thanks also to the Hong Kong University students who assisted in the workshops: Betty Chan, Sanaz Fotouhi, Cindy Hui, Ruth Hung, Keon Woong Lee, Shalini Nanwani, Carlos C. Perito, Davina To, Nicholas Y.B. Wong and Nicole Wong. Dr. Jennifer McMahon was a superb creative administrator. We also thank the Associate Dean of Education, Dr. K.W. Cheung, who took on the responsibility of outreach to the participating students and schools: Canadian International Primary School; Creative Primary School; Heep Yunn Primary School; Marymount Primary School; Po Leung Kuk Luk Hing Tao Primary School; St. Francis of Assisi's Caritas School; St. Paul's Co-educational [Kennedy Road] Primary School; St. Paul's Co-educational [Macdonnell Road] Primary School; St. Stephen's Girls' Primary School; Victoria English Primary School; Canadian International Secondary School; Law Ting Pong Secondary School; Sacred Heart Canossian College; SKH Bishop Mok Sau Tseng Secondary School; St. Clare's Girls' School; St. Joan of Arc Secondary School; St. Paul's Convent School; True Light Middle School of Hong Kong; and Wah Yan College, Hong Kong. We gratefully salute Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor K.M. Cheng for sharing our vision. Finally we thank Sonal Srivastava for her help with preparation of the manuscript, the school principals and teachers involved in the project, the parents whose enthusiasm was infectious, and above all the children whose remarkable poems make this anthology possible.

The Sweet

The first time I ate sweets,
It was a strawberry sweet.
Oh! It was so sour.
Toooooooooo! I spat it out.
After that I didn't like strawberries anymore.

And I tried to eat grape sweets.
Em it tasted toooooo sweet,
So I don't like grapes anymore.

After 1997,
I have found a Green Tea Sweet
At a Japanese Restaurant.
It suits me!
It is not too sweet or too sour.
It's just right.

*Zoe Lavinia Lau
Primary 5, St. Stephen's Girls' Primary School*

The goose eats seafood,
as it chases small fishes
in the ocean.

Honk Honk Gulp.

*Justin Ho
Primary 5, St. Paul's Co-Ed (Macdonnell Road) Primary School*

My Whale Speaks of Gibberish

I've known gibberish.
I've known gibberish, as nonsensical as Xavier.

My spirit has grown like the gibberman's.

I learned giberphibit very hard.
I drank the purest water from gibberzon.

*Philip Lui
Primary 5, Canadian International School*

Rice Dumpling

I'm Miss Rice Dumpling.
I'm made of rice and pork.
I smell nice and soft.

I'm Mr. Rice Dumpling.
My clothes are green and
My inside is light brown.
And I am salty.
If you eat me too much
You will be sick.

*Ching Yi
Primary 6, PLK Luk Hing Too Primary School*

Moving Poetry

I wish I were a wise wizard
I wish I had a waggery wand
I wish it had weird wonders
I wish my wonders were as wild as the north wind
I wish the north wind would not whisper like worms
I wish the worms would not wiggle into my walls.

*Angela Cheung
Primary 5, Marymount Primary School*

Wishes

I wish I had an elder sister, as kind as a fairy
godmother.
I wish I owned a black limousine, as long as the
Amazon River.
I wish I were an old oak tree, with birds perching on
me.
I wish I lived in a volcano, with red and orange
everywhere.
I wish I were an alien, with branches on my head.
I wish I were a Porsche, driven by men really fast.
I wish I were a blackboard, with words written on me.
I wish my father were a woman, so he won't be so
fierce.
I wish my school were built in space, so I could go to
school on UFOs.
I wish Hong Kong was a green city, with fresh air and
a nice environment.

*Jeannette Ip
Primary 6, Marymount Primary School*

Riddle Poem

When it's very cold,
I'm very hard.
When the weather is mild,
I move about wherever I like.
When it gets very hot,
I fly with the wind.

(answer: water)

Candy Chan
Form 3, True Light Middle School

I wish I can go to America.
I wish I can go to Neverland with Peter Pan.
I wish my home can be as big as the sky.
I wish I have pink wings and can play on the moon.
I wish I can eat a bowl of ice-cream everyday.

Cossette Lau
Primary 6, PLK Luk Hing Too Primary School

Snow

Ah! Snow is quite white.
It drops on the blue sea
Like a white paper.

Jennifer Chow
Primary 6, Marymount Primary School

There was a young man from Shek O
Who hated to play the piano.
He hated to play
And he hated to stay
So he hurried away from Shek O.

Melissa Yeung
Form 2, True Light Middle School

Loneliness
is a friend
of the elderly.

Chu Christy
Form 2, True Light Middle School

What Are Little Girls Made Of?

What are little girls made of, made of?
Lace dresses and the wind of spring,
Sweet kisses flying through the air,
A juicy peach hanging from a tree
With lots of butterflies flying around it.
A piano playing automatic love songs.

What are little boys made of, made of?
Animal waste and methane gas,
Cockroach legs and CFC,
Rows of shark teeth
And a tongue made of a bloody knife.

*Christy Chu
Form 2, True Light Middle School*



Moving Poetry

When I Am Happy

When I am happy,
I jump up.

When I am sad,
I drink 7-up.

When I am angry,
I eat a Chupa-Chup.

When I am lonely,
I throw some plastic cups.

*Chris Tsui
Primary 4, Victoria English Primary School*

When I Grow Up

When I grow up,
I want to be an artist.

I'll draw my future.
I'll draw my past.
I'll draw my happiness.
I'll draw my sadness.

*Angela Li
Primary 4, Marymount Primary School*

People Who Live in Hong Kong

People who live in Hong Kong
are very busy.

Every day they go to work,
work and work.

Why don't they play or sleep?

People who live in Hong Kong
go to work by the MTR.

They are all tired and sit quietly.

I think they didn't have
a good sleep last night.

Women who live in Hong Kong
always play with one another.

But sometimes they don't cook dinner.

Why? Because they all have a servant.

People who live in Hong Kong
are all very busy.

Helen Lai

Primary 4, St. Paul's Co-Ed (Kennedy Rd) Primary School

Extension to the Hong Kong Convention Centre

The figure dips and it sways
It pirouettes then disappears
Behind nooks and crannies
Appearing again in full frontal
It sweeps away
Into a gigantic curve

I follow the flow
Through your bold surfacings
To your most secret interstices
Through your finest mesh
Your exposed girders
I shall remember your multiple nudities
When you become fully drest
As the largest unsupported space in Asia

*Louise Ho
from: New Ends Old Beginnings*

To a Friend Who Has No Use for Poetry

Yet you remind me of e.e. cummings.

Your desk untidy,
Bills moulded together at the bottom of your wallet,
More sugar please in your already stormy coffee.
To over one hundred people,
You owe at least twenty dollars.

You never read manuals.
Never bother with sunscreen.
Cannonballing off the high board,
Fully dressed,
Tie and all,
Into a pool deep with practicality,
You soak us into smiles.

Timothy Kaiser

Afterword

Poems as Actions: Teaching the Craft of Writing Poems to Hong Kong Schoolchildren

Page Richards

This attempt by all of us to bring children and poems together, it turns out, is like bringing together fish and water. Schoolchildren of Hong Kong already swim. What is a grape for Jessica Sze? "Looks like the earth / Colors the ink of my pen." How does Thomas Chiu see the Peak? Through his father's eyes first: "He said, 'You can see / all the things in Hong Kong.' / I saw many things, more than anyone could see. / I could even see my apartment, / my room, my toys, and my bed."

Moving Poetry started with a voyage by Shirley Geok-lin Lim: to find poems in Hong Kong's children and to revisit Hong Kong through the children's imaginations. As a series of workshops and training sessions in the spring at The University of Hong Kong, Moving Poetry coaxed teachers to hand down the craft of writing poems, a treasure applicable to children everywhere. It is easy for them; they're open to the world. We just help them recognize it.

Learning to be a careful observer is a form of

empathy. It leads to the protection and preservation of the children's home: "Breathe the busy air, feel the excitement, with no pressure," advises Fabia Cheung. At the same time, Hong Kong's international position — its intermingling of tongues — makes words volatile, particularly capable for admitting change and revision. About delivering words to others, Hong Kong poet Leung Ping-kwan writes, "Delivered so, they are no longer the same words; they drift / on an expanse of water, held in the surges and ripples of waves."

Thus, beauty was not only in the children, but in the lesson of developing successful ways to teach the craft of poems in English to Asian schoolchildren. For three Saturdays in late April and early May more than 150 school children in Hong Kong learned how to make things with words. What they created also taught us, the teachers. Any teacher learns from the freshness of children. For Natalie Yeung, just eating a banana lets in the jungle: "When I was eating a banana, a lion roared. / A tiger roared too." And Tsang Hei Man fashions the wind: "I wish I could be the wind. / I wish I could be a wind designer." Yeung Yiu Hong holds down the real: "The sky is blue / When it is / Early morning, / It's yellow orange / In the morning. / It is light blue / In the afternoon." Poems hold up words as choices. The moon creates many moons and a question: "I can see / A red moon / In the morning. / And I can see / A black moon at midnight / Why do I say that?" asks Lee Ka Yee. We are responsible for making those choices increasingly clear and passing on the magic.

All of us teaching for Moving Poetry attempted to do this in our classrooms. It was a big idea, but one

that was also in many ways natural, overlooked yet easily available. I have been for years both a teacher and performer. My work on many stages leads me to know that good shows or classes make good participants from their audiences. Thus, the teachers' collaborative work in Moving Poetry leads us, we hope, to join finally with new teachers. The next teachers will help others to recognize and shape patterns of experience, memory for example. A burning candle in the darkened classroom leads Siting Yip to the memory of a very dark night: "The stars still sparked, but not as bright as before." Then begins a second memory of dreams: "The scene led me back to my dreams."

Both private journal and public document, our classrooms included Main Building 201, Seminar Room 113G, and the large conference room by the courtyard, Room 104. Private conversations between teachers and students began about sharks' wetness and bears' loudness, the subjects. Experienced teachers interrupted Chau Ton and Hiu Laam to help. The shark's wetness becomes cleanliness: "What's your body when it's wet?" / Can you make it clean?" The bear too was refashioned in private, back at the desk. "Shouting loud," the bear is asked, "What happened to you?"

Compiling a public record of successful practices started as soon as we spoke together about our ideas. Shirley Geok-lin Lim and I began by leading training sessions for the teacher-poets in the Main Building to outline together some of these exercises. We all agreed, for instance, upon a circle formation for the chairs, rather than lines. In a circle the children would feel part of one another. (The circle remained the metaphor; each class we came 'round and 'round to the same patterns

but with more to think about, more to feel.) Animal poems were suggested as inviting themes. We also talked about activities in which the whole of the children's bodies would be involved: noses, fingers, ears, hands. One teacher developed an extraordinary exercise using perspective. As the teacher said, this approach was inspired by Wallace Stevens's poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," in which a blackbird, flying out of sight, "marked the edge / Of one of many circles." Made of words, the children's poems also came out of seeing an object *relationally*. Each child was asked to stand near an object, such as a candle, then walk far away from it and look back. A student could also hold the same object above the head, just before standing on a desk to look down on it. One girl saw a candle's action by creating a second look. The flame is first a "crisis." Then this: "A candle / is shy little smiling girls / with their triangular, pink faces."

We talked together about adding music, such as Pachelbel, to aid memory. In class, the exercise was turned into a home for memory. Pachelbel was played, while the sound of waves was added. The children were still, as they remembered something. Immediately paper was handed out, and the children wrote about their experiences of things or people in Hong Kong: "Mr. Lai took me / to ride on the Star Ferry," began Helen Lai. Feeling seasick but special, the rider concludes, "Why couldn't the sea / not have any waves? / But the waves are / beautiful."

Varying tone and timing was also important for us. We discussed having them work independently, and in groups. One teacher's exercise had each child contribute one line to a class pastiche: "My legs are as

long as snakes. / The turtles are as hard as titanium. / Lions sound like my school bell. / . . . My eyes are fishballs, when I was a baby," begins one collaborative poem. While the students were working, we agreed, we would generally let them forget about punctuation and spelling and grammar. As one teacher said, "Grammar and sense should not be over-emphasized if we want to enter their poetic world." We encouraged the reading of poems out loud to one another, including group readings. Recitations of the city names, for example — Shanghai, Seattle, Toronto, Beijing — permitted us to be born again, together as poets.

Language for poems is also action, a way children can move themselves from one place to another: from a "before" to an "after," from being small to being big, from the body of a person to the mind of an animal (we had given the smallest children beanie babies, so each child had an immediate friend from another world). We wanted poems as transportation from one world to another, from a "soft patch of grass" to a plane over Phuket, from Pokfulam Road to the inside of Carol Yu's tick of time: "The plant of life nourishes on something / called time, / from which days, hours and minutes pass by / all started in the tick of a second." Out of the tick comes something special: "The hours extend into the brilliant sunset, / and from it blossoms the night sky, / and within the night lies twinkles of sprinkling."

Poems were a way to move them into new ways of themselves. Some students at first were afraid: what to do with this unusual thing in their hands? One girl had written a shape poem, in the form of a balloon, but did not trust its *poemness*. Her teacher had to slide the paper gently but forcefully from the top of her desk to

collect it. Older students occasionally felt self-conscious. Poems belonged to poets they had studied: Li Po and Shakespeare and Meng Hao-jan. How could they, young people sitting near the main courtyard one afternoon, compete? But listen to Jenny Cheng: "I wish I were a map holding the ocean and land."

We are aware, too, that poems have too often been painfully reduced to "meanings" or "messages." Poems are not that. All of us look at them as a way *to see* or — better — as a way *to move*. As poems move forward, so does a student's self-confidence. By choosing "a goose" instead of "a bird," for example, a miracle happens. The long "o" is funny. A long neck appears with it. A goose lives in places that ostriches, for instance, don't inhabit. So a world appears around the goose that was not there before. "Goose" also has associations with fairy tales and golden eggs. When Justin Ching Ho, a boy who had been given a goose beanie baby, chose the word "goose" in his poem for "bird," he saw an abyss and a dive and something else, the beauty and horror of its mechanics: "Among the creatures of the deep, / I saw a goose, / in metallic grey, / diving in the abyss, / stealthily, neck straight." In other words, he thought in new ways by saying in new ways. By seeing the goose slowly he saw its metallic feathers. Sight and insight combine, and Justin becomes both a witness and a creator.

What worked best in our classrooms occurred when children perceived and wrote images simultaneously in sounds, touch, and action. One of the teachers had the lights turned out while the children passed around several objects to taste, smell, touch, and hear. Anita Mak knows a pineapple: "Hard and dry outside, / Green

hat on head." I had them paint a house (it could be anything, a horse or person) twice. The first time, they were asked to give exceedingly little detail. The second time they were to see the same image in slower motion. We also tried sometimes to slow their hands down. Some of them painted in slow motion as well. Every body part is a part of the whole, so the organ of the eye is slowed down appreciably after the children learn to slow their hands in painting. By using their fingers to paint and immediately moving their fingers to write, they found shaping to be alike in both drawing and writing. In the first picture, Stephanie Tsang's house had a path; in the second, it was red with "clear" windows and "green bushes," and — surprise! — "juicy red strawberries around it."

Teachers regularly went around the room to hear all the voices. One boy was immediately engaged by the attention. He was lovely, thick-haired, very formally dressed. Serious, he was a reminder of Coventry Patmore's exquisite "Son," with the careful and serious play of a child: "My little Son, who look'd from thoughtful eyes / And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up wise . . . had put within his reach, / A box of counters and a red-vein'd stone / A piece of glass abraded by the beach . . . And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful / art, / To comfort his sad heart." The children did not consider carefulness to be an unnatural addition to language-making.

Our assistants helped to make the settings, as much as possible, playful, open, inviting. We did not stand in the center of the circle. We all walked around and made suggestions for a poem that might be a special fit: a boy's cap, a girl's blue-striped pen. Assistants often

began at the other end of the circle so that the attention was immediately forthcoming. Children raised their hands, thrust their papers forward for us to see. Some of the boys called out the parts of their poems that required help. As one teacher said, "kids found it really hard to express a feeling that they had not thought about; they really needed us to provide materials for them as we asked them to think, transform, and create out of the given materials."

Children need some kind of form to begin. The language for poems can be found in the most common things, such as paint. Children can learn ways to thin language (when it needs more light), to add blues and greens and black (when contrast is important), to move it with a brush in stanzas of three lines, four lines, short lines, half lines. Teachers can help them. Kenneth Koch, a poet who has worked extensively with teaching the craft of poems in New York to children and to whom this project is indebted, has found several examples of actions that help to organize perceptions: "I Used To/ But Now"; "I Seem To Be/ But Really I Am," both of course variations on "Before/After." With help from poets such as Adrienne Rich and Langston Hughes, we added some: "You're wondering if I'm *lonely*: / OK then, yes, I'm *lonely*" and "I've known *rivers*: / Ancient, dusky *rivers*," for example. Other exercises included fairy tales: one class reimaged the fairy-tale structure for modern Hong Kong stories: "Cinderella went to the fireworks all fancy," begins Becky Martyn. Whom does she meet? "Cinderella went to the fireworks. / She met a business tycoon." Another class asked about trees: "Why Do I Like Trees?" "Because trees are tall. Trees are strong. / They aren't afraid of the rain and storm," answers Ng

Chung Yan. Color poems came out of one class. About Yellow, there were tigers knocking over baskets with "bananas, lemons, and mangoes in it," witnessed by Cheng Yuk Kin.

Deliberately, we sometimes made famous, well-crafted poems worse. We did it to show them what was lost. We reduced a runner in a Walt Whitman poem to statement: "There is a runner on the street . . . He runs with his arms at his side." We had them stand up and imitate such a runner. Then we had them imitate *the* runner, Whitman's runner with his "lightly closed fists." They saw more. They felt their own bodies more delicately. One boy, Xavier Tam, chose a slam dunk and saw it more keenly, connected it to other things he has thought about: a skunk's "heart is a basketball that is dribbled by a player left and right." We hoped that they would see such comparisons, comparisons that later will turn into histories for them, the beauty of histories in expression: eventually, *shan-sui-shih*, Chinese poems of "mountains and rivers," ballads, sonnets, yes, but also pediments and fugues and, when they're older perhaps, cycles of history and families.

Part of our responsibility was to create such background maps and continuities, ones they could inhabit and write and revise for themselves. One method was to create links and repetitions through all the sessions. A class, for instance, had four parts each session: the "stimulus" stage; writing stage; recitation stage; finalizing of drafts for submission. Another worked consistently with haiku. In two of our classes, we entered the lives of animals progressively. William Blake's poem, "The Tyger," beginning, "Tyger! Tyger! burning bright / In the forests of the night," led the way

in one class. June Lau, rethinking her pony, responded, "If you hear me, neigh, neigh / You know I am trotting by / like the wind, the wind." In another, the children wrote the names of their beanie babies on the board, along with the kind of animal, its habitat, how it moves, what it does in the day, what it does at night. Each week, of course, the board was erased. Each week they started again. They could write what they wrote before *or* revise what they wrote by adding detail, following the "life" of the animal more closely, now that they were learning to see in slow motion.

Increasingly, they entered the mind of the animal that they originally were only writing *about*. At first they did not see this, but the elements on the board every week become more accurate, more precise in vision and attention. Where there was a rabbit on the board, there soon appears a "nibbler." That same "nibbler" by the third class, on the board, becomes a "nibbler nibbling leaves."

Children liked writing on the board, and they were at the same time transgressing. They dared at the board, and they brought that important, wonderful feeling back with them to their desks. Like the haiku and like the four-part sessions, the repetition of the practice became refrains that we made for them. Like a good refrain the pattern began to fold into the children's poems. We therefore tried to have the children recycle what they learned and increase their abilities. We all taught revision regularly, at first in literal ways: seeing things again. A scientist in a first drawing stands nowhere in particular; in the second the scientist has experiments in a lab, so the verb changed from "thinks" to "experiments."

Revisions could be difficult, however. For a flower, they tried "tulip," then "blank tulip." A "line of birds" became "birds flying in a line." For verbs, some looked again at their pictures. Poems are made out of words, not ideas first. Some were not afraid at all. They allowed words their multiple lives. Words, like children, have many lives, and children can intuitively free words from a single restrictive meaning or use. Indeed, we recognized one thing that the bilingual ear offers: an ability to hear words easily as sounds. The students moved to accommodate possible shapes of words, disconnected from a single meaning or association. For instance, when a man in a poem moved "hummingly," they already remembered the word *in relation* to other words by sound: "stunning," "strumming." The adverbial "ly" function, therefore, was for them the smaller sound. One natural action of a poem, seeing something in relation to something else — as *like* — is built into multiple tongues. Hearing patterns of sound, and deriving pleasure from that, has natural footing.

In addition to being quiet, through sounds such as "hummingly," poetry is noisy: "So, I like evening very much. / Why? Why? Why? / It's because the sun and the sky / Are orange in the evening," explains Yim Man Kit. It is conversational, as well as elusive and suggestive. It talks across generations even before it utters its first word. We continued to teach the children forms: repetition, comparison, refrains. The patterns behind these forms are not unique to poems. They are the patterns of generations, of reproduction, of being "like" and "unlike." They are patterns of return.

But how do children learn to hear how exactly poetry is social, how it speaks to the living, the dead,

ancestors, friends, old kings and queens, dragons, and a nearby azalea rooting itself to Bonham Road? How do these same children learn not to associate it either with a purely private language or a social mask? How? Children, like poems, are naturally noisy as well as quiet, conversational as well as enigmatic. Children are naturally social in the ways that poems are naturally private, and vice versa. That is, they instinctively resort to ceremony as a way to express themselves privately and intimately with parents, family, and friends. Therefore, they talk to other children less often by statement than by gesture: both hands and feet drooping, smiles half-made or unreturned. Long before words, these gestures clue children in to other children and their surroundings and to themselves again.

So poems follow the same circles. They talk to one another across centuries in sonnets, wave open arms in free verse, have controlled conversations to one another in syllabics. And in so doing they understand their own social *and* private worlds better. Rita Dove, an African-American poet teaching at the University of Virginia, holds a conversation with William Blake, a White Englishman of the eighteenth century; reinventing his patterns, she finds her own voice and surroundings nearer: "Sometimes there were things to watch — / the pinched armor of a vanished cricket, a floating maple leaf. . . ." Just as poems invent one another, so do children. The form of poems is the first subject of the poem. A noted reader of poems, Helen Vendler, points to possible acts: "Is [the] poem a Boast, or an Apology, or a Prayer?" The actions of children, too, take place in words, and they can recognize in ceremony a private feeling. The movement of a polar bear is dance, and

its beauty is transformative, generational, for its watcher:
"A polar bear / With a thick white coat / Walking in the
strong wind / Stepping on the cold ice . . . It will never
rest / Till it finds the food / For its lovely baby."

Children want to express themselves more clearly and by doing so know themselves better. Whether or not the children continue to write poems, we hoped each of them felt a new kind of attention (more close and more slow) inside their bodies. We think some of them did feel this already. Kite Kwong watched the rain: "Rain is a little baby, depending on me." Tsang Hei Man is aware of an owl: "I have an owl / Called John." He pays attention to its night habits: "It always flies / In my bedroom / and eats the flowers." Hong Kong, under Yvonne Leung's watch, grows: "One tiny dot, / With all combines, / With all amazes." The students moved through poems and they were moved by poems. The children moved us with their eagerness, fears and skillful recoveries, their openness.

Soon their words, when you see them on buses and subways and posters, will move you too. Their words will take you back home — to Hong Kong — in a way you've never felt before. Hong Kong has fantastic rains and flowers, and pineapples and "busy air." One teacher said the children's "joy and gaiety" made her "see [her] world differently." We have seen it better because of the children who came and let us know their words. They, and we through them, revisit what Ng Cho calls "a wonderful place," Mong Kok, and the larger Hong Kong.