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Random Acts of Poetry bring verse to everyday places

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TORONTO - Canadian poets will accost the general public with Random Acts of Poetry this week, employing "guerrilla" tactics to raise awareness of what they feel is a seldom celebrated literary form.

Beginning Monday, poets in cities from Victoria to St. John's, Nfld., will visit everyday places – streetcars, parks, hair salons and gas stations – to recite their poetry aloud and hand out free volumes of verse.

"If I show up in a service station, I'll approach a vehicle, and whoever happens to be in it is going to be the target for the moment," Glen Sorestad, Saskatchewan's poet laureate, told CBC News.

"I have to stress that a poem is read in its entirety," said Sorestad, who will be participating around Saskatoon. "Mind you, I'm going to choose shorter poems."

The campaign is the brainchild of B.C. poet Wendy Morton, who earned the title of WestJet's "poet of the skies" when, in exchange for free passage on the Calgary-based airline, she offered to read or compose poems in-flight for other passengers.

"You can read a poem in 30 seconds, so it doesn't offer the same kind of challenges as a short story or a novel to somebody who's not perfectly literate," Morton told the Canadian Press.

With online bookseller Abebooks.com and a silent patron donating \$35,000 to cover the costs of the poetry volumes (and to pay poets \$5 for each book they distribute), the 27 cross-country bards will wax poetic through Sunday and attempt to whet the public appetite for verse.

"At times, I feel that poetry is not receiving the kind of attention that it could, or that it does in other countries," Sorestad said.

"In North America, where we think that perhaps our education systems are among the most advanced in the

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world, one of our serious literary arts has been a kind of casualty of it."


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