

Living Words Creative Writing Workshop Exercise

"What did you do to stay cool before air conditioning?"

As this was the first workshop in the series, we wanted to be sure to help people get to know each other, as well as give them a clear idea of what to expect for the rest of the 10 weeks, so icebreakers lasted longer than usual for most exercises.

Introductions (5 minutes)

Have the workshop mediator introduce him- or herself and give the group basic information about the Living Words workshop (assuming it is the first workshop in your series).

Icebreakers (20 minutes)

Give the participants (including the guest writer) the opportunity to meet each other through an icebreaker. Use compelling questions derived from the Ungame, which is a game created by Rhea Zakich.

Pass around a few of the questions on index cards for every participant to look through and choose to answer one that they like. Questions may include: "Would you ever go skydiving?" and "How do you feel about hitch-hiking?" Have each participant choose a question, give a little information about him- or herself, and answered the question.

*Note that this icebreaker allows people the opportunity to talk, to share, to reminisce, to make a decision, to take a stance, among other things. These mostly outward actions prepare the participants for the writing that will follow.

Writer introduces himself and the topic (3-4 minutes)

Have your writer introduce the writing activity by discussing how hot it is now-a-days, but say that perhaps he or she has a sneaking suspicion that the participants know better about being hot because they lived in a time without air conditioning. This leads into the prompt, which is, "What did you do to stay cool before air conditioning?" Have the prompt also written on the board for participants to refer to throughout the writing process.

Writing (10 minutes)

All material copyright Living Words Program, 2009. Permission to duplicate for personal or educational use only. For questions or permission, contact LivingWordsProgram@wofford.edu.

Living Words Creative Writing Workshop Exercise

Have your writer mingle with participants as they write and help individuals write if they are not able to. As participants write, expect people to share stories with one another. Writing should last about 10 minutes, giving enough time to write but ending before participants become idle.

Sharing (15-20 minutes)

Prompt sharing by saying, “Who has something they would like to share?” and complement people as they share. This encourages individuals to share their writing by framing it as a comfortable and welcoming thing to do.

*You might find that not only will people share what they wrote, but that it will also spark other interests and questions that participants will share stories about. We found that allowing individuals the freedom to do this and not limiting conversation in any way worked very well.

Thanks/ Goodbye (1-2 minutes)

Have the mediator thank everyone, including the guest writer, for coming and leave things on a positive note.

*Like our mediator, you might want to spark participants’ interests for what is to come but telling them of other types of writers that will come. If it is the first session, we suggest inviting the participants to leave their journals with the facilitators so that they do not have to remember to bring them back every week. Also, invite participants to write “private” on their journal if they do not want the facilitators to read them.