

Björklunden Seminars

“Vacation with a purpose”

OCT. 20-25, 2024 AT BJÖRKLUNDEN



Photo courtesy of Kim Blaeser

Poetry of Spirit and Witness

Course Description

Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan claims, “To be spiritually conscious means to undertake a journey that is often a political one.” Can poetry embody both the inner landscape of spirit and the outer landscape of active witness or engagement with the world? Are the two inevitably linked?

As 21st century poets living in the midst of climate crisis, wars, and political upheavals, we often struggle to maintain spiritual balance. As poets, we seek to say the unsayable truths—to touch with language the intersections of despair, injustice, belief, and joy.

In this generative class with past Wisconsin Poet Laureate Kimberly Blaeser, writers will read poems that meld socially conscious writing with spiritual quest, and experiment with building this complexity into their own poetry. Each of us has witnessed small or large events that have shaken us. We have had encounters that changed or enlightened us. Participants will use prompts and writing exercises to gather pivotal moments from their experience and trace or unmask the impact or reverberations of these moments through the poetic process.

During the week, we will generate not only material but also strategies. We will expand the notion of witness to include the everyday as well as the more extreme experiences of our lives; and expand the tactics with which we approach these subjects to include unexpected tools such as humor, silence, and gesture. Participants will have the opportunity to share work in a short reading event.

In weaving together the strands of spirit and witness, we will create what Seamus Heaney calls “transformative” poetry.

[Register Here>>](#)

Instructor



Kimberly Blaeser

Blaeser, past Wisconsin Poet Laureate and founding director of Indigenous Nations Poets, is a writer, photographer, and scholar.

She is the author of six poetry collections including *Ancient Light*, *Copper Yearning*, and *Résister en dansant/ikwe-niimi: Dancing Resistance*. Blaeser edited *Traces in Blood, Bone, and Stone: Contemporary Ojibwe Poetry* and wrote the monograph “Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition.” Her photographs, photo-poems, and ekphrastic pieces have appeared in exhibits.

An Anishinaabe activist and environmentalist, she is an enrolled member of White Earth Nation and grew up on the reservation. 2024 Mackey Chair in Creative Writing at Beloit College and a Vassar College Tatlock Fellow, Blaeser is a Professor Emerita at UW–Milwaukee and an MFA faculty member for Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. She serves on the Poetry Coalition of the Academy of American Poets and is Vice President of Letters for the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters.

Her accolades include a Lifetime Achievement Award from Native Writers’ Circle of the Americas.

Blaeser splits her time between her home in rural Wisconsin and a water-access cabin near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Minnesota.