

Abandoned Farmhouse

by Ted Kooser

He was a big man, says the size of his shoes
on a pile of broken dishes by the house;
a tall man too, says the length of the bed
in an upstairs room; and a good, God-fearing man,
says the Bible with a broken back
on the floor below the window, dusty with sun;
but not a man for farming, say the fields
cluttered with boulders and the leaky barn.

A woman lived with him, says the bedroom wall
papered with lilacs and the kitchen shelves
covered with oilcloth, and they had a child,
says the sandbox made from a tractor tire.

Money was scarce, say the jars of plum preserves
and canned tomatoes sealed in the cellar hole.
And the winters cold, say the rags in the window frames.
It was lonely here, says the narrow country road.

Something went wrong, says the empty house
in the weed-choked yard. Stones in the fields
say he was not a farmer; the still-sealed jars
in the cellar say she left in a nervous haste.
And the child? Its toys are strewn in the yard
like branches after a storm—a rubber cow,
a rusty tractor with a broken plow,
a doll in overalls. Something went wrong, they say.

Directions: Write a poem like this about **your own bedroom**, the objects someone might find there, and what those objects would “say” to someone who happened to be looking around your room while you weren’t there. Describe the room by providing snapshots of it in the same way a police photographer records the placement of clues, details, and other objects of interest at the scene of a crime. Pretend you are a detective with the rare ability to actually “hear” what the objects are saying. Who lives here? What kind of person are they? Are they happy?

Write your piece in the third person, so it’s not from your point of view. Use the poem above as a model. Keep returning to what the objects actually *say*. It’s okay to repeat the word “say” a lot. Or vary your verbs. Since this is your room, you have a lot more information than you need so you’ll have to pick and choose. Consider the following three student examples:

Albert You can tell a lot about me from the objects in my room, which are totally random. There’s assorted stuff everywhere, and each object tells a different interesting story about my multifaceted personality.

Bertha There are dirty clothes everywhere and the bed is unmade. There are initials carved in the surface of the wooden desk, some old, some new (shavings and sawdust). On the bed is a stuffed polar bear with dirty fur and only one eye.

Colby The unmade bed says she left in a hurry, or is lazy. Or both. The pillow on the floor says she had a bad dream last night. The bullet in her bedside table says she doesn’t mind being alone. But the vodka hidden in a shampoo bottle say she isn’t the good girl her parents think she is.

Do you *have* to write about your bedroom? Not if you have a better idea. But it has to be a scene from your own life that you actually witnessed. Can you “invent” some specific details you may not remember just to make the scene more vivid and memorable? Yes, you can and should!