

Poetry and creative writing tools for workshops.

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Warm Ups

Physical Warm Up Games

Shoals of Fish.

In groups of 6-8 move together around the room, like shoals of fish - First get each individual to find their own fish, then work out how the shoal moves. There's always a leader, and the others follow, as soon as leader turns, whoever is at the front of the shoal becomes the leader. **(gets them working together physically and co-ordinating)**

Zip Zap Boing - All stand in a circle. There is a series of actions and accompanying noises.

Zip is palms together with 'Zip' noise (say the word) passed left or right around the circle. Zap is palms together but you pass it across the circle. If you receive a Zap, you can choose to go left or right with a Zip or Zap it to someone else.

If you receive a Zip you can send it back the way it came by holding up two hands and saying 'Boing'. Zip then has to return to it's sender and they decide whether to Zip it in the other direction or Zap it across the circle. **(fun, collaborative game, remembering instructions, movement and noises. Idea is once everyone has the hang of it, you speed it up. You can also add in movements and noises of your own).**

Robots.

In groups of three. Two people are robots (walk like a robot/make a robot noise) and can only walk in a straight line. If they hit a wall or a person they get stuck and let out an alarm noise. The third person is a controller and needs to run after each one to stop them hitting anything/anyone. **(V noisy and fun, gets them working together physically)**

Tableau - put into small groups of five. Give each a scenario - i.e. your in a car and something is about to happen. You're claiming a mountain and something is about to happen (whisper so rest of group can't hear) and they have to decide what the something is, then work out a tableau to illustrate it. Give them 2 minutes or v short time. The rest of the group have to work out what it is. Everyone does a different one. **(this gets them thinking in image and illustration, useful for metaphor)**

Chest click clap or body percussion in a circle.

Rhythm copying - call and response.

Circle jam. Mark out a count of 8. Everyone comes up with a vocal sound - long, short, percussive, word - whatever they like. They can place it in two places within the count of 8. Build it up until everyone is making a groove. Over this you can improvise lines of spoken or sung text. You can direct it louder, quieter, do drop outs etc.

Stop, Clap, Jump, Walk

Get them to walk around and follow your instructions so they do what you say. Use the words in bold. You can play with 2 jumps, 3 claps, jump clap jump etc. Then once they're locked into it, switch the words, so Stop means Walk and vice versa, Clap means Jump and vice versa. **(Gets them concentrating and doing two things at once - useful for performance when you are both thinking about your own performance and reading the audience)**

In groups, Make physical representation of a something. Family, A Season, A Colour - a bit like Tableau, but more abstract

Talking Warm Ups

123

In pairs take it in turn to count to 3. i.e. person no 1 says 'ONE' person no 2, says 'TWO', person no 1, says THREE, person no 2 says ONE etc.. do it for 30 seconds and then ask what happened. It's a focus game

Story circle.

One word each in a circle, starting with 'One day i walked in the woods and I.... They have to listen and serve the story, not their own idea of where they want it to go. **Giving up ego in service to the idea.**

Rhyme Tennis

Sort group into two lines facing each other. You are umpire. You decide which team is going first with coin toss or similar. You throw a one syllable word to serving team. They have three seconds for someone to step forward with a word that rhymes. First person to step forward says the word. Opposite team has three seconds to send one back. If one team responds with a two syllable word then the other team must reciprocate with two or more syllables.

Rules.

You can't repeat a rhyme.

If you take longer than 3 secs, other team gets a point.

First to 3/5/7 - you choose.

Talking Poem

Who I Am – In a circle. Take it in turns to say a line each. Each line starts with I AM

1st round describe our appearance, attributes, family.

I am brown eyes, blue hair
I am glasses, cracked on the right eye
I am generous, I'll give you whatever I have
I am shy. Don't look at me
I am Black Doctor Martins shoes
I am pink laces

2nd round – describe our environment – our home, work, places we hang out

I am Tuesday night at the Chippy
I am Flat A, 72 Denmark Street, Blue door,
I am Darren's green sofa, playing Xbox

3rd round - something the rest of the group might not know - a little secret they are willing to share

I am no tonsils
I am a lost a toe since I was three
I am the owner of a hamster called Nigella

You can also add a round of
I remember

or

I wish for...

It's a lovely sharing game, speaking into a circle, it makes a poem and offers you an insight into their creativity and how they see themselves.

Writing into performing. I use this a lot. You can also get a couple of scribes to write out each line, then cut them up and the group arrange them in a fridge magnet poem. This is a great group writing exercise.

Writing Warm Ups - Solo

Lower Your Standards

The prolific American poet, William Stafford famously wrote a poem every day for forty or fifty years. When he was asked how he did it, he replied, "simple, I lower my standards." Discuss the critical voice and how it can sabotage our efforts if we allow it in too early. This is a warm up exercise, that gives permission to lower your standards and for a poem to be whatever it is, without searching for perfection.

Read three short contrasting poems. Don't discuss them. Give everyone 5 minutes to write a response to anything they heard in any of the poems. There is no right or wrong. Can be a theme, a line, a combination of the two. After 5 mins, ask if anyone wants to share. Don't offer critical feedback, just let the poems sit in the room. **It builds confidence in sharing and just trying. It's a nice one to use early in each session, as a way of bringing focus in and doing some quiet writing.**

Kennings - intro to metaphor

Discuss Kennings - Norse form - Anglo Saxon (Google it!)

Intro - Two word metaphor for something.

Whale Road = The Sea

Battle Metal = Weapon

Battle Sweat = Blood

Bone beak = axe

Feeding the eagle = killing enemies

Modern

Ankle Biter

Bean Counter

Brown Noser

Hot Potato

Tree Hugger

Take 2 mins - write as many as you can - share

It's a fun way into metaphor and you can quickly build up a bank of 'other ways of saying stuff'. If they get stuck, give them prompts. Write kennings for parts of your body, clothes, phone, etc.

Metaphor Game

Intro metaphor. Discuss for a few mins. Give examples. Discuss cliches.

Examples

This sickness is a nest of hornets in my belly
Her smile was a locked door in winter.

If time, read 'Not The Furniture Game by Simon Armitage. Great intro to metaphor. Great poem.
Discuss.

Share some -cliche alarm

Raining cats and dogs
Time Will Tell
As Old as The Hills
Opposites Attract
Head Over heels in Love

Task

Write for one minute. As many metaphors as you can for; Make it a competition. Who can write the most?

1. Clouds - 1 minute

The clouds are...cities in the sky
worlds of soft animals
gods of the imagination

Share

2. Home is...a chip butty and hot mug of tea a basket of snakes

Share

3. I am a...meat bag with brains drawer full of old letters

Share

4. Add your own...

Paint colours - Discuss names of paint colours at Homebase - Cornfield yellow, summer haze etc. Cliche riddled.

In 1 minute - write some names of your own. Old dirty trainer grey, nosebleed red, disappointment, etc

Free Write – explain free writing.

Rules - don't stop writing for agreed time. Forget punctuation. It doesn't have to all make sense. If you get stuck, just write the same thing over and over until you trip back into writing etc. You won't be asked to share.

Explain you are cutting below the surface thoughts and trying to get to the deeper stuff.

5 mins x 3

First round - general,
Second round - specific,
Third round - personal

Eg. Music.

General - everything about music. Not what it means to you, but what you know about it. how it works, what people do with it and why.

Specific - a moment when music moved you, did something to you. don't write about you, write about the moment as if you were describing it to someone. The walls, the temperature, the other people there, the way the bass rattled the windows.

Personal - what it means to you. what's your relationship

Writing warm ups - Group

Fridge Magnet - Picture response.

Group sits in a circle facing each other. You find two contrasting pictures - can be photos, piece of art. Choose two scribes.

You show picture one to each persons for 5 seconds max. They have to say what they see. Scribe writes it down big. New line for each person. Do the whole group. Repeat for second picture.

Cut up the words and phrases. You will have loads of contrasting but related material that creates a strong sense of something. It helps if you give this a title. I have a book of pictures representing hope. So I call the poem 'Hope is...' then the group arranges the words and phrases to create a list poem

Hope is...

a magnet
three children
a bruised sky

Good group cohesion exercise that highlights how we all see something new and different in any scenario. Make time to discuss process.

Rules - you can add connectives and take away lines that aren't working.
Emphasise that it doesn't need to make narrative sense, just needs to sound and feel right.

One Word One Minute.

Each person to write for one minute on six words that you give them. Jacob Sam La Rose used these and I find they always work, but you can choose whatever you like.

Bone, Faith, Moon, Mother, Scar, Ending.

Write a personal definition, memory, image.

Arrange them into small groups. They have to agree on the word that has the most juice for them as a group then arrange them into a short group piece.

You also secretly give permission for each group to add one line from a subject different to the one they have chosen. i.e. group doing a piece about Bone. Tell them they can have one line about Ending.

When they've arranged it, they can then work out how they want to perform it. Give them strict time limits for each part of the process.

Writing Prompts

If I ruled the world - write a poem that is a manifesto.

If I ruled the world, all chickens would live freely without fear of death

If I ruled the world I would ban all music teachers from making me play music made before 1987.

It can be funny or powerful, but it lends itself to playing with performance. Works well in schools or any institution.

Once they're written, what happens when it's performed deadpan, vs larger than life. Play with persona and amplification.

With all poems - get them to perform to each other as a group.

Try whispering the poem

Try dead panning

Try making it melodramatic.

Try gesture

Explore physicality. Where are boundaries of acceptable and suitable?

Mundane Love Poem:

think of things we take for granted, that we need and write love poem to it. Then perform it, like a love poem. Heartfelt, serious, passionate. but to a lamp. or a toilet roll holder

My amazing pants/trousers - works well with young kids.

Write three things. 1. Describe the pants
2. describe their super powers
3. How will they make the world a better place

You can create individual pants poems or group pants poems - this always works nicely

Three titles for poems – give them

For those who don't know what to do with a....

An invitation from a....

A recipe for a...

They choose, write a piece, then share it.

Often it's great to provoke the group into giving their feedback on a performance. Get them to notice body language, tone of voice, pace, dynamics, eye contact, stillness, movement. Try doing the opposite with your voice than what you think the poem needs. See what that does. Push at the limits they set themselves.

Riddle writing / personification

Write first person description of an object that is meaningful to them.

Grandad's watch..

I am a two handed time traveller
I have fought a war
delivered a baby
seen a wife die.

Share. Group has to guess.

Sex and Death (for young adults and older)

Split group into two. give them a big piece of paper and a pen.

One group writes in a spider chart, all descriptive words they can think of relating to sex.
The other group writes down all they can think of to do with death.

Swap lists

Sex group writes a poem about death using sex words
Death group writes a poem about sex using death words.

Warning - not a poem about necrophilia!

You are looking for the most original metaphor and innovative descriptive. Older groups love this one.

Heat.

Write down all the words associated with heat.

Everyone shouts them out. Write them down.

Everyone then has to write a poem about heat without using any of those words.

This is a banger and forces them to be original and inventive.