

Voices of Change

A Poetry Practicum in 7 Parts
Hosted by kwe

Workshop Description

To write poetry is to peer into the myriad forms and expressions of the human experience; it is a journey of discovery that can leave us transformed in powerful ways, as unsuspected connections between self (i.e., the world of personal experience) and the varied stories, histories, expressions and philosophies of the human family are revealed. As such, poetry constitutes a true path of self-discovery not solely intended to foster critical thinking and creativity, but also to help realize the importance and value of pondering the perennial question: *what does it mean to be human?*

In this workshop, we will observe the notions of self, identity and becoming, as related to our own creative expression. We will complement our creative praxis with the intermittent study of various interdisciplinary works (plays, novels, films, and music). During the workshop, you will keep a journal of your insights, questions and thought pieces. Along with working on your own writing, weekly reflections will be integrated in online discussions on the social network for media learning – <http://wordsoundlife.ning.com>

Basic principles

- That revolution is the art of freedom
- That the goal of education must include the ability to understand the connections between what at first may seem unrelated disciplines and practices
- That the connected study of music, poetry and philosophy can enable one to better appreciate the varied forms of expression of the human experience
- That a creative voice, crafted in the poetics of self-awareness can rise as a genuine and powerful vehicle for change in the world
- That philosophy is more in the questions one poses than in the answers one provides; as such philosophy teaches us to see and think with discernment



Schedule

1 – Introduction

2 – Caves, Shadows and Light

“Seeing the light” is a common philosophical metaphor in many cultures and religions. In the *Allegory of the Cave*, Socrates describes ordinary men and women as prisoners in a cave, shackled in the shadows of illusion, forever blinded to the light of reality; while the philosopher is depicted as the prisoner who, freed from the shackles of ignorance, is allowed to ascend out of the cave. Can the poet, as one who questions and composes reality, be considered a counterpart to the philosopher on the path towards greater light?

Readings:

Plato, *Allegory of the Cave*
Hansberry, *Raisin in the Sun*
Film – *Slam*

3 – The Journey Inward

The true profession of man is to find his way to himself. To find self is to realize that of the vastness of the world, of the numerous groupings of people along various lines, race, color, creed, gender, belief, there exists no other abode but in oneself. The path of spiritual becoming is a poetic one that takes its cue and vitality from the heart of its travelers. In this section, we will share and explore conceptions of self and identity, as reflected in our own writing, in an effort to uncover the salient ideological features (race, gender, culture, politics) that most fervently inform our voice – the image of our self.

Readings:

Campbell, *The Journey Inward*
Hesse, *Siddhartha*
Poems written by you

4 – A Divine Song

When practiced as a medium for self-awareness and transformation, poetry becomes an effective tool to reclaim self from the ideological forces that widely misrepresent it. Of the sacred books of the Hindus, the Bhagavad Gita is the most widely read and probably the most important text for the understanding of Eastern mysticism. It is actually an episode in India's great epic, the Mahabharata, whose main story involves a war between two branches of a royal family. However, the essence of the Gita is not concerned with the respective merits of war and peace, but with the deepest aspects of man and God. What perspective, if any, does a reflection on such ancient teachings bear on your conception of self and identity?

Readings:

Miller, *Bhagavad Gita*
Film - *Vanaprastha*

5 – The Music of Life

In this unit we discuss the role and impact of music in our lives. To prepare for this discussion, please take some time to reflect on the questions below in your class journal. Also, bring in a piece of music (with lyrics) that you would like us to discuss in relation to our themes of self/identity and their related categories (race, gender, class, culture, religion).

- * How does music help you understand or express yourself?
- * How do you understand music in terms of its *physical, psychological* and *spiritual* aspects?
- * In your opinion, what reflection does the music of today give of our views, values and beliefs?

Readings:

Khan, *Mysticism of sound and music* (excerpts)

Assagioli, *Music as cause of disease and healing agent*

Music by KRS-ONE, Mos Def, Last Poets, Nina Simone, Bob Marley, Sizzla and more

6 – Voices of Change

By the use of a powerful and enchanting imagery, the poems of Kofi Anyidoho venture beyond the confines of static political commentary into a deeply metaphoric realm. Anyidoho has gone on to produce and perfect a performance mode that is returning written African poetry to its dramatic oral roots. In her work, Sonia Sanchez blends a figurative, autobiographical mode of speech with a fervent political tone to create a profound statement of hope and upliftment. Miguel Pinero's streetwise urban poetry served as a prelude to rap and hip-hop, and influenced the subsequent evolution of the Nuyorican Poet's Café, which he helped co-found. How did these great poets create such depth and power through words? What can their mode of expression teach us about poetic style and power? How can we harness these qualities in ourselves and become more critical voices of change in the lives of our respective communities?

Readings:

Sanchez, *Blues Book for Blue Black Magical Women*

Anyidoho, *A Harvest of our dreams*

Film - *Pinero*

7 – Conclusion

Instructor Bio

kwe left his home country of Cameroon to study at the *Ecole Saint-Martin de France*, a boarding school for boys, where he wrote his first poem in French after earning his Baccalaureat in 1996. A teacher and musician with a Masters in Humanities from the University of Chicago, he has written over 100 works of music or spoken word poetry and traveled extensively across the continental United States to conduct readings, attend conferences, teach or perform. *Dirges of Becoming* is his first collection of poetry that retraces the joys and perils of a man's 21-year journey from his African homeland.