

## Literacy Development

# Why Write Poetry?

Writers often choose poetry as a way to express ideas and feelings. Poetry allows them to be creative and play with language in different ways.

Some writers have used poetry as a way to escape reality and imagine another world. Others have used language to tell a story or bring a character to life. Here is the story of one writer for you to get to know and discuss.



Jimmy Santiago Baca, Poet

## Biography: Jimmy Santiago Baca

Jimmy Santiago Baca was born in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1952. Abandoned by his parents at the age of two, he lived with one of his grandparents for several years before being placed in an orphanage. He wound up living on the streets, and at the age of twenty-one he was convicted on charges of drug possession and incarcerated. He served six years in prison, four of them in isolation. During this time, Baca taught himself to read and write, and he began to compose poetry. A fellow inmate convinced him to submit some of his poems to *Mother Jones* magazine, then edited by the Denise Levertov. Levertov printed Baca's poems and began corresponding with him, eventually finding a publisher for his first book.

*Immigrants in Our Own Land*, Baca's first major collection, was highly praised. In 1987, his semi-autobiographical novel in verse, *Martin and Meditations on the South Valley*, received the American Book Award for poetry, bringing Baca international acclaim. A self-styled "poet of the people," Baca conducts writing workshops with children and adults at countless elementary, junior high and high schools, colleges, universities, reservations, barrio community centers, white ghettos, housing projects, correctional facilities and prisons from coast to coast.

### Further Resources:

**Video:** A poem read by Baca: *I'm offering this poem to you.*

thi<http://www.flickr.com/photos/geminipoet/3016172582/>

**A Fan Blog:** <http://www.kimantieau.com/2008/04/interview-with-jimmy-santiago-baca.html>