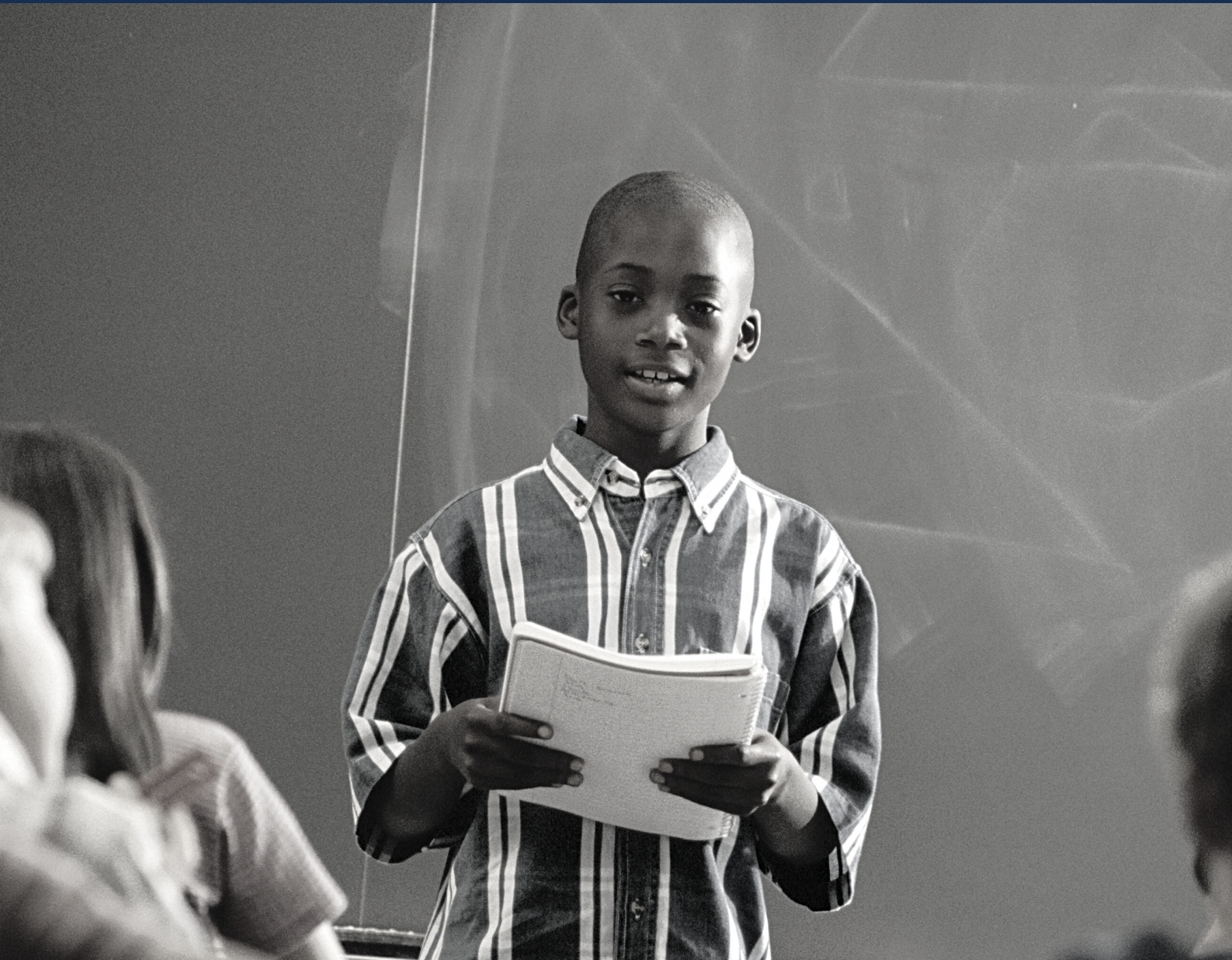


# Event Guide

How to host your own  
Favorite Poem Project  
Reading.







# TYPES OF EVENTS

The planning required for the reading will depend upon how you design the event. You may decide to host a casual event: an "open mic" occasion with people signing up to read just before you get started. If you choose to do a low-key reading, you might want to have an open sign-up some weeks before the event, on a first-come first-served basis. That way, the readers will be prepared ahead of time—and they'll be less likely to break the rule about not reading their own poems

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More formal events tend to go better, but they take more planning. A carefully produced community event involves a selection process. You should start planning about six to eight weeks before the scheduled date, so that you can solicit and select readers. Such events have the advantage of ensuring an exciting variety of readers and poems. Your early publicity can ask people from your community to send you their favorite poems, along with a brief statement about the poems' significance in their lives. You or your staff will make the selections for your event and will extend invitations to those selected. You may decide to ask a local poet to help you make selections. Fifteen is a good number of readers. Of that number, perhaps three or four—or more, if you choose—may be prominent people in your community.



# SELECTING READERS

A broad range of readers, from school children to elected officials, makes for a lively event. You may solicit readers from schools, religious and civic organizations, programs such as Poets-in-the-Schools, etc. A variety of backgrounds, languages other than English, different kinds of education and profession, all add variety and interest.

Because Robert Pinsky is interested in the civic presence of poetry, he's included some eminent Americans in the Favorite Poem Project's recorded archives: former President and Mrs. Clinton, Georgia Supreme Court Justice Leah Ward Sears, Boston's Reverend Michael Haynes. Local Favorite Poem readings have featured many public figures: the governors of Maine and Iowa, the mayors of Los Angeles and Saint Louis, and senators from several states. However you proceed with your event, it's worthwhile to invite some civic figures from your community to participate—the mayor, an alderman, the president of a local college or university, a philanthropist or community leader.

# THE ONLY RULE

The only rule for an event affiliated with the Favorite Poem Project is that poems recited are NOT poems the readers or their friends or relatives have written—but, rather poems they have read, perhaps many times, and to which they feel a personal attachment. Poems, for example, from the great history of American poetry, perhaps by Walt Whitman or Emily Dickinson, Langston Hughes or Gwendolyn Brooks, Wallace Stevens or Robert Frost. A reader might also choose Robert Browning or William Shakespeare—or a poem written in another language, along with an English translation. At various readings, we've heard poems in Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish, Japanese, Russian, Yiddish, Vietnamese and other languages.



# PLANNING THE EVENT

## SET A DATE

Set a date six to eight weeks from the time you begin planning. If you don't already have one, **secure a space** for your reading.

## SOLICIT GENERAL READERS

Announce in a newsletter, on local bulletin boards or in classified or free ads that you're looking for readers for a Favorite Poem event. You might even make up a contact form that asks "What's your favorite poem—and why?" and drop them off at a few high-traffic places: your local library check-out desk, the grocery store, some schools. What you'll look for, along with good poems, are the most interesting personal attachments to poems.

## INVITE SPECIAL READERS

The solicitation process, handled correctly, is sure to uncover some interesting participants. However, beyond that you might need to seek out and invite some local eminences who turn out to be poetry-lovers. Send invitations and make some calls to local public figures to see who might join you.

## WRITE A PRESS RELEASE

Once you begin to finalize your reader list, you can write a brief press release that includes the date, time and location of the event. Quotations from the participants may add texture and generate press and public interest. We suggest making events free and open to the public. Send your press release to the local newspapers and local television and radio stations. Follow up with phone calls a day or two after the release goes out.

## CREATE A PROGRAM FOR EVENT NIGHT

It doesn't have to be anything fancy! Even a simple program that presents the order of readers, their names and their chosen poems is useful. It's better not to include the text of the poems to be read, as this can be distracting.

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# IMPORTANT SUGGESTIONS

The readings Robert Pinsky has hosted have been unique and inspiring. People tend to leave these events thinking, often audibly, about what poems they would choose. After many successful readings, we've learned a few things. Here are a few of them:

**The readers should be personal, not general, in answering the question, "Why have I chosen this poem from among my favorites?"** This is the big, important point to emphasize: not a term paper, but an account of the reader's experience.

**Tell everyone, emphatically, that they are limited to five minutes.** That way, even the most long-winded readers won't go on too long. Five minutes is a long time, and should be enough for the poem and for explaining their connection to it. If a poem takes longer than five minutes to read, an excerpt will do.

**Absolutely nothing in writing should be allowed, except for the poem.** There should be no reading of prose; participants who speak informally, from the heart, are far more effective. This prevents homework assignment or book report style digressions away from why readers are reading a particular poem. People who are lively and interesting as themselves can become dull and monotonous when reading from a prepared text.

**Also, there are advantages to having the readers sit on a stage or in the front of the room in a crescent of chairs:** the audience can watch their responses to each other and can also mark the progress of the reading.

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# YOUR CONTRIBUTION

A community Favorite Poem reading contributes to the Favorite Poem Project by extending the project's legacy to new people and places. If you decide to host a reading in your community, please let us know!

You may decide to record your event for your own records or enjoyment. Many communities have recorded readings in order to create an archive and share them locally, some events have even been broadcast live on local television stations. We're always happy to see press about your events, or to receive updates from organizers and participants. Please let us know how it went!

If you have specific, detailed questions about planning an event, contact the project staff by email ([fpp@bu.edu](mailto:fpp@bu.edu)), phone (617-353-2821) or at Favorite Poem Project, Boston University, 236 Bay State Road Boston, MA 02215.

