

## LOCAL CONVERSATIONS, LOCAL PROMPTS

*We hope some of you may want to share this book, or some of its poems, in classrooms, community reads, or writing and book groups. Here are questions to begin a discussion around the ideas of local writing, wherever you live, and writing locationally meaningful poetry:*

1. Do you prefer specific language in poems? Why or why not? What places do you think should be named, and how? Do you like “the gym,” “church,” “the store,” or would you write “the ‘Y’ on Odana,” “High Point Church,” “the Jenifer Street Co-op”?
2. What do you think about the use of historical research in local poems? Some examples in this book are pieces by Fabu, Jim Stevens, Kimberly Blaeser, and David Steingass, and Darrell Petska. Local archives are great resources for poetry. Lots of material is available digitally and online, but what places would you suggest, in addition to or instead of a museum, library, or archive, to research a poem? What difference might that research make to the poem?
3. Be aware of and awake to local language—in our region, “Willy Street,” “bubbler,” and “Freakfest” are a few examples of local referents, to local celebrations and events, and to locally significant symbols. What are some of these in your local? How does their significance vary culturally within your local? What local symbols do/don’t resonate for you and why?
4. Does an event that received news coverage outside your local represent the event accurately? When people outside your local refer to it, are they unrealistically positive or negative? How does that make you feel?
5. Be aware of local events and communities, and read local news, but observe for yourself when you can in order to witness what is local. Walk your neighborhood. Walk another neighborhood. Go to events you don’t normally get to in ways you don’t normally use to get there. Take the bus (or other public transportation), if you drive, or take public transportation somewhere new. Talk (and listen) to new people. Write notes about what you see, what surprises you, what you learn.
6. What does “Madison” mean? What’s our responsibility as writers (and readers) to name/create/present/challenge ideas around “Madison” (or the city or town you live) to outsiders and insiders?
7. What is a writer’s responsibility to represent their place accurately? Can we approach poetry this way, at least sometimes? Should we? Why or why not?
8. How is poetry different from ethnography, journalism, or other kinds of observation? Is there overlap? Of what sort?
9. Do you feel like you have some sense of Madison from reading these poems? What is it? If you’re from Madison, does the city that emerges here match your experience or not?
10. How might this anthology be different if we had focused on Madison poets, instead of Madison poems? Would the reader have a different sense of Madison, reading that alternate anthology?
11. What other places and locations and spaces might an anthology focus around? A county? A watershed? A neighborhood? A particular platted area? A river or coastline or culture? A gathering place? A festival?
12. What places do you love? What places do you spend a lot of time and don’t enjoy? What places inspire you? What places do you want to change/transform? How might writing poetry about these different places change those feelings, or would it?