

POEMS FOR YOUR WHOLE SELF:

ACTIVITIES FOR THIS PLACE CALLED POETRY

This exhibition examines WritersCorps students' relationship to writing poetry. The students profiled in the show use writing to express themselves and to engage the world around them. In this part of the exhibition, we're going to explore other means of personal expression, and art, along with writing. These exercises are broken up into different disciplines of art in order to include everyone, all learning types and personality types, in the exhibition.

In these activities, other forms besides writing are brought to the center of the exercise. However, movement, visual art, and performance are all

part of the process of writing and understanding poetry. Poets think carefully about what words they choose. What those words feel like, sound like, and even look like are important to the meaning of a poem. These activities allow us express ourselves in personal and unique ways, as well as help us understand the process of both writing and reading poetry well. They are meant to be playful and sometimes even silly, but don't be shy.

These activities are most fun if you have a partner to do them with, but if you don't, you can still do steps one to two of every activity alone. We hope you'll try them all. Have fun!

Who are you? Are you the child of the city you live in or the country you come from?
Are you as steady as the beat of the music you love, as surprising as a bright
flash of lightning, or as soothing as the sound of your grandmother's songs?

—WritersCorps prompt from *Tell the World*

We start with words...

Think of 10 words or phrases that can present you to the world. Pretend that these words are all you have to introduce yourself to someone you have never met. Be as creative as you like. They could be as varied as: loving, laugh, butterfly, 12-years-old, wise, silly, angel, etc. Write them down. These words are now your building blocks for the following activities.

If you are having trouble, you can pick up a poem written by one of the WritersCorps students, underline ten words you like, and then write them down as your list. For example, in *Daily Praise* by Annie Yu, you could choose: praise, door, soft, warmth, silence, mother, music, sweets, far away, eyes.

WORDS AND MOVEMENT

1. Give each of your words a body movement.

For example:

16-years-old = jump up with arms in the air

Honest = chop downward with hand

You do not need to write them down—experiment to find the body movement that best expresses the word to you. Don't worry about whether your movements will make sense to other people. Just concentrate on how the movements feel to you—try to capture each words' meaning in the act of moving.

2. When you have found them all, show your partner each of your movements in succession. Do not speak the words, just do the movements.

3. Watch your partner's movement poem carefully. Write down words or phrases that come to mind as you watch them.
4. Examine the notes you took. Write a poem that uses each of these words or phrases.
5. Both partners read their poems aloud.
6. Discuss: Were the poems what you thought they'd be? Is there any overlap between the original words you came up with and the poem your partner wrote? Does the poem in any way present who you are? Why or why not?

WORDS AND VISUAL ART

1. Make a symbol for each of your words. The symbols don't have to look like, or relate to the words themselves. A symbol for butterfly may just be made of squiggly lines. Just make sure that in some way they represent the word to you. You could also give a line-weight, or value, to each word. Some words can be light curvy lines, dashes, or a dark slash. Play with your strokes so that they invoke the word they represent.
2. Make a picture using only those symbols—arrange them or layer them however you'd like, make them on different scales, or focus just on one part of one of them. This is your time to express yourself visually. Experiment with closing your eyes so you don't determine exactly where the symbols are on the page.
3. Show your creation to a partner.
4. Write down some words or phrases that come to mind when you look at your partner's drawing. What do you see? What feelings—happiness, loneliness, anger, love—does the drawing express? Do you see any shapes that remind you of words?
5. Examine the notes you took. Underline some of the words and phrases you like. Now use these underlined words to write a poem. You can order these words any way you like for your poem. Maybe you'd like to add more words, in addition to the underlined ones to make your poem more complete.
6. Discuss: Were the poems what you thought they'd be? Is there any overlap between the original words you came up with and the poem your partner wrote? Does the poem in any way present who you are? Why or why not?

WORDS AND PERFORMANCE

1. Say your first word to your partner in the personality of the words themselves, or use the word as a name for a person. For example, if your word is “loving” you might think about what tone Loving speaks in, and how Loving holds her hands when she talks.
2. Act out each of your words back and forth with your partner.
3. Together choose a combination of a few of both your words that work well together.
4. Now try to imagine what a performance of these words would look like. How would these words personified act toward one another? You can add more words or phrases in order to create a complete poem to perform. Think not only about the personalities of the words, but how you might stage them, what movements they should make. Does the performance progress to new feelings as it continues? Can you show this?

WORDS AND SOUND

1. Give each of your words a sound
For example:
Cool = shhhhaahh
Nice = Mmmeeeww
You don't need to write them down. Play with different noises until you find the one that makes the most sense for your word.
2. Say your complete poem to your partner, only using the sounds to express the words, not the words themselves.
3. As you listen to your partner's sounds, write down some words or phrases that come to mind.
4. Examine the notes you took. Write a poem that uses each of these words or phrases.
5. Discuss: Were the poems what you thought they'd be? Is there any overlap between the original words you came up with and the poem your partner wrote? Does the poem in any way present who you are? Why or why not?

POETS TO POETS

We invite you to go in to the Writing Room section of the exhibition. There you are provided with the materials you need for writing as well as writing prompts and advice from the WritersCorps students themselves. Let's try Antonio's prompt here since it's meant for a team of two or three people. Here's how it works:

1. Write one line. It can be something you don't want your partner to know.
2. Write your second line. It should be something that you would like to show to your partner.
3. Then fold down the top part of the paper and hand it to your partner so that he or she can only see the second part.
4. Switch papers with your partner, and repeat steps one to three.
5. Continue until everyone has had a turn. Then unfold the paper to discover your poems.