

# Introduction to Poetry

BY BILLY COLLINS

I ask them to take a poem  
and hold it up to the light  
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem  
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room  
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski  
across the surface of a poem  
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do  
is tie the poem to a chair with rope  
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose  
to find out what it really means.

Billy Collins, "Introduction to Poetry" from *The Apple that Astonished Paris*. Copyright ◆ 1988, 1996 by Billy Collins. Reprinted with the permission of the University of Arkansas Press.

Source: *The Apple that Astonished Paris* (1996)