

THE CRAFT OF EXPRESSION

INTRODUCTION:

The relationship between poet and audience, or between the poem and how it is experienced can be fine-tuned through the expression a writer chooses to use in order to connect with an audience. In a poetry performance, a poet has the power to create a shared world of sounds and images and ideas for an audience to inhabit with them. This space is like entering a dizzying museum and while the poet might be the tour guide, the tour group is free to veer off and enjoy the space at their own leisure. Crafting both a poem and a collective space for the poem to find resonance is the responsibility of the poet. In this session, we examine how using image-based techniques such as personification, simile and imagery help create a world for both poet and audience to engage in together.

EXERCISE 1 - ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE SHOPPING LIST

In a hypothetical scenario, the students are told to imagine it's the zombie apocalypse and everyone in the room is at the local supermarket with only minutes to get supplies to survive it. As a group we can take ten items from the store and these are written on a whiteboard. Unbeknownst to the students the facilitator is creating an image-based poem in their head using each new item as the basis for a detailed piece of poetic imagery. A code is used numerically (1 is sun, 2 is eyes, 3 is triangle, 4 is floor, 5 is finger, 6 is sticks, 7 is up, 8 is octopus, 9 is baseball, 10 is hen). During each suggestion I'll combine the suggested grocery item with the code word in a striking visual that includes the two objects interacting. At the end, the students are encouraged to make their own mini poem in their heads using the memory codes as a way of linking everyday objects in the room to create their own striking imagery.

EXERCISE 2 - MUSICAL FREE WRITE

The students are given 5 minutes to free write anything and everything that comes to mind. The emphasis is on volume not quality, with two rules: write as fast as possible, and no stopping. During this experience, the facilitator plays a variety of different songs (classical, hip hop, jazz etc) to help inform the writing of the students. At the end of the activity the students are asked to circle the most honest or truest thing they wrote. This line will serve as a starting off point for the subject of their poem. Equally important. Secondly, there is power in using our voices to tell our stories, to represent our communities, to ultimately be a voice for the voiceless. I believe this idea of giving voice to the voiceless is a wonderful way of getting creatives to start thinking about the power of their gift and how they can empower others to start using theirs.

EXERCISE 3 - MAIN ACTIVITY

The subject of the poem that the students write is particular to them and will hopefully come from an emotionally honest place from the exercise before this. The students are then asked to visually explore what these feelings and thoughts might look like. The simple rules for this poem: no rhyme, all five senses need to be evoked, and at least three similes.

EXERCISE 4 - REFINING THE POEM

A few ideas for editing and refining these poems:

- If the student feels it works, they can go back in and add rhyme once it's done (especially towards the end of a poem as a final rhyming couplet)
- Cutting out any unnecessary words or accidental repetitions
- Sometimes the point or main thought of a poem is too vague or sometimes too obvious – does the poem need to be more ambiguous or does it need to be clearer?

POET BIOGRAPHY

Philip Wilcox is an Australian Poetry Slam Champion and a two-time NSW Poetry Slam Champion. He has performed his poetry at the Sydney Writers' Festival, Ubud Readers' & Writers' Festival, and TEDx. His work has featured in a variety of journals and his debut collection Beetle Prayer came out in 2021

FURTHER RESOURCES

Listen to this poem with your eyes closed: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fpx23hDgk-k&t=130s&ab_channel=WordofMouthLondon

What are the images that you see in your head?

Watch this poem by Shane Koyczan: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltun92Dfn-PY&t=98s&ab_channel=ShaneKoyczan

How do the visuals in the animation support the words of the poem?

Empowering Young Voices Project – a collaboration between University of Warwick and Coventry Boys and Girls Club with generous funding by the British Academy and Leverhulme Trust

Share your experience of using this resource with young people on Twitter or Instagram @EmpoweringYV

Visit <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/philosophy/research/currentresearch/eyv/> for more information