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

**Poetry** **and Friendship**

**Workshop description:**

Our 90-minute creative writing workshop explores **Poetry and Friendship** as we read contemporary poets exploring aspects of friendship and relationships between people.

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. Today we specifically want to focus on the various ways that poets have tackled issues of friendship in their writing, and what a consideration of our intimate relationships offers to our writing practices.

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 to describe how each person is feeling today

*(5 minutes)***Share the purpose of this workshop**: **To explore issues of friendship within poetry**

* The topic of friendship opens towards considerations of politics, the movement of time, the nuances of love, and web of connections between people. They also provide an antidote to poems focusing on romantic love
* What do poems that tackle these issues look and sound like?
* What are the implications for our own writing when we begin to explore how our own friendships shape our language and creativity?

*(5-10 minutes)***Read “Zevart” and “Gayatri” by Souvankham Thammavongsa** from her recent book of poems ***Cluster*** (2019)

*(20 minutes)***Writing from prompts:**

* Include the name of the friend (perhaps this is the title)
* Include/ reflect on a piece of technology that is no longer around/ in regular use
* Include a food you would enjoy with this friend
* Include the line and fill in the blank: “I never went \_\_\_\_\_\_ because of you.”
* Include a career plan either of you had when you were younger
* Write in couplets or have a section in couplets
* Describe a photograph that you’re in together - what’s happening in the photo? Mention something that is absent from a scene that’s expected to be there (like a star on top of a tree or cutlery on the table when you’re about to eat)
* Recall a specific moment the two of you shared and reflect on what that moment meant - translate it
* Say something about how you’ve come to understand love and its connection to friendship and care

*(5-10 minutes)***Read “On Gifts for Grace” by Bernadette Mayer, “Having a coke with you” by Frank O’Hara, and “Urgent Telegram for Jean-Michel Basquiat” by Kevin Young**

* “On Gifts for Grace” by Bernadette Mayer

<https://poets.org/poem/gifts-grace>

* “Urgent Telegram to Jean-Michel Basquiat” by Kevin Young

<https://poets.org/poem/urgent-telegram-jean-michel-basquiat>

* Having a coke with you” by Frank O’Hara

https://poets.org/poem/having-coke-you

*(20 minutes)***Writing from prompts**

* Include a percentage
* Include three detailed descriptions of things you would buy your friend if you had enough money/ the means
* Include the smell of something
* Include spaces that a friend used to occupy and spaces that they haunt now
* Use telegram language (or replace periods with the word “stop”)
* Include an invitation to the friend to join you
* Make a list of beautiful places you’ve visited or would like to visit
* Repeat the phrase “partly because…” to divide up aspects of an experience your friend
* Finish the phrase “you suddenly wonder why ….”
* Include a definition (real or fake) of a name of a friend in the poem
* End your poem in the present tense (maybe you speak to someone directly here)

*(5 minutes)***Ideas for exit conversation**. **Participants invited to discuss:**

* What did you notice as you read and wrote? Were you surprised by anything? Comfortable or uncomfortable with the ideas/ experiences expressed?
* Benefits / uses of reading and writing into poetry of friendship?
* Do you think you will use this or a version of this in your own classrooms? How? In conjunction with what texts/ ideas/ questions?

**Other possibilities**:

“The Friend” by Matt Hart

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/58352/the-friend-56d23ca66debe>

“When Dean Young Talks About Wine” by Tony Hoagland  
<https://whatnarcissismmeanstome.tumblr.com/post/3623714914/when-dean-young-talks-about-wine-tony-hoagland>

“He Said Turn Here” by Dean Young

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47666/he-said-turn-here>

Link on friendship between Audre Lorde and Diane di Prima:

<https://blogs.lib.unc.edu/rbc/index.php/2013/06/25/sisters-outsider-diane-di-prima-and-audre-lorde/>

David Whyte on friendship via *Brainpickings*

https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/04/29/david-whyte-consolations-words/

Not exactly about friendship or a poem, but about the broader history of feminist poets and theory:

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/sister-arts-on-adrienne-rich-audre-lorde-and-others/>