



ZIP CODE MEMORY PROJECT
www.zcmp.org

COLLECTIVE WRITING

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The idea of collective writing is to blend our personal stories and perspectives together to make something collective and new. One goal of these two workshops is to put pressure on the boundaries of where our personal perceptions may begin and where they may end, to challenge the concept of a contained individual story and push us towards a creative communal mapping.

Our collaborative poems and stories are also meant to move us beyond memorialization, beyond the remembrance of COVID. Here we're beginning to ask ourselves - what are we doing with our memories? Do we feel the need to mobilize them? If so, how? If not, why? And for whom? Our communities, our families, ourselves, none of the above? Where might we locate the pockets of humor and gratitude and joy that encourage and activate us? How can our storytelling move us toward repair work? Towards justice that needs to be served? And what use, if any, does the convergence of fiction and memory have for us today?

1. Collective Haiku Workshop

PREP: MENTI CLOUD INTERVIEWS

This activity offers us a chance to interview one another, share stories and memories from material scraps we brought to the workshop (text messages, pictures, etc.), and begin to build a vocabulary, or menti cloud, of meaningful words and phrases.

Participants are encouraged to borrow from this collection of words for the collective haiku activity that follows.

Directions: In groups of two, choose a “storyteller” and a “creative archiver.” Using the snippets of conversation, text messages, songs, photographs, etc. participants were asked to bring in, the “storyteller” will read their snippet aloud. Then answer the following:

1. Why did you choose this snippet?
2. What does it bring up for you/trigger? Positive emotions? Humor? Gratitude? Images? Sounds/songs?
3. How - if at all - has your relationship with the words or images evolved/shifted since then?

The “creative archiver” will listen and record phrases and words based on their interpretations of what they hear directly into the designated Menti Cloud.

www.mentimeter.com/features/word-cloud

Once done, switch roles.

CORE ACTIVITY: COLLECTIVE HAIKUS

Poetry, and haikus in particular, have a powerful way of encouraging deep yet concise reflection. As ZCMP participants and workshop leaders transitioned during the spring of 2021 into crafting personal and social justice demands around COVID, the haiku exercise served as a means to begin thinking about what it was we could, should, and hoped to demand [hyperlink to JUSTICE] of our communities and of ourselves. The collective nature of haikus allows us to explore just how our stories and our memories take on new forms and new meanings when explored through a collaborative lens.

We can do this either in the form of collective haiku poems or free verse. I've chosen Haiku precisely because it is quick, elegant and can be extremely evocative.

Haiku is a form of Japanese poetry made of short, unrhymed lines that [often] evoke natural imagery. Haiku can come in a variety of different formats of short verses. The most common is a three-line poem where:

- The first line is 5 syllables
- The second line is 7 syllables
- The third line is 5 syllables

Many like to break with the 5/7/5 structure, but [still] maintain the power, simplicity, and brevity of haiku.

Directions:

I suggest that each group begin by reflecting on a theme. What you create could be a Gratitude haiku, a Protest haiku, a Movement haiku that speaks to lack of mobility, a Speculative or futuristic haiku that weighs in on your thoughts about the future. Spend time together and/or independently brainstorming, then come back together and marry your ideas into the poem.

Example

Purchase before you do

Well, what do you do?
if the possibility of death
crack crack open us.

purchase before dy
Ing, well loved and expiring
Goodbye my sweet love

What if I really
died? what can I offer what
can I give, receive?

Well, what do you do?
if the possibility of death
crack cracks us open

what if I really
die. what does the coffin cost?
can mom afford that?

Purchase before dy
Ing, the possibility of death
crack crack open us.

2. CREATIVE APPEAL WORKSHOP

In times of crisis, it is important to be reminded of the potency of vision, both communal and individual, particularly when crafting demands for justice.

PREP: TREE VISUALIZATION ACTIVITY

To get into the mindset and correct register for both the Tree Visualization Activity and the Creative Appeal, we first gather in a circle and “perform” together segments of the Black Panther Party’s ten-point program.

[\[https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/primary-documents-african-american-history/black-panther-party-ten-point-program-1966/\]](https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/primary-documents-african-american-history/black-panther-party-ten-point-program-1966/)

The visualization activity that follows is an introspective, individual-oriented precursor to the more in-depth exercise called the “Creative Appeal.” It is intended to help quiet our minds and bodies, become present with some of the buried emotions and sensations we each carry, and begin to draw connections between these personal experiences and the crafting of specific COVID-19 related collective demands we have for ourselves, our politicians, and our communities. The goal of this visualization activity is multi-tiered: to pull our embodied experiences upwards towards the part of us that engages in the imaginal act; to move beyond interacting and acknowledging our COVID stories/experiences towards mobilizing them; to become attuned to the possibilities within our experiences and move them into demands we make of ourselves, our world, and/or our communities. This requires:

- attentiveness to the old (our stories);
- making space for the new (our demands);
- deliberate grounding in the images, feelings, and visions we're aiming to attain (our visions).

For the activity, I ask each participant to visualize any type of plant or tree that they feel represents who they've come to be during the past two years.

Part 1: recognizing the stories that nourish

- Focus on the soil as a space of "nourishment." Houses the experiences that shaped our current selves from COVID. Sit here for a while

Part 2: identifying different stages of our demands

- Now imagine a branch or the shoot of a plant beginning to sprout, beginning to grow. It represents the demand I WANT.... Each leaf a different demand

- Now imagine a second branch/shoot growing.
This represents I HOPE /PRAY/DREAM/WISH
- Another gentler form of the I want: I ASK THAT
- As the plant grows larger, transition into imagining another sprout/branch and leaves that represent I AM GRATEFUL FOR

Part 3: moving into the imaginal act. imagination can be mechanistic as well as transformative. In this exercise we use our imagination to envision something else, something new, something not yet here.

- Finally we reach the top of the tree which represents the visions we'd like to see. ONE DAY, I SEE...

As each participant emerges from their own visualization experience, they write down their personal demands on paper cut out in the shape of leaves and stick them onto a pre-drawn tree so that all demands are visible for the next activity.



CORE ACTIVITY: CREATIVE APPEAL

For the appeal, we break out into small groups and pool our personal demands that came up throughout the visualization activity. Each group responds to the prompts, “WHAT *specific* demand is the group interested in crafting?” “TO WHOM *specifically* is this demand directed?” And “HOW could this demand be creatively expressed?” As for the last prompt, each group is responsible for coming up with an innovative way to present their demand. This can result in beautiful visual appeals and even short theatrical skits.

