

Poem III:
Marked

Exercise III.2:

On the surface, “Marked” asks us to pay attention to the tools with which we write, but the poet is also creating metaphors for different attitudes toward life. Does Tafolla’s characterization of those who write with pencils resonate for you? What images arise from the tools for writing names in the last stanza? A person who prefers the ability to erase their words could be tentative—or they could be a perfectionist. What do you think Tafolla means?

Is your writing utensil something you think about when you write? Do you consider where you write—the size and quality of the surface you write upon? Do you consider the environment in which you write? How does writing by hand differ from writing on a computer? Do these considerations matter differently for you in conjunction with certain kinds of writing? All these factors can contribute to the character of our poetry, and observing how they work for you will make you a more self-aware poet.

The idea of “making a mark” in life is played against the idea of being “marked” throughout the poem. A gang member might “tag” a building, marking territory. Tattoos can be seen as simultaneously making a mark and being marked. What other ideas play against each other in this poem?

Write a journal entry to express your responses to these questions and to this poem that draws our attention to what we write with. Consider what tools you use best to make your mark on life. Turn the journal entry into poetry.

— Exercise provided by Kamala Platt, author of *On the Line*