A Writer’s Journal

by: Becca Hay

for: my minds of the world

One of the most effective ways to improve writing is—quite simply—to write! No amount of writing instruction can take the place of practicing writing and learning to find your voice and joy in writing. This journal will give you the opportunity for practice as well as the opportunity to become skillful observers of the life around you. It will also be a place for you to become aware of how your favorite writers captivate readers through the use of strong verbs, carefully chosen adjectives, skillful metaphors and similes, surprising personifications, careful dialogue, and precisely crafted description.

The Nitty-Gritty:

* There should be a minimum of 30 entries in the journal.
* You should spend at least 15 minutes on each entry.
* All 30 entries will be solely of your own craft.
* The journal entries will not be individually graded.
* ***Date each entry*.** This is imperative to see consistent, semester-long effort on the journal.

I do not expect perfect spelling, neatness, or exemplary handwriting. what I do expect is to see that you are using this time to:

1) be creative by trying unusual types of writing: a journal entry from a slug or a haiku

about Spam;

2) bring an artist’s observant eye to the world around you, and play with concrete,

precise description that makes the world come alive; and

3) be playful and have fun with words and topics. Ultimately, good writing isn’t just about

sharing good ideas or grand experiences—good writing is also based on skillful word

choice.

Your journal should be kept in some sort of binder. Bring the journal to class when assigned and keep it up to date. Do not wait until the end of the semester to quickly attempt 30 entries as this practice defeats the entire purpose for keeping the journal. An outstanding journal is one that shows consistent genuine effort, observational skills, creative use of words, and a diversity of entries.

Here are some suggestions to begin the writing process. Remember, these are only suggestions and this journal is yours to fill.

### Wordplay

1. Pick any subject and write down as many specific verbs as you can think of that describes what that subject can do. ex. A sunbeam can dance on a wall, sneak through a tree, splash on your skin, vanish in a second, sweep away darkness, and vanquish winter’s bitter gloom.

2. Play with personification: pick a verb and use it to describe a noun in a new way. ex. silence can be lazy, light can taunt you, music can seduce is, floorboards can groan.

3. Word walls: Organize a verb or noun word wall around a specific concept. Ex. “Halloween” Verb: scares, haunts, excites, races, lingers, hangs-over, energizes, changes, transforms, masks, frightens. Noun: witch, pumpkin, jack-o-lantern, zombie, mummy, ghost, broom, bucket, costume, candy, sugar, wrapper, sugar coma.

4. Choose a color and write a list of words that evoke that color’s emotions or mental pictures.

### Creativity

1. Brainstorming with authors: Pretend you’re brainstorming with your favorite author and come up with new concepts for their works. ex. Create and describe three new classes that could be taught at Hogwarts, or describe three new spells to teach first year students. Imagine you are creating the next arena for the Hunger Games, what is one challenge you would put in the arena? Mr. Rochester’s crazed wife, from Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, never dies. How does Jane’s story end?

2. Write a list of what you’d expect to find in Dobby the House Elf’s closet. What would you find in Thor’s refrigerator? What would Belle’s (*Beauty and the Beast*) make-up kit look like against another Disney princess’s?

3. Make a “To Do” list for loved T.V.(*How I Met Your Mother’s* “Barney Stinson”) /movie (*Iron Man’s* “Tony Stark”) /book (*Twilight’s* “Edward”) characters, friends/family in your life, or your pet!

4. Do you have a favorite childhood book? Write the sequel to *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* entitled *If You Give a Camel a Redbull.* Or rewrite portions of you book: “If you give a mouse a cookie he will ask you for the recipe.”

5. Scene description: Have different characters describe the same scene. How would Hagrid, The Cat In the Hat, and your mom describe your room?

### Description

1. Close your eyes, imagine a place of importance and show more than tell what one would see there. What features make this place so important to you? What do you notice that others may overlook?

2. Who are you? Timing yourself, describe who you are, right now. Then, in the same amount of time, describe your 10-year-old self, 5-year-old self, etc. Turn back the clock. Who were you?

3. Keep a running list of favorite words or sentences from books you read, things people have said, throughout the semester.

4. What if? Play around with different scenarios from the realistic to unrealistic: What if you had your favorite superpower? Then what would you do? What if you didn’t have to wear glasses? What if your skin didn’t freckle?

5. Write about your favorite elementary school teacher? What was she like? What did she teach you? What makes her memorable?

### Poetry

1. Try a “When I am…” poem, such as “When I am brave,” “When I am a graduate,” “When I am a college senior.”

2. Write a haiku about something seemingly un-poetic such as irons, ironing boards, the Hunger Games, purses, or a peppermint patty.

3. Take one of your writing explorations and turn it into the poem. Capture the essence of the narrative with carefully chosen words, metaphors, similes, etc.

4. Try a prepositional phrase poem based off a strong verb (such as “sneaks” or “squirms”)

5. Try a fractured poem: “It was the night before finals when all through the…”

6. Try writing a fractured nursery rhyme where Little Miss Muffet meets Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters.

### Engaging With Rhetoric

1. Find a favorite quote and rephrase the quote into your own words. ex. Original: “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” Revised: “When in want, look first to those in need.”

2. Respond to a famous author’s well-known phrase. Original: “I have a dream” MLK Jr. if you had a dream and hundreds of thousands of people listening, what would you persuade them your dream is?

3. Craft a creative response to a well-known quote.

Original: “Live the life you have imagined” –Henry David Thoreau.

Response:

“...next to him, head on his arm,

...in bed tangled with sheets,

…under the cover of nightfall,

...throughout a heartfelt lifetime,

lives the life I have imagined.”

4. Using the logic of the rhetoric at play, recreate the same rhetoric with a personal twist.

Ex. “The idea behind a “26.2,” “13.1” or “0.0 I don’t run” bumper sticker is that this person has accomplished something unique and special that required effort and dedication. I want there to be a bumper sticker which states “24/7 I don’t stop” because sometimes my 100% effort isn’t in running a marathon, it’s in surviving the day--it’s in getting everything done, turned in on time and not falling asleep mid-conversation.”

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Class Brainstorm