

Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards*

*Presented by the Cleveland Foundation

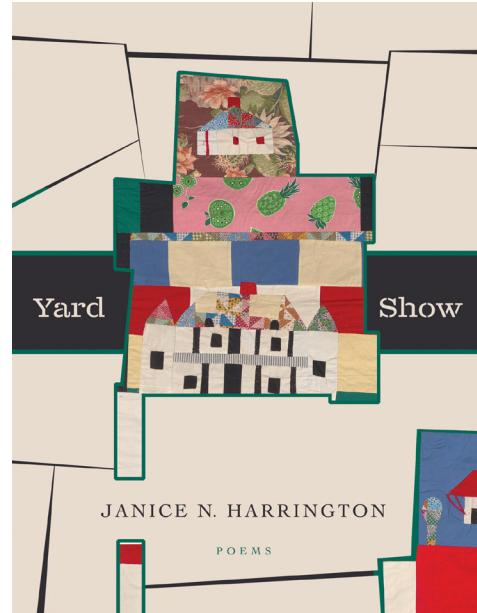


CLASS OF 2025 BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Yard Show

by Janice N. Harrington

POETRY



1. In "Yard Show," Janice N. Harrington poetically explores the African American Midwestern tradition of curating a Yard Show—a lively front yard display that transforms everyday objects into a quasi-folk museum. When ordinary objects like plastic waterfalls, bronze dolphins, bird houses, tin basins and various ephemera form in the front yard, outdoor spaces transform into places of belonging. Think back through the ways African American people have been stripped of a connection to the outdoors, to the land and to place. What is your relationship to the outdoors, to the land and to place? Have you ever transformed an unconventional space into a place of belonging?
2. Nature plays a strong role throughout "Yard Show." Harrington strikes a fine balance—she highlights the spiritual and healing qualities of the outdoors, showing us how nature can help us find belonging and peace. At the same time, she doesn't ignore the harsh reality that for Black people the outdoors can be a location of deep violence and fear.

Take the poem "The Art of Porch Swinging," where Harrington writes:

*"Six shot on a porch in Cleveland.
A three-year-old shot on her parents' front porch.*

*Fearing unrest, police clear the street,
fire paint rounds at porch watchers.*

*If memory is the stoop and its steps
—will you go in or out?"*

This moment captures the tension between comfort and danger. The split seconds where relaxing in nature can turn toward fear. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood? What is your relationship to your block across all of the seasons? What would it take to make our porches, our yards and our streets feel like places of refuge and restoration?

3. "Yard Show" opens with an epigraph written by Roxanne Gay, "There aren't a lot of Black people writing about the Midwest." Harrington responds by documenting Black life in the contemporary Midwest, while also tracing material culture back through the Great Migration and beyond. In doing so, she preserves cultural practices, memories and traditions that might otherwise be forgotten. What is your relationship to the Great Migration? Are there traditions in your family or neighborhood that you feel are lost? What would it be like to preserve those traditions?