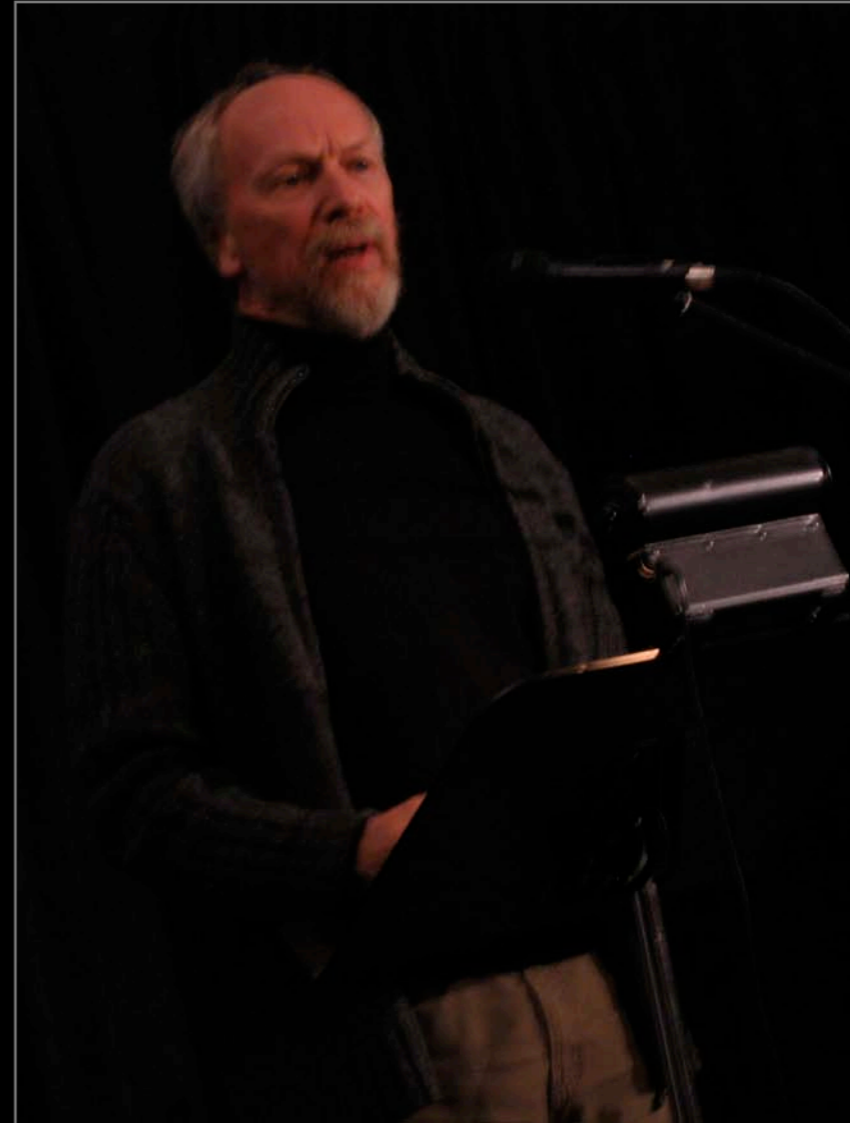


Exploring Contemporary Canadian Voices

the spoken word

John Steffler



Bio

John Steffler

- Served as Canada's 3rd [Parliamentary Poet Laureate](#) from 2006-2008.
- His five books of poetry include *That Night We Were Ravenous*, which won the 1999 Atlantic Poetry Prize.
- His novel, *The Afterlife of George Cartwright*, won the 1993 Smithbooks/Books in Canada First Novel Award, the Thomas Head Raddall Award and was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award and the Commonwealth Prize for Best First Book.
- Although born in Ontario, Steffler adopted Newfoundland and Labrador as his home for over 30 years ago.
- His writings about Newfoundland reflect a most Canadian occupation with discovery and exploration.
- His classic of Canadian wilderness writing, *The Grey Islands*, describes a sojourn on an isolated island off the coast of Newfoundland.



Before Viewing

John Steffler

Before viewing *That Night We Were Ravenous*:

- Have you ever seen or experienced something strange when you were driving at night, or when you were outside in the dark?
 - ▶ For example, something familiar in daylight suddenly looks totally different at night, like the tree outside your bedroom window turns into a strange creature.
 - ▶ How would you describe it?



View *That Night*
We Were
Ravenous

3 minutes, 31 seconds



After Viewing

John Steffler

After viewing *That Night We Were Ravenous*:

- Who was 'she'? What do you think she might represent?
- Name at least two of the metaphors that Steffler used to describe the strangeness of this creature.
- Compare Steffler's presentation with the presentations of the slam poets.
- How is his presentation different?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of reading from the page?



Activities 1

John Steffler

- HERE is a link to the text of [That Night We Were Ravenous](#).
- DRAW a picture of one or more of the images that Steffler used to describe the moose. Don't draw the animal itself, but the image he creates, e.g., 'a beaver trying out stilts.'
- PICK an animal and describe it using metaphors and similes.
- COMPARE it to unexpected things, as Steffler did, such as: comparing a moose to a beaver trying out stilts; eyes like Halley's comet; insubstantial as smoke.

more on next slide...



Activities 2

John Steffler

- USE the metaphors and similes from his poem as a model to draw out your own. Follow his poem, noting the following:
 - ▶ How does the animal make you feel? (“She made us feel blessed.”)
 - ▶ What does the animal remind you of? (“She reminded us she was an ocean wearing a fur suit.”)
 - ▶ What does this animal know nothing about? (“She knew nothing of corners or doorways.”)
 - ▶ What does the animal remember? (“She could remember a glacier where she was standing.”)
 - ▶ What does the animal do? (“She pulled our zippers down.”)
 - ▶ What would happen if you touched the animal? (“If we had touched her, she would have burst through our windshield in a wall of blood.”)



Before Viewing

John Steffler

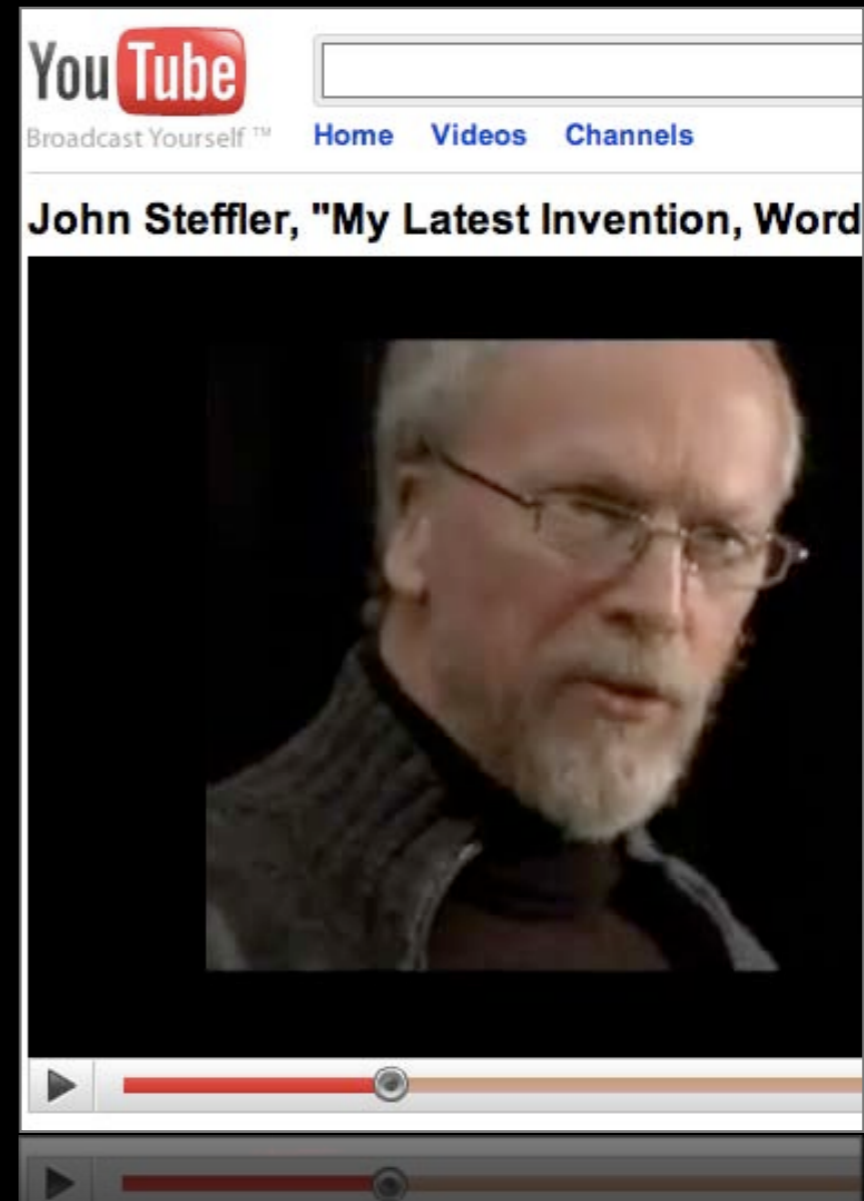
Before viewing *My Latest Invention*:

- What device would you like to invent or have someone invent?
- What would it do?
- Have you ever invented something? Describe your invention.



View *My Latest Invention*

1 minutes, 50 seconds



After Viewing

John Steffler

After viewing *My Latest Invention*:

- What does the plumber's new invention do?
- What would the consequences of this new invention be?
- Name some advantages and disadvantages of this device.



- **DRAW** a picture, cartoon or comic strip of the world after the use of this weapon. What would a town or city look like with only the plumbing and the people left?
- **WRITE** a poem or short story about something ludicrous, something that would never happen in real life but that would be funny as a story.
- **WRITE** a journal entry stating the ‘imperfections’ of this invention.



Before Viewing

John Steffler

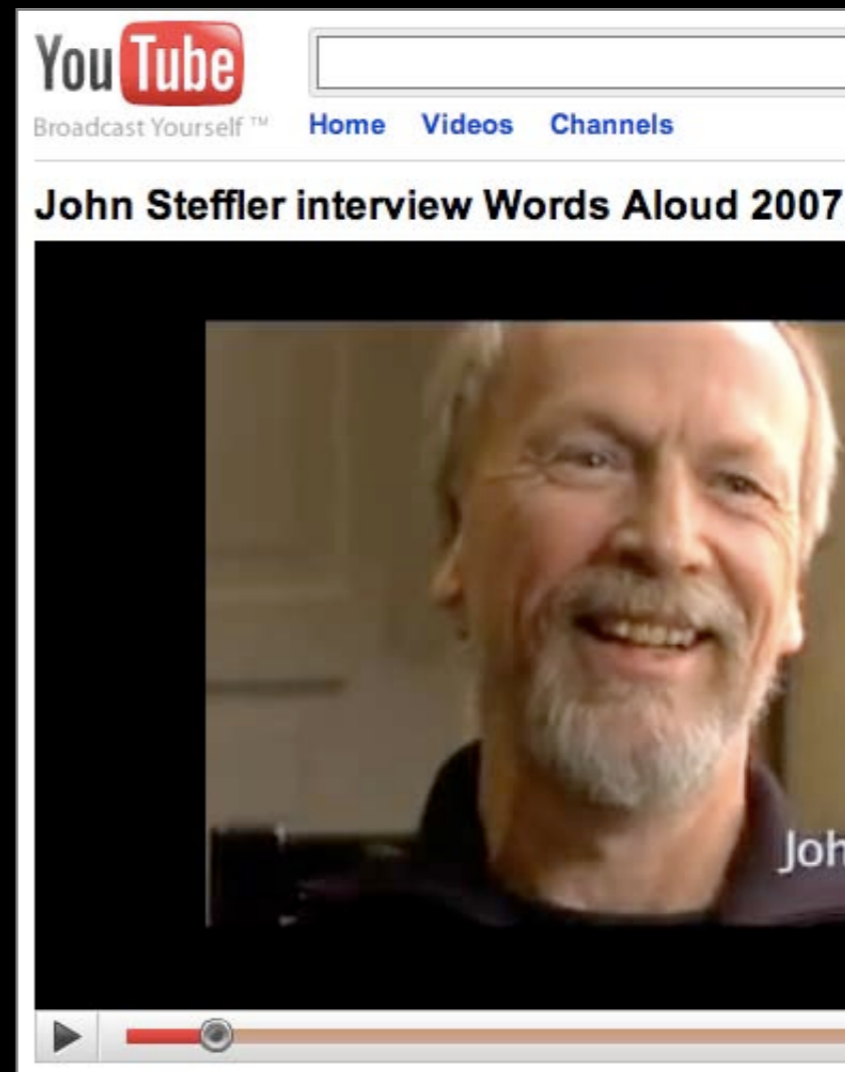
Before viewing *Interview with John Steffler*:

- Check out the [Poet Laureate Map of Canada](#).
 - ▶ The [FAQ page](#) has information about the role of a poet laureate.
- What is a Poet Laureate?
- What does a Poet Laureate do?



View *Interview* *with John Steffler*

9 minutes, 36 seconds



After Viewing

John Steffler

After viewing *Interview with John Steffler*

- How does Steffler describe being poet laureate of Canada?
- What are the benefits? Disadvantages?
- How and when did Steffler start writing poetry?
- How difficult was it for Steffler to support himself only on writing?
- What did he do to try to solve his financial problems?
- What does Steffler say you should do about hard times?



- Imagine that you are the Poet Laureate of your school, city or town.
 - ▶ How would you demonstrate to your community the importance of poetry?
- Create a poet laureate position for your class or school.
 - ▶ Perform random acts of poetry.
 - ▶ Check out Canada's [National Random Acts of Poetry Week](#) for ideas.



Credits

Videos – Filmed at the 2007 Words Aloud 4 Spoken Word Festival based in Durham, ON. The videos were produced/directed by Liz Zetlin and Myke Dyer.

Words Aloud 4 Festival 2007 – Presented by the Words Aloud Poetry Collective in collaboration with the Durham Art Gallery.

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