

How Writers Write Poetry 2015

CLASS ONE • Discussion Topics

How to use these questions:

These discussion questions are based on the video and required reading for each class. You can use them to lead a discussion with your group, or you can use them to think about the class videos and readings on your own. You do not have to use them in the order given below, and you do not have to use all of them. Onward!

Class 1 Questions for Beginning Writers

Choose one or more of the options below to discuss with your group:

From Lia Purpura's talk:

Lia Purpura mentions a variety of types of journals you can use to capture moments from your day. Imagine writing a poem based on your observations of today, or of a recent day in your past. Which type of journal do you think might be most useful to you in creating this poem? How might you decide which type of journal is best for a specific occasion, time, or place?

From Kate Greenstreet's talk:

Kate Greenstreet mentions her method of keeping an “epic” journal – a compiled collection of all of her fragments of notes that she takes throughout the day – and using the epic journal as a base for new poems. Think about the events you experienced today, or during a recent day: what do you remember? Notice what fragments might come forward if you were to begin a journal of that day: are they memories of physical experiences you had, such as moments of sight, sound, or touch? Are they memories of emotions you felt? How might you begin to note these fragments of your day in a journal entry?

Optional assignment preparation question for beginning writers:

To get you started on the Class 1 Assignment, take a look at a past journal entry or create a journal entry. What strikes you about that entry? Do you notice any patterns or lines that emerge from your journaling? Think about how the entry might be turned into a one-, two-, three-, or four-line poem.

From Robert Hass's talk:

Robert Hass discusses one- to four-line sketching techniques. Do you notice particular differences between one-, two-, three-, and four-line poems? What can a one-line poem do that a four-line poem can't? What can a four-line poem do that a one-line poem can't? Are there emotions or ideas you would like to convey that you imagine would work better in a one-line poem than a four-line poem, or vice versa?



Optional discussion activity: Read “Catullus 85,” which Robert Hass references in his talk (a link to this poem can be found in the Class One Readings document). Have each person write down the poem and then quickly rewrite it as both a three-line and four-line poem. Have each person read their rewrites to the group. Did each person choose the same line breaks? When reading them aloud, did everyone put emphasis on the same words?

Class 1 Questions for Experienced Writers

Choose one or more of the options below to discuss with your group:

From Lia Purpura’s talk:

Lia Purpura mentions a variety of types of journals you can use to capture moments from your day. If you have tried any of these methods, which type of journal works best for you? If you have not, which type do you think would be best suited to the way you normally approach writing poetry?

From Kate Greenstreet’s talk:

Kate Greenstreet states that when she journals throughout the day, her notes usually begin to take on a rhythm, even before she has begun to consider how she might assemble them into a poem. A week of your life is likely to contain patterns: you may go to school and/or to work at the same times every day or two, using the same methods of transportation, moving through the same settings. In your home, you may complete similar tasks every day, using the same tools, surrounded by the same objects and/or people. Reflect on the events of the past week, noticing the patterns that emerge in your days, and consider what fragments you might write down. As you consider your life’s daily patterns, do particular rhythms emerge? Are these rhythms tied to a particular sense, such as a series of sounds or sights or smells? Does one sense memory follow another, such as a sound, then a smell, then a sight, then another sound? How might writing down your notes on the sense memories of your daily routines produce an awareness of how you might shape a poem about your daily routines? Since your notes will contain rhythms and line structures, even if you don’t make deliberate decisions on what those rhythms and line structures will be as you are jotting them down, could the notes themselves simply become a poem?

From Robert Hass’s talk:

Robert Hass discusses one- to four-line sketching techniques. Look at the two-line poem “Catullus 85” (a link to this poem can be found in the Class One Readings document). Read the poem out loud and consider its rhythm and its pace: how might the effect of the poem change if it were a one-line poem or a three-line poem? What kind of rhythm does the poem have that a one- or three-line poem might not have? Think about the poetry you’ve written in the past: do you tend to rely on long or short lines; on many line breaks or few, to convey your meaning?