

read and write beside them

increase confidence & independence with daily reading,
writing, & revising

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I write to hold my life in my hands and to declare it a treasure. ~Lucy Calkins

Never hesitate to imitate another writer. Imitation is part of the creative process for anyone learning an art or a craft. Bach and Picasso didn't spring full-blown as Bach or Picasso; they needed models. This is especially true of writing. ~ William Zinsser

Exercise the writing muscle every day, even if it is only a letter, notes, a title list, a character sketch, a journal entry. Writers are like dancers, like athletes. Without that exercise, the muscles seize up. ~Jane Yolen

If you tell your students what to say and how to say it, you may never hear them, only the pale echoes of what they imagine you want them to be. ~Donald Murray

THE LAUGHING HEART

CHARLES BUKOWSKI

your life is *your life*
don't let it be clubbed into dank submission.
be on the watch.
there are ways out.
there is a light somewhere.
it may not be much light but
it beats the darkness.
be on the watch.
the gods will offer you chances.
know them.
take them.
you can't beat death but
you can beat death in life, sometimes.
and the more often you learn to do it,
the more light there will be.
your life is *your life*.
know it while you have it.
you are marvelous
the gods wait to delight
in you.

After Second Shift

by Lowell Jaeger

She's stopped to shop for groceries.
Her snow boots sloshing
up and down the aisles, the store
deserted: couple stock boys
droning through cases of canned goods,
one sleepy checker at the till.

In the parking lot, an elderly man
stands mumbling outside his sedan,
all four doors wide to gusting sleet
and ice. She asks him, Are you okay?
He's wearing pajama pants, torn slippers,
rumpled sport coat, knit wool hat.

Says he's waiting for his wife.
*I just talked to her on the payphone
over there.* He's pointing at
the Coke machine. *What payphone?*
she says. *That one,* he says.
It's cold, she says, and escorts him inside.

*Don't come with lights
and sirens,* she tells the 9-1-1
dispatcher. *You'll scare him.*

They stand together. The checker
brings him a cup of coffee.
They talk about the snow.
So much snow.

They watch for the cop.
This night, black as any night,
or a bit less so.

"After Second Shift" by Lowell Jaeger from *Or Maybe I Drift Off Alone*.
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Poem for an Inked Daughter

Jean Wyrick

I did it too you know, just differently.
Way back then
when I was angry young
I pierced my ears with a rusty ice pick,
and willfully wore dangly earrings
(and a smirk) to Christmas dinner.
My scandalized mother
referred to me for days as
"my daughter, the dirty gypsy."
I let my ears jingle silver music, ultimately
dancing right over her Victorian disapproval
out of that house forever.

And now here you are,
fresh from a different kind of parlor,
with that defiant dragon
curling dark over your shoulder.
No, of course you know I don't like it.
Another gauntlet thrown down
in the ongoing Mother-Daughter Wars.

But hear this, my own gypsy girl:
I know something you don't.
That under that fierce fire-breathing dragon,
claws bared, ready for the next battle,
under the skin where the purple ink turns to blood,
your blood is my blood,
rushing red to red, flowing in a long bond
linking my heart to you no matter what,
like the swirling, twisting lines
of an intricate intimate tattoo,
invisible, indelible, forever permanent.

Sincerely, the Sky

by David Hernandez

Yes, I see you down there
looking up into my vastness.

What are you hoping
to find on my vacant face,

there within the margins
of telephone wires?

You should know I am only
bright blue now because of physics:

molecules break and scatter
my light from the sun

more than any other color.
You know my variations—

azure at noon, navy by midnight.
How often I find you

then on your patio, pajamaed
and distressed, head thrown

back so your eyes can pick apart
not the darker version of myself

but the carousel of stars.
To you I am merely background.

You barely hear my voice.
Remember I am most vibrant

when air breaks my light.
Do something with your brokenness.

Deer Hit

By Jon Loomis

You're seventeen and tunnel-vision drunk,
swerving your father's Fairlane wagon home

at 3:00 a.m. Two-lane road, all curves
and dips—dark woods, a stream, a patchy acre

of teasle and grass. You don't see the deer
till they turn their heads—road full of eyeballs,

small moons glowing. You crank the wheel,
stamp both feet on the brake, skid and jolt

into the ditch. Glitter and crunch of broken glass
in your lap, deer hair drifting like dust. Your chin

and shirt are soaked—one eye half-obscurd
by the cocked bridge of your nose. The car

still running, its lights angled up at the trees.
You get out. The deer lies on its side.

A doe, spinning itself around
in a frantic circle, front legs scrambling,

back legs paralyzed, dead. Making a sound—
again and again this terrible bleat.

You watch for a while. It tires, lies still.
And here's what you do: pick the deer up

like a bride. Wrestle it into the back of the car—
the seat folded down. Somehow, you steer

the wagon out of the ditch and head home,
night rushing in through the broken window,

headlight dangling, side-mirror gone.
Your nose throbs, something stabs

in your side. The deer breathing behind you,
shallow and fast. A stoplight, you're almost home

and the deer scrambles to life, its long head
appears like a ghost in the rearview mirror

and bites you, its teeth clamp down on your shoulder
and maybe you scream, you struggle and flail

till the deer, exhausted, lets go and lies down.

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Your father's waiting up, watching tv.
He's had a few drinks and he's angry.

Christ, he says, when you let yourself in.
It's Night of the Living Dead. You tell him

some of what happened: the dark road,
the deer you couldn't avoid. Outside, he circles

the car. *Jesus*, he says. A long silence.
Son of a bitch, looking in. He opens the tailgate,

drags the quivering deer out by a leg.
What can you tell him—you weren't thinking,

you'd injured your head? You wanted to fix
what you'd broken—restore the beautiful body,

color of wet straw, color of oak leaves in winter?
The deer shudders and bleats in the driveway.

Your father walks to the toolshed,
comes back lugging a concrete block.

Some things stay with you. Dumping the body
deep in the woods, like a gangster. The dent

in your nose. All your life, the trail of ruin you leave.

In Spite of Everything, the Stars

~Edward Hirsch

Like a stunned piano, like a bucket
of fresh milk flung into the air
or a dozen fists of confetti
thrown hard at a bride
stepping down from the altar,
the stars surprise the sky.
Think of dazed stones
floating overhead, or an ocean
of starfish hung up to dry. Yes,
like a conductor's expectant arm
about to lift toward the chorus,
or a juggler's plates defying gravity,
or a hundred fastballs fired at once
and freezing in midair, the stars
startle the sky over the city.

And that's why drunks leaning up
against abandoned buildings, women
hurrying home on deserted side streets,
policemen turning blind corners, and
even thieves stepping from alleys
all stare up at once. Why else do
sleepwalkers move toward the windows,
or old men drag flimsy lawn chairs
onto fire escapes, or hardened criminals
press sad foreheads to steel bars?
Because the night is alive with lamps!
That's why in dark houses all over the city
dreams stir in the pillows, a million
plumes of breath rise into the sky.

Appendix A

What We Talk about When We Talk about Poetry

A LEXICON

alliteration – the repetition of beginning sounds, usually consonants, in neighboring words

allegory – a story with a second meaning hidden inside its literal one

allusion – within a poem, a reference to a literary work or an event, person, or place outside the world of the poem

anaphora – repetition in which the same word or phrase is repeated, often at the beginning of lines

anastrophe – a deliberate inversion of the normal order of words

annotation – a reader's written comments on a poem

anthology – a book of poems by different poets

assonance – the repetition of vowel sounds in neighboring words

cadence – a rhythmic pattern that's based on the natural repetition and emphases in speech

caesura (si·ZHOOR·uh) – a slight but definite pause *inside* a line of a poem created by the rhythm of the language or a punctuation mark, e.g., a period, dash, or colon in the middle of a line

cliché – an expression that has been used so much it has lost its freshness or meaning, e.g., a rainbow of colors, as busy as a bee, a blanket of snow; note: the adjective form is *clichéd*

close form – poetry written to an established pattern, e.g., a sonnet, limerick, villanelle, pantoum, tritina, sestina, or rondel

collection – a book of poems by one poet

concrete – a real, tangible detail or example of something; opposite of *abstract* or *general*

couplet – a pair of lines, usually written in the same form

connotation – the emotions and associations that a word suggests beyond its literal meaning

denotation – the literal or dictionary meaning of a word

diction – a poet's word choices

elegy – a poem of mourning or praise for the dead

end-stopped line – when meaning *and* grammar pause at the end of a line: a line-break at a normal pause in speech, usually at a punctuation mark; the opposite of an *enjambéd line* or *enjambment*

enjambéd line – when the meaning and grammar of a line continue from one line to the next with no pause; also called a *run-on line*

epigraph – a quotation placed at the beginning of a poem to make the poem more resonant

figurative language – comparisons between unrelated things or ideas: metaphors, similes, personification, and hyperbole are all types of figurative language, which reveals the familiar in a new, surprising way; the opposite of *literal language*

free verse – poetry that doesn't have a set rhythm, line length, or rhyme scheme; it relies, instead, on the natural rhythms of speech; today the most widely practiced form of poetry in the English language

form – the structure of a poem; how it is built

hyperbole –when a poet exaggerates on purpose for effect

image/imagery – a sensory response evoked in the mind of a reader by the diction in a poem; not just visual but any sensory impression— sound, touch, taste, odor—inspired by language

irony – when a poet says one thing but means something else

line – a group of words in a row; the unit of a poem

line break – the most important point in a line of poetry: the pause or breath at the end of a line

literal language – the straightforward meanings of words; the opposite of *figurative language*

lyric poetry – short poems (fewer than sixty lines) about personal experiences or feelings; most verse written today is lyric poetry

metaphor – a comparison in which the poet writes about one thing as if it is something else: A = B, with the qualities of B transferred to A

open form – see *free verse*

oxymoron – a figure of speech that combines two words that contradict each other, e.g., bittersweet

personification – a comparison that gives human qualities to an object, animal, idea, or phenomenon

poet laureate – a title given to an outstanding U.S. poet by the Library of Congress, usually for one or two years

prose poem – a piece of writing that has poetic features—rhythm, imagery, compression—but doesn't rhyme, conform to a set rhythm, or break into lines

rhyme scheme – the pattern of rhyming in a poem; to describe the pattern, each line is assigned a letter, and lines that rhyme are given the same letter, e.g., abab

sensory diction – language in a poem that evokes one of the five senses

simile – a kind of metaphor that uses *like* or *as* to compare two things: A is like B

speaker / persona – the voice that speaks the words of a poem, not necessarily the same person as the poet

stanza – a line or group of lines in a poem that's separated from other lines by extra white space; a division in a poem that occurs at a natural pause or at a point where the poet wants to speed up or slow down the poem, shift its tone, change the setting, or introduce a new idea or character

symbol – a thing or action that represents, in addition to itself, something else

tercet – a unit of three lines, usually written in the same form

theme – an idea about life that emerges from a poem

tone – the attitude of the speaker or poet toward the subject of the poem or toward the reader

tricolon – a rhythm, pattern, or emphasis used three times; a.k.a. “the power of three”

turn – a point in a poem when its meaning moves in a new, significant direction, or its theme emerges

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Quick Write Invitations: the power of Microbursts (a small and intense downdraft)

Our students are terrified of failure when they need to know how to make use of it. They have been taught by teachers and parents, the press, and their own instinct, that everything must be done perfectly the first time. They are inhibited, constipated, frightened—in no condition to produce good writing. Writing that is written to avoid failure guarantees mediocrity.

~Donald Murray

We must build a volume of ideas and confidence with young writers. We must lead them to practice revision as a daily habit.

Why write with your students? Passion is contagious. Every teacher needs to live, learn, and discover ideas in writing. The language we use in our teaching is embedded with values and beliefs, our hope and vision for each of our students. The standards do not prevent creative, imaginative writing. We do. We prescribe, assign, and rubric-ize the imaginations and individual expression of writers. Teaching is about our force of will—our vision. Our vision determines practice. Practice determines possibility.

You might start with generating ideas in story:

- list addresses where you have lived, star the one that is most vivid to you
- read several poems from George Ella Lyon's *Many Storied House* and quick write 2-3 minutes after each
- sketch the floor plan of the address* (or sketch your neighborhood): as you sketch, let memories come and jot notes to yourself (where do stories live/hide)
- turn and talk to a partner about your sketch
- write for about 10 minutes: keep the camera on one story and stretch out that moment (called a long write in my class—this will be an initial writing assessment)

A handful of my favorite spoken-word poems you can find on youtube:

"Knock Knock" by Daniel Beaty

"Teeth" by Phillip Kaye

"Pretty" by Katie Makkai

"An Origin Story" by Phil Kaye & Sarah Kay

MSA 2009 Taylor Phillips

"Thinking of You" by Mike Taylor

"Shake the Dust" by Anis Mojgani

"Repetition" by Phil Kaye

"Crab Apple Pirates" by Andrea Gibson

"To This Day: for the Bullied..." by Shane Koyzcan

"Beethoven" by Shane Koyzcan

All by Sarah Kay:

"Hands"

"Point B"

"Hiroshima"

"Montauk"

"Postcards"

"Private Parts"

"A Love Letter"

"Brother"

"Sarah Kay's Playlist"

watch Sarah Kay's Ted Talk

Students reread and revise at the end of our burst of quick writes as regular practice. As author Chris Crutcher said, **"Why invest in revision? Because messing with language makes us smarter."**

A Letter to the Girl I Used to Be

by Ethan Walker Smith

Dear Emily,

Every time I watch baseball a voice
I no longer recognize whispers
“Ethan, do you remember?
When you were gonna be the first girl in the major leagues-
Seattle Mariners. Rally cap.”

To be honest, Emily, I don't.
Dad told me that like it was someone else's bedtime story.

But I know you had that drive,
didn't let anyone tell you to wear shorts above your knees
didn't care if boys thought your hair fell on your shoulders just right
but with girls
sleepovers meant the space between your shoulder and hers was a 6-inch fatal territory.

The year you turned eleven was the first time you said out loud
that you didn't want to live anymore.
In therapy you said you wouldn't make it to 21.
On my 21st birthday I thought about you,
you were right.

At nineteen you started to fade.
I tried to cross you out like a line
in my memoir I wished I could erase completely.
And maybe I'm misunderstanding the definition of death
but even though parts of you still exist you are not here-
most of my friends have never heard your name until now.

I've been trying to write this letter for six months.
I still can't decide if it should be an apology or not.
But now you will never hear “Emily Smith” announced at a college graduation,
get married, have children.

I made the appointment,
to let a doctor remove your breasts so that
I could stand up straighter.
Now even if I somehow had those children,
I wouldn't be able to nourish them.
My body will be obsolete,
scarred cosmetic, but never C-section.

I was four days late
they will never be grandparents
I was one week late
they will never hold their lover's sleeping figure.
I was eleven days late
they will never breathe in a sunset and sunrise in the same night.

I was two weeks late
they will never learn to jump rope.
I was three weeks late
they will never shout "Watch Mommy! Watch me on the slide!"

I was two months late.
A piece of us will never wrap their arms around our leg for comfort,
or just to keep them from falling down.

And I am, sorry,
that this process is so slow
and all you can do is wonder if you ever had a place.
You did.
You still do.
Don't forget that.

Yours,
Ethan

p.s. I never hated you.