

Goodrich Study Guide for Teachers:

Student prep ideas: You may choose to let the presenter speak for himself. Or you may want to introduce Charles Goodrich as a poet who has been featured on Garrison Keillor's *The Writers Almanac* and published in *Orion*, *Northwest Review*, *Open Spaces*, and *The Sun*. He has also published several books of prose and poetry (see below). The many insights that allow him to write empathetically about bugs, building and being in the natural world come from acute observation of the world around him, and his long tenure as a gardener for the Benton County Courthouse in Corvallis, OR. One critic writes that "Charles Goodrich's missives from the garden are winsome and precise, offering a tonic of reflection and compassion for troubled times. Losing himself to pole beans and garlic, he finds the deeper humanity that comes from having hands and head close to earth." He is currently co-director of the Spring Creek Project for Ideas, Nature and the Written Word at Oregon State University in Corvallis, OR.

Part 1 (23:30): In part one, Charles addresses flies, bees, aphids – scorned creatures all – and responds to questions about instinct, forgotten places and "security and adventure." Have students read *The Behavior of Flies* and *The Master* (below). Provoke them for their ideas about what Goodrich is saying, prior to listening to the podcast.

0:00 Introduction
0:32 flies
2:27 The Behavior of Flies (poem)
4:11 bumblebees
4:56 The Master (poem)
8:21 aphids
11:38 A Lecture on Aphids (poem)
14:16 Q & A

Part 2 (23:13): In part two, Charles seeks out spiders and gives the vulture a voice, and responds to questions about restoration, which he views as "restory-ing," and the relationship between science and philosophy. Part 2 begins with Goodrich reading Walt Whitman's "A Noiseless Patient Spider" so you may want students to have read that, or have access to it. Compare it to *Vacuuming Spiders* (below).

0:00 Introduction
0:32 spiders
3:21 Vacuuming Spiders (poem)
8:51 vultures
10:26 Turkey Vulture Talking (poem)
12:07 Q & A
20:02 Thinking the Sky (poem)

Further classroom discussion/writing prompts:

1. How can a diverse group strive toward common solutions? What are analogies for this in nonhuman flora and fauna?

2. How does love for something or someone help define “responsibility”?
3. Where is your “home”? Do you have a refuge? What was your secret childhood place?
4. Find adventure in a common and familiar place like your own backyard. Why should you look for adventure there?
5. Describe something ordinary as magical. Describe its emotional life. Describe it as humorous.
6. Describe an intimate encounter with something you labored to create (an art project, a piece of writing, a structure, a relationship, etc.).
7. Describe something you have “cross-pollinated,” and its richness and diversity.
8. Invite someone to “look through [your] hand lens.”
9. What non-human life form provides the best metaphor for your spirit/spirituality?
10. Be a storyteller: bring together “fact” and “values” in a new way.

Selected passages:

The Behavior of Flies

I’ve always thought they were good-for-nothing free-loaders, trash mongers, corpse defilers. Even the adults were just winged maggots, to my mind.

But this one on the porch rail appears to be doing exercises – push-ups, neck stretches and wing-flexing isometrics. Which makes sense when you think about it, for what is the fate of an out-of-shape fly?

Its wings are like isinglass. It has bulbous eyes the color of chestnuts, and whenever I lean close, it crouches and holds still, ready to flee if I move to strike. And I am tempted to take a swat – it’s a kind of itch in my chest muscles, and urge to lash out.

The Master

Early morning in the garden, I’m watching a bumblebee bang around in a poppy. He buzzes over to a penstemon, shoves his way down a blossom, then backs out with pollen stains on his face. Now he shambles across the rosemary like a drunkard and stumbles onto an aster, a clumsy, fat ballerina in a black tutu.

It’s hard to take this bumblebee seriously, with his stubby wings, pudgy thorax, geodesic eyes. When he lifts his ponderous body in flight, he fudges several laws of aerodynamics. If this is how plants get pollinated, it’s a wonder the planet survives. Weird, how evolution flirts with absurdity.

My mother used to tell me, “Don’t be half a fool.” So I bow to the bumblebee, my mentor in accident and indirection, who has gotten himself stuck just now in a foxglove. Humming and shoving, he shimmies back out, waggles his butt and buzzes away, the master, my implacable guru.

Vacuuming Spiders

I admire their geometrical patience,
the tidy way they wrap up leftovers,
their willingness to be the earth's
most diligent consumers of small bitternesses.

Sometimes at night I hear them
casting silk threads, clicking their spinnerets,
plucking their webs like blind Irish harpists.

I can almost taste the fruit of the fly
like sucking the pulp from a grape.

But when their webs on the ceiling
begin to converge, and the floor
glitters with shards of insect wings
I drag out the vacuum
and poke its terrible snout under the sofa,
behind the radio—everywhere,

for this is the home of a human being
and I must act like one
or the whole picture goes haywire.

Grinding Wheel

Mounted on a steel frame
with a metal seat
and a foot treadle on the left side

the big grindstone still spins
on its well-greased bearing
implacably as a small planet.

Back then, everything depended
on blades – axes and pulaskis, chisels and adzes,
knives in the kitchen, the tool shed, the barn
a knife in every man's pocket.

They say
some old-timers
could whet a blade so fine
it would slide between the atoms
of wood or flesh, not cutting, not drawing blood, just
probing the void

Or maybe that's just a story,
not what the grindstone is saying in its gruff voice,
as I pump the treadle
and press my puny blade
to the wheel.

Thinking the Sky

The sky's blue
was an afterthought
of flowers and trees
as they respired oxygen into the atmosphere.

They also brought improbably insects
to shuttle their pollen.
And once there were bugs to eat
birds became thinkable.

Everyone who was paying attention
knew humans would be along soon
but no one imagined the sky
would go gray.

Wild Geese

I'm picking beans when the geese fly over, Blue Lake pole beans I figure to blanch and freeze. Maybe pickle some dilly beans. And there will be more beans to give to the neighbors, forcibly if necessary.

The geese come over so low I can hear their wings creak, can see their tail feathers making fine adjustments. They slip-stream along so gracefully, riding on each other's wind, surfing the sky. Maybe after the harvest I'll head south. Somebody told me Puerto Vallarta is nice. I'd be happy with a cheap room. Rice and beans at every meal. Swim a little, lay on the beach.

Who are you kidding, Charles? You don't like to leave home in the winter. Spring, fall, or summer either. True. But I do love to watch those wild geese fly over, feel these impertinent desires glide through me. Then get back to work.

Place-based curriculum (Oregon's Willamette Valley) from *The Practice of Home*:

Grade 9

English: literature of the Willamette Valley: *Moontrap*, Don Berry; *Coyote Was Going There*, Barry Lopez; *Always Coming Home*, Ursula LeGuin

Writing: poetry and prose writing on home, neighbors, local critters, and plants

Carpentry I: bookshelves and birdhouses

Mathematics: geometry and algebra applied in measuring and cutting; balancing a checkbook

Chemistry and Home Economics: cooking and baking; cleaning products, how they work and how they degrade; water and sewage treatment

Ecology: chaotic structure of a sunflower; galaxy formation

Grade 10

English: literature of the American West: *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain; *Myths and Texts*, Gary Snyder; *Housekeeping*, Marilynne Robinson

Writing: the art of complaining: letters to the editor; oral histories; family histories

Carpentry II: garden construction: arbors, trellises, benches

History: history and prehistory of the Pacific Northwest; *Ishi*, Theodore Kroeber

Applied Chemistry, Physics, and Mathematics: welding, soldering, painting, plumbing; ecological impacts of industrial chemicals

Art: drawing, painting, and drafting your dream house

Grade 11

English: world literature: *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau; *Howard's End*, E.M. Forster; *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez; *The Issa Valley*, Czeslaw Milosz; "The Bear", William Faulkner

Carpentry III: beginning cabinetry

Applied Geography, Civics, and Land Use Planning: apply for building permit; attend Land Use Planning Board meeting

Art: constructing scale models of houses and civic buildings

Grade 12

English, Writing, Civics, Ecology, Art: conversing with the community: reading, writing, and speaking out on local issues in education, ecology, landscape, and architectural design; keeping a lifetime illustrated journal

Carpentry IV: apprenticeship with Habitat for Humanity

Selected Bibliography:

Insects of South Corvallis, Northwest Poetry Series, Cloudbank Books, 2003

The Practice of Home: Biography of a House, The Lyons Press, 2004

Heavy Mulching: Eleven Dispatches from the Garden, Knot House Press, 2007

In the Chesnim Country, Knot House Press, 2009

Going to Seed: Dispatches from the Garden, Silverfish Review Press, 2010

Listen to Charles read four poems (two are also included in this podcast):

<http://www.terrain.org/essays/25/goodrich.htm>