

### “A Small Needful Fact” - Selection of Detail Review

**Introduction:** Eric Garner died, age 43, on Staten Island, in July 2014, after a police officer put him in a chokehold. Garner, a former horticulturalist for the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, who quit for health reasons, had a police record for assault, resisting arrest, larceny and selling “loosies” (unlicensed cigarettes)—none of these a death penalty offense—and a reputation in his neighborhood for generosity, congeniality and peacemaking. He had six kids, including, at the time of his death, a three-month old child, and three grandkids. NYPD officers approached Garner on suspicion of illegally selling “loosies”; Garner told police he was tired of being harassed and wasn’t selling cigarettes. They set about arresting him. One officer took Garner’s wrist behind his back, and Garner, with his imposing 6’4 stature, swatted his arms away. The officer put him in a chokehold and pulled him to the ground, then removed his arm from Garner’s neck, and pushed Garner’s face into the ground while four officers restrained him. Garner repeated “I can’t breathe” 11 times while lying face down on the sidewalk. After he lost consciousness, officers turned him on his side to ease his breathing. An ambulance arrived seven minutes later. He was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital about an hour later. Medical examiners ruled the death a homicide. In the wake of Garner’s death, during demonstrations against police violence against African-Americans, many protesters bore signs reading “I can’t breathe.”

The following poem serves as a tribute to Eric Garner. In the poem, Ross Gay depicts the softer qualities of Eric Garner, qualities that were tragically overlooked as he was being arrested.

**Directions:** Follow the steps provided below:

- Go through the poem and choose FOUR details that Gay includes to essentially negate the “physically menacing” traits of Eric Garner that were, in all likelihood, internalized by the police by as they apprehended him and applied that fatal chokehold. Keep in mind that these details don’t necessarily have to be JUST about Eric Garner.
- Use the “COMMENT” function to highlight each of your four chosen details. After you’ve highlighted and hit the “comment” tab, write a 2-3 sentence response that discusses HOW that detail functions in the text as a whole, how that detail essentially negates the arresting officers’ (and many pundits’) impression of Eric Garner and contributes to Gay’s larger message.
  - Try using an “effect” word (as in cause & effect) to lead into your analysis to make it more purpose driven. Consider using a word like:
    - *By, Because, Since, As a result, Thus, Through, etc.*
  - Then consider using the following words to help you create more meaningful commentary:
    - *Proves, Implies, Demonstrates, Captures, Underscores, Exemplifies, Conveys, Supports, Illustrates, Confirms, Establishes, Reflects*

**POEM**

*\*Use the comment function to analyze FOUR details that Ross incorporates throughout the poem.*

**A Small Needful Fact**

Is that Eric Garner worked  
for some time for the Parks and Rec.  
Horticultural Department, which means,  
perhaps, that with his very large hands,  
perhaps, in all likelihood,  
he put gently into the earth  
some plants which, most likely,  
some of them, in all likelihood,  
continue to grow, continue  
to do what such plants do, like house  
and feed small and necessary creatures,  
like being pleasant to touch and smell,  
like converting sunlight  
into food, like making it easier  
for us to breathe.