

**LEDBURY POETRY FESTIVAL COMMUNITY PROGRAMME
SEGMENTS POETRY WORKSHOP
OCTOBER 2020 : INDOOR NATURE**

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EXERCISE ONE: Warm-up writing exercise – Mystery Objects!

Read *The Guardian* article about mystery objects and the British Science Museum

here: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/jul/19/science-museum-asks-public-to-help-identify-mystery-items>

Look at these two mystery objects from their collection of Mystery Objects. I have attached images of them but you can also find them here if you scroll down:

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/gallery/2020/jul/19/mystery-objects-from-the-science-museum-in-pictures>



Item 1 (the horizontal item): This item is part of Sir Henry Wellcome's museum collection. Its purpose is unknown. It was made between 1750-1850 using steel and wood.

Item 2 (the vertical item): Very little is known about this device.



Pick one and write an article about it for a museum brochure. Decide what you think the object might be, describe it, what it was used for, who used it, its origins, who made it, where it was found, has it a colourful history, any stories attached to it, etc...

For further information, the Science Museum blog gives links to the collection and what happens with objects that aren't identified: <https://www.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/blog/solving-mysteries-in-the-collection/>

EXERCISE TWO: The theme for this exercise is INDOOR NATURE

Let's start with houseplants. Sales of houseplants have boomed during lockdown. Research suggests foliage can boost mental, emotional and physical health. Poetry holds similar powers, and may be part of the reason poetry and nature have always forged a connection.

The physical changes we see in plants can mirror our own personal growth and transformations. Consider "roots" and how we nourish or neglect them. How we flourish and regenerate, wilt, renew ourselves.

One of the many theories behind the recent houseplant boom is that it represents an attempt for humans to reconnect with nature in the midst of an increasingly corporate, technology-driven way of life.

Look at the following poems. Both poems and commentary can be found here:

<https://www.readpoetry.com/4-poems-for-plant-lovers/>

Bringing In The House-plants by Tony Connor (English poet and playwright born in Manchester in 1930. This poem, written in 1980, precedes the current houseplant craze, yet captures much of its meaning and momentum. Connor illustrates how caring for plant companions awakens our most nurturing instincts, tapping into an innate ability to love)

Peace Lilies by Cathy Smith Bowers (American poet. Our cultural tendency to give plants and flowers as shows of sympathy and as housewarming gifts reveals their ability to comfort us, as well as provide a homey presence in new, unsettling situations. Bowers sees plants as a reminder of grief, but also a soothing, physical manifestation of connections and relationships that are never truly lost)

Now let's broaden the theme. Consider objects that you have brought into your home from outdoors. This does not include food items. For example, do you have a shell in your house? Feathers? Decorative stones/pebbles? Artworks/ornaments made from outdoor natural materials? Any other items of outdoor nature that you have brought into your home? The items almost become exhibits or part of the collection in your own 'museum-home'. Here are pictures of items I have in my home: a key-ring containing a bug, seeds, a sprig of heather given to me by a friend while walking in Scotland many years ago, a shell from New Zealand, a fossil, darts with feathers from birds of prey, a picture made of Morphos Butterfly wings.



Look at this poem: *Boy At The Window* by Richard Wilbur (1921-2017; an American poet and literary translator. The poem is based on personification and unexpected points of view (the snowman's) revealing an unsuspected truth. The poem follows an abba bcbcb abba bcbcb rhyme pattern and has ten syllables per line). The poem can be found here if you scroll down, though I urge you to read the poem *Snow* by Louis MacNeice and the commentary too:

<http://thestoneandthestar.blogspot.com/2011/11/louis-macneices-snow-poem-about-being.html>

EXERCISE THREE: Indoor Nature Poetry

Write a poem inspired by the items shown here, items you may have and/or theme. Here are some suggestions for ways in to writing your poem:

Write a personification poem from the point of view of the object. 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? Memories? How different is its life now compared to its life outdoors? Does it yearn for the outdoors?

Write a poem inspired by the theme that evokes a personal memory for you. How did you come by the object? What is its significance to you? What do you like about it? Is there a story about why it ended up in its present form and/or in your house?

Write an ode to your object – a poem in praise of your object; a thank-you poem – taking into account its beauty as a natural object that would have existed outdoors perhaps in a different form,

its former natural state, its function now, how it makes you feel. Praise small details about what it looks like, feels like, sounds like, smells like. Here's a quote about houseplants from gardening author Patricia R. Barrett: *'Connection with... potted plants can become windows to the inner life. The simple act of stopping and looking at the beauty around us can be prayer.'*

Maybe use a poetic form from the example poems, eg: personification (*Boy At The Window / Peace Lilies*) rhyme and internal rhymes (all three poems), repeated structures and patterns (all three poems) experimental form (*Peace Lilies*), conversational style and tone (*Bringing In The House-Plants*)

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

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