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Poetic Dialogue for Norcata Conference
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Warm-up.

- * Write a list of words you like. Any word is okay. Then say one out loud and I'll write it on the white board. Notice how you might let the word come without planning or trying, how it could simply flow from your thoughts into your mouth and outward.
Let more single words flow onto your paper just like you would say them to me.
- * Write some words the critic might say and call those out. Take a breath and make some space for the flow of words and the critic.
- * Make a list of things you could plant. These could be what you would expect or unexpected.
E.g. a bedroom, a clock, a watermelon seed, etc.
- * If you planted them what would grow? E.g. a love, an hour, a purple melon bush, etc.
- * If the critic comes, take a breath make some space for the critic so the flow of words could be there also. Say some words from the critic. Write some responses.

Opening Poem

On Emergence
By Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

In May I planted a whole row of beans
along the back fence of the garden,
pushed each of the small white seeds one inch
into the spring-damp soil. I waited weeks.
Not one came up. Not one.
I planted them again, planted them in twos
two inches apart. I waited weeks. Three
came up. There were over 100 seeds.
I am trying to tell you that sometimes
what we wish for does not happen.
Though we do everything by the rules.
Though we have known success before.
Though we long for our plans to take root,
to bloom, to fruit. Then all through the rows
emerged this spring dozens of volunteer cosmos.
This morning, a generous riot of pink, dark pink
and white fluttering in the spaces where
I'd envisioned only the green of beans.

Discuss the poem:

- *What do you like about this poem? What images, words, or phrases capture your interest or attention?
- * Is there anything you don't like about the poem? This is important and quite ok.
- *What is the message or meaning that comes to you from this poem? (No right or wrong answer.)

What is poetic dialogue?

*The secret is that all writing is a dialogue. The author dialogues with him or herself and all the complexity therein. Writing can also be inspired by another's writing, artwork, or music. When we read or hear something creative, we enter into a dialogue with the author and all that came before. When we bring a poem, story, or artwork to a group, we enter into a dialogue with the artwork and the members in the group.

*Specific dialogues are more deliberate conversations. You can “answer” or imitate a style. If you are writing a poem for a work of art, that's called ekphrastic poetry.

Writing Prompts for *On Emergence*

- *What do you like to plant? This can be real or metaphorical.
- *How hard do you try to reap what you have sown and how does this work out for you?
- *What do you do when something really important that you need isn't happening?
- *What “volunteers” have shown up for you when you didn't expect them? Has that happened even today, perhaps?
- *Other prompts?

Giving Positive Feedback in the group:

- * What you like about the writing and why? (May need to hear it read more than once.)
- * What ideas, images, thoughts, and emotions are in the writing, and how does the writing open up ideas and commonality for you and the author.
- * How you felt hearing the writing and how this has helped or moved you.

Write for 15 minutes

Any form of writing is great. That is free writing, journal entry, story, etc. If you want to write a poem, go ahead. Your critic may come up to tell you it isn't good enough, but see if you can let yourself sow some words and allow what happens to come up. Rhyming isn't necessary, but is also fine.

Read your writing and get feedback as time permits

What is poetry therapy? Adding you your recent experience...

* Using a poem (most often written by someone other than the poetry therapist leading the group) as a springboard for discussion and writing. The successful poem is usually clear in meaning, has interesting images and evokes an emotion. It's generally important that the poem has a hopeful ending. There is no right or wrong in how to understand a poem; poems can have more than one meaning, just like dreams or artwork.

* Poetry is a wonderful vehicle for expressing feelings and thoughts through images, sounds, and rhythm. Its compactness can get a lot of meaning across in a few words. Sometimes hearing a poem can give participants the courage to write one of their own. Poetry can also be a container for difficult ideas, experiences, and emotions. And it can, but doesn't have to rhyme!

* The writing response can be in any form—free writing, story, journal entry, etc. and does not have to be poetry. As with any creative/expressive group, participants need permission to do whatever is comfortable for them.

* In poetry therapy, we do not critique writing in any way. We provide a safe environment to create and share, giving only honest positive feedback in response to writing that is shared.

* Honest positive feedback helps soothe the inner critic and a supportive, safe environment can increase comfort with creativity and self esteem.

A few thoughts:

*In art therapy groups, you can use participants' artwork to create writing prompts using the same "honest positive feedback only" ideas. You can mix up who writes about what in creative ways.

*You may already be having group members write about their artwork. You can add warm-ups for the writing like the ones we have done today.

Closing poems with their inspiration photograph/drawing for today:



Photograph and drawing by Devora Weinapple, MFT

Ode to the Pears Drawn by Devora

How naturally they settle
together in their bowl,
snuggled and safe,
but if I could, I would
eat the one with
the blush, or at least
take a bite.

After she drew them,
did she realize
her caress of pink
was an embrace,
her pencils on the paper
making them ready
for anything .

Standing Invitation

How we can settle here
together in our bowl,
safe to say what comes, to see our
pinks, our blues, our pearskin
colors as beautiful and delicious.

How I can open
the window so the curtains
can dance into our room
and all this in less than ninety
minutes. I'll have to bring a wand.
Hope you can make it.

Both poems are by Phyllis Klein

More on Poetic Dialogue:

These poems turned out to be too long to include in our short workshop. I offer them and the discussion below if you are interested in more examples of dialogue and poetry, writing prompts, etc.

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks
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Dear Rumi,

After reading The Guest House, by Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks
by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

The house, remember how it was swept
so clean last time you came around?
Not a book left on the shelves. The closets,
hangerless. The drawers, bare. Not even
a dust bunny under the bed. It was terrifying,
really, to inhabit all that emptiness. No cup,
not even a dirty one, to offer you. And you,
unphased, led me to the river to drink.

I am almost afraid to tell you I bought new cups.
And the shelves, well, there are lots of new books.
Many I have not yet opened. I just bought them
hoping to know, know something, something more,
something about nothing. That is ridiculous,
I know, and I can laugh at myself and still
I order more books.

There are rugs in the halls, and lamps, and I could even
offer you a stool. Is it so wrong, Rumi, to have brought
all the furniture in again? Shame, she came again
last week. She spit on my mirror and it won't come off.
And Fear, he trampled mud all over the new white carpet.
And Anger, he tossed two of the new tea cups
on the floor where they shattered like hope.
And Hope, she picked up the pieces and made
a mosaic of wings.

I am learning, perhaps, to better greet
these visitors and laugh as you suggest.
Sometimes I even get excited to hear
the doorbell ring. And sometimes when I hear
footsteps at the door, I run to the closet,
curl myself into a ball, cover myself with old coats
and boots and shudder.

Dear Rosemerry,

After reading *The Guest House*, and your letter to Rumi, *Dear Rumi*
by Phyllis Klein

I know it too— the shuddering, I mean.
Your arrivals—Shame, Fear, and Anger—
they knock on your front door.
My arrivals come to the car.

I get in and Regret has already
put on the Janice CD playing
Me and Bobby McGee full volume.
Oh, all the things I have let slip away.
Oh, poor Janice, I still miss you.
Then, Loneliness whimpering at the gas
station looking for a ride. He opens
the back door and Grief, Depression,
and Fear hop in. They crowd
the seat singing along with Regret,
eating cookies, leaving crumbs, asking
repeatedly, "Are we there yet?"

But Rumi knows nothing about cars,
engines, transmissions, or tires.
Maybe that's why he hasn't come
to visit. At least I haven't had
to explain why the trunk is full of bags,
books, and Goodwill items. Maybe he
would like that I am recycling. It's just
as well, I don't want him to comment
on my fear, my intransigence, the way
my body tightens around the wheel
and my jaw clenches
and I can't begin to laugh about it.

I'm so sorry Shame spit on your mirror,
that Fear trampled the clean white carpet.
Luckily my floor mats are black so they hold
the darkness without it showing even with
crumbs. Why is it so much easier to be kind to you
than to myself? I did just get the car
detailed, maybe there is room for Hope,
and maybe I will hang a crystal from
the rear view mirror for rainbows. As long as
it doesn't blind me with the light.

Would you like to go out for a drive sometime?
Rumi wouldn't have to know about it so we could
have a grumble fest and laugh. And fear could
be in an upscale closet somewhere else, with
music and drapes, cushions and someone safe
peeling grapes for company. You and I could eat
hamburgers and fries, roll the windows low,
sing about *Lucy in the Sky* or *You've Got a Friend*.

The Guest House, translated by Coleman Barks
Dear Rumi, by Rosemerry Wahtohla Trimmer

How to use poetry therapy in a group setting:

Bring a poem to the group. Choose a poem that is at the level of the members' abstract abilities. It's fine to start with poems you love. It's good to have something that ends in a hopeful manner. Which of the 3 poems I read would you not bring to a group by itself? (I wouldn't bring Rosemerry's poem to Rumi into a group unless I thought they could handle the difficult conclusion.)

You could also bring a poem that is written to accompany a picture. (Ekphrastic poetry). That might be lovely in an art therapy group.

Read the poem aloud usually twice. Poetry has rhythm and sound that is meant to be read out loud as well as silently.

Discuss the poem, reactions, likes, dislikes, ideas about what it means.

If you were using the 3 poems I shared today here are some of the questions you could ask and discuss before writing together in the group that could be used as writing prompts:

*What does The Guest House mean to you?

Like art, poetry is subjective. There is no right or wrong answer. It's ok to like the poem or not. You will learn something about yourself from your response to a poem.

*What do you do when fear, anger, or shame comes to visit? What would you like to be able to do and why?

*What do you do when happiness, joy, or hope visits? What more would you like to be able to do and why?

*What images do you like in the poems? What lines do you like? Start your writing with a line or part of a line from the poem/s.

It's ok to "borrow" things as long as you don't use more than a phrase. You can always mention the author you are quoting if you want to borrow more.

Write in any form. This isn't a time to be learning how to write. It is a time to let words come to mind and write them down.

Address the inner critic and how to loosen up. Everyone has one. Somaticly, stretching can be good and also moments of silence can be helpful.

Ask for questions or needs before starting the writing.

Sometimes people feel intimidated or stuck, especially if this modality is new for them. It can help tremendously to solicit questions and address discomfort, fear, or confusion for individuals briefly to help them get started. And it's also ok to spend time with someone after everyone else has started to help them get started also.

Let people know, we will be giving honest positive feedback and talking about how the writing affected us. We will not be talking about how to improve the writing. That is for another kind of group. This group is for you to get to write about something meaningful and get honest positive

feedback. We might also talk about helping you with feelings or thoughts the writing might bring up. No one is required to read their writing. If it's too personal that's a good reason to keep it private. If you think your writing isn't good enough, it might be very helpful to try reading it so you can get practice with meeting your inner critic and getting group support.

***A short list of poems to bring to groups:**

- *Everybody Made Soups* by Lisa Coffman
- *Allow* by Danna Faulds
- *Strewn* by Barbara Crooker
- *Invisible Work* by Alison Luterman
- *Kindness* by Naomi Shihab Nye
- *As Is* by Ann McNeal
- *Visiting Mountains* by Ted Kooser
- *Day One* by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer
- Your favorite authors here

***Suggested Reading:**

Poetry as Therapy, an online article by Perie Longo, PhD.

<http://www.sanctuarycenters.org/pdfs/resources/poetry-as-therapy.pdf>

Giving Sorrow Words

Available on the National Association for Poetry Therapy Website

<http://www.poetrytherapy.org/publications.html#GSW>

The Healing Fountain

Also Available on the Poetry Therapy Website

<http://www.poetrytherapy.org/publications.html#Healing>

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