



Billy Collins reading *Grave*. 1:31 min. Camera: Lee Skye. Video editing: Daniel Colmenares. Photo & Design: Raymond Elman

## A Discussion with Billy Collins, 2x U.S. Poet Laureate

By Elman + Skye + Colmenares

Dubbed “the most popular poet in America” by Bruce Weber in the *New York Times*, **BILLY COLLINS** is famous for conversational, witty poems that welcome readers with humor but often slip into quirky, tender or profound observation on the everyday, reading and writing, and poetry itself.

Collins was born in 1941 in New York City. He earned a B.A. from the College of the Holy Cross, and both an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of California-Riverside. In 1975 he co-founded the *Mid-Atlantic Review* with Michael Shannon. He has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the New York Foundation for the Arts and has taught at Columbia University, Sarah Lawrence, and Lehman College, City University of New York, where he is a Distinguished Professor. He is also Senior Distinguished Fellow of the Winter Park Institute in Florida, and a faculty member at Stony Brook University (New York).

Collins’s level of fame is almost unprecedented in the world of contemporary poetry: his readings regularly sell out, and he received a six-figure advance when he moved publishers in the late 1990s. He served two terms as the U.S. Poet Laureate, from 2001-2003, was New York State Poet Laureate from 2004-2006, and is a regular guest on National Public Radio programs. In 2002, as U.S. Poet Laureate, Collins was asked to write a poem commemorating the first anniversary of the fall of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center on September 11. The reading was in front of a joint session of Congress held outside of Washington, D.C.

— *Poetry Foundation*

The videos below are organized by topic and run between 30 seconds and 5 minutes. Click on any video. You must be connected to the Internet to view the videos.

### HUMOR: 1:23 min.



*What was the impact of becoming U.S. Poet Laureate?*

### SERENDIPITY: 0:56 sec.



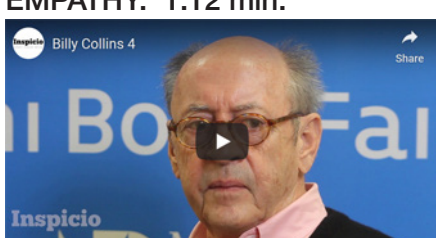
*You have collaborated with musicians Paul Simon and Paul McCartney. What’s the backstory?*

### CRITICAL THINKING: 0:56 sec.



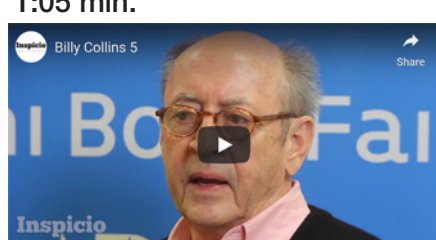
*Since songwriting can be much more lucrative than writing unadorned poetry, have you ever considered writing song lyrics?*

### EMPATHY: 1:12 min.



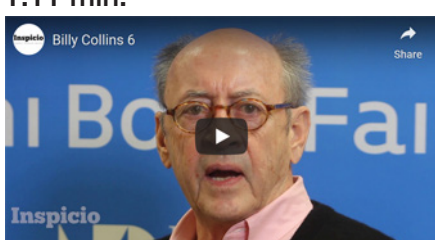
*How can the arts become more embedded in K-12 education?*

### INSIGHT & INSPIRATION: 1:05 min.



*What are you working on now?*

### UNDERSTANDS THE AUDIENCE’S PERSPECTIVE: 1:11 min.



*The beginnings of your poems are very clean and accessible, and then seem to become more complex. What are you trying to accomplish?*

### PERSEVERANCE FURTHERS: 1:43 min.



*Can you describe a challenging situation with a successful outcome?*