

Contemporary Canadian Poetry

HOSTS:

Ashleigh A. Allen &

Ben Gallagher

Workshop description:

This 90-minute creative writing workshop unpacks the creative possibilities of reading and writing through recently published Canadian poetry. Each of these collections has been nominated for either a national award or international award or both!

As always in our monthly writing workshop, we look at a range of contemporary poets pushing against or harnessing these forms for their own purposes, to think about the possibilities they offer us for our own writing and thinking. The purposes of this workshop are: to share in the reading of contemporary poetry, experience the act of writing poetry in community, and think about the possibilities for contemporary poetry in our lives and classrooms as writer educators. We aim to consider not only the content but also the sonic and structural choices poets make, as a way to consider the possibilities that a creative writing practice has to offer us as writers and educators.

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

Workshop outline:

(5 minutes)

Welcome participants & introductions / check-ins

Names, pronouns, a word or two to describe how each person is feeling today

(5 minutes)

Share the purpose of this workshop

Award season is upon us, this is a selection of Canadian poetry published in the last year (or 2)...

(10-15 minutes)

Participants volunteer to read through all the poems at least once (Quaker style)

The East Side of it All, Joseph Dandurand

- Write a list poem that includes signs the universe gives you that your life is “right” (be as specific as possible)
- Write a memory of foraging for or capturing your own food that made you maybe “feel alive” and connect to the world (it could be fishing like Dandurand, but it could also be hunting, picking fruit or a vegetable etc.). Or, maybe you had the opposite reaction...

- Write a poem about a mythical creature or figure who lives among us for a while. Feel free to explore and answer in the poem: Where did they come from? Why did they come here? What do they do here? And, what makes them return to where they are from?...
- Include the line (and fill in the blank): “And that was the best year for _____ in a long time”

A Thousand Times You Lose Your Treasures, Hoa Nguyen

- Think of (or look at) an image of an elderly family member or maybe someone that has passed – describe what you see, hear, smell, and taste in that scene. What will happen after this moment that is captured that you know about - this is maybe a piece of knowledge that haunts the scene.
- List phrases you know in another language (but write them here in English)
- Write a list poem of lost things that include: words, objects, locations, etc.

Dream of No One But Myself, David Bradford

- Take a piece of text to make an erasure poem/visual poem (through obscuring and/or circling text). You can also do this with something else you’ve previously written
- End a sentence halfway through (perhaps by ending the sentence on “and”)
- Emphasize a selection of words in your writing to produce a layered second text
- Include a footnote that details an aspect of your psychological state

Resurrection Fail, John Wall Barger

- Have a conversation with a sacred figure (who may or may not answer)
- Combine a historical event and a fictional movie character in your writing
- Revisit a childhood playground

(40-45 minutes)

Participants write

Using the prompts offered, participants mute their mics and write (for 45 minutes). Participants are encouraged to consider: What else do you see happening with language and imagery and topics/themes in these poems? Feel free to include or mimic other things you notice in these poems or anything else that inspires you today!

(5 minutes)

Ideas for exit conversation. Participants invited to discuss and reflect on the experience:

- What did you notice as you read and wrote? Were you surprised by anything in particular?
- Benefits/ uses of a workshop like this?
- Do you think you will incorporate any of these poems, themes of the poems, or this method of writing together in a virtual room in your own teaching? In what specific

ways? If you would use these texts, you'd use them in conjunction with what other texts/ ideas/ questions?

- Are your students writing creatively together in virtual spaces? What does that look and feel like?