

Distilling Language

Age Group: high school, undergraduate, graduate, community audience

Materials: *Inventory Of Doubts*. Landon Godfrey, electronic device for writing

Time: 60 - 90 mins

Medium: in person

Lesson Overview: through reading, discussion and self examination, this lesson offers an opportunity for students to learn the tool of distillation, and engage with the empowering process of “letting go” of control of the line.

Reading #1

Ice Bucket 34 pg - Inventory 37 pg

Discussion #1

What is the effect of the prose poem form on these poems? How was the title and content in conversation with each? Describe the different approaches the poems use.

Activity #1

Gather in small groups of 3-4 as a group select two new letters (Not E or F) and come up with as many things as possible that begin with said letter. Try to think of a variety of different objects, places, people etc.

When complete come back as a whole group to share your answers.

Activity #2

On your own select one of the words mentioned in activity #1 and write down as many details as possible about the word... describe it, imagine its thinking, what does it see? Etc.

Writing #1

Using your word write a 10 line prose poem using details from activity #2, title the poem the word you selected. For this prose poem do not break the line until your computer naturally does it.

Discussion #2

Describe the poem you wrote. What was the experience of giving the control of the line over to the word processor? What are the most vital details you wrote about your word? What is the speaker? What is their vantage point?

Reading #2

Stain and Stamp 64 pg. - 65 pg.

Discussion #3

How are these poems in conversation with their title? Are they describing the object? Who is the speaker? What is mentioned about the object? Is there anything left out of the poem that you would include?

Writing #2

Using your list from activity #2 and the same title, write the same poem in three lines. What important details will you include? What is your approach? What needs to be said?

Reading #3

Ceiling 10 pg., Suitcase 63 pg. Test 72.

Discussion #3

How are these poems able to capture such depth in a short amount of language? How are these poems using the white space and title to do the work of creating context?

Writing #3

Write the same poem using activity #2 in 1-2 lines. Consider how to use the space of the page, what word the title already does in the poem etc.

End discussion

Describe the process of distilling down the poem from 10 lines to 1-2? What did you change? What did you keep the same? How did you go about making these changes? Describe your approach to the writing process?