

EXERCISE ONE: A warm-up writing exercise called Home Alive

This is an exercise in personification. Imagine your abode is speaking to you during lockdown. What would it say? Does it like you being there / living in it? Your choice of decoration? How you live? Does it compare you to past residents who have lived there before you? Think about its opinions, thoughts, likes, dislikes, dreams, ambitions, pet hates. Now write a monologue from the point of view of your home as it addresses you directly.

You might like to listen to the podcast *Everything Is Alive* featuring interviews with inanimate objects eg: Louis, the Can of Cola; Maeve the Lamppost. "...hilarious – and strangely moving." (The Guardian) <https://www.everythingisalive.com/>

You may wish to write your monologue in the form of a poem

EXERCISE TWO: The theme for this writing exercise is BREAD

There has been a marked shortage of flour and yeast in the shops during lockdown as people embrace the art of baking their own bread! Bread is one of the oldest prepared foods – evidence from 30,000 years ago in Europe and Australia shows primitive forms of bread-making. Here are some pictures to get you in the mood for writing about this subject:

Clockwise from top: A 15th century North Italian bread shop; steps to make unleavened tortillas; baking bread in East Timor; a dough trough used for leavening bread located in Aberdour Castle in Scotland; starter yeast (the 'mother'); various loaves of bread made by my friend, Paul Baker (aptly named!)



Think about the significance of bread – its religious, social, political and cultural meanings and associations.

*Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough,
A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse — and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness —
And Wilderness is Paradise enow.*

Omar Khayyam from 'The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam'

<https://www.poetry-chaikhana.com/blog/2011/04/11/omar-khayyam-here-with-a-loaf-of-bread-beneath-the-bough-2/>

Think about the words and phrases we use concerning bread – our daily bread; the staff of life; know which side one's bread is buttered; the best thing since sliced bread; take the bread out of someone's mouth; earn your bread and butter; bread basket (stomach); living on the breadline; to break bread with someone; being the bread-winner; use your loaf of bread ('head' in Cockney Rhyming Slang). The word 'companion' comes from Latin *com* 'with' + *panis* 'bread'. Medieval bakers used ale barm, the yeast left over from the brewing process, to bake sweet-tasting bread. The leavening agent was called 'barm' and its unpredictability gives us the word 'barmy'.

Think about the words we use when making dough and baking bread – proving, kneading, resting, stretching, folding, feeding the mother... Here's an article that appeared in the March edition of *Ledbury Focus* magazine about the trials and tribulations of keeping a sourdough starter by Geraldine Woods-Humphrey (scroll through and find it on P.51):

https://issuu.com/grapevinepublications/docs/ledbury_focus_march_2020_v3

Now read the following poems from the Bread Poetry project based in Bristol. Follow this link and scroll down to read them:

<https://www.lukejerram.com/breadpoetry/>

'The Battle To Be A Breadwinner' by Lizzy Lawrence (She says: *My poem is about the pressures of being able to provide and survive as a young, single mother. Although I have come through the other side now, my poem addresses the hard work it took to get there and the sacrifices a teacher makes at the expense of their own children and well-being. I wanted to highlight these issues and dispel myths about teenage mums and people on benefits. The title uses a metaphor for providing – as well as linking to the loaf of bread – it also symbolises a difficult time for me when I couldn't afford food.*)

'Blue Hour' by Cheryl Pearson (She says: *I am interested in exploring different kinds of creativity, and am particularly fascinated by practical creativity such as baking and knitting. A lot of my poems are concerned with where we come from and what we pass on, not just genetically but practically – in this case, a recipe, a craft. The poem is thirteen lines long to represent the baker's dozen.*)

EXERCISE THREE: Writing Bread Poetry

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

Write a personification poem from the point of view of a loaf of bread / a breadcrumb / the 'mother' starter yeast etc. 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? What are its ambitions?

Write a poem inspired by the theme that evokes a personal memory for you, for example, Ronnie Corbett's father was a baker on a night shift. Ronnie's memories can be read here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2007/nov/24/foodanddrink.baking11>

Write an ode (love poem) to bread. Make it as OTT as you like!

Write a poem in the style and form of one of the example poems. Think about the form of the poem and how it fits with what the poem is saying, for example, Cheryl Pearson wrote her poem 'Blue Hour' in 13 lines (6 couplets + 1 line) to reflect the baker's dozen. Would you like to have a go at doing that with your poem? Does it suit your poem to have verses? Does it work better using rhyme schemes or in free verse? Think about 'word music' and the flow of the poem.

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

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