

before you teach

1

a few hours before class
drive out Tinton road
until you leave any traffic
behind you
the trees will not distract you
they will stand
perfectly still

here, you must leave the
the beaten path
and join them along
an ancient road left
overgrown

wind your way among them
to a shaded spot
and kill your engine
from here you travel
on foot

speed is no longer
your goal
each step is a lesson

2

here, dig into
the hard dirt bank
find egg-shaped rocks
fractured by the weight
of millennia
and know that a thing
whether fertile or not
left long unhatched
turns to stone

think as you walk
of the mountain lion
waiting patiently
for a sign of weakness
know that hunger
is his nature
and that you have come here
with only a pocket knife
and your senses

see—he has left
for you a sign
claw marks in the mud hole
long and deep,
count them
one, two, three, four, five
straight as a treble clef left empty
and waiting
for your half
of his composition

3
coming home
roll down all the windows
and drive fast
letting the dust
filter in
sprinkle, flavor
your books your papers
even your skin
the sweat of the journey
will make it stick
and you will taste it
in your teeth
even as you speak
to your students