

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Analyzing Poetry

Below is Rebecca Kai Dotlich's poem "What We Know." Read the poem a few times. Then discuss the questions on the next page. This activity is meant to be completed in small groups.



## What We Know by Rebecca Kai Dotlich

- 1 We shared soup, sandwiches, cots,  
dry pajamas, prayers, as we rolled  
up sleeves, eased fears, held hands.  
With quiet nods, we came to know  
5 that just when worlds  
turn upside down,  
someone, somewhere  
hands out raincoats, sets up games,  
10 gives out books, calls our names . . .  
unwrinkles the worry, smooths the sorrow,  
offers a blueprint

A cot is a small bed that folds up so it can easily be carried around.

A blueprint is a guide or plan that shows how to make something.

**Directions:** Discuss the following questions with your group. (You don't need to write your answers down.)

*Note:* To keep things simple, we refer to the speaker as "she" in this activity—but the speaker is not necessarily female.

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- 1 Which of the following is this poem about? Choose the best answer.**
- a. a neighborhood picnic
  - b. a community affected by a disaster
  - c. parents taking care of young children
  - d. a wedding

- 2 Support your answer to question 1.**  
Point out some details in the poem and explain how they help you understand what situation the speaker is describing.

- 3 Who is the speaker of the poem? Choose the best answer.**
- a. someone seeing her family for the first time in years
  - b. someone building a house
  - c. someone helping others after a disaster
  - d. someone receiving help after a disaster

- 4 Explain your answer to question 3.**

- 5 This poem includes three lists. The following questions are about those lists.**
- How are "prayers" different from the other items in the list in lines 1-2?
  - What do you notice about the items in the list in lines 2-3?  
How would you describe them?
  - What do you notice about the items in the list in lines 8-9?  
How would you describe them?

- 6 Consider the phrase "with quiet nods" in line 4.**  
What emotions does this phrase suggest that the speaker and the people with her were feeling?

- 7 Consider line 10.**  
Here, the poet uses verbs—unwrinkles and smooths—that aren't usually used to describe reducing worry and sorrow; it's more common to talk about relieving, easing, or soothing worry and sorrow.
- Why do you think the poet chose the verbs unwrinkles and smooths for this line?
  - Do these verbs create any images for you?
  - What do they add to the poem that more commonly used words would not?

- 8 Consider lines 11-12.**  
What do you think the speaker means when she says someone "offers a blueprint for tomorrow"?