

POETRY FOR WELLBEING  
WORKSHOPS

WORKSHOP 4

HOLDING ON,  
LETTING GO



## INTRODUCTION

*Our thanks to Ryan Van Winkle for writing this workbook for us.*

This session is centred around the things that shape us and hold us, and about how we might let go.

As a first activity, we will take the time to get to know ourselves and each other a little better. Use the exercise below to do this.

## EXERCISE 1

**Discuss together:** If you could be a year – or a decade – which would it be? Explain why.

**Write:** Spend some time free writing about this prompt. Then practice 'zooming in and out'.

First, 'zoom in' and focus on the small details of the time you chose – the things you can see, hear, touch, or smell around you – a favourite food or a song you loved listening to. Then 'zoom out' and write about the bigger picture things – like the mood of that decade, or a historical event that happened that year – which made you choose that year or decade. It can be effective to alternate between zooming in and zooming out as you're writing.

If you're finding it difficult to start, try beginning with this prompt: ['The year that gave me...'](#)

## EXERCISE 2: MY... HAVE...

**Read:** 'My Worries Have Worries' by Laura Villareal  
<https://onbeing.org/poetry/my-worries-have-worries/>

**Discuss together:** We all have worries. Where do you put yours? What do you tell them? What do they tell you? What do they feed on? What do they sound like? What do they do while you sleep? While you work? Will they be there tomorrow or the next day - or the next year?

Some other ideas for writing using this approach include:

My losses are lost  
My doubts have doubts

**Write:** Take 15 minutes to write a poem using this approach, and allow time to share afterwards for those who wish to.

**Discuss together:** Poetry of this kind offers lots of scope to think about how our worries, doubts, and joys hold us and shape us. How might seeing and reflecting on these in a concrete way through poetry help us to understand them in new ways? How might it help us let them go? How might it help us transform them?

## AN EXAMPLE FROM ARIANE

My dreams have dreams.  
They float away from me to past times and Greek islands.  
There, they banquet on spanakopita, crispy and too hot to hold, they lick their fingers.  
The sun warms them, and they smile contentedly.  
They whisper to me of the blueness of the sky as they wander towards the shoreline.  
Their voices are a gentle hum that grows stronger with each passing day of winter.  
I refer them to my cares, to my responsibilities. I beg them to consider my future.  
They splash me until saltwater drips down my face, mocking me.  
I leave them curled up on the sand, listening to the cicadas, waiting for the dark and the shooting stars that pass overhead.

## EXERCISE 3: SOUVENIRS

**Read:** 'The Man Explains His Souvenirs' by Charles Rafferty

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/01/17/the-man-explains-his-souvenirs>

**Discuss together:** Souvenirs are like personal artifacts; they are signifiers of identity, story tellers of times and places we passed through. Which souvenirs do we cherish? Which souvenirs do we need to let go?

**Write:** For the next poem, explain your souvenirs. Who might you explain them to? Take 15-20 minutes to write your poems and then share what you have written.

## AN EXAMPLE FROM ARIANE: HOW PEARLS ARE MADE

Going through the jewellery boxes.

The treasures tarnished by moisture, and in need of care.

You all fall upon the starfish, untangling them from the nets of necklaces.

Who wants the dolphins swimming into an embrace?

It fits one of you perfectly. The endless tail of rose gold circling your pretty, young ring finger.

For me, I keep the pearls, restrung from a necklace my grandmother wore.

Trying to recall how pearls are made, how they are shaped by the sea, and by time.



## **EXERCISE 4: ENDING**

**Discuss together:** Share something that you enjoyed about the session and something you struggled with today.

Participants talked about rushed transitions from work into the poetry workshop and feeling not 'in the zone' but then being surprised by the writing that emerged even so.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Look for things you enjoy. Find a poem you like and spend some time with it – borrow from it, try to write in that way, and find a way into writing through it.

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