

Seattle City Council

Finance and Culture Committee Meeting

2 p.m. Wednesday, December 10th, 2014

Words' Worth

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Sierra Nelson**

Today's poet is **Janie Elizabeth Miller**

Janie Elizabeth Miller is a poet and essayist whose work explores environmental imagination and activism. She won the Grand Prize for the Eco-Arts award in 2014 and teaches poetics at the University of Washington Tacoma. Her work can be found at Terrain.org, Poecology, Cimarron Review and others. Janie recently moved to a farmhouse on Vashon Island where she sees goats from her window. You can find out more about her and her work here: janieelizabethmiller.com

Paper Sparrows

by Janie Elizabeth Miller

for #BlackLivesMatter

a slip of paper no larger than a dollar
records the scale of value for a slave.

Rows of age and rows of worth, the black
body's gains and losses over time.

You see the paper is degrading, yellowing
tree fibers from an oily thumb, nearly enough

to forget the pencil's mark.

At the next exhibit white poets
read paper sparrows to sleep,

a stiff wind in their feathers—still
love in their curated bodies of paper.

They lean in until a black fly in the bird's eye
tires, eating away the carrion into sight,

and they see suddenly a boy
his invisible hands raised opening his heart

to a country refusing to remember him.
Some keep the dead alongside them,

feathers in the cap, the bittersweet blues
of fairytales, while others open and close

the birds' beaks to hear
the price of a spirit, the labor of a body,

a hundred dollars for each year of life,
the value of a dead boy in the street.

-- *end* --