AT LAST, POETRY
A New Genre from an Old Friend

Chances are, if you haven’t attended yourself, you know someone who’s an enthusiastic follower of Let’s Talk About It, Oklahoma (LTAIO). For over 30 years, Oklahoma Humanities has distributed this popular reading and discussion program across the state, bringing communities together to discuss the human experience through the lens of literature.

Programs take place in a variety of venues: local libraries, museums, universities, prison diversion programs for women with children, state prisons, arts and humanities councils, and a veterans’ hospital. No matter the audience, exploring the humanities through a common text unites readers, opening doors to new ideas and shared perspectives.

After decades of reading series comprised of fiction and nonfiction, Oklahoma Humanities has three new themes that include poetry.

The “Civil Rights and Equality” series includes Native Guard: Poems (Mariner Books, 2007), the Pulitzer Prize-winning book by Natasha Trethewey, nineteenth Poet Laureate of the United States. Trethewey’s collection explores issues of race in the Deep South, through the experiences of her own family and the legacy of the Louisiana Native Guard, one of the first black regiments called into service during the Civil War.

The series “War, Not-War, and Peace” features Neon Vernacular: New and Selected Poems (Wesleyan, 1993) from Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Yusef Komunyakaa. Bloomsbury Review calls Komunyakaa’s poetry, “razor-sharp pieces that tell us more about our culture than any news report.” The poems in Neon Vernacular reveal the voice of a black man, a child of the South, and a soldier using language to paint a gritty image of life and the Vietnam War.

“Coming and Going in Oklahoma Indian Country,” a series developed by author, poet, and musician Joy Harjo, features the work of Joe Dale Tate Nevaquaya in his book Leaving Holes & Selected New Writings (Mongrel Empire Press, 2011), winner of the 2012 Oklahoma Book Award for Poetry. Nevaquaya’s verse speaks of poverty, pain, and obstacles; of native identity, heritage, and honor; and of humor and our shared humanity.

Whether it is a lifelong passion or an eternal mystery, come explore the language of poetry, revealing the tragedy and beauty that is the human experience. Find a book discussion near you: okhumanities.org/calendar.