



10 Creative Writing Activities

by **Cecilia Knapp** - Associate Artist

1. Free writing prompts

Put your pen on the paper. Write one of these prompts. Begin, see where it takes you. Then don't stop. Don't tell yourself it's bad, don't cross anything out. Don't worry about what you're writing. Don't worry about your spelling, your grammar, your handwriting. Just let the words flow. Allow it to be imperfect, unfinished, random, surprising. Allow the process of *keeping going* to uncover some beautiful things you had lurking at the back of your brain. If you don't feel like writing with a pen, write notes on your phone or speak into the voice recorder. You got this. Enjoy the feeling of letting go and just expressing yourself.

- If I were a bird...
- The stars keep on shining...
- I hope...
- I will...
- I wish...
- I know...
- When I see you again...
- The first time...
- Now I can see spring...
- A good memory...

2. Love poem to myself

Read this poem by *Cia Mangat* (one of the winners of the *Foyle's Young Poets* award):

Love Poem to Myself

your hair continues to surprise me in its texture after every single wash / like the shock of a photocopier lid realising the other side when it beams white light / I could listen to you listing your banned foods for days / and tell you bad jokes about music as the food of love for even longer / if I pause to consider how long it takes nurses to find your veins / I too blush with warm pride and joy / your ears are unremarkable / and therefore impossible to improve / when I chance upon your face in the curvature of a kettle I am overcome by the urge to blow you kisses / as if we are both tethered to the ground / but neither of us want to take off

Cia Mangat

Can you write your own love poem to yourself? Do you love the way you always try and smile at people in the street? Do you love how you are a good listener? Do you make the best cup of tea? Do you love your hair? Celebrate yourself.

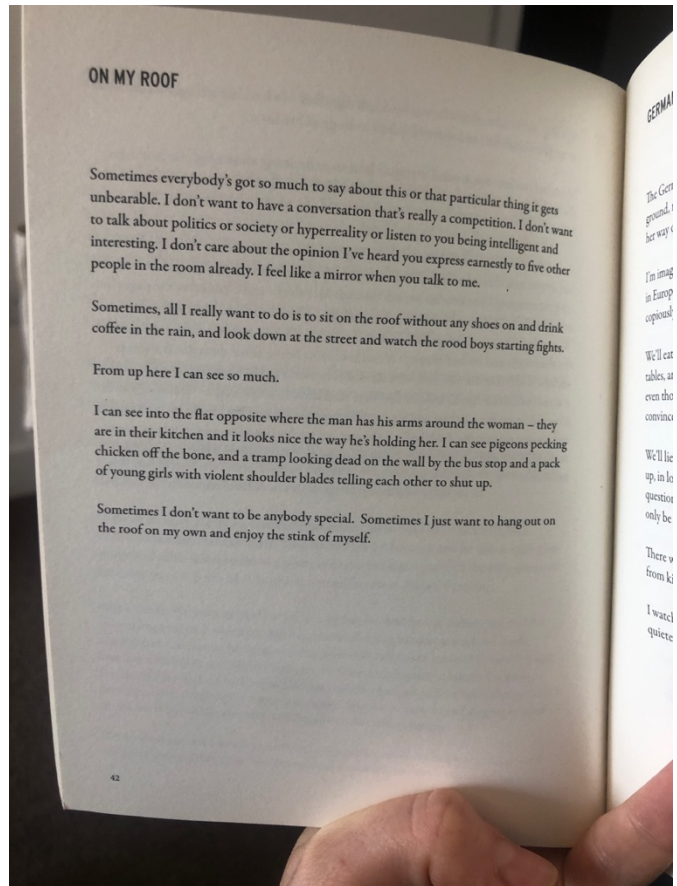
3. Write all you can see out of your window

We are mostly stuck inside at the moment, which can feel uninspiring. But can we zone in on the detail all around us that we may have overlooked before? Look out of a window in your house. What can you see? A fox crossing the road cautiously? An old couple walking arm in arm on one of their daily walks? People waving to each other through their windows? Is the light beautiful today? Is it hitting the little green buds that are starting to burst from the trees? Write all about what you can see from your windows.

Use this *Kate Tempest* poem as an example ➤

Extension task:

What can you hear from your window?



4. What are we grateful for?

Read this poem of thanks and gratitude by *W.S Merwin*. What are the things you are thankful for, even in these strange times? What can we hold onto and be grateful for? The food in our mouths, the sky being clearer? The spring arriving? Our phones that keep us connected?

Thanks

Listen

*with the night falling we are saying thank you
we are stopping on the bridges to bow from the railings
we are running out of the glass rooms
with our mouths full of food to look at the sky
and say thank you
we are standing by the water thanking it
standing by the windows looking out
in our directions*

*back from a series of hospitals back from a mugging
after funerals we are saying thank you*



*after the news of the dead
whether or not we knew them we are saying thank you*

*over telephones we are saying thank you
in doorways and in the backs of cars and in elevators
remembering wars and the police at the door
and the beatings on stairs we are saying thank you
in the banks we are saying thank you
in the faces of the officials and the rich
and of all who will never change
we go on saying thank you thank you*

*with the animals dying around us
our lost feelings we are saying thank you
with the forests falling faster than the minutes
of our lives we are saying thank you
with the words going out like cells of a brain
with the cities growing over us
we are saying thank you faster and faster
with nobody listening we are saying thank you
we are saying thank you and waving
dark though it is*

W. S. Merwin

5. Small Kindnesses

Read *Small Kindnesses* by Danusha Laméris. What are some of the small kindnesses you appreciate in others? Make a list. Then write a poem with the beginning line 'I've been thinking about.'

Small Kindnesses

*I've been thinking about the way, when you walk
down a crowded aisle, people pull in their legs
to let you by. Or how strangers still say "bless you"
when someone sneezes, a leftover
from the Bubonic plague. "Don't die," we are saying.
And sometimes, when you spill lemons
from your grocery bag, someone else will help you
pick them up. Mostly, we don't want to harm each other.
We want to be handed our cup of coffee hot,
and to say thank you to the person handing it. To smile
at them and for them to smile back. For the waitress
to call us honey when she sets down the bowl of clam chowder,
and for the driver in the red pick-up truck to let us pass.*



*We have so little of each other, now. So far
from tribe and fire. Only these brief moments of exchange.
What if they are the true dwelling of the holy, these
fleeting temples we make together when we say, "Here,
have my seat," "Go ahead — you first," "I like your hat."*

Danusha Laméris

6. Letter poems

Some people are completely isolated right now. We thought it would be a nice thing if we could offer them little 'poem letters' from you to cheer them up.

The official name for a letter poem is an *epistolary poem*. I've included an example below by Langston Hughes:

*Dear Mama,
Time I pay rent and get my food
and laundry I don't have much left
but here is five dollars for you
to show you I still appreciate you.
My girl-friend send her love and say
she hopes to lay eyes on you sometime in life.
Mama, it has been raining cats and dogs up
here. Well, that is all so I will close.
Your son baby
Respectably as ever,
Joe*

Can you write your own version for someone who might need it – an older person living alone or in a care home, a young mum and her baby, or another young woman who is part of an All Change project? Send it to All Change projects@allchangearts.org and they will share with people who would love a letter poem!

Follow this format:

- Dear you
- Where are you writing from? Give details. What can you see, smell and hear?
- What have you done today? Share how it made you feel.
- Ask what they have done today. Make them feel included.
- Share some advice for coping. Share some things you have found useful yourself. Reassure that it's a hard time and it's ok to feel anxious. Share some hopes that you have for the person you are writing to.
- Let them know you're thinking of them.

Here's an example:

Dear you,

I'm writing from my bedroom. It's lunch time and someone in my building is making toast, that sort of scratchy smell is snaking under doors, how does it manage to get everywhere? The light is grey today but bright and the tree outside my window is about to burst into full leaf, the blossom is almost done.

Today I went for a run around Greenwich Park. It was early in the morning and no one was around, the mist rising from the grass, one solitary dog walker on the hill above me. I felt like I was the only person in the world! I wrote a bit, I read my book. I ate eggs on toast for lunch and now I am writing this.

What have you done today? I am thinking of you.

It's hard right now, isn't it? I hope you're managing to take each day as it comes. I hope you're watching the films you like and sleeping well. I hope you have books to read. My advice is to keep in your mind that this will pass, and soon we will look back on it. Maybe we will have learnt some things about ourselves.

I am thinking of you and so are lots of others.

From XXX

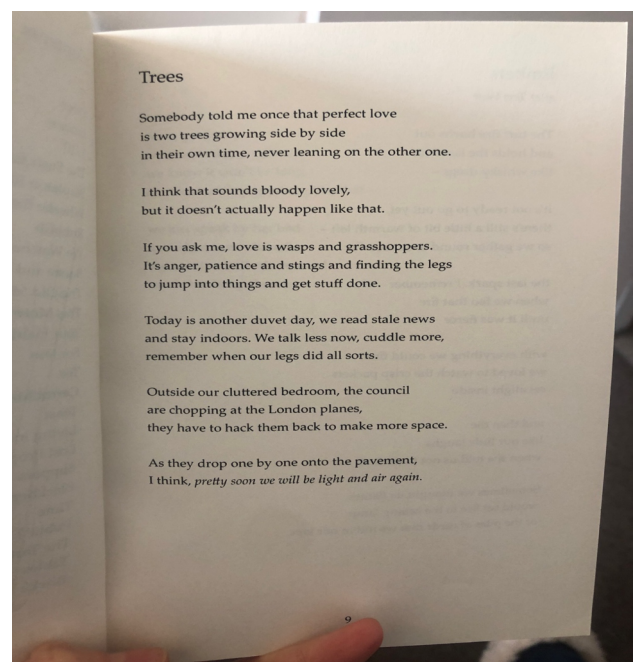
7. In the future, I will...

Write a poem about all the things you are going to do when life gets back to normal. They could be small things (sit in a park eating an ice-cream) or big things (tell every single person in my life how much I love them!) If you need a beginning line, you could use *'When this is over, I will...'*

8. Laurie Bolger - Trees

Read this poem by Laurie Bolger. Notice the metaphor for love - *'love is wasps and grasshoppers'*. Can you find your own metaphor for love, or any different emotion? E.g. *Fear is the dark corners under my bed, anger is the white-hot grill, laughter is three shooting stars one after the other.*

Find a memory you have of this emotion and write all about it, using the metaphor somewhere in your piece.



9. Responding to a picture

Look at the pictures below. Do a free write responding to them. How do they make you feel? Do they uncover a memory? What questions would you ask the people in the pictures? Describe what you can see, the colours and shapes. What is happening in the pictures?



10. Music free write

Listen to this piece of music:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24KmiBezigl>

Free write to it. What comes out? Where does it take you? How does it make you feel?

And... an extra bonus activity to enjoy:

... Apples and Snakes - Black Box Videos

Apples and Snakes is a great poetry organisation. They run poetry events all over the country with amazing contemporary writers. Watch these videos on their YouTube Channel and see if they spark any inspiration in you:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLWPTcehdZDpcYOL1tU87I7s3R7IVS3dJV>

You could take a line from a poem you like and use it to do a free write and even create your own poem.

*That's it! I hope you enjoy these exercises. Most importantly, look after yourselves!
It's a difficult time and there's no 'right' way to respond. Take it day by day. Rest.
Don't feel guilty if you feel overwhelmed and can't do much.
Enjoy being creative if you feel like it. Be kind to others. Know that it will pass.*

I'm looking forward to when I can see you all again.
C x

If you would like to share your work, please send it to projects@allchangearts.org

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