

POETRY FOR WELLBEING  
WORKSHOPS

WORKSHOP 1

# MAPPING & GROUNDING



# INTRODUCTION

Begin with some intentions for the session. It's important to make clear to everyone that this is a safe space, and that what we share here stays here. It's also important to say that we're aiming to **be** writers today, not just pretending to be. We will explore how stepping into this can be a helpful mindset shift.

*'The only difference between writers and non-writers is that the writers are writing and the writers keep writing through the difficulty.'*  
– John Glenday

*'Write a little each day without hope and without despair.'*  
– Karen Blixen

Let everyone know that we'll aim to share and read aloud what we have written. Reading aloud is part of the reflective process as it helps us see and understand our writing and experience in a different way.

Of course, there can also be good reasons not to share – if, for example, something is confidential or very personal. If you have a good reason, it's okay not to share your writing. The less good reasons usually have something to do with thinking your work isn't good enough.

## INTRODUCTORY EXERCISE: INSTANT NAME POEM

**Write:** Create a poem of 10 lines by completing the following line starters:

1. Write your name (William Stafford said write every day and start by writing your name – then you know all will be okay)
2. It means . . . (insert three adjectives)
3. It is the number. . . (insert chosen number here)
4. It is like. . . (describe a colour without naming it)
5. It is like . . . (a memory that made you smile)
6. It is a memory of . . . (a person who has been significant to you)
7. (A line about something they taught you – about their values)
8. (A line about something they did that showed this)
9. My name is . . . (write your full name here)
10. It means . . . (something important you believe about life)

## AN EXAMPLE FROM AUTUMN

Autumn.  
It means creative, curious, loving.  
It is the number 8.  
It is like the light through the trees.  
It is like a small warm hand taking yours.  
It is a memory of Frances  
Who taught me to question and to give  
When she cooked for people it made a table a place to belong and share.  
My name is Autumn Ellen.  
It means we can we can all bring more love into the world.

Ask each person in turn to share their poem as a way of introducing themselves.

**Discuss together:** After everyone has shared their poem, take a moment to reflect on this idea:

*'You discover stuff about yourself as you write. We are creatures of contrast.'*  
– John Glenday

You could also connect this exercise to ideas about the 'use of self' in social work - in other words, about writing as a way of knowing yourself anew.

Even engagement with things like nature, which might not seem to relate our inner selves, can provide us with wider insights about ourselves.

*'It is always ourselves we find in the sea.'*  
– e. e. cummings

## EXERCISE 2: READING AND REFLECTION ON THE EMOTIONAL WORLD POETRY CAN OPEN UP

**Read:** My Heart by Kim Addonizio  
<https://poets.org/poem/my-heart>

This is a list poem. There is much mystery in it, and it shows the power of indirectly talking about feelings. Specifically, it shows us how we can talk about feelings in the way we describe the world - and how a title can do a lot of work to tell us that's what our poem is aiming to do.

**Discuss together:** Why might talking about feelings at a distance be good?

If you need prompts for this discussion, think about the value of catharsis, reflection, new perspectives, and the fact that it can be easier to describe the world we live in than our emotional/inner world.

'I had no one to help me, but T. S. Eliot helped me. So when people say that poetry is a luxury, or an option, or for the educated middle classes, or that it shouldn't be read at school because it is irrelevant, or any of the strange, stupid things that are said about poetry and its place in our lives, I suspect that the people doing the saying have had things pretty easy. A tough life needs a tough language – and that is what poetry is. That is what literature offers – a language powerful enough to say how it is. It isn't a hiding place. It is a finding place.'

– Jeanette Winterson, in *Why be happy when you could be normal*

**Discuss together:** What does the above quotation mean to you? Think about the importance of creative and artistic sources in our lives, as part of our self-care, and perhaps even to our survival.

## **EXERCISE 3: WRITING EXERCISE - SELF PORTRAIT AS A MAP OF THE WORLD BY ORONCE FINE**

Introduce the next exercise with some tips for writing from poet John Glenday:

1. Use the five senses
2. Don't say too much
3. Keep it as simple as possible
4. Concentrate on the solid stuff, leave emotions to the reader
5. Don't tell the reader things, just show them
6. Write first and ask questions later

On the next page is a photo of Oronce Fine's *Map of the world* depicting a map in the shape of a heart - a newly discovered world, but one that may not have been not fully explored. This reflects how the poems we make might be like maps of ourselves and our hearts. Maps can help us find where we are and where we want to go - and so can reading and writing poetry, and the reflection that goes with it.



**Write:** Thinking about Fine's *Map of the world*, take 10 minutes to write. Include at least three of the following elements:

- The name of a country or continent
- A description of weather
- A colour
- Something to do with music
- A reference to a favourite possession
- A reference to water in any of its forms

**Discuss together:** After sharing poems, you might like to reflect on the way that poems often like to cycle back round to end where they began.

'En ma Fin gît mon Commencement'

- Mary, Queen of Scots, embroidered in the period before her execution

Can poetry help bring us back to who and where we are? Think about your own 'moral compass' or 'interior compass' - how do we keep true to this when our work and practice pull us in opposing directions, or lead us to places we don't want to go? What would a practice navigated by your interior compass look and sound like? In what ways does it look or sound or feel different - if it does?

## **HOMEWORK**

Give yourself a few moments every day to really notice things – great writing comes from great observing.

Try to complete a simple piece of writing every day and aim to have completed a cinquain - a poem or stanza composed of five lines - before we meet again. Read more about the form here: <https://poets.org/glossary/cinquain>

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