

## 2013 Inaugural Poem

January 21, 2013

### **‘One Today’**

*Following is the text of the poem, “One Today,” delivered by Richard Blanco, the inaugural poet.*

One sun rose on us today, kindled over our shores,  
peeking over the Smokies, greeting the faces  
of the Great Lakes, spreading a simple truth  
across the Great Plains, then charging across the Rockies.  
One light, waking up rooftops, under each one, a story  
told by our silent gestures moving behind windows.  
My face, your face, millions of faces in morning’s mirrors,  
each one yawning to life, crescendoing into our day:  
pencil-yellow school buses, the rhythm of traffic lights,  
fruit stands: apples, limes, and oranges arrayed like rainbows  
begging our praise. Silver trucks heavy with oil or paper—  
bricks or milk, teeming over highways alongside us,  
on our way to clean tables, read ledgers, or save lives—  
to teach geometry, or ring-up groceries as my mother did  
for twenty years, so I could write this poem.  
All of us as vital as the one light we move through,  
the same light on blackboards with lessons for the day:

equations to solve, history to question, or atoms imagined,

the “I have a dream” we keep dreaming,

or the impossible vocabulary of sorrow that won't explain

the empty desks of twenty children marked absent

today, and forever. Many prayers, but one light

breathing color into stained glass windows,

life into the faces of bronze statues, warmth

onto the steps of our museums and park benches 2

as mothers watch children slide into the day.

One ground. Our ground, rooting us to every stalk

of corn, every head of wheat sown by sweat

and hands, hands gleaned coal or planting windmills

in deserts and hilltops that keep us warm, hands

digging trenches, routing pipes and cables, hands

as worn as my father's cutting sugarcane

so my brother and I could have books and shoes.

The dust of farms and deserts, cities and plains

mingled by one wind—our breath. Breathe. Hear it

through the day's gorgeous din of honking cabs,

buses launching down avenues, the symphony

of footsteps, guitars, and screeching subways,

the unexpected song bird on your clothes line.

Hear: squeaky playground swings, trains whistling, or whispers across café tables, Hear: the doors we open

for each other all day, saying: hello| shalom,

buon giorno |howdy |namaste |or buenos días

in the language my mother taught me—in every language

spoken into one wind carrying our lives

without prejudice, as these words break from my lips.

One sky: since the Appalachians and Sierras claimed

their majesty, and the Mississippi and Colorado worked

their way to the sea. Thank the work of our hands:

weaving steel into bridges, finishing one more report

for the boss on time, stitching another wound

or uniform, the first brush stroke on a portrait,

or the last floor on the Freedom Tower

jutting into a sky that yields to our resilience.

One sky, toward which we sometimes lift our eyes

tired from work: some days guessing at the weather

of our lives, some days giving thanks for a love

that loves you back, sometimes praising a mother

who knew how to give, or forgiving a father

who couldn't give what you wanted.

We head home: through the gloss of rain or weight

of snow, or the plum blush of dusk, but always—home,

always under one sky, our sky. And always one moon

like a silent drum tapping on every rooftop

and every window, of one country—all of us—

facing the stars

hope—a new constellation

waiting for us to map it,

waiting for us to name it—together