Let’s Think in English
Decisions
Traveling through the dark I found a deer
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;
she had stiffened already, almost cold.
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching her side brought me the reason –
her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,
alive, still, never to be born.
Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;
under the hood purred the steady engine.
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all – my only swerving –
then pushed her over the edge into the river.
• What is the decision?

• How does the person feel about their decision? How do we know?
Kawasaki & Autumn

© Let’s Think in English
Fifteen

South of the Bridge on Seventeenth
I found back of the willows one summer
day a motorcycle with engine running
as it lay on its side, ticking over
slowly in the high grass. I was fifteen.

I admired all that pulsing gleam, the
shiny flanks, the demure headlights
fringed where it lay; I led gently
to the road and stood with that
companion, ready and friendly. I was fifteen.

We could find the end of a road, meet
the sky on out Seventeenth. I thought about
hills, and patting the handle got back a
confident opinion. On the bridge we indulged
a forward feeling, a tremble. I was fifteen.

Thinking, back farther in the grass I found
the owner, just coming to, where he had flipped
over the rail. He had blood on his hand, was pale –
I helped him walk to his machine. He ran his hand
over it, called me ‘Good man’, roared away.

I stood there, fifteen.
• What is the decision?

• How does the person feel about their decision? How to we know?
Traveling through the Dark and Fifteen

• Are the poems written by the same poet?

• If not, why do you think so?

• If yes, what is the evidence for this? (There may be several similarities)
William Stafford (1914 – 1993)

- born in Kansas; grew up during the Depression
- refused to fight in World War 2; worked in forestry for the Government at $2.50 a month
- graduated 1947
- from 1948, taught at Lewis & Clark College, Oregon, for the rest of his career
- first book of poems, *Traveling through the Dark*, published 1953; won a National Book Award
- published many books of poems after this
Reflection

These poems both tell stories that happened to William Stafford. They could have been written as normal stories, in prose running across to the right margin.

Has writing them as poems made them more interesting or enjoyable for you?

Or would you prefer them to be written in prose?
This is just to say and Reply

Now read *This is just to say* and *Reply* again
Compare them with *Traveling through the dark* and *Fifteen*
Thinking about all four poems, can you mention some things that make a poem a poem instead of chopped-up prose?