

Laundromat

When Mom goes to the laundromat
I come along. I'm old
Enough to carry stacks of stuff
And I know how to fold.

We shell out quarters. Underwear
Swirls in a soapy waltz,
Socks leapfrog over other socks,
Pop's pants do somersaults.

We drag 'em out. The dryer drum
Starts overturning. See
My bathrobe rock-and-rolling round—
More action than TV!

And when at last we're driving home
I dream beside a pile
Of fresh clean clothes and toast my face.
Hey, that's my favorite mile.

– By X. J. Kennedy

Responding to the Poem





Laundromat

X. J. Kennedy

Monday: Introduce the Poem (big book pages 26 and 27)

The Heart of the Poem

Often writers find poetry in ordinary, everyday events—even in chores as boring as doing the laundry! The family in this poem does their laundry at a laundromat. The speaker watches the clothes tumbling around inside the machines and describes what happens in some really unusual ways.

Conversations About the Poem

Instead of just telling us that the clothes go around in circles in the dryer, the poet makes laundry exciting by seeing it and writing about it in an unusual way. How did the speaker in the poem describe the way the family's clothes twirl and spin around? Let's share some of the parts you remember. Now take a moment to think about some of the chores you help out with at home. Do you think that you could find poetry in a chore the way this poet did?

Tuesday: Ways to Climb Inside the Poem

Acting

Ask your students to think about how the poet chose words that make the laundry move around in our minds. Highlight *somersault*, *leapfrog*, *waltz*, and so on. Next, divide the class into halves. One group will be readers, and the other group will be actors. As the poem is being read, actors can act out the action. The italicized words from the excerpts listed below can be given a specific motion or gesture to bring another dimension to the poem.

- ☉ I'm old / Enough to *carry* stacks of stuff / And I know how to *fold*.
- ☉ We *shell out* quarters. Underwear / *Swirls* in a soapy waltz, / Socks *leapfrog* over other socks, / Pop's pants do *somersaults*.
- ☉ We *drag* 'em out. The dryer drum / Starts *overturning*. See / My bathrobe *rock-and-rolling* round—
- ☉ And when at last we're *driving* home / I *dream* beside a pile / Of fresh clean clothes and *toast* my face.

After one performance, have the two groups switch roles.

Wednesday: Ways to Climb Inside the Poem

Interactive Writing

Make a list together of the household chores your students participate in at home. Choose one of these chores, and talk about ways that students could envision that chore in a brand-new way. Remind them how the speaker in “Laundromat” sees, instead of a mess of clothes in the dryer, “socks leapfrog over other socks” and a bathrobe “rock-and-rolling round.” Write the chore you’ve chosen at the top of a piece of chart paper. Now list your students’ ideas about how they can make that chore more interesting by seeing it in brand-new, unusual ways—just as X. J. Kennedy did in “Laundromat.”

Thursday: Poet’s Talk

X. J. Kennedy writes,

“[Some poems] begin when I notice something, or experience something . . . that, for reasons I don’t always understand, sets off strong feelings.”

When we reread his poem “Laundromat,” we feel that we’re almost there in the laundromat and that we can see what the speaker sees. Which part of the poem shows that this experience “sets off strong feelings” for the speaker?

Friday: Craft Talk

- ☉ The poet uses a specific **rhyme pattern** within each stanza: lines 1 and 3 do not rhyme; lines 2 and 4 do rhyme. More sophisticated young writers may be able to examine and try out rhyme schemes in their own poems.
- ☉ The poet uses **metaphor** to describe the way the laundry moves, comparing it to dancing and playing. Unexpected **images** are created in the readers’ minds. Children may be encouraged to describe ordinary events in unusual ways, as the poet does in this poem: “underwear swirls in a soapy waltz,” “socks leapfrog,” “pants do somersaults,” “bathrobe rock-and-rolling.”
- ☉ The poet uses **specific verbs** to clarify exactly what is happening as the family does laundry (*carry, fold, shell out, waltz, leapfrog, somersault, drag, toast*). Encouraging children to use specific verbs will strengthen the description in their poems as well.