

Observation and Research Exercise

I place 30 objects on the front desk and ask the 20-25 students to come forward and choose one. Then, we write:

1. Describe your flower literally. Then return it to the front desk. When all flowers have been returned, exchange your description with a partner. Ask that partner to identify your flower based only on your written description. If they can, find out what helped them. If they can't, find out what details would have helped. Collect your flower once again and return to your desk.
2. Freewrite to the following prompts as I read them. If you get engaged in one, keep writing; you can come back to others later. Don't try to write a poem, try to evoke the flower in your hand in as much detail as you can.
 - Describe the flower's smell. Its color. Its texture. Its shape.
 - Take an inventory of the particularities—what makes this flower like no other?
 - Compare the flower to ten other things. What is it like, what does it evoke?
 - Contrast the flower to ten other things. What is it not like at all?
 - Tell the flower's secret. Make a wish upon the flower.
 - Make a creation myth for the flower, how did it come into being?
 - Make up three new uses for the flower.
 - Let the flower speak and listen to and note down what it says.
3. Draft a poem from these writings.

Use the research materials I pass out today as you revise the draft. Try to include new words, colors, ideas into your poem. Post this draft on the class discussion board by Friday noon.

Along with the subject of our class inventions—pecans or walnuts, camellias or shells (and if not used as a first-day lesson students can be asked to supply their own flower, fruit, etc.) I provide the initial research materials mentioned above (generally pages from a pictorial dictionary, web research, dictionary definitions, thesaurus or synonym finders that can be accessed in class) and encourage beginning poets to draw from these as an *illustration* of how primary and secondary research can work for them. (see Bishop 1999, 27-28 for another version of the assignment.)