

*Nemerov's Door: Essays*  
**Robert Wrigley**  
 Writing Prompts and Activities

**Target Audience:** High school, College, and Beyond

The following writing prompts are written primarily as individual activities however, they may be adapted for group work or group discussion. Additionally, each writing prompt may be adapted for an in-class lesson (an example follows).

1. Consider “Of Failures and Shadows,” “Who Listens But Does Not Speak,” “The Gift,” and/or “The Music of Sense.” In these essays, Wrigley discusses or analyzes another poet’s poems. Making note of how Wrigley addresses poetics, sound, sense, and other moves, write your own analysis or discussion of a poem of your choice. Be sure to make clear to your audience that you are presenting your own interpretation of the poem.

“The Weight of Arrival”

1. In “The Weight of Arrival,” Wrigley identifies a dichotomy between an “idea” and “inspiration.” What is the difference between an idea and inspiration according to Wrigley? According to your own experience? Where do you find your own ideas or inspiration?

“Seeing Arrowhead, Seeing Flint”

1. How does the journey and search for arrowheads in “Seeing Arrowhead, Seeing Flint” reflect the writing process, specifically of poetry?
2. Wrigley writes of a journey where he finally discovers an arrowhead of his own and then reflects on what he’s learned from this journey and discovery. Compose your own essay that follows a similar structure: a journey; an object found; a message or lesson you learned and now wish to share with your audience.

“Under My Skin”

1. How does Wrigley use character development in “Under My Skin”? How does he use description (in particular: Frank Sinatra, Wrigley’s own father, Uncle Bob, himself)?
2. Identify places where Wrigley describes the times he’s living in at different points in the essay. What descriptors does he use? How do these descriptors epitomize the times? Where are these descriptions placed throughout the essay? (E.g. “Less than two hundred miles south the white civic leaders of Memphis are worried about the ‘threat’ of integration. It will be a couple of years yet until the 1964 Civil Rights Act is passed into law, and a few more after that until the Gulf of Tonkin incident, which will be used to justify sending ground troops to Vietnam” (Wrigley, 37).)
3. What might you identify as details that Wrigley has researched in this essay? (Think about how he references Sinatra, JFK, current events at the time of the essay, as well as

those things that he experienced as a member of his family). Use research as a starting point for an essay or poem.

4. Use one person (or a small group of people) to follow throughout your life and compose an essay that describes how that person (or group) brought about change in your life (pay particular attention to elements of characterization).

#### “Of Failure and Shadows”

1. One message in “Of Failure and Shadows” is that writing is a way to share stories or messages that you didn’t get to share at the time.
  - a. Write an analysis of a poem to the poet who wrote it. Why is this poem good or powerful? What or how does the poem carry meaning for you?
  - b. Write an essay or poem to share a message with someone that you didn’t get a chance to share.

#### “Nemerov’s Door”

1. In “Nemerov’s Door,” notice both the universality and specificity of writing in the second person (Wrigley at once evokes a general experience as well as his own specific experience). Write an essay or poem using the second person. (Pay particular attention to the ways that you might address a general audience with the specificity of your own experiences).

*Nemerov's Door: Essays*

**Robert Wrigley**

Lesson Plan: Writing about poetry

**Target Audience:** High school, College, and Beyond

**Materials:** *Nemerov's Door: Essays* by Robert Wrigley; pen or pencil; paper; white board and markers (or some way to create a group list)

**Time:** 45 mins (adaptations for time constraints are indicated below)

Overview

This lesson focuses on poetry analysis. Students will consider the essays “Of Failures and Shadows,” “Who Listens But Does Not Speak,” “The Gift,” and/or “The Music of Sense” in *Nemerov's Door* in order to examine how a writer writes about writing, both his own and others’. Students will then begin to construct their own analysis of a poem (or some other genre). By asking students to engage in small group work, instructors might encourage students to share observations and engage in discussion about poetry and writing, opening up possibilities for ways that students might approach their own writing.

Before the Lesson

Before class, students should read the essay(s) “Of Failures and Shadows,” “Who Listens But Does Not Speak,” “The Gift,” and/or “The Music of Sense” in *Nemerov's Door*. Ask students to pay attention as they read and make note of the way that Wrigley writes about other poets’ poems. (If you have a longer class period or are not afforded time to read the essays before class, you may adapt this activity to focus on one of these essays and/or read it during the meeting time.)

In-Class Activity

1. Divide students into small groups of three or four. Assign each group a different essay. Ask students to discuss how Wrigley writes about and analyzes other poets’ poems. Students should be able to point to specific passages and share with the class.
2. Still in small groups, ask students to make a list of how Wrigley address different poetic elements in the poems he analyzes, such as: sound, sense, delivery, structure, rhyme, rhythm, etc. Students should be able to point to specific passages and share with the class.
3. Come back together as a class. Students share their observations. Instructor makes a list on the board of different elements and observations from student input.
4. These essays by Robert Wrigley are not necessarily academic analyses of poetry and combine Wrigley’s experience as a poet and a teacher, and moments from his own life. He manages to show the readers not only elements of the poems and his own interpretation of them, but how they have some impact on his own life as a poet. Again,

in small groups, ask students to discuss the ways that Wrigley combines analysis with personal narrative. Students should be able to point to specific passages and share with the class.

5. Come back together as a class and ask students to share their observations. Provide students with the prompt: write your own analysis or discussion of a poem of your choice. Be sure to make clear to your audience that you are presenting your own interpretation of the poem. (Alternatively, the instructor may have a poem they wish to assign for students to analyze.)
6. Students can begin by identifying a poem (or another piece of writing, an essay or short story, or even a song). For the remainder of the class meeting, students work independently or in their small groups to begin brainstorming how they want to respond to the prompt.
7. Students take the prompt home to compose the bulk of their essay. This might be a homework assignment for one night, or it might be a larger essay assignment where students are given a week or two to compose their essay and turn it in. If the class meeting time is much longer, students might also write their essay in class.