

OISE, University of Toronto  
Hosts: Ben Gallagher & Ashleigh Allen

### Taking up subjects & remixing images: Poetry Workshop

#### Workshop description:

Our 90-minute creative writing workshop looks at **Taking up subjects and engaging with images** through poems from Stevie Howell's recent collection *I left inside on purpose* and engaging with images and considering **ekphrasis poetry**. We will also remix in the "Business" section of today's local newspaper to interrupt and enliven the language in the poems.

The purpose of this workshop is to expose participants to different ways of reading and writing poetry as a community, and to think about the possibilities for poetry in our lives and classrooms and communities. Today we specifically want to focus on how to use images and language foreign to the English class as fodder for poems.

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

(5 minutes)

#### Share the purpose of this workshop:

- To engage with poems being written at and in response to our present moment

(30-40 minutes)

(5 minutes to read, 15 minutes to write, 5-10 minutes to share)

#### **Poems & prompt 1:**

#### Stevie Howell, from her collection *I left nothing inside on purpose*

Use Howell's collection to explore:

- What is it to take up a subject and respond to it in a poem?
- Here the framing is about the speaker – who is the speaker in the poem? An investigation into voice – a bot, an embryo as a way to generate writing that isn't about us, not written in our voice, but is an investigation into the world.
- **"Embryonic"**
- **"Talking w/humans is my only way to learn"**

Prompts:

- *Leave a space or gap in the lines*
- *Include abbreviations ex: b/c, &, yr, w/ (make a bank of words before you begin of abbreviations you like to use)*

- *Include language from today's business section - banks that aren't in our own psyches, which broadens the horizons of the poem*
- *Include words that differ only by one letter (ex: women, omen) – You can make a bank of words before you begin and use them when you want*
- *Include the point of view of a machine*
- *Start a line with “on the internet”*

(30-40 minutes)

(5 minutes to read, 15 minutes to write, 5-10 minutes to share)

### **Poems & prompt 2:**

#### **Definition of this concept/practice of Ekphrasis:**

“Ekphrasis means ‘Description’ in Greek. An ekphrastic poem is a vivid description of a scene or work of art. Through the imaginative act of narrating and reflecting on the ‘action’ of a painting or sculpture, the poet may amplify and expand its meaning.” (From <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/ekphrasis>)

“Ekphrastic poems focus on works of art—usually paintings, photographs, or statues. And modern ekphrastic poems have generally shrugged off antiquity’s obsession with elaborate description, and instead have tried to interpret, inhabit, confront, and speak to their subjects.” (From [https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poems?field\\_form\\_tid=408](https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poems?field_form_tid=408))

#### **Read Rita Dove’s poem “Sonnet in Primary Colors”:**

<https://www.persimmontree.org/v2/winter-2012/twelve-poems/>

- Here Rita Dove looked at self-portraits Frida Kahlo and wrote this poem inspired by a combination of images

*Prompts:*

- *Write about what you do see in the image*
- *Begin a line “This is.... Who...”*
- *Think about this life/space at a different time of day, what happens at night? Daybreak?*
- *Choose an aspect of the image that is “immutable”*

#### **Read Margaret Atwood’s poem “This Is a Photograph of Me”:**

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/photograph-me>

*Prompt:*

- *Write from the perspective of someone present in the scene that isn't visible or is below / beyond the surface of the image*
- *When was the photograph taken? Why was it taken?*
- *Consider the moment before the photo was taken and just after, what was happening? Explore those moments.*
- *What's seen and what is unseen?*
- *What is just beyond the frame itself?*
- *Start a line: “The effect of \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_”*
- *If you want to maintain Atwood’s format, spend the first half describing what you see and the second half going beyond the surface*

*(5-10 minutes)*

**Ideas for exit conversation**

- Participants invited to discuss:
  - What they noticed as they read and wrote
  - Benefits / uses of writing poems using ekphrasis? Would you consider using news images? Historical images? Students personal images?
  - We can consider general reflections on the poems and formats as well as how we feel reading, writing, and sharing these poems