

CRW 204: Research for Creative Writers

In-class Exercise / Homework

Braided Essay Machine

I want you to begin this exercise in class, with the aim of responding quickly (taking 15-30 minutes apiece) to two or three of the numbered prompts during our time together and finishing up at home/in the library by the end of Week 4.)

Note: Some of these prompts are more easily accomplished (or at least begun) via quick, online research; others may require use of library databases, even books! As always, seeking out a variety of sources, from a variety of places, will yield the most interesting, fertile, and reliable results.)

Please respond to *at least five* of these prompts:

1. Look at Lee Jeffries' photographs from the series "Homeless" or Michael A. McCoy's series "Portraits" (both available online) **OR** search for and select one or a small group of the Depression-era photographs by Dorothea Lange, and describe it/them in detail or in some other way respond to the work in 250 words. (Before or during this writing, see what you can find out, through research, about the photographer and the subject[s] of work on which you focus.)
2. Write 250 words on a place you love to go to be alone **OR** where you have ever felt unwelcome. Don't overtly explain your feelings about this place—offer it mainly in **images** (keeping in mind that images can be visual or they can appeal to our other senses—smell, touch, sound, taste). Use the internet to look at photographs, maps, or descriptions of the place if you can. (If you can visit this place before or during the writing, great. You may also want to try "visiting" a location using the virtual reality technology available in the Digital Makerspace in the UCNW library!)
3. Write 250 words directly addressing someone who was once very important to you but with whom you haven't had contact in years, and remind him/her of a moment you once shared. Be as concrete as you can.
4. Write 250 words about a historical figure you admire or with whom you empathize and who is considered in some way an outsider; do not employ the first person, and make use of information gleaned from at least two sources.
5. Write 250 words on the difference between being alone and being lonely. Begin by investigating the etymology of these two words and researching their equivalents in other languages. (Try the Online Etymology Dictionary—good nerd fun!)
6. Write 250 words about a character from a book, movie, or TV show you read/watched as a child, and make it a character to whom you strongly relate. (Use the internet to find details, refresh your memory, look at images, read excerpts, watch clips.)
7. Interview someone (a classmate, if you do this in class) about the first house in which s/he can remember living. Get as much detail as you can, make notes, write down or record quotes, and then write 250 words about what you learn. (If the situation allows and the interviewee knows the address, or even the approximate address, look at the house/street/neighborhood on Google Street View while you are conducting the interview.)

8. Use the internet to discover and investigate an “untranslatable” word—a word from a language other than English and for which English offers no direct equivalent; in about 250 words, reflect on this word in whatever way feels useful to you.

Once you have completed your five segments, you’ll want to make some choices—the final essay should make use of at least three of the five prompts. Then undertake the shaping of your essay.

- **Organize.** Think about the arrangement of the parts—which juxtapositions draw out the connections that exist between the segments? Whatever order you decide on, keep the sections visually discrete—use white space, subtitles, numbers or some other cue to signify their separation.
- **Revise.** What can/should you do to elucidate the connections you’re noticing? Do you need to add or cut language, expand or shrink a segment? (Don’t go under 100 words or over 500 words for any segment.) Is there a segment missing? About what? Do you need to conduct additional research?
- **Title.** What’s the resulting essay “about”? Can/should you signal that subject/theme in the title? (Do you need/want an epigraph—a useful quotation from another author? If so, that should come just below the title and before the first segment of your essay.)

The final product should be between 1000 and 1500 words. Please keep the process/parts/first draft in your exercise notebook but submit the “finished” essay to me either in hard copy or via email by the end of Week 4.