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## When You're Not Smarter Than a Fifth Grader

Janine Certo

*But in the night  
still comes  
the unexplained figure*  
—Mary Oliver

My students once asked if they could learn about bats.  
They were outraged. There was a ring of men  
who killed for fun. Bat shoots, they said.

So we read, hammered bat houses, wrote reports.  
The Bat Guy from Game and Inland Fisheries  
came to give a talk. One night I was sitting

outside a P.T.A. meeting, watching children  
put up posters they'd designed: colorings of ponds, woods,  
triangle ears and umbrella top wings, their letters scrawling:

*EAT 3,000 IN ONE NIGHT.* Promise roosts  
like a long, soft fur in the caves, preserving its marvelous  
dreams: the small moth, the mayfly, the lacewing.

But to the idiot who works against the intelligent  
shift in the air: watch what will vanish without notice  
of these schoolchildren, whose high-pitched sounds

probe who's listening. At least ten-year-olds care  
that the Virginia big-eared bat does not join the Caspian  
Tiger, Pyrenean Ibex, Yunnan Box Turtle, and  
the Dodo Bird.



Janine Certo is an associate professor at Michigan State University's College of Education. Her recent scholarship focuses on poetry to express cultural lived experiences, children's poetry writing practices, and teachers' engagement with poetry. Her articles are published or forthcoming in journals such as *Journal of Literacy Research*, *English Education*, *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, *Pedagogies*, *English Journal*, *Language Arts*, *The High School Journal*, and *The Reading Teacher*. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Alimentum*, *Burningword Literary Journal*, *Cider Press Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *JoLLE*, and *Main Street Rag*. She can be reached at [certo@msu.edu](mailto:certo@msu.edu)