

WHAT I MEAN WHEN I SAY  
CHINOOK SALMON

Geoffrey Davis

My father held the unspoken version of this story  
along the bridge of his shoulders: *This is how  
we face and cast to the river—at angles.*

*This is how we court uncertainty.* I want to say  
he taught patience before violence, when to hold  
and when to strike. My fingers carry

the stiff memory of knots we tied  
to keep a 40-pound King from slamming back  
into the panicked blue and constant shove  
of the river's current. Back home, kneeling at the edge  
of the tub, he showed us the way to fillet the King,  
to slice along the pectoral and study the pink rose

insides for the secrets of the Pacific. Then, half asleep,  
he'd put us to bed, sometimes with kisses.

## A THIRD GRADER DRAWS TEXAS

Geffrey Davis

Grab the card stock from the teacher's desk, as quickly as you can.  
Grab the necessary crayons. Get in line and hope hard that

nobody takes your father's state before you reach  
the front. Smile when you see the empty column

beside Texas. When the teacher hands you its symbols,  
relax. Slip the materials into your backpack—keep them perfect.

Rush home to memorize the details before your father returns  
from work: the bustle of Austin, the treacherous

Rio Grande, Pecan Trees(*Carya illinoensis*) weighted with false nuts,  
regal plumes of Bluebonnet (*Lupinus subcarnosus*),

and Mockingbirds(*Mimus polyglottos*) picking through  
the sounds of spring. Color each broad square

of the flag's design, and the solo star—use the white crayon, finally.  
Color the seal's celestial five-points the universal yellow

you were taught, and the olive and live oak branches  
a single green beneath the sprawling "State of Texas."

Trace as best you can, by eye, a silhouette of its boundaries,  
of land floating in space. Fill in terrain.

Think about your father as a boy between low  
mountain ranges and rugged hills. Think of rattlesnakes.

Finish a week's worth of work, despite your mother's worry,  
in a single afternoon. Wait for your father at the kitchen table.

Watch as he points a calloused finger to his birthplace  
between the borders you've drawn. Call the project done.

Go to school proud on Monday and place your things  
in the slot set aside for *Texas*. Get ready to hide

your stutter when it's your turn to talk.  
Hold back tears when Alicia from the front row points

at your map, says *It looks like a heart—a real one*: meaning,  
all your effort looks like the right and wrong thing;

meaning, your image for father has become the fist-sized  
force that keeps your insides in motion.