

JAMESTOWN  PUBLISHERS

Themes *in* Reading

VOLUME 

Robert Fulghum

Pat Mora

Ann Cameron

Amy Ling

Gwendolyn Brooks

Esmeralda Santiago

Dave Barry

Julius Lester

and others



A MULTICULTURAL COLLECTION

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Themes *in* *Reading*

VOLUME ③

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Expressions of Love

Love is a powerful emotion. We learn how to love from other people who love us. We learn from their expressions of love: a parent soothes a sick child, an older sister gives a favorite game to her brother, or a friend listens when another friend needs to talk. These are some everyday expressions of love.

In this unit you will read about people who love each other. They express their love in different ways, and sometimes they do not know how to express it. Some expressions of love are ordinary, everyday actions. Others involve major sacrifices.

As you read, think about the people that you love and those that love you. Why do you love them? Why do they love you? How do you express your love for them? How do they show that they love you?



When I Hear Your Name

Gloria Fuertes



The speaker in this poem can't get someone's name out of her mind. What does that tell about her feelings?

¹ uncontrollable impulse
or desire

² spoken

When I hear your name
I feel a little robbed of it;
it seems unbelievable
that half a dozen letters could say so much.

My compulsion¹ is to blast down every wall with
your name,
I'd paint it on all the houses,
there wouldn't be a well
I hadn't leaned into
to shout your name there,
nor a stone mountain
where I hadn't uttered²
those six separate letters
that are echoed back.

My compulsion is
to teach the birds to sing it,
to teach the fish to drink it,
to teach men that there is nothing
like the madness of repeating your name.

My compulsion is to forget altogether
the other 22 letters, all the numbers,
the books I've read, the poems I've written.
To say hello with your name.
To beg bread with your name.
'She always says the same thing,' they'd say when
they saw me,
and I'd be so proud, so happy, so self-contained.

And I'll go to the other world with your name on my
tongue,
and all their questions I'll answer with your name—
the judges and saints will understand nothing—
God will sentence me to repeating it endlessly and
forever.

About the Author

Gloria Fuertes is well known in Spain, not only for her poetry but also for her children's stories. About fifteen years of her writing career were spent writing stories for children's magazines. Ms. Fuertes, known for her humor and compassion, has also presented poetry readings and recorded many of her poems.



Responding to the Poem

▼ Think Back

Which statements in the poem are exaggerations?

At the end of the poem, the speaker imagines being sentenced by God to repeat the special person's name "endlessly and forever." Does the speaker fear or welcome that sentence? How can you tell?

▼ Discuss

We are told how the speaker feels when hearing the name of a special person, but we are never told what the name is. Why might the poet have chosen not to give it?

What do you think the speaker means by the statement "When I hear your name/I feel a little robbed of it"?

Is "When I Hear Your Name" a love poem? Why or why not? If it isn't a love poem, what other emotion might the speaker be feeling? Explain.

▼ Write

Create Sound Images The imagery in "When I Hear Your Name" appeals mostly to the sense of sound. Reread the poem to identify sound imagery. Can you create other sound images that could be part of the poem?

Write a Poem Is there someone you really like or dislike? Write a poem that explains how you feel. Build your poem around imagery that appeals to one of the senses. Begin by finishing the statement: "When I hear your name, I . . ."

The Good Stuff

Robert Fulghum



The cardboard box is marked “The Good Stuff.” As I write, I can see the box where it is stored on a high shelf in my studio.¹ I like being able to see it when I look up. The box contains those odds and ends of personal treasures that have survived many bouts² of clean-it-out-and-throw-it-away that seize me from time to time. The box has passed through the screening done as I’ve moved from house to house and hauled stuff from attic to attic. A thief looking into the box would not take anything—he couldn’t get a dime for any of it. But if the house ever catches on fire, the box goes with me when I run.

One of the keepsakes in the box is a small paper bag. Lunch size. Though the top is sealed with duct tape, staples, and several paper clips, there is a ragged rip in one side through which the contents may be seen.

This particular lunch sack has been in my care for maybe fourteen years. But it really belongs to my daughter, Molly. Soon after she came of school age, she

We all save things that are important to us. What is the thing that Robert Fulghum can’t bear to throw away?

¹ place where a writer, artist, or other craftsperson works

² rounds; times

became an enthusiastic participant in packing the morning lunches for herself, her brothers, and me. Each bag got a share of sandwiches, apples, milk money, and sometimes a note or a treat. One morning Molly handed me two bags as I was about to leave. One regular sack. And the one with the duct tape and staples and paper clips. “Why two bags?” “The other one is something else.” “What’s in it?” “Just some stuff—take it with you.” Not wanting to hold court over the matter, I stuffed both sacks into my briefcase, kissed the child, and rushed off.

At midday, while hurriedly scarfing down my real lunch, I tore open Molly’s bag and shook out the contents. Two hair ribbons, three small stones, a plastic dinosaur, a pencil stub, a tiny seashell, two animal crackers, a marble, a used lipstick, a small doll, two chocolate kisses, and thirteen pennies.

I smiled. How charming. Rising to hustle off to all the important business of the afternoon, I swept the desk clean—into the wastebasket—leftover lunch, Molly’s junk, and all. There wasn’t anything in there I needed.

That evening Molly came to stand beside me while I was reading the paper. “Where’s my bag?” “What bag?” “You know, the one I gave you this morning.” “I left it at the office, why?” “I forgot to put this note in it.” She hands over the note. “Besides, I want it back?” “Why?” “Those are my things in the sack, Daddy, the ones I really like—I thought you might like to play with them, but now I want them back. You

didn't lose the bag, did you, Daddy?" Tears puddled in her eyes. "Oh no, I just forgot to bring it home," I lied. "Bring it tomorrow, okay?" "Sure thing—don't worry." As she hugged my neck with relief, I unfolded the note that had not got into the sack: "I love you, Daddy."

Oh.

And also—uh-oh.

I looked long at the face of my child.

She was right—what was in that sack was "something else."

Molly had given me her treasures. All that a seven-year-old held dear. Love in a paper sack. And I had missed it. Not only missed it, but had thrown it in the wastebasket because "there wasn't anything in there I needed." Dear God.

It wasn't the first or the last time I felt my Daddy Permit was about to run out.

It was a long trip back to the office. But there was nothing else to be done. So I went. The pilgrimage³ of a penitent.⁴ Just ahead of the janitor, I picked up the wastebasket and poured the contents on my desk. I was sorting it all out when the janitor came in to do his chores. "Lose something?" "Yeah, my mind." "It's probably in there, all right. What's it look like and I'll help you find it?" I started not to tell him. But I couldn't feel any more of a fool than I was already in fact, so I told him. He didn't laugh. He smiled. "I got kids, too." So the brotherhood of fools searched the trash and found the jewels and he smiled at me and I smiled at him. You are never alone in these things. Never.

³ journey

⁴ one who is sorry for his or her sins

⁵ partly useful

⁶ very carefully

After washing the mustard off the dinosaurs and spraying the whole thing with breath-freshener to kill the smell of onions, I carefully smoothed out the wadded ball of brown paper into a semifunctional⁵ bag and put the treasures inside and carried the whole thing home gingerly,⁶ like an injured kitten. The next evening I returned it to Molly, no questions asked, no explanations offered. The bag didn't look so good, but the stuff was all there and that's what counted. After dinner I asked her to tell me about the stuff in the sack, and so she took it all out a piece at a time and placed the objects in a row on the dining room table.

It took a long time to tell. Everything had a story, a memory, or was attached to dreams and imaginary friends. Fairies had brought some of the things. And I had given her the chocolate kisses, and she had kept them for when she needed them. I managed to say, "I see" very wisely several times in the telling. And as a matter of fact, I did see.

To my surprise, Molly gave the bag to me once again several days later. Same ratty bag. Same stuff inside. I felt forgiven. And trusted. And loved. And a little more comfortable wearing the title of Father. Over several months the bag went with me from time to time. It was never clear to me why I did or did not get it on a given day. I began to think of it as the Daddy Prize and tried to be good the night before so I might be given it the next morning.

In time Molly turned her attention to other things . . . found other treasures . . . lost interest in the

game . . . grew up. Something. Me? I was left holding the bag. She gave it to me one morning and never asked for its return. And so I have it still.

Sometimes I think of all the times in this sweet life when I must have missed the affection I was being given. A friend calls this “standing knee-deep in the river and dying of thirst.”

So the worn paper sack is there in the box. Left over from a time when a child said, “Here—this is the best I’ve got. Take it—it’s yours. Such as I have, give I to thee.”

I missed it the first time. But it’s my bag now.

About the Author

Robert Fulghum was born in Waco, Texas, in 1937. He is a painter, writer, and lecturer who has also had careers as a part-time minister and as an art teacher. Unlike some writers who struggle for years, Fulghum had immediate success with his first book, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. The themes of his essays touch readers with their simplicity, humor, and insight into human nature. “The Good Stuff” is from his 1988 book *It Was on Fire When I Lay Down On It*.