

Writing Workshop Offerings

(can be tailored to a single- or multiple-session workshop or webinar;
are writing-intensive rather than critique-based)

Hybrid Lit: To Genre-Bend/Blend/Blur/Bust for Truer Narratives *adults*

“Emotional truth is the reward of digging deeply enough to find the truth about how one really feels, but in order to convey this truth with any force, or artistry, one needs to create a form of expression, and this form determines its own genuine information,” says poet Philip Schultz, in a 2008 interview (*Five Points*, Vol. 12 No. 2). We’ll explore the prose poem, flash fiction, flash nonfiction, haibun, zuihitsu, the lyric essay, surreal memoir, and the graphic poem and essay to elicit fresher ways of seeing and saying the scenes and stories that compose your life.

What Is a Prose Poem? *adults*

“What is poetry and if you know what poetry is what is prose,” Gertrude Stein states rather than asks, suggesting that the distinction is either unknowable or unessential. Is the prose poem a hybrid, elegant and inventive, or a mongrel, unrefined and unharmonious? We will read sample poems representing the various strains of prose poetry to investigate the sentence as a structural unit, prose as a movement of language, and the prose poem as a vehicle of subject matter. We will then use those poems as launching pads for our own prose poems.

So You Say You Can’t Write Poetry? *adults*

As children we were natural poets, but by adulthood, we likely suppressed some of the sensibilities that enliven our reading and writing of poetry: (1) a fascination with wordplay and the infinite possibilities of language, (2) an alert sensory perception, (3) recognition and acceptance of our unique voice, and (4) patience with our learning process. Designed for the beginning or tentative poet (although practiced poets will find it enriching, too!), this educational and fun workshop will present accessible poetic forms, sample poems, and prompts as structures that allow for the possibility of poetry as we uncover or recover our individual poetic voices. We will create a safe space for generating lots of original writing while attending to the particulars of craft: language choices, the poem’s shape, and various poetic devices.

Poet as Architect *adults*

Li-Young Lee says that poetry has two mediums—language and silence—and that language (the material) inflects silence (the immaterial) so that we can experience (hear) the silence, and ultimately our inner space. In this workshop, we will step outside our familiar poetic homes and build new dwellings (temples *and* taverns!), utilizing such timber as sound patterns, found text, and invented forms. We will explore the structural possibilities of language to ultimately answer the question: How does form serve content? Both beginning and practiced poets will generate lots of original writing from this language play and experimentation, and will bring home a fresh eye with which to revisit old poems stuck in the draft stage.

Poem=Sound=Body

adults

Ezra Pound said that poetry begins to atrophy when it departs too far from music, and music begins to atrophy when it departs too far from the dance. How do we source our poems from our own body's rhythms, so that our poems are bodies of sound—sound bodies—durable because they are built from the language's meaning *and* music? In this workshop, for beginning and practiced poets, we will generate lots of new writing while attending to sound, with sample poems selected for their musicality. Memorable poems are often those that get inside and move both our brain (what's said is heard) and our body (what's unsaid is felt).

eKpHrAsIs: Visual Art as Spaces for Poetry *(can be conducted in an art gallery)*

adults

John Berger said, "Seeing comes before words." How may we *see*, that is, experience a painting, a sculpture, an artist's body of work, such that we can locate our unrealized poems and build them beyond mere description of the visual art? During this workshop, we will look at examples of ekphrastic poems, then move freely through the gallery spaces (or supplied art books) to generate our own.

Poetry of Place

adults

"Is it certain that a true poet occupies a place? Is the poet not that which, in the eminent sense of the term, *loses place*, ceases occupation, precisely, and is thus the very opening of space?" queries Emmanuel Levinas, in his book *Noms Propres*. Via sample poems and the composition of our own poems, we will investigate how poets construct place as both a literal and an ontological location, asking these questions: How do we locate ourselves? How do we dislocate and relocate ourselves? Is a poem a means of placement—or displacement—for its writer and its reader/listener?

Form First

adults

Writers, visual artists, architects, designers, even fitness instructors—all have something to say about form versus content or function. While Öyvind Fahlström is pragmatically reasonable when, in his "Manifesto for Concrete Poetry," he asserts, "Nowadays there is a tendency for the unifying element to be the content, both in terms of the subject described and the ideas it represents. But it is best if form and content function as one," what if we explore the structural possibilities of all the literary genres and let form determine content? What if we, should content arise first, consider which genre, and which form inside that genre, best serves that content?

Writing Your Spiritual Mosaic

adults

"Any moment, if you pay enough attention to it, will act as a hologram for meaning and truth," said poet Christopher Merrill (at the Associated Writing Programs' 2012 conference). What moments, grand and mundane, religious and secular, stand out as signposts and milestones along your human-spirit journey? We will explore those moments, in prose and verse, generating enough writings that may be assembled into a mosaic-like spiritual narrative that you can add to ongoingly.

Writing Au Naturel

adults

Susan Griffin, in *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, says, "We know ourselves to be made from this earth. We know this earth is made from our bodies. For we see ourselves. And we are

nature. We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature. Nature weeping. Nature speaking of nature to nature.” Modern culture—industry, technology, urbanization, prosperity—has disconnected us from the natural world. How do we reconnect with and bare our own wildness so that our nature writing transcends mere description of nature-nature and transforms our subject-object relationship with it? How do we become “nature speaking of nature”?

Poem as Map

adults

T.S. Eliot wrote, in “Little Gidding,” from *Four Quartets*, “We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time.” Poems: relentless navigations of self that return us more recognizable to ourselves—and wonderfully less so. We will engage, both individually and collaboratively, in inventive exercises designed to have us write—content- and form-wise—beyond what we already know. And we will inquire into the map/poem as an instrument of communication, persuasion, and power, and the possibility (or desirability) of a poem’s being an impartial reference object—what we assume a map is.

Poet as Witness of a Moment

adults

Paul Eluard wrote, “There is another world, and it is in this one.” Poems we remember, poems we return to, likely presence for us what it means to be human, or spirit incarnate. How do we write poems that transcend mere description of our visible world? Conversely, how do we write poems about the invisible world, without weighty abstractions, and instead with the sensory details of our earthbound lives? In this workshop, we will look at poems by other poets to discuss whether they successfully or unsuccessfully bear witness to human experience. We will then generate our own poems while attending to aspects of poem-making that establish the poet as credible witness.

A poem is a poem is a poem...

children, 3rd grade & up, or younger if accompanied by adult

List poem. Acrostic. Concrete poem. Haiku. Chant poem. Limerick. Partner poem. Ode. So many fun ways to write a poem! In this workshop, we will work, stretch, roll, and mold language into crazy and not-so-crazy word-art that can stand alone or be illustrated with pictures.

If A Million People Were Listening

teens & young adults

Macrina Wiederkehr said, “If it doesn’t improve on the silence, don’t say it.” What language would we speak, what poems would we write, if an entire world were listening? So much of our language is received from our communities and the larger culture. How do we identify clichés, easy solutions, habitual ways of articulation, and vague generalities in our writing, so that we can begin to invent language that powerfully communicates the personal and the universal simultaneously? This workshop will present accessible poetic forms, sample poems, and prompts as structures that allow for the possibility of poetry generated outside our predictable expression. We will create a safe space for the sharing of work and guided group feedback in service to what the poem wants to say.

POME: Experiments in Language

teens & young adults

“Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes, and having fun,” says author and activist Mary Lou Cook. In this language lab, we’ll investigate, observe, measure, dissect, replicate, manipulate, validate—we’ll go out into the field of language to question our hypotheses and discover new elements in the poem-making process. All word scientists, poetic and prosaic, will be enlivened by these leaps to the place that spiritual teacher Andrew Cohen calls “a mysterious point between the present and future...the very point where something comes from nothing.”