

The soul of a poem is in its images. I define it as a phrase which creates a physical sensation in the audience—a mental picture, a taste in the mouth, an echo in the ear, goosebumps, a welling of tears. Images are words from the language of sensation—that is, concrete language, language that refers to things you can stub your toe on, or feel stirring your hair, or things you can pick up and hold. Physical, tangible things.

This concrete language of the senses is the Yin to **abstraction's** Yang. Abstract words are a necessity—we don't think well without them. If you want to say that urban life in the 20th century can be *lonely, depressing, sordid, rushed, and anonymous* and that it leaves us *nervous, dissatisfied and frustrated*, you can't (or shouldn't) use those abstract words I've italicized. That is **Telling** the reader what they should be feeling. Only foolish people enjoy being told how to feel.

The alternative to telling is **Showing**, or re-creating sensory experience by casting your experience into images. Images create sensations (mostly pictures) inside the audience's mind. Those sensations, in turn, create emotions within the audience. Your job as a poet is to put pictures into other people's minds. Images are a kind of word-picture that leaps off a paper and pierces the eye or the ear and forms an equivalent sensation in the mind, which then pierces the heart.

To be effective, an image needs to be particular (specific), not general. Your words must **point** at that apple, the one with freckles and a bruise, not some imaginary apple that's already in the audience's mind. Don't say "dog", say "that Labrador over there, the one whose tail is whapping her master's leg."

You find your images in the world, on the Earth. The world is a mirror for our feelings. We notice those physical things which strike a chord within us—when this happens, **PAY ATTENTION!** Earth is giving you your material. Your unconscious mind collaborates with Earth in this process.

In effect, we often notice what we **need** to notice. If you want to use your writing process to help you live your life, be open to

receiving your images from your direct sensory experience of the world. Once, when I was long-windedly developing this idea for a second-grade class, a little boy raised his hand and brightly said, "Oh. You just mean the world speaks our feelings back to us." Just. Indeed.

"An image is a piece of news from the real world outside or from our own bodies which is brought into the light of consciousness through one of the senses." —John Frederick Nims

"We think in generalities, but we live in detail." —Alfred North Whitehead

"An image ... presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." —Ezra Pound

"An image is anything presented to consciousness as a bodily sensation." —John Frederick Nims

"The poem does not just come from a mind, it comes from a mind in (and very much aware of) a body. ...Aware of the world. It sounds like a real voice speaking. If we do not believe the voice in a poem, nothing else matters. The poem has left a credibility gap we will never bridge. Whatever else a poem may be, unless it seems a real voice in a real body in a real world, it is not likely to affect us deeply." —John Frederick Nims

The artist picks out the luminous detail and presents it. He does not comment. —Ezra Pound

Abstract	Concrete by Shakespeare
Ungrateful kids are a source of parental suffering.	How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child.
I often change my mind	I am a feather for each wind that blows.
I have much that worries me.	O, full of scorpions is my mind...
Abstract	Concrete by Caddy
Herons land clumsily on their nests	Great paper kites collapse and collapse into boughs
Forest rodents chew bones of dead animals and in the process recycle the calcium in the bones.	the jaws of small mothers chew calcium to set their milks against the hunger in the den...the circle of the nipple and the mother's tooth
The natural world seems callous in the presence of human suffering	every feather every leaf should tremble in the presence of her grief
Courtship rituals in many animals are quite attractive.	but they will not We are all most lovely not making love, but just before.
Aquatic animals and birds are both shaped by the transparent fluids through which they move	fish and fisherbird silver and greyblue
	shaped by flowing through clear simples

