

EXERCISE ONE: A warm-up writing exercise called Creative Creatures

There have been numerous articles appearing in the news of animals leaving their usual abodes during lockdown and taking up residence in towns and cities, for example, a herd of mountain goats wandered around Llandudno, eating garden hedges and sleeping in the local churchyard. Here are some pictures from around the world:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2020/apr/22/animals-roaming-streets-coronavirus-lockdown-photos>

Write a piece from a creature's point of view – animal, bird, insect, reptile, fish – during this strange time. What would it say? What changes does it notice? How would it change its behaviour in these new circumstances? What would it do that's different? What would it think about their environment now? Would it know what is happening? Think about the personality your creature might have, its opinions, thoughts, likes, dislikes, dreams, ambitions, pet hates.

Initially, this will be a piece of free-writing / free flowing writing for 6 minutes. Do not take your pen off the page, just keep going. If you get stuck, repeat the sentence you just wrote until something else comes. When the time is up, you will have some raw material to shape into a poem later.

A good resource for free-writing is a book called *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron. In it, she introduces the idea of writing like this every morning - she calls it 'morning pages'. Here's a link to Julia Cameron's morning pages and a short informative film about them:

<https://juliacameronlive.com/basic-tools/morning-pages/>

EXERCISE TWO: The theme for this writing exercise is DISSECTOLOGY or DOING JIGSAW PUZZLES

Sales of jigsaw puzzles have sky-rocketed during lockdown, comparable to the Great Depression of the 1930s. They are a cheap, long-lasting, recyclable form of entertainment, as well as providing excellent stimulation for brain and memory functions. Jigsaw manufacturers are now marketing jigsaw puzzles as 'screen savers' and part of the 'Anti-Screen Revolution' - they are a prime example of 'real play' and powerful tools to build 'digital resilience'.



Clockwise from left: John Spilsbury's "Europe divided into its kingdoms, etc." (1766); wooden jigsaw pieces cut by hand, a puzzle without a picture, the Guinness record holding 551,232 piece jigsaw by CYM Group, 3D jigsaw puzzle; "whimsy" piece in a wooden jigsaw puzzle.

John Spilsbury (1739 – 1769), a British cartographer and engraver, is credited as the inventor of the jigsaw puzzle. Spilsbury created such puzzles for educational purposes and called them “Dissected Maps”. He made his first puzzle in 1766 as an educational tool to teach geography. He affixed a world map to wood and carved each country out to create the first puzzle.

There is more information about the history, construction and variations of jigsaw puzzles in Wikipedia (which incidentally has a logo of an incomplete globe made up of jigsaw puzzle pieces - the missing pieces symbolizing the room to add new knowledge) here:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jigsaw_puzzle

Information about the health benefits of doing jigsaw puzzles can be found here:

<https://classifieds.usatoday.com/uncategorized/the-surprising-benefits-of-puzzle-solving-for-adults/>

I was very interested to discover the Benevolent Confraternity of Dissectologists (BCD), a club for followers of Jigsaw Puzzles based in the UK. It's open to all like-minded enthusiasts world-wide and more information can be found here: <https://www.thebcd.co.uk/>

The BCD chairman, David Shearer, has set up an accompanying website called The Jigasaurus which is a library/museum of jigsaw puzzles: <http://www.thejigasaurus.com/jigasaurus/main.php>

Make notes on the information that you find – your thoughts, feelings, sparked memories, anything you find interesting or unusual, anything that gives you the stirring of inspiration about the theme.

EXERCISE THREE: Writing Jigsaw Puzzle Poetry

Your task is to write a poem inspired by the theme of Jigsaw Puzzles. You may use any of the aforementioned resources as inspiration. Here are some further thought guides and suggestions:

Consider why writing poetry is similar to doing a jigsaw puzzle - you think about each piece of a poem as you put it together; fit words together to create a whole poem; think about the shape and structure of the poem; build the poem up; analyze each piece; play around with words until it all fits together properly; a poem is made up of interlocking and connecting parts...

Former US Poet Laureate Rita Dove described her writing process as “similar to assembling a jigsaw puzzle.”

Read the following poems:

'Jigsaw Of Life' by Goldfinch60:

<https://mypoeticside.com/show-poem-80043>

(Comment from the author: *I bought a jigsaw puzzle for my wife hoping it might help her in coming to terms with her dementia - it does keep her more occupied, some of the more meaningless things that she gets involved in. These words came to mind*)

'Sam's Poem For Jigsaw Puzzles' by Sam Robinson

<https://hope1032.com.au/stories/station-news/2020/surviving-isolation-through-poetry-who-knew-a-man-could-love-jigsaw-puzzles-this-much/>

(scroll down to see it and hear him recite it on Hope Radio)

Writing a poem inspired by jigsaw puzzles may lend itself to a particular style and form, for example, the Terza Rima - literally meaning 'three rhymes' and, in its most basic form, comprising a series of

three-line stanzas with an *aba, bcb, cdc, ded* etc rhyme scheme. This sets up a chain of interlocking sounds throughout the poem.

The poem, 'Acquainted With The Night' by Robert Frost is an example of a terza rima sonnet – 4 three-line stanzas followed by a couplet at the end, *aba, bcb, cdc, ded, ee*. More information about writing a Terza Rima poem and the text of Robert Frost's poem can be found here:

<https://classicalpoets.org/2017/01/05/how-to-write-a-terza-rima-with-examples/>

You may wish to write a personification poem from the point of view of a jigsaw or puzzle piece. Write your poem imagining the object is 'alive' and has the same attributes as a human being. What would it say? Think about the function of the object, where it is situated, what it sees, smells, hears, touches etc. What does it think about/dream about? What are its memories? Ambitions?

Write a poem inspired by the theme that evokes a personal memory for you. What are the 'interlocking' pieces or puzzling moments in your life? / What connects to make up 'the bigger picture' for you?

Imagine you are putting together a jigsaw puzzle but you have no idea what the finished picture will be. What will appear as you put the pieces together? Can this be a metaphor for something else in your life?

Have a go at writing your Jigsaw Puzzle poem using a structured poetic form, for example, rhyming couplets, a terza rima or terza rima sonnet

And, of course, you can write a poem about the theme in your own way and your own style!

Are you pleased with your poems? If you want to share one of your poems from this workshop, I'm sure the BCD would be very pleased to receive Jigsaw Puzzle poems for their newsletter! <https://www.thebcd.co.uk/>

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