

A Ritual to Read to Each Other

By William Stafford

If you don't know the kind of person I am
And I don't know the kind of person you are
A pattern that others made may prevail in the world
And following the wrong gods home we may miss our star.

For there is many a small betrayal in the mind,
A shrug that lets the fragile sequence break
Sending with shouts the horrible errors of childhood
Storming out to play through the broken dyke.

And as elephants parade holding each elephants tail,
But if one wanders the circus won't find the park,
I call it cruel and maybe the root of all cruelty
To know what occurs but not to recognise the fact.

And so I appeal to a voice, to something shadowy,
a remote and important region in all who talk:
Though we could fool each other, we should consider--
Lest the parade of our mutual lives get lost in the dark

For it is important that awake people be awake,
Or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;
The answers we give-yes or no, or maybe –
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.