

PAGE MIND

This exercise can be very helpful for accessing the subconscious connections between things on your mind, thus adding emotional power to your poetry.

Step One:

Be alone or at least far enough away from others to feel private. Use a blank sheet of paper, preferably not lined, but if lined ignore the linear boundaries on the page (and in your mind). Imagine the page as a visual representation of what's on your mind, your consciousness as it exists at this moment, and start drawing circles. The size of each circle corresponds to the amount of psychic energy you are aware of devoting to something. For instance, maybe you have an important interview coming up and you are thinking about it constantly. That circle would be large compared to the circle that represents the mildly upset stomach you have from drinking coffee that morning without cream (or perhaps not if stomach issues have been especially prominent in your brain lately). Be as honest as you can. Get every existing circle down on the page. Use another sheet of paper if necessary (not the back of the original). No circle is unimportant - your job is to get them all out on the page. Tuning in to your body helps because, as you know, we store emotions there as much, if not more than in our heads. Before you stop making circles, ask your legs what's on their mind, your shoulders, etc. Put a label inside each circle (or to the side of the circle if the circle is too small). Use short words or phrases to label them like "Interview," "Stomach ache," "Sister mad at me," etc.

Step Two:

On a new piece of blank paper, write one line of poetry for each of the circles. Place the lines anywhere you want on the page. There is no correct order, and there are no rules for how you generate the lines, although feel free to add structural limits, such as each line must start with a certain letter, or be in iambic pentameter, etc. (Here is where following Pam and Lidia's advice to focus on the physical might again be useful as a limit. Or perhaps the limit is to seek the "glimmer" that is trying to shine out of each circle.) Resist connecting any of the lines with others yet until you have generated one for each circle. It can be hard to hold back. This "page mind" process is very powerful - your subconscious will be raring to take over and reveal its connections at this point if only because it recognizes itself on the page. If you can't stop yourself from writing a poem at this step, no problem - just go for it and be grateful you have one burping up. Success!

Step Three:

Playfully look at the page of lines and let the connections percolate. Here you can employ games such as which two lines are most different, and how can one connect them? Can one then, perhaps, break them apart and write them into similarity? (Ala Lidia.) What does the smallest circle have to say to the largest? Are the larger circles possibly bullying the others? Or,

maybe the other way around? Listen with your heart to what is revelatory. A poem will reveal itself because our subconscious is always telling us a story about our moment to moment perceptions and feelings. Tune in to the story of this moment, this snapshot of your mind. Play, play, play until inspiration hits you and the play gets serious. Then write.

Craft tip: look to unused circle lines on your page for enriched clinchers to your poems.

Variation: As per Sam, maybe play with different geometric shapes instead of circles for each thing on your mind. This can add challenge and interest when imagining the connections between the things on your mind.

Have fun with Page Mind. I am always interested in reading poems generated in this way. Please email them to me at jtblossom808@gmail.com or post them in the comment section of my blog if you feel like it or on my Facebook page (jtblossom). Thanks!

Aloha,
John

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