OISE, University of Toronto
Hosted by: Ben Gallagher & Ashleigh Allen

Contemporary poets for the contemporary moment

Workshop description:

Our 90-minute creative writing workshop will begin with reading poems by two contemporary poets whose writing is charged with the present moment - a moment when bodies and lives are particularly political.

Participants will take turns reading the poems by both poets (Billy-Ray Belcourt and Terrance Hayes).

Workshop facilitators share prompts (which are literary moves they notice happening in the poems). These prompts are meant to engage participants and give them direction/ inspiration for writing their own poems charged with their version of this present moment – their lives providing fodder and Hayes and Belcourt providing inspiration. (Writing is 20-30 minutes)

Participants are invited to discuss what they noticed in the poems they read and wrote. We can consider:
  - General reflections on the poems…
  - How do we feel reading these poems? Why do we feel this way?

The purpose of this workshop is to expose participants to important voices in literature today. Participants are encouraged to explore contemporary poets and to bring these poets into their classes for students to engage with.

We are grateful to be a part of a community that values engagement with writing and reading.

Workshop outline:

(5 minutes)
Welcome participants & introductions

(5 minutes)
Share the purpose of this workshop: to engage with writing happening now and to create our own pieces of writing!

(15 minutes)
Introduce participants briefly to Terrance Hayes and this collection we will read from.
Participants read Terrance Hayes poems without pause or interruption

(15-20 minutes)
Introduce participants briefly to Billy-Ray Belcourt and this collection we will read from.

Participants read Billy-Ray Belcourt poems without pause or interruption

Participants are offered prompts (these prompts are inspired by moves Hayes made in the poems we read) to write with these voices in their heads.

<u>**Terrance Hayes PROMPTS**</u>:
- Lock a person with whom you feel tension with in your poem – what is the atmosphere, describe the space, temperature, and use the senses to describe the space. Once they're there, what do you have them do, or what do they do?
- Include a homophone (ex: gym/ Jim, aural/ oral, beet/ beat, bare/ bear)
- Have something happen in a shadow
- Have someone whisper a word or short phrase that's a mantra repeatedly. Consider where they say it, who hears it.
- Compose a list of names (people real and fictional), places, historical events (personal and public) that are fundamental to your identity. Then order these alphabetical.
- Take an emotion and make it a piece of furniture or a part of the construction of a home (a door, a window, a chimney) and use this metaphor to talk about the nature of the emotion
- Offer a recipe on how to overcome an emotion (maybe the one you named but maybe not!)
- Mention a time of day
- Mention a brief description of a dream

<u>**Billy-Ray Belcourt PROMPTS:**</u>
- Include a numbered list
- Include a dance (and/or the description of a specific dance)
- Include a compliment spoken by someone else
- Include the experience of hand-holding or not hand-holding
- Include internet slang
- Use a word, and then define it after you use it
- Describe a body part of yours or someone else's, give its history in some way

(20-30 minutes)
Participants free write

(10-15 minutes)
Participants are invited to share their writing or a section of what they wrote (Optional!)

Participants invited to **discuss what the process was like for them**, whether or not they use (or will use) this method or not; if it was their first time, maybe they have thoughts on using prompts inspired by the literary moves of the poets we read.
We can talk through the poems and **do an analysis of the poems themselves informed by our own experiences of trying to adopt some of the writers' literary moves** to see if the practice of writing has opened up any analytic windows.