



Week 2 Writing Exercise



This week:

Your Childhood Story

- **Approach this exercise from an exploratory, meditative perspective.**
- Many of us have pat stories about our childhood, more of a documentation of the way things were. *I was born here. I did this. This happened to me. And so on.* They are the stories that hold the shape and frame of life and are often physically focused. While those may indeed be fascinating and beautiful, or even tragic and harrowing, set them aside for now.
- **You're going to practice opening up beyond your physical experience.** Quiet your mind, open your imagination in the direction of your childhood. Call out to the heart that has always beat within you. Call out to the storyteller that you have always been, the storyteller of your own life... *and wonder...*
from this living that I have done, what do I know? What have I learned? What wisdom do I carry? What purpose? What path have I been on since I was young? How and why did I get here from there? Most of us have been exactly who we are our whole lives. In fact, childhood may have been the time when we were most ourselves.
Just as sure as these questions are asked, let them soften and slip away. Don't respond with thoughts. Do your best to just sit, feel your body and listen.
- **Listening includes being open to imagery that arises.** This depth of the heart often speaks in metaphor and symbol. Sometimes song. Curiosity is key if you are to see beyond and through the surface of things. If a particular incident or experience, even an image or phrase comes to you, don't take it at face value. Imagine that it is a doorway to walk through.
- **Remember stopping and starting when writing, feeling lost or unsettled or even hitting what seems like a wall is all part of it.** This is why we have been practicing going slowly. The slower we go, the stronger we are. There is a song within you. The more awareness you bring here, the more it will build up until it pours out.
Do not overly concern yourself with making the words perfect at this point. Jot down what's important. The editing will work itself out later. Remember, right now is about listening.

****More for the Heart****

View Additional Heart Exercises in the Classroom

- Going Sloooooow
(video)



Week 3 Writing Exercise



This week:

Meditative Writing/Listening to Yourself with Intention

Choose 1 or both options

**you will use one of these writings for next week's practice*

Quiet and listen to yourself. Listen to your heart. Wait until you hear. You will know when. It won't feel like the wind, fleeting and like you can't hold on to it. It will feel like a mountain. Something that is true and enduring. Almost like you're remembering something that you've always known.

****More for the Heart****

View Additional Heart Exercises in the Classroom

- Creativity & the Heart
- Renegotiating "Creative Blocks" (text & audio)

- 1. Ask yourself, what is my path here? What do I really want for my story, my arte, my children's book? How do I want to interact with the world? How do I want my book to interact with the world?**

Next ask, what if anything is holding me back? Be curious and nonjudgmental. Be kind and welcoming. Don't get too distracted by the details though. Just pay attention to what your heart already knows. Write down what you know.

While this isn't specifically for a story, you might be surprised. Usually why we make children's books is deeply embedded in our stories, our arte and how our work moves in the world. Writing down your path can provide a foundation for all your writing and make clear to you the purpose and meaning of your work.

Write at least one fat sentence or a short paragraph about your path as a children's book creator. If you have more than that? Feel free to write as much as you need.

- 2. This time when you quiet and listen, open up to an image, a title, a spark, a clue, a whole tale even, about the most important thing your current self would want to share with your childhood self. Write it all down and create a short story or poem of some kind. It can be very short or rather lengthy. It's up to you and your massively creative brilliance. But work on it until it feels solid.**

*if you already have a manuscript, I encourage you to do the other two exercises first. Then feel free to use this to go deeper into your own manuscript.

Spend a moment listening to yourself as you hold your manuscript in your hand. What does your inner self tell you is at the heart of this piece? Take your time. Listen closely. Then write down what you receive.

Then read it to yourself and choose one element from your story, if anything stands out focus there, if nothing stands out as you read it, choose an element yourself...now take that one thing into your heart and listen to what it is telling you.

See if you can find out what's hidden within your manuscript. Why is this story important to you? Write down what you receive.

Week 3 - Writing Exercise - Meditative Writing/Listening to Yourself with Intention



Week 4 Writing Exercise



This week:

You as Storyteller

Choose one of your most personal stories

If you did last week's writing exercise, this may be the perfect one. It does not have to be a complete story. It does not have to be a story even. It could be a series of words, a poem, a piece of writing from your journal. *Choose something that comes from your deep heart.*

****More for the Heart****

View Additional Heart Exercises in the Classroom

- Exploring Symbology
- Heartsong, One's True Voice (text & audio)

Now find yourself alone and able to hear yourself speak.

Read your words to yourself projecting outward.

Experiment with reading with a quiet voice, a whisper even, soft and to yourself.

Jot down a few notes about how this feels...in your body, in your heart.

Then read with a strong voice. Put your hand on your belly allowing your voice to come from here.

How far does your voice reach? Could someone hear you at the back of the room?
Write down any related thoughts.

Now try a conversational voice, as if you were talking to someone you trust and talk to all the time that is sitting near to you.

As you write down thoughts about this, notice which voice feels the most like you. Notice which voice rises effortlessly, moving through your words, rising from your heart. Do not judge, thinking I should have a strong voice, or my voice should be soft and inviting. Just *know* your voice.

Now, stop all your thoughts, rest your mind and open up to listening.

This time read your story to yourself using your voice.

Feel your body as an instrument of your story. You and the story, the telling of it as well as the actual experience of it, are one. *The circle is complete within you.*

Feel the part of you who is telling the tale. And feel the part of you who is listening. Feel free to imagine/remember the child you were, feel the adult who you are now. *The circle is complete within you.*

Let your story rest inside of you for a moment, moving around, opening up your heart.



Week 5 Writing Exercise



This week:

Lineage of Storytelling

Even if you did not directly experience it in this lifetime, your voice rides on the oral traditions carried by your community(ies) of origin. **You are part of a long song**, even if at times it seems that song has dissipated or lost its strength. The song is still there, it's just transforming. Part of that transformation is you coming into your own voice. You are carrying on the tradition of your own people in the here and now, affected by everything that has brought you to this place whether you're aware of it or not. Your voice is a culmination of your own experience as well as contributing to your community of origin as well as the bigger picture of how your community engages and contributes to the universal human voice.

****More for the Heart****

View Additional Heart Exercises
in the Classroom

- Staying with your Heart
(text)

When you come to terms with your own voice, your difference, your unique contribution then you can honestly and unabashedly come to the table prepared to accept that in another in true equality. **First there is one, then there is oneness.** Value yourself first, then you'll know how to value another. If you do not fully value your own voice, you cannot fully value another's. You will always have an unspoken aspect of yourself trying to come through and be heard.

1. Explore what oral and storytelling traditions your community(ies) of origin hold.

This can often show you the bigger picture and even your place in it.

When you turn toward your community(ies) of origin what kind of voice do you hear? What types of tales? Is it obvious how these may have affected you in this life? If not, how do you relate to them now as you bring your attention to them?

Open your mouth for your ancestors for a moment. Unlimit your voice. You may feel more recent or your very ancient ancestors have familiar voices and stories that feel like yours too. Their stories may easily flow through you. Notice any traditional tales, parables or folklore. *What wisdom lies in your traditions that are still meaningful and relevant today? What wisdom has been lost? What wisdom transformed, rediscovered?*

For myself, two of the tales I didn't grow up with, but as an adult have provided me with a deep resonance and complicated understanding of one of my communities of origin, are those of *La Llorona* and *La Malinche*, the crying woman and the betrayer. Through these tales I can sense how my life and my voice contribute to a strong Chicana presence in the here and now and continues the long song of Mesoamerican women. By seeing myself in these tales I can ride their strength and antiquity into deeper and deeper aspects of my own experience and feel the timelessness of my current experience.

2. Look at your childhood story again. Play with framing it within the storytelling tradition of your ancestors, recent or ancient.

Rewrite part or all of it to echo your tradition. *How does the story change or feel differently after you do this? How does it stay the same? Does your story make more sense when you see it within a larger context? How does being in touch with your storytelling traditions affect your voice today?*



Week 6 Writing Exercise



This week:

Self-Editing through Storytelling

Give yourself time to focus on each step. Paying attention to one aspect at a time gives you a more complex and rich perspective when you get to the end. Don't over think it. Let each element affect the other naturally, in an intuitive, imaginative way. Blur your thinking mind and listen to your voice from your artistic heart. Listen to your voice.

****More for the Heart****

View Additional Heart Exercises in the Classroom

- The importance of reading out loud & Self-editing through reading out loud (text)

1. **Read your story out loud as if you were talking to someone.** *Does it feel conversational? Do you feel natural? Are your word choices natural to you? You may find yourself naturally changing the way you say things as you read it. Jot down these notes on your manuscript. Don't make any changes yet.*
2. **Read your story out loud and listen to how the words sound together.** *What sort of sounds do you hear a lot of? Do the words flow one into another? Are there a lot of round sounds? Or sharp or shrill? Lots of la la la lo lo lo. Is there a rhythm to the sounds? Slower parts, faster? Dipping in and out of song sounds, language that reflects the emotional content, natural ways of current speech...notice the sound/song of your story.*
3. **Read your story out loud and imagine you are standing in the hallway listening to it.** *What catches your attention? What does not? Mark what parts of your story stand out to you on your manuscript with something flashy like a star or a big square.*
4. **Read your story out loud and follow the sequence of the story.** *Do things follow the way you want them to? Mark places that may seem questionable.*
5. **Now look at your manuscript.** *If you were going to tell a story about your story, what would it be? Pay attention to where you have stars to see the larger picture. Look for the flow of the story. It does not have to be linear. I look for bridges and paths between my stars. Then create a map on your story. I am very visual and drawing on my manuscript helps me see the bigger picture. Circle, draw lines, star things! See the bigger elements of your story.*
6. **Now look at your manuscript in terms of sound and rhythm.** *Check your notes and see if anything still feels true. You may want to reread your manuscript a few times using different options to check what feels right to you.*
7. **Check anything else that stands out in your notes and make what changes feel right.**
8. **Read your story out loud again.**
9. **Repeat this until it feels solid and then put it down for a while.** *Later, come back to it and reread it silently and out loud to see if you need to work on it some more.*