

*Thomas March  
Runner-up*

Edward Hopper's "7 a.m."

"The clock says seven, but what time of day?"  
the "Art Appreciation" lady asked.  
She came on Tuesdays, every other week,  
and knew us not by name but by our grade.  
She held the mounted print upon her knees  
and smiled a smile she seemed to wish we'd smile,  
believing that this clock could tell our age.

I answered, "Morning!" But I don't know why.  
I was no prodigy of painted light.  
I had no special insight on the scene.  
I saw what anybody else would see—  
an empty store, its walls a dingy white,  
a tidy dirt yard, then a depth of trees.

"How did you know?" she asked. I couldn't say—  
except that people like that time of night,  
and it's their lounging presence, not the light  
that marks the falling hours of the day.  
And maybe I saw signs of waking life  
among the greens that smudge between the trees.

That was the time of day that I knew best.  
I'd wake to make my breakfast by myself.  
More than the light, the clock, the vacancy,  
the out and upward yawn of trees, I knew  
the burdensome proximity of dreams.