

NOT LIKE THE REST OF US

Contemporary Indiana Writers:
Discussion Questions and Writing Exercises



Written by Rachel Sahaidachny and Andrea Boucher

Edited by Barbara Shoup



WITH SUPPORT FROM THE NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES



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Not Like the Rest of Us: An Anthology of Contemporary Indiana Writers
Discussion Questions and Writing Exercises

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Layout by Andrea Boucher

ISBN: 978-0-9967438-3-9

Printed in the United States of America

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Introduction

Not Like the Rest of Us: An Anthology of Contemporary Indiana Writers is a publication of the Indiana Writers Center. The title comes from an essay about Cole Porter by Muncie author, Cathy Day.

Partially funded by an Indiana Masterpiece Grant from the Indiana Arts Commission and the Indiana Bicentennial Commission and Indy Reads Books, the collection includes more than 75 notable writers of fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry from around the state—among them: Marianne Boruch, winner of the Kingsley-Tufts Award; Jared Carter, winner of the Yale Younger Poets Award; Christopher Coake, winner of the PEN/Robert Bingham Fellowship; Mari Evans, winner of the John Jay Whitney Fellowship; Helen Frost, winner of the New York Historical Society’s Children’s History Book Prize; John Green, winner of the Printz medal for Young Adult Fiction and the Edgar Award; Patricia Henley, finalist for the National Book Award; Adrian Matjeka, finalist for the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize; Susan Neville, winner of the Flannery O’Connor Award for Short Fiction; Scott Russell Sanders, winner of the Lannan Literary Award and the Mark Twain Award; and Dan Wakefield, winner of a Rockefeller Grant for Creative Writing. The most experienced writers are in their nineties, the youngest in their twenties. Some are best-selling authors, some widely known in literary circles, some just beginning. Many were born and raised in Indiana, others found their way here and stayed.

An officially endorsed Indiana Bicentennial Legacy Project, the book extends the appreciation of Indiana’s rich literary heritage into the 21st century, celebrating authors who are bringing honor to the Hoosier state in our own time.

In choosing works to include in the anthology, special consideration was given to pieces the editors felt would be accessible to high school students, with the hope that teachers would use the book to introduce their students to contemporary Indiana writers and writing.

Thanks to the generosity of the writers published in *Not Like the Rest of Us*, teachers may visit indianawriters.net to download the stories, poems, and essays at no cost for use in their classrooms. The site currently includes writers represented in *Not Like the Rest of Us*, but the Indiana Writers Center will continue to develop the site to include many more accomplished writers who live and write in Indiana or have a strong connection to the state.

Thanks to a grant from Indiana Humanities, the Indiana Writers Center was able to create this free curriculum with study questions and writing exercises to reflection and creativity.

We hope you’ll make good use of it, and we’d love to hear about your students’ experiences reading, writing, and talking about *Not Like the Rest of Us*. You can email us at mail@indianawriters.org.

Barbara Shoup

Executive Director

Rachel Sahaidachny

Editor, Programs Manager

Andrea Boucher

Editor, Curriculum Design

nonfiction





How to Stop Smoking

A. LYN CAROL

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Creative nonfiction essays can employ a variety of formats to tell a personal story. In this case, the author mimics a “How To” list as a way to tell the story of how she first began and eventually quit smoking. Consider why this format might be effective for topics about which we are often given strong advice.
2. What details and scenes does the author choose to convey her addiction to smoking? What do you think the reader is meant to conclude about the habit of smoking from each one?
3. What is the turning point that causes the author to quit smoking for good and become a birdwatcher?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write your own “How To” list to convey a personal story or aspect of your life. Some ideas might be “How To Make Your Parent/Sibling/Grandparent/Friend Smile” and it could be about a special time you’ve shared with this person; or, conversely, “How To Make Your Parent/Sibling/Grandparent/Friend Cry,” and it could be about a time you’ve disappointed this person. It could be something lighthearted, like “How To Get Out of Chores” or something serious like “How To Waste Your Life.” The choice is yours, but employ the list to tell something personal about your life in a condensed form.

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/carol-a-lyn.html>

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That's What You Remember [An Essay in Third Person]

JILL CHRISTMAN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Nonfiction essays are typically written in first person. Consider how writing in the third person might affect the reader's perception of the writer's experience.
2. Also consider what benefit the author might gain from the distance that writing in the third person brings, for example, the fact that she doesn't always like children.
3. Do you think the little girl, Cameron, was lonely? What details in the story support your opinion?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Think of a memory you have and write the story of the event, but put yourself in third person. (Rather than "I went to the store ..." write "He/she/they went to the store ...")

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://rkvryquarterly.com/interview-with-jill-christman/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/christman-jill.html>

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Not Like the Rest of Us: A Hoosier Named Cole Porter

CATHY DAY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The author presents personal reflections and research about Cole Porter and his connection to her hometown, creating a kind of mosaic. Consider the effectiveness of this method. How do you think a more traditional essay on this topic might have been different?
2. The author writes that being an “expatriate Midwesterner” and leaving Indiana is her redemption. What does she mean by this?
3. The author writes two sections on bullying. Share examples of being shunned or judged for being a Hoosier.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a mosaic essay about a topic with which you have some kind of connection, combining research and personal information.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.indystar.com/story/life/2014/02/10/indiana-author-cathy-day-tackles-life-love-and-the-colts/5363117/>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/day-cathy.html>

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The Hoosier Identity

PHILIP GULLEY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Consider the series of anecdotes the author uses to show his feelings about being a Hoosier. Listing specific examples, what does the author like or dislike about this identity.?
2. The author states that his fourth grade teacher imparted to her students the belief that “when anything bad happened in our town” the blame was on “people from the city.” Were you raised with prejudices you now realize to be untrue and inaccurate? What were they and how did they affect your understanding of others?
3. How do states end up with a collective identity? Name identities other states share, good or bad. Is this fair or unfair?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write an essay that explores a stereotype and shows how it is false, for example, “All Hoosiers are hicks” or “All football players are dumb jocks.” Provide a nuanced argument that shows how stereotypes never apply to every single person within a group.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.bookreporter.com/authors/philip-gulley/news/interview-073105>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/gulley-philip.html>

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Faith

JEAN HARPER

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. List some of the character descriptions the author uses and discuss how these details help to enrich the story. Are the characters likable or unlikable? How does the author convey this?
2. Why is the characterization of people and place so important to a key element of the story, that of skipping the number 666 on the counter?
3. The author concludes the essay with the line, “What else, what else, would there have been to do” as a statement rather than a question. What do you think the author means by this statement? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a character or place description using each of the five senses: sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing. Choose words and descriptors that will make the reader understand the characters and their values *without* telling readers how to feel.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://www.arts.gov/writers-corner/bio/jean-harper>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/harper-jean.html>

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Nonfiction



Fort Wayne Is Still Seventh on Hitler's List

B. J. HOLLARS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss the title of this essay. What is the relationship of the title to the text, and why do you think the author chose it?
2. The author weaves together his own personal story with historical facts and journalism. How do they work together to present a fully rounded essay?
3. Every author makes deliberate choices when writing. Why do you think the author chose to use a series of questions and answers (Q & A) throughout the essay? How does the format enhance the effect of the essay?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write an essay that uses Q&A throughout.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.triquarterly.org/interviews/bj-hollars-interview>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/hollars-bj.html>

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Walking in Outer Space

MICHAEL McCOLLY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. This piece opens with a quoted passage. Why do you think the author choose this quote and how is it relevant to the content and personal experience recounted in the essay?
2. The essay is full of ideas at odds with each other, for example, partaking in Zen meditations with inmates as a “guard with a loaded shotgun in his lap” watched from “a chair on the altar.” Find sentences/passages that highlight these contrasting worlds.
3. The author has a pivotal moment that changes his perspective and changes him from being someone in a hurry to leave the prison town to someone who doesn't want to leave. Find this scene and discuss how and why it causes a change of heart in the author.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Think of a quote from a book or song that you especially like and write about a personal experience that is somehow related to it.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://estellabooks.blogspot.com/2007/08/interview-michael-mccolly.html>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/mccolly-michael.html>

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Neighbors

SCOTT RUSSELL SANDERS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the central theme of this essay? Choose three passages from the essay to support your answer.
2. The author opens with a scene from his childhood. Why do you think he chose this particular scene to open with? How does it support the essay as a whole?
3. The author poses a set of moral and ethical questions, such as “Isn’t life easier if we mind our own business and let other people mind theirs?” Write out each of these questions and then share your opinion for each one, along with the reason why you feel this way.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a scene from your life that shows an example of what you consider community and neighborliness.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://inscape.byu.edu/2017/01/27/interview-with-scott-russell-sanders>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/sanders-scott-russell.html>

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The Artist's Torah

SANDY SASSO

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways does the author believe that God and the artist share common traits? Use examples from the text to support your answer.
2. The author asks if the creative process is a “breathing in ... the chaotic swirling of jumble and thought” and putting it into form or a “calling up from the emptiness ... something new and altogether original.” Which do you think it is and why? What is your own personal creative process?
3. Study the last paragraph of the essay. Is the author leaving us with a hopeful note or one of despair? Is it a call to action or a tone of resignation? Support your answer with current-day events.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write an essay about a creative project you were involved in, describing the process from beginning to end, with special attention to how your idea of the project changed as you proceeded and how the end product measured up to what you thought it would turn out to be. The project you write about doesn't have to be a work of art. Examples to consider: building a model, redecorating your bedroom, cooking a meal, planning a vacation versus the way the vacation actually turned out.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

http://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/blog/The_ProsePeople/post/interview-rabbi-sandy-sasso

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/sasso-sandy.html>

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Fishing in Middle America

GREG SCHWIPPS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. On the surface, this essay is about fishing, but what is this essay really about? List two to three passages from the essay to support your answer.
2. The author uses a great deal of sensory detail, for example, “The smell of wood smoke floats to you, along with the sharp stink of your own wet clothes.” List five additional examples from the text and circle all descriptors. Now rewrite each of these examples using your own descriptive language.
3. The author writes in second person. Who do you think the “you” is? How does the use of “you” enhance the emotional effect of the essay?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Using dialogue and action, write a scene from your life about a bond you share with your family or friends.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://iupress.typepad.com/blog/2012/08/author-interview-greg-schwipps-what-this-river-keeps.html>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/schwipps-greg.html>

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Working a Jigsaw

BARBARA SHOUP

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In this essay, the author has isolated herself in a cabin for the purposes of solitude and writing, but then she spends many hours working on a puzzle instead. Why is the time spent on the puzzle ultimately worthwhile? How are writing and putting together a jigsaw puzzle the same?
2. The author weaves information about the painter Vermeer into the essay. How does this serve to enrich the essay as a whole? Support your answer with examples from the text.
3. In the last sentence of the essay, the writer has the epiphany that “every beautiful thing is made of many pieces, each one complete in its own way, utterly, maddeningly, gloriously itself.” How do you interpret her epiphany? Name something you find beautiful (it can be an actual object, something abstract, or a concept) and discuss how it supports this epiphany.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Look at a picture of one of your favorite paintings and describe what you see in vivid, descriptive language, as if describing it to a person who is unable to see it themselves. After describing the painting visually, write about how it makes you feel and why.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

https://www.nuvo.net/arts/written_spoken_word/the-write-life-making-the-cut-in-indiana-publishing/article_ca2b5cd0-081c-5d5c-84ef-47f742ce6118.html

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/shoup-barbara.html>

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The Labors of Our Fathers

KELSEY TIMMERMAN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The author provides us with several statistics and poses the question, “Where are all the fathers?” Does he use these statistics to build up his father or disparage him? Cite specific passages from the text in support of your answer.
2. The author states that “economists and development experts believe that the best way to lift families out of poverty is to educate and employ women.” Do you agree or disagree? Support your opinion with personal anecdote and/or current (or historical) events.
3. By the end of the essay, the father is the same in fundamental ways, but he has grown. Use specific examples from the text that show the father’s personal growth.

WRITING EXERCISE:

The author states that his father instilled in him a strong work ethic. What family trait do you think has been instilled in you? Support your answer with a personal story that shows us (not tells) how you exhibit this trait. Note: The trait doesn’t have to be one that is considered positive.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.midwestwriters.org/2014/05/real-stories-into-real-career>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/timmerman-kelsey.html>

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Basketball Crazy

DAN WAKEFIELD

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The author employs humor throughout an essay filled with statistics about basketball games. Find three examples where he combines the two and discuss the effect this has on author voice and what it adds to the “feel” of the story.
2. The author is writing of his adolescence in the 1940s and 1950s. What specific details does he include to convey this particular time and place? How would a story about basketball be different today?
3. How does the author use dialogue and diction to convey a conversational tone to the story? Support your answer with examples from the text.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write an essay about a time in your life when you loved doing something—and it could be something as simple as going swimming at the city pool. Using specific details and anecdotes, write about why you were so crazy about it and why it made you happy.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.pifmagazine.com/2004/04/dan-wakefield>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/wakefield-dan.html>

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How I Spent My Summer Vacation

LILI WRIGHT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The author uses a title that sets a certain expectation for the reader. What was your expectation based on title alone? How did your expectation change as you began reading? Why do you think the author chose to use this title?
2. Despite the potentially depressing topic, the author injects humor into the piece. Cite three passages from the text where the author's careful word choice conveys humor even in the midst of unpleasant circumstances. Underline these specific word choices and passages.
3. Sometimes authors use tones of humor or irony to lighten a heavy topic and/or provide the reader with an unexpected reading experience. Does this essay benefit from the author's chosen tone? Why or why not? How would it have changed your reading experience if this had been written with somber word choices and details?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write about a difficult and tense situation you've been involved in, but use humor and irony to tell the story.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.thenationalbookreview.com/features/2016/8/3/17lvj4qotygg95a9pzh0q4lz4jp0hg>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/wright-lili.html>

poetry



NOT LIKE THE REST OF US

Poetry



Being in this World Makes Me Feel Like a Time Traveler

KAVEH AKBAR

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Name the rounded objects that are referred to in each stanza.
2. How do the rounded objects in each stanza reflect the theme of the poem?
3. What is the speaker's relationship to religion?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem that uses objects representative of different times in your life.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://prairieschooner.unl.edu/blog/kaveh-akbar-illicit-luck-daily-poetry-practice>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/akbar-kaveh.html>

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Poetry



Memo to the 21st Century

PHILIP APPLEMAN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Pastoral poetry seeks to romanticize rural life and retreat from the modern world. How does this poem reflect the pastoral tradition?
2. What emotion does the speaker seek to evoke in the reader?
3. Is the speaker hopeful for the future? What words or images in the poem support your opinion?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem to future generations about what you hope they will save.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://billmoyers.com/segment/the-poetry-of-philip-appleman/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/appleman-philip.html>

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Postcard

FRANCISCO ARAGÓN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does the title of the poem, “Postcard,” relate to the images in the poem? In what way is the contrast between an idealized photo-perfect world and the reality of the scene enhanced by the title?
2. In poetry, a turn is when the speaker suddenly changes direction in the narration of the poem, usually towards a new understanding. Where is the turn in the poem? What is significant in the turn?
3. What is the significance of mentioning the mission and its name Dolores (meaning pain) and then using Spanish in the end of the poem?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem about a tourist attraction and what you might see beyond its “postcard view.”

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://ht.ly/pOoS30aws6f>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/aragoacuten-francisco.html>

NOT LIKE THE REST OF US

Poetry



Big Little

MARIANNE BORUCH

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the similes and metaphors in the poem?
2. In what way does the use of figurative language personify the heart and the brain?
3. The speaker of the poem asks, “which one of them wants more?” Is that question answered in the poem? If so, how? Use examples to support your answer.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem personifying parts of the body, using simile and/or metaphor, to address a question of importance to you.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://www.divedapper.com/interview/marianne-boruch/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/boruch-marianne.html>

NOT LIKE THE REST OF US

Poetry



Love Is Blue

NANCY BOTKIN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. This poem is a modern sonnet. What are the elements in the poem that differ from the traditional sonnet form?
2. After examining the examples of the physical sensations represented by the images in the poem, how do you think the speaker feels about love? What is the “music” in the room at the end of the poem?
3. *Volta* is a device used to change the tone or thought in a sonnet. Find the volta in this poem and describe how it changes the poem’s tone or thought.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a fourteen line modern sonnet with a volta that evokes a physical sensation.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://iusbcreativewriting.wordpress.com/2014/11/10/nancy-botkin-interviewed-by-indianas-poet-laureate/>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/botkin-nancy.html>

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Poetry



Tomato Soup

MARY ANN CAIN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What memories in the poem are associated with the soup? What emotions are tied to each memory?
2. The poem is divided into three sections—how does this help the reader to understand the emotional movement in the poem?
3. What words and images link the three sections?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write about a food that has emotional attachment for you. Convey the emotion through the description of the food and the occasion, without mentioning the emotion.

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/cain-mary-ann.html>

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Returning to Rilke

DAN CARPENTER

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The mode of the poem is meditative. What is the speaker contemplating?
2. What language in the poem is abstract? What is concrete? Give examples.
3. The poem ends in a different place than it begins. How does the poet achieve that? How does Rilke come into play?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a meditative poem addressing an author or a work of art. Use concrete imagery to lead the poem towards some epiphany.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://ihspress.blogspot.com/2013/07/interview-with-ihs-press-author-dan.html>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/carpenter-dan.html>

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The Measuring

JARED CARTER

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the traditional forms of rhythm and meter used in the poem? Are there places in the poem where the rhythm or meter alters? What do you notice about those places?
2. Who is the “you” in the poem, and what is the relationship of “you” to the speaker?
3. What is “the measuring” happening in the poem?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a ten-line poem using the same rhythm and rhyme scheme as in “The Measuring.”

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://pennreview.com/2009/03/a-conversation-with-jared-carter/>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/carter-jared.html>

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My Buddhist Lessons

KYLE D. CRAIG

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The poem is a *Haibun*, a Japanese form of poetry created by combining two other poetic forms: prose poem and haiku. How does the haiku enhance and advance the narrative of the prose?
2. What is the theme of the poem?
3. What language and images anchor the poem in the theme?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a Haibun. It can alternate prose and haiku in any order, and the prose can be as short as a sentence or two, or as long as a paragraph.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

[https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0131/8202/files/Kyle D. Craig interviewed by Shari Wagner.docx?8145026769276481953](https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0131/8202/files/Kyle_D._Craig_interviewed_by_Shari_Wagner.docx?8145026769276481953)

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/craig-kyle-d.html>

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Poetry



When Your Mother Corrects the Indiana Poet Laureate You Feel Like Yelling

CURTIS CRISLER

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the effect of using the second person in this poem? How might the poem be different written in first or third person?
2. The poem is a mix of reflection and figurative language. Choose a stanza and consider how the similes or metaphors affect your understanding of the reflection.
3. How does the poet's use of interesting and unusual language, in a near prose form, affect your experience of the poem?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem in second person about a personal experience. Use at least one simile, metaphor, or personification.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://nwestmoss.wordpress.com/2015/03/21/curtis-crisler-on-writing/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/crisler-curtis-l.html>

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Poetry



MITCHELL L. H. DOUGLAS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Identify the emotional tension in the poem. How does the language work on the page to create that tension?
2. How does this poem make the political personal?
3. The final image of the poem is one of disruption – how does this affect the narrative of the poem?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a personal poem based on a news story. Create a strong image in the poem that represents the story.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://www.connotationpress.com/hoppenthaler-s-congeries/2012/une-2012/1412-mitchell-l-h-douglas-poetry>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/douglas-mitchel-lh.html>

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Celebration

MARI EVANS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Consider the voice in this poem. How is it different from the more traditional poetic voice?
2. What effect does the poet's use of language create?
3. What is the celebration, referred to by the title?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem that uses ordinary language to express a complex emotion. Add repetition and rhyme to give it some music.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.wfyi.org/news/articles/a-rare-interview-with-mari-evans>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/evans-mari.html>

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Birthday Swim

MARY FELL

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Water takes many forms in this poem. Chose one instance and reflect on how it might represent a time or situation in the speaker's life.
2. What might water represent overall in the poem?
3. *Enjambment* is when a poet ends a line before the sentence is complete, creating a double meaning that complicates and enriches the poem. Highlight moments of enjambment in the poem. Choose a couple to focus on and explain the way each shift in meaning effects the poem.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a ten-line poem about life changes using images of an element, and its changing forms. Use enjambment at least once in the poem.

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/fell-mary.html>

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Solo Act

CHRIS FORHAN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The title helps to highlight the main tension in the poem. What is this tension?
2. Who is the moon in the poem? Who holds the candle?
3. Sound plays an important role in this poem – where do you find music in the lines? (This website discusses the varieties of sound devices used in poetry: http://homepage.smc.edu/meeks_christopher/SOUND%20DEVICES%20USED%20IN%20POETRY.htm.)

WRITING EXERCISE:

Chose one or two poetic sound devices and use them to write a short lyrical poem.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://midwestgothic.com/2017/04/interview-chris-forhan/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/forhan-chris.html>

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Valentine's Day, Sixth Grade

HELEN FROST

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How are snow and love related in the poem?
2. What are the implications of the speaker hiding her valentine from her friend?
3. Consider how what the speaker knows now affects her understanding of her sixth-grade self and brings resolution to a painful time in her childhood.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem about a moment in grade school that's unforgettable, looking back at it as the person you are now.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://healinghamlet.com/interviews/poet-and-author-helen-frost/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/frost-helen.html>

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Alfonso Street

EUGENE GLORIA

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How is death represented in the poem? What details in the poem amplify the contrast between life and death?
2. Where in time is the speaker of this poem?
3. How are the places in the poem connected?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem about your first experience with death, embodying the contrast of life and death with vivid details.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://blog.superstitionreview.asu.edu/2016/11/18/authors-talk-eugene-gloria/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/gloria-eugene.html>

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The Sadness of Youth

MATTHEW GRAHAM

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the allusions the speaker uses to analyze his identity and what do they reveal?
2. What exactly is the “sadness of youth” the speaker refers to with the title?
3. How do sentence length and syntax work in the poem?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem that tells the story of something that happened to you that suddenly changed how you saw yourself.

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/graham-matthew.html>

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Restavek

JANINE HARRISON

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Looking at the note at the end of the poem, consider what is happening in the narrative. Why does the girl's arm hair rise? What is going to happen to her, and why?
2. Who do you think the speaker in the poem might be? How does the speaker relate to the narrative?
3. What is the relationship of the characters in the poem to each other?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem about something you witnessed or read about that deeply moved you.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.wabashwatershed.com/2015/11/12/septemberoctober-2015-poetry-feature-six-indiana-women-poets-2/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/harrison-janine.html>

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Grandmother at the Dressmakers'

MARC HARSHMAN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the details that make this poem come to life?
2. How is the speaker personified in the poem?
3. The poet uses varied indentation, and a combination of long and short sentences in the poem. What are some reasons the poet might have decided to use this structure for the poem's form. Do you feel it adds to or detracts from your understanding of the poem?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem using abundant and vivid detail to describe the people and situation. Experiment with indentation and line length.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.fluent-magazine.com/a-conversation-with-west-virginia-poet-laureate-marc-harshman/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/harshman-marc.html>

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Fog / Light

JOSEPH HEITHAUS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the situation the poem describes?
2. What language in the poem conveys mood?
3. How does “fog light” reflect the meaning of the poem?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Evoke an emotional landscape in a poem, using only images.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.wabashwatershed.com/2014/06/12/may-june-2014-poetry-feature-joseph-heithaus/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/heithaus-joseph.html>

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The Mirror and Map of Memory

ALLYSON HORTON

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Pick out imagery that establishes the landscape. What is the landscape of the poem?
2. Cite examples from the text that establish the relationship of the speaker to the land and the figure in the poem.
3. What is the underlying tension of the poem?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem about a person that uses imagery from the landscape that formed them.

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/horton-allyson.html>

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Final Bath

MARC HUDSON

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the narrative of the poem?
2. Consider the language used to describe the body throughout the poem. What does it convey?
3. How do the allusions in the poem enhance the situation?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem about the last time you did something with or for somebody you care about.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0131/8202/files/Interview_with_Marc_Hudson_by_Shari_Wagner.pdf?9222126383707370854

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/hudson-marc.html>

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Vacation

ANGELA JACKSON-BROWN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the underlying struggles of the narrator in this poem?
2. Chose one of the metaphors in the poem and discuss what it reveals about the narrator's situation.
3. The title of the poem suggests an extended metaphor. What is the narrator escaping from? What is the vacation?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Create a narrator who has a deep internal conflict and use an extended metaphor to reveal the situation.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.negativecapabilitypress.org/blog/2016/8/23/featured-poet-angela-jackson-brown>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/jackson-brown-angela.html>

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World without Birds

GEORGE KALAMARAS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways is the tornado in line seven relevant to the rest of the poem?
2. Choose an element of syntax: imperatives, repetition, line-length, fragment, end-stop, or enjambment, and explain its use and effect in the poem.
3. What issue is at the heart of this poem?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem that begins with a hypothetical question and then describes how the answer to that question could change the world as we know it.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://atticusreview.org/a-poetics-of-generosity-an-interview-with-george-kalamaras/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/kalamaras-george.html>

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Assemblage: Lake County

KAREN KOVACIK

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. List as many fairy tale elements from the poem as you can find.
2. What elements, real and imagined, does the poet use to create the collage?
3. Based on these details – what is the pervading emotional heart of the poem?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a collage poem using memories as well as images from another type of literature (adventure tales, mysteries, epics, fairy tales, and so on).

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://atticusreview.org/an-interview-with-karen-kovacik/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/kovacik-karen.html>

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Bach in the Morning

NORBERT KRAPF

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways do you find the poem speaks to, or is reflective of, music?
2. If the poem is a snapshot, what is in the picture?
3. In stanza twelve, who are the three people the speaker mentions?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem whose words and rhythms create a similar feeling to a piece of music.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.krapfpoetry.com/hoyt.htm>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/krapf-norbert.html>

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On Seeing *The Embroiderer, or Mette Gauguin*

NANCY CHEN LONG

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the tension in the poem?
2. Where does the language most reflect what is at stake for the speaker?
3. Why does the speaker feel a connection to the woman in the painting?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Writing poetry influenced by art is called *ekphrastic* poetry. Choose a work of art and write a poem that describes the work of art but goes beyond mere description to illuminate some aspect of life.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://tampareview.org/nancy-chen-long-launches-her-tampa-review-prize-poetry-book>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/long-nancy-chen.html>

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Epidemic

ALESSANDRA LYNCH

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the epidemic the author is describing? Use specific examples from the text to support your opinion.
2. Read the poem aloud noticing the hard consonants and consider the nature of the energy they bring. Also notice the military images and other images that reflect violence. What do you think the author is saying about the lives of women through these devices?
3. Consider the last stanza of the poem. What do you think it offers in terms of curing the epidemic?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem about something in the world to which you have a visceral reaction and that is so pervasive in our culture that it feels like an epidemic. Use objects, rhythms, and sounds that convey the strength of your feeling without naming the feeling.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://alicejamesbooks.org/2017/listen-and-speak-an-ajb-interview-with-alessandra-lynch/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/lynch-alessandra.html>

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Map to the Stars

ADRIAN MATEJKA

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Place is an essential element in this poem. Based on the details the speaker provides, what do you know about this place?
2. Stars are referenced several times in the poem. How are the points linked?
3. Who is the speaker in the poem? What do you know about this person?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Choose a place you are familiar with and write a poem that captures the personality of a place, and brings it alive through specific details.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://www.divedapper.com/interview/adrian-matejka/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/matejka-adrian.html>

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Himmler's Lunch in Minsk, 15 August 1941

BONNIE MAURER

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the important moment of history the poem encapsulates?
2. What are the details in the poem that bring it out of history and make it seem alive on the page?
3. What is the tone of the poem? What in the language supports your perception of tone or emotion from the speaker?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Choose a historical person and write a poem about only one moment in their life, using details and bits of language from another source.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.wabashwatershed.com/2014/03/29/march-2014-poetry-feature-bonnie-maurer/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/maurer-bonnie.html>

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When the Stars Go Dark

JIM MCGARRAH

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The theme of connection is mentioned in the poem: what types of connections do you notice?
2. What similes and metaphors are used to describe stars?
3. What are the images used to reflect the wars the men have been through?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem about stars that also relates to some aspect of life and human connection.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://memorywritersnetwork.com/blog/interview-vietnam-vet-memoir-mcgarrah/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/mcgarrah-jim.html>

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Country Roads

KEVIN MCKELVEY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What language in the poem could be representative of the justice system or imprisonment?
2. What could be the reason for implying the roads make up a sort of prison grid?
3. What is the speaker committing to “witness” in the last line?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem about a map of your community – with yourself in it. Is there a way you can subtly insert a concern (or take the opposite stance, and use praise) about what is happening in your community?

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/mckelvey-kevin.html>

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Kissing in Madrid

ORLANDO RICARDO MENES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What traditional form of poetry does this poem represent?
2. The poem is a snapshot of the speaker's first kiss. Identify specific language in the poem to discuss the impression the poem creates.
3. Circle the verbs, nouns, and adjectives in the poem. Which do you feel are most effective, and why?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a sonnet about a first kiss, or another first experience, using effective verbs, nouns and adjectives to convey the energy and emotion of the event.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://letraslatinasblog.blogspot.com/2015/10/an-interview-with-orlando-r-menes.html>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/menes-orlando-ricardo.html>

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Veteran's Affairs

NORMAN MINNICK

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Using details from the poem, what do you know about the grandfather?
2. What do you perceive about the relationship between the speaker and the grandfather?
3. What does the poem memorialize?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Use a memorable moment from a shared experience as one element in a poem that is a character portrait of the person you shared the experience with.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://bsuenglish308summer.blogspot.com/2014/04/an-interview-with-norman-minnick.html>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/minnick-norman.html>

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Extremist Sonnet

MARK NEELY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways does the poem highlight the dichotomy of man and nature?
2. How does the form of the poem enhance the theme?
3. The poem ends on a shocking image. What is its effect?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem in couplets contrasting two entirely different things, blending the two through images in the poem.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://htmlgiant.com/author-spotlight/four-mark-neely-interview/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/neely-mark.html>

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1948

ROGER PFINGSTON

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What language in the poem makes this snapshot come to life?
2. How do the three stanzas work in the narrative?
3. Consider the various kinds of symbolism surrounding snakes. How do the snakes work as a symbol in this poem?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem based on a snapshot with at least three people in it, using specific details and dialogue.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.wabashwatershed.com/2015/02/08/januaryfebruary-2015-poetry-feature-roger-pfingston/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/pfingston-roger.html>

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Joining the Community of Ghosts

RICHARD PFLUM

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What elements of fantasy, whimsy, or otherworldliness exist in the poem?
2. What does the speaker's fantasy about the afterlife imply about his current life?
3. What is the veil the speaker sees into, and why can he see into it?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem in which you describe the personal standards and pleasures of life as a ghost. Add a stanza that begins, "So now, still being alive..." that imagines what people will think of you when you're dead.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.wabashwatershed.com/2014/03/02/february-2014-poetry-feature-richard-pflum/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/pflum-richard.html>

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Chartres in the Dark

DONALD PLATT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Deep image poetry relies on concrete images to create a connection between the physical and spiritual realm, and create poetic meaning. Where in the poem do you see the connection between the spiritual and the physical realm?
2. The poem relies on *associative leaps*—a sudden change in direction in the poem. Where did you find a surprising moment? What about it stood out to you and how does it affect your understanding of the rest of the poem?
3. How does the form of the poem (the staggered lines and stanzas) reflect the themes of the poem?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem using associative leaps. Start the poem by getting deeply invested in the description of an image, and let the details carry you to other places, things, moments, or events. (For example, in Platt's poem, color is often a portal to another place and time.)

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://cavankerrypress.org/uncategorized/nin-andrews-interviews-donald-platt/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/platt-donald.html>

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Poetry



The Fire Academy

DANA ROESER

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. This poem starts with a dream, then moves to the memory of a tree outside the speaker's childhood home, which triggers a series of tree images that ultimately bring her to the Fire Academy. Look at the tree images, consider how they are connected to different times in her life, and how the last tree brings to the Fire Academy.
2. The author uses being on fire as a metaphor for avoiding direction and commitment. Consider how specific images convey the repercussions of that way of being.
3. The author's use of line length and enjambment creates a kind of barrier between the reader and the poem. How does this work with the language and themes in the poem? Try copying a stanza of the poem in prose, and then consider how it changes your comprehension of the poem.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem that begins with a nightmare, then follows the speaker into their waking hours and brings some understanding to the past. Use choppy line length to enhance the effect.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://verdadmagazine.org/vol16/interview.html>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/roeser-dana.html>

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The Sky Turned Orange on the Eastern Side at Twilight

RACHEL SAHAIDACHNY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How are the details in the landscape used to reveal details about the speaker?
2. Focus on one or two moments of enjambment in the poem. How do they work to expose the tensions?
3. What is the body's place in the environment of this poem? What does the insertion of the body on the environment have to do with the relationship between the self and the natural world?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Use landscape to reveal tension in a poem, through word choice and description. Tension could be between two or more people or within one individual. Have at least one enjambed line that works to enhance the tension in the poem.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://blogs.butler.edu/butlermfa/2014/09/15/rachel-sahaidachny-butler-mfa-wins-literary-honor/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/sahaidachny-rachel.html>

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Bringing Things Back from the Woods

DAVID SHUMATE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. A prose poem appears as prose on the page, but uses poetic techniques such as fragmentation, repetition, associative leaps, surrealism, rhyme, and compression to maintain a poetic quality. Identify examples of poetic techniques in the poem. What does writing in prose form add to the meaning or effect of the work?
2. In what way, and why, are the forest spirits trying to communicate with the speaker?
3. What is the speaker's underlying desire?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a prose poem. In addition to the prose format, use other elements of prose poetry, too, such as humor, surrealism, and associative leaps. Give your main speaker a desire, hinted at but not revealed.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://geosireads.wordpress.com/2016/07/26/interview-with-american-poet-david-shumate/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/shumate-david.html>

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Poetry



The Tragedies

KEVIN STEIN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the narrative occurring in the poem?
2. The speaker uses stream-of-consciousness (associative leaps) to move from one allusion to another. Pick one of the allusions and discuss what its reference adds to the theme and narrative in the poem.
3. What elements of sound play, rhythm, and rhyme do you find in the poem?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem that uses three allusions to develop its theme and enhance the narrative. Try to make the allusions glide by association from one to the other.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

http://www.smilepolitely.com/arts/kevin_stein_poet_laureate_future_celebutante/

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/stein-kevin.html>

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Poetry



This God of My Waking

JESSICA D. THOMPSON

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Who is the “he” the speaker refers to in the poem?
2. What does the poet’s use of enjambment add to the poem?
3. Just before the end, in stanzas seven through nine, the poet uses repetition, specifically *anaphora*. How does it change the feeling in the poem?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem about a spiritual moment (small or large) and let anaphora be your guide by either starting the poem with heavy repetition or ending it that way.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://chapbookinterviews.wordpress.com/2015/02/26/jessica-d-thompson/>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/thompson-jessica-d.html>

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Poetry



The Lerner Theatre, 1953

SHARI WAGNER

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does the poem capture the time period in which the narrative takes place? Give specific examples.
2. What is the significance of the safety-pin necklace?
3. In this coming of age poem, what transformation does the main character experience?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem that is a portrait of someone who is in a moment of transformation. Make the moment real through the use of concrete details that are very specific to the person.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

https://www.nuvo.net/arts/written_spoken_word/the-driving-force-for-indiana-s-poet-laureate-shari-wagner/article_fed46ea9-5ef0-52b0-a93a-7edb41a0e240.html

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/wagner-shari.html>

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Myth

ELIZABETH WEBER

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the tension in the poem?
2. How does the speaker try to balance out the fear, anger, and sadness that linger from her traumatic loss in the poem?
3. What could be the purpose of ending on a creation story and the phrase “in the beginning”?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem that wrestles with a difficult or unfair situation for which there is no real resolution.

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/weber-elizabeth.html>

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Poetry



Taking Aim at a Macy's Changing Room, I Blame Television

MARCUS WICKER

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read the poem out loud and make a list of what you notice about song, rhythm, and rhyme.
2. How are the images in this litany linked? How do the linked images contribute to the theme of the poem?
3. Consider the last five lines of the poem. How do the images in these lines contrast with the earlier images? What do you think the speaker is saying about himself here?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a poem about something you were forced to do that you felt went against your true self using a litany of images that create the feel of the experience. End with an image of yourself. Be playful with the images and have fun with the sounds.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.32poems.com/blog/10215/punch-like-kiss-collarbone-interview-marcus-wicker-cate-lycurgus>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/wicker-marcus.html>

fiction



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The Spirit Stone

MAURICE BROADDUS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The story is based on a series of slave narratives, which the author expanded and developed as a short story. Research slave narratives and consider how they are alike and different from “The Spirit Stone.”
2. The author uses a great deal of metaphor, for example, “... Marse Chapman was a thunder cloud waiting to break wide open and rain anger on all of us.” Find five more examples of metaphor in the text and explain for each one what idea or image is being conveyed.
3. How does the author’s repetition of the refrain “Lord have mercy on my soul” fit not only the story but also the history and heritage of this time?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Use a narrative that’s been passed down orally as a basis for a short story, using characterization, plot, setting, and tension to flesh it out. Feel free to add or subtract from the story to make it your own. You might use a family story, one from your community, or one told in religious teaching.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://www.apex-magazine.com/interview-with-author-maurice-broaddus>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/broaddus-maurice.html>

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The Close Calls

CHRISTOPHER COAKE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Find at least one sentence or detail in each of the four sections that reflects the author's age, mindset, and perspective at the time. How does the author employ vignettes set at different ages to advance the story to its full outcome?
2. A thread of violence runs throughout the story. What different forms does this violence take? How does it lead to the final scene? What do you think is the message of this piece?
3. What do you think will be the outcome for the narrator? Has he experienced change by the end of the story?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Structure a story and theme around a behavior that recurs at various stages throughout the protagonist's life, one that ultimately leads to a final outcome that has been building for a long time.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://www.indianawriters.org/blogs/news/11581301-deanna-morris-interviews-christopher-coake>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/coake-christopher.html>

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Go Back

KAREN JOY FOWLER

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The author tells the story from a child's point of view, factual and without adult reflection. How does this technique serve to heighten the swift turn that takes place during the story's climax?
2. Why do you think the author chose to make the Uncle Wiggily board game eerily prophetic? What does this add (or take away) from the story?
3. In the story, the mother says, " Sometimes going back is better. Sometimes it only looks like you're losing when really it's the only way to win." How does this fit the theme of the story? How does the final prediction from Uncle Wiggily support this theme?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a story from the perspective of a child, remembering that you can only know what a child that age is capable of knowing, notice things a child would notice, and use language that a child would use. Resist the impulse to explain what's happening based on what the character might come to understand later.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://theamericanreader.com/an-interview-with-karen-joy-fowler>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/fowler-karen-joy.html>

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Ruin

MELISSA FRATTERIGO

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. An atmosphere of loss, tragedy, and destruction runs throughout this story. What word choices, writing style, and details does the author use to create it? Find five passages from the text to support your answer.
2. The story is told through the eyes of a young girl, Luann, who is acting as a mother to her doll, Tracey. The author chooses to personify Tracey so that we can hear and see what Luann is imagining. How does this serve to attach the reader to Luann? What effect does this attachment have on the reader, in particular at the end, when we find out Luann's mother is dead?
3. What does the dead boy represent? What do you think is behind the author's choice to include him in the story and have Luann discover him?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write the story in which a beloved object plays a part in how the main character comes to terms with something too painful, confusing, or awful to contemplate head-on.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

http://www.newsbug.info/lafayette_leader/q-a-with-melissa-fratterigo-from-the-lafayette-writers-studio/article_d98125e0-f206-11e5-afcd-df4cbba86ce7.html

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/fratterigo-melissa.html>

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Love and Mono

BRYAN FURUNESS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The author uses a variety of figurative language to convey all five senses, for example, “There was a cool breeze that smelled like it had come through a mile of clean laundry.” Find five more lines of descriptive language and metaphor; then rewrite the lines using a different metaphor to convey the same idea.
2. Find specific examples to show how the author injects humor and approachability into each of the story’s characters. What overall effect does this have on the reader? How does it add to the poignant ending?
3. At the end of the piece, Revie whispers “Holyghost” as he watches his mother leave. How does the story of Al Djukic and the copier reflect Revie’s real-life situation? How do you think the writer feels about religion?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a story about the relationship between a child and parent in which humor is used to characterize both the joys and sorrows of the relationship.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://phdincreativewriting.wordpress.com/2012/12/02/how-bryan-furuness-became-a-writer>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/furuness-bryan.html>

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Double On-Call

JOHN GREEN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss how the quote at the beginning of the story reflects the story's theme.
2. Later in the story, the narrator states that “neither superstition or religion works,” that “they are not *intended* to work.” What do you think he meant by this? Cite passages from the text to support your answer.
3. How does the author's use of dialogue show not only the bond between the different characters who work in the hospital but also how they cope and deal with trauma? Cite specific passages to support your answer.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a dialogue between two people that captures their personalities and conveys crucial information about a tense, difficult situation they share—without explaining anything.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

https://www.goodreads.com/interviews/show/828,John_Green

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/green-john.html>

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Rings

LUCRECIA GUERRERO

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The author writes this in second person using the word “you.” How does this choice affect the tone of the story?
2. What moment in the story is the turning point for the narrator? Look at the author’s word choice in that passage and use specific details to show how they work to make readers feel what she wants them to feel.
3. At the end of the story, Casa Brasil is in rubble and thunder rumbles in the distances. What do you think it means that the place he is seeking is destroyed? What does the thunder symbolize? Support your answer with textual references.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a story in which a chance encounter prevents a character from acting on impulse and doing something unwise.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://labloga.blogspot.com/2017/01/interview-of-lucrecia-guerrero.html>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/guerrero-lucrecia.html>

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The Secret of Cartwheels

PATRICIA HENLEY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The story opens with a vivid winter scene. List five descriptive phrases and adjectives the author uses to convey winter. Why do you think the author opens up with a frigid scene? What winter details match Aunt Opal's appearance and demeanor?
2. Conversely, the author closes the story with a scene set in the springtime. Why do you think the author chooses spring? With that in mind, what do you think the final line of the story means? ("The new spring leaves were so bright they hurt my eyes.")
3. The night before she leaves, Roxanne's mother tells her, "There are signs in life. Signs that tell you what you have to say or do." What signs do you think she might have been referring to? How did her decision to follow the signs affect the narrator of the story and her siblings? At the end of the story, do you feel sympathetic towards the mother? Why or why not? Use specific examples from the story to support your answer.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a story in which a character receives a sign that they believe calls for a specific course of action.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://sycamorereview.com/2014/11/03/writing-ya-an-interview-with-patricia-henley-elizabeth-stuckey-french>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/henley-patricia.html>

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The Woman with No Skin / The Woman Who Was a House

SARAH LAYDEN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

In each of these stories, the author treats a figurative concept in literal terms, which creates an extended metaphor: in the first, a woman has no skin; in the second, a woman is a house.

1. In “The Woman with No Skin,” what aspect of being a woman is explored? What happens at the end, and how does this literal event support an abstract concept?
2. In “The Woman Who Was a House,” what aspect of being a woman is explored? What has happened to the “house” by the end of the story, and how does it reflect the lives of women?
3. What do you feel the writer is saying about being a woman in these stories? Use specific examples to support your answer.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Create a story in which you take something literal and treat it figuratively to convey something deeper.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.fearnolit.com/fail-better-sarah-layden>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/layden-sarah.html>

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Shuhua's Suite

BRIAN LEUNG

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The author divides the story into three distinct sections, each with a different purpose, setting, and place. Give a brief summary of each section and analyze how each section sets the reader up for the next; then, describe how they work together to create a complete and complex story.
2. At the beginning of Parts I and III, the author directly addresses the reader. What is the tone of his messages to the reader and how do they support the story?
3. The piece begins and ends with a graphic depiction of wartime violence. The middle section is told from the young girl's innocent perspective. How does this work to create a more impactful ending? What is meant by the final line "Shuhua is shelved"?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Construct a three-part story in which each section is separate but related to each other in a way that mimics this author's structure:

- Section one: an historical vignette
- Section two: a personal experience within the historical moment
- Section three: a modern reflection that shows the outcome and/or aftermath.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://www.writingclasses.com/toolbox/author-q-a/brian-leung>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/leung-brian.html>

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Elvis Presley Visits His Red Harley

SEAN LOVELACE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. This story is a piece of flash fiction and concise by nature. It begins *in media res*, or “in the middle of things” at a crucial part of the action. Does it matter in this case that we never know the reason behind the slap? Why or why not?
2. The author takes a legendary figure, Elvis Presley, and constructs a personal account as if told from Elvis’s point of view. How does what you know of Elvis Presley affect your understanding of the story? How would the impact of the story be different if the main character was an ordinary person?
3. What do you think is the significance of Elvis throwing the keychain into the deep end of the pool and the closing phrase, “I don’t know why. Lots of times I don’t know why.”

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a flash fiction story (250-500 words) told from the perspective of a current cultural icon and begin the story *in media res*.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://flashfiction.net/2010/11/06/flash-interview-sean-lovelace-cracked/>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/lovelace-sean.html>

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Contributor's Note

MICHAEL MARTONE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. This is one of a series of tongue-in-cheek biographical notes that play with the idea of a writer's identity and how a writer might choose to appear to his readers, depending on who those readers are. Who is "Michael Martone" in this piece? Find specific details in the story that convey information about his personality, his life, and what he values. What audiences do you think would appreciate this particular version of "Michael Martone" What audiences might be put off by him? Why?
2. The author writes the story in one long block of text and employs many long sentences composed of phrases separated by commas. How does this affect your reading experience? What might be lost if he had written it more traditionally?
3. How does the final sentence "And time—time was constant, too"—encapsulate the scope of this story? What do you think the author means by this?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write your own fictional contributor's note in the form of a story. Consider the publication you are writing it for and choose the fictional details you create about yourself to fit its image and readership; for example, a bio for *Sports Illustrated* would be different than a bio for *The New Yorker* or *Seventeen Magazine*. Your story should be at least 500 words.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://quarterlyconversation.com/the-michael-martone-interview>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/martone-michael.html>

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Jubilee

SUSAN NEVILLE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does the author convey “Midwestern small town” and a summer atmosphere with her word choices? Find five examples of descriptive language and analyze how and why each example enriches the story as a whole.
2. What is your impression of the relationships between the husbands and wives in the story? How is it emblematic of the time and setting of the piece?
3. This story is a riff on John Mellencamp’s song “Jack and Diane,” which he wrote early in his career as John Cougar. What role does the rock star play in the story? How is the narrator’s longing to catch a glimpse of him related to her husband’s dream of a new car? What do their longings tell you about the life they lead and what kind of future they might expect to have?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a story about longing, in which a character does something extreme in a desperate effort to get something they want and feel like they need.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://thecollagist.com/collagist-blog/2016/11/7/we-shouldnt-criminalize-the-victim-an-interview-with-susan-n.html>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/neville-susan.html>

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A History of the Ghosts of Judy, Tennessee

MICHAEL POORE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What role do urban legends play in this piece? In what way do they enrich the story? Why do you think the author chose to include them?
2. The author weaves together three different stories: Odie Clark, Zion Calder, and Vonda. How does the author use them to tell separate tales that contribute to the story as a whole?
3. What do you know about Vonda's home life without having been told by the author? Find five examples in the story where the author uses specific details to convey how she lives.

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a story in which the action hinges on an urban legend you know or one you make up.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://qwillery.blogspot.com/2012/07/interview-with-michael-poore-author-of.html>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/poore-michael.html>

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Interview with a Moron

ELIZABETH STUCKEY-FRENCH

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The author adopts the form of a formal interview to tell this third-person story about a young man (“Interviewer”) going to see his learning disabled brother (“Subject”). How does this seemingly removed format allow us a more intimate look at the relationship and history between the two brothers? Or does it? Support your answer with specific examples.
2. One of the pleasures of this story is its subtle humor and irony. Find examples of both throughout the story and discuss how they work to allow the reader to see something about the narrator and the situation that he doesn’t see himself.
3. There is an abrupt shift to first-person narration at the end of the story. Find the paragraph where this switch occurs. The story concludes in this “I” narration. How does this unexpected change in perspective affect your understanding of the story? Why do you think the author chose to do this?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a story in this same Interviewer/Subject format between two people who know each other well (siblings, best friends, parents, etc.), using humor and irony to convey information to the reader that the narrator doesn’t see. Then switch abruptly to first person in the conclusion so that the narrator loses his objectivity and brings a deeper understanding to the story.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/1998/06/facts-fiction/377131/>

LINK TO AUTHOR’S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/stuckey-french-elizabeth.html>

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An Affair Before the Earthquake

SAMRAT UPADHYAY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. This is a love story imbued throughout with the culture and heritage of the protagonist and his lover. In what ways does the role of culture enrich this story and give it texture? Find five examples to support your answer.
2. The narrator alludes several times to an earthquake. What does the earthquake symbolize in this story? Provide specific examples to support your answer.
3. The last line of the story is “Today I want to live again, and again today I want to die.” How do you interpret this?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a story set in a culture with which you are familiar, letting the culture itself have a primary role in the characters' situation and the story's resolution.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<https://www.writermag.com/2014/06/24/samrat-upadhyay-capturing-momentum/>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/upadhyay-samrat.html>

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Pulsus Paradoxus

DALY WALKER

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. This story, told through the eyes of a surgeon, uses a significant amount of medical terminology. How do you feel the use of this professional language affects the authority of the narrator's voice? Consider the challenge a writer faces in finding a balance between using technical language that creates an authority of voice and confusing or overwhelming the reader.
2. In the scene where Wes is dying and the doctor must make a split-second moral decision, the author pauses and slows the story down so that the reader is suspended in a moment of tension with the narrator. In your opinion, do you think the doctor made the right choice in saving Wes, though he knew this would very likely endanger his daughter's life? What would you have done in that situation?
3. In the end, the doctor saves Wes and goes to tell his daughter that "all is well." Is it? How do you think the story will play out?

WRITING EXERCISE:

Write a story in which a character faces an ethical question whose outcome, no matter what they decide, will have a profound effect on their life and the life of someone they love.

LINK TO AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR:

<http://www.dalywalker.com/images/Interview-with-Daly-Walker.pdf>

LINK TO AUTHOR'S WORK:

<http://www.indianawriters.net/walker-daly.html>