

*Habitat*  
*New and Selected Poems, 1965-2005*

by Brendan Galvin

Louisiana State University Press

A Reading and Discussion Guide

Prepared by Diane Giarrusso  
Boxford Town Library System, Boxford, MA

Massachusetts  
Honor Book  
2006



**SUMMARY:**

*From the publisher:*

(<http://s50780.sites40.storefront-hosting.com/detail.aspx?ID=225>)

A master craftsman who seamlessly combines vision and contemplation, Brendan Galvin is considered among the most powerful naturalist poets today. *Habitat*, Galvin's fourteenth book of poems, combines eighteen new works with lyric pieces from the past forty years—including two book-length narratives, *Wampanoag Traveler* and *Saints in Their Ox-Hide Boat*. In a voice of quiet authority leavened with humor, Galvin intimately conveys his landscapes, birds and animals, people, and weather. By elevating the commonplace to the crucial, he takes his readers very far from the familiar.

*Habitat* offers an opportunity to trace a remarkable poetic career. In their richly various shapes, colors, textures, and strategies, Galvin's poems bear witness to matters both joyful and intractable.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. The dictionary defines “habitat” as the place where a plant or animal naturally or normally lives and grows. Considering all the nuances of the concept of habitat, discuss how the poems in this work relate to the title. Why do you think the title is, or is not, appropriate for the collection?
2. Several of Galvin’s poems are in a narrative style, recounting memoir and history. Read again the “Wampanoag Traveler” (p. 161-204), “Saints in the Ox-Hide Boat” (p. 95-131) and his Charlie Fox poems (p. 45, 47, 73). Just as a biographer develops a relationship with his/her subject, discuss what we can infer of the relationship Galvin has with these figures. Discuss how these poems relate to the title of the book.

3. Re-read a few of the following poems: “Hummer” (p. 9); “The Potatoes Have a Word to Say” (p. 42); “Toad” (p. 58); “VII” (p. 181); “Pitch Pine” (p. 225); “Old, Old Woman, Little Girl” (p. 227), and “The Bats” (p. 249). Discuss the different ways Galvin details the natural world, illustrating the inherent dignity and beauty of all living things.
4. “Testament” (p. 50) strikes a different tone from many of Galvin’s other poems. Discuss the poem in relation to others in the collection: who might the speaker be addressing, how does it relate to other poems that describe people and personalities (p. 19, 23, 152 for instance).
5. Discuss the themes that inspire and inform Galvin’s work. How does Galvin’s work relate to the work of other twentieth-century poets?
6. Discuss why you think the editors chose to present Galvin’s poetry in reverse chronological order.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

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Brendan Galvin is the author of fourteen poetry books, most recently *Placekeepers* and *The Strength of a Named Thing*. His poems have appeared more than six hundred times in anthologies and magazines, including the *New Yorker*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *New Republic*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Nation*, *Paris Review*, and *Poetry*. He has received, among other awards and honors, the O. B. Hardison Prize from the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Sotheby Prize of the Arvon Foundation, the Charity Randall Citation from the International Poetry Forum, *Poetry* magazine's Levinson Prize, two NEA fellowships, and a Guggenheim fellowship. He lives in Truro, Massachusetts.

### **HELPFUL LINKS:**

Short Interview with Brendan Galvin:

<http://www.ecu.edu/english/tcr/21-2/Galvininterview.html>

Boston College Magazine review of *Habitat*

[http://bcm.bc.edu/issues/spring\\_2005/ll\\_readersnotes.html](http://bcm.bc.edu/issues/spring_2005/ll_readersnotes.html)

The Hudson Review on *Habitat*

[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa4021/is\\_200510/ai\\_n15716777](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4021/is_200510/ai_n15716777)

National Book Review citation for *Habitat*

[http://www.nationalbook.org/nba2005\\_poetry\\_galvin.html](http://www.nationalbook.org/nba2005_poetry_galvin.html)

*Outer Life: The Poetry of Brendan Galvin*. Martha Chrisitina, ed. Ampersand Press, 1991.



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