OISE, University of Toronto

Hosted by: Ashleigh Allen & Ben Gallagher

**Poems about physicality/ stories of our bodies**

**Workshop description:**

Our 90-minute creative writing workshop explores the creative possibilities these poems about the body (its parts, interpretations, genders, etc.) have to offer us, as we explore new ways to experience and reflect on the stories bodies tell, the ones we tell ourselves about them, and the ways that we spiritually engage with our physical life. There is also a history of exclusion organized around bodies that these poems work to undo, as they celebrate a range of different bodies and feelings about those bodies.

To acknowledge the important holiday that is today - Martin Luther King Jr Day - we will start the workshop with a contemporary poem about him and his legacy and dreams.

The purpose of this workshop is to share contemporary poetry and the experience of writing poetry in community, and to ultimately 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**: **To engage in reading/ writing about bodies**

* We want to make space in the workshop setting to consider our own physical bodies, their stories, and how poetry might help us speak to this encounter with gratitude, trust/distrust, journeying/evolution, and the body’s potential for rebirth/return.
* Through reading and writing these poems, we explore themes of who and how our bodies are in natural, scientific, and spiritual environments, at times encountering these spaces and places as bodies themselves.

*(10-15 minutes)*

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

*(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!

After writing:Everyone is called back and invited (to voluntarily) share what they wrote or a section of what they wrote...

**POEMS:**

**“Martin Luther King Jr. Mourns Trayvon Martin” by Lauren K. Alleyne**

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/02/trayvon-martin-martin-luther-king-jr/552596/>

* Make a list of verbs and their conjugations, and use two versions of the same verb in a single line (eg: alive/living)
* Make a list of alliterative words to use (eg: open doors/opportunity/oppression)
* Include a direct quote from someone

**“Anodyne” by Yusef Komunyakaa**

<https://poetrysociety.org/features/ars-poetica/yusef-komunyakaa>

* Include the word *anodyne* or (as metaphor perhaps) name what could be your body’s anodyne
* Describe specific body parts external (like hands) and internal (like organs) and how they’ve specifically served you
* Name some specific parts that you love - say so and explain why
* Include a part of your body that’s possibly “haunted” or where there may be the presence of a ghost!

**“Remember, Body…” by CP Cavafy**

<https://hellopoetry.com/poem/16462/remember-body/>

* Address your body and urge it to remember specific moments of desire, then unpack 1-2 of those moments

**“homage to my hips” by Lucille Clifton**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49487/homage-to-my-hips>

* Write about a part of your body that takes up space and note specific ways and scenarios in which it takes up space. (Clifton writes about her hips but maybe it’s your arms or hands or feet, maybe it’s your voice or hair or otherwise…)
* Include the sentence “I have known them [or it] to put a spell on\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”

**“The Way to Keep Going in Antarctica” by Bernadette Mayer**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49723/the-way-to-keep-going-in-antarctica>

* Address yourself by including the phrase: “Be strong (your name)”
* Include a section with negations; perhaps start with the phrase “no more\_\_\_\_\_ no more”
* Quote yourself! Something you’ve recently said or written. Mayer begins her line with:

“I had written: …”

**“Green Migraine” by Michael Dickman**

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/10/26/green-migraine>

* Choose a colour, make a list of objects related to or with that colour to draw on in your writing
* Repeat a word pair three times (eg: green sky green sky green sky)
* Describe a scene looking out from a window of your house/living space

**“Twenty Five Thousand Miles of Nerves” by Nino Mick**

<https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/march-2019-swedish-twenty-five-thousand-miles-of-nerves-nino-mick-christian>

* Recount a social situation using an animal figure (eg: snake on the path)
* Divide your writing into sections based on visits to a specialist of some kind
* Is your poem a lure for anything or anyone?

**“For Calling the Spirit Back from Wandering the Earth” by Joy Harjo**

<https://poets.org/poem/calling-spirit-back-wandering-earth-its-human-feet>

* Address someone else, or address yourself, using the second person “you”
* Make a list of healing instructions for someone to follow
* Where does pain live in your body? Where does forgiveness live in your body?

*(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?