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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

poem, stones, listen, slow, birds, human, cardinals, didi, claims, grief, daily, trees, trudging, hear, gray, shed, tethers, goings, natural, perk

00:05

I'm us Poet Laureate Tracy k Smith. And this is the slow down.

00:22

Most of the time in my daily comings and goings, I find myself trudging along on my way and barely paying attention. But sometimes, I remember to look up and listen. Those times, the natural world seems so alive, so full of purpose, and meaning. Those times, the birds and trees, the grass, even things like rocks, which I can't say with full confidence are not also alive. All of it seems to belong to something I longed to be part of myself out on walks with my dog, her leash tethers her to me, it keeps her in my world. But I know she hears and smells, what the other animals are up to. I know she is fluent in a language I can only wonder about. And it makes me curious about what I'm missing out on what my human senses barmy, from grasping. What I love about today's poem, listen by Didi Jackson, is that it's human speaker is willing to claim an authority not natural to humans, she sets about making sense of the birds and the stones, of all the things that surround her in nature. She knows what the Cardinals cry means. She claims to know what the mourning doves have turned their attention to. And she makes me reasonably certain that the pile of stones out by the shed can hear that's one of the exciting things poems can do. They can bring the human perspective into contact with something that otherwise can't reach. And they can imagine what occurs at that point of contact. As a poet. I know that much of the work my own poems do is work that is useful to me emotionally, and intellectually. The birds and my poems behave in ways that are helpful to me in whatever my state happens to be. The trees in my poems embody traits that are useful to the human questions I struggle with. And when there are no people in my poems, that's probably when my poems have the most to do with my own questions and frustrations about the world of people. I think, listen, is a poem about living with grief, perhaps not fresh grief, not active grief, but the quiet background grief of a loss that has

been lived with for some time, I believe listen is a poem in which the speaker claims kinship with the natural world, because she needs it to help her shoulder her loss.

03:19

Listen, by Didi Jackson.

03:23

Like 100 gray years, the river stones are layered in a pile near the shed were mourning doves slow their pack and bobl. To listen to a chorus of listening. Small bugs on the lilac perk up a Cardinals torpedoed call comes in slow waves of four round after round. It's a love call, a call to make Him known to himself. The stones listen harder, decipher the song, attempt to offer back its Echo, but fail. This is not a poem of coming spring. This is a poem well aware that gray flesh is dead flesh. All of the right listening comes at a cost. The first sky is in all skies. The first song is in all songs. The slow down is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation. To get a poem delivered to you daily, go to slowdownshow.org and sign up for our newsletter. Follow the slow down on Instagram and Twitter at [slowdownshow](https://www.instagram.com/slowdownshow)