

Exercise 3: Make a List!

This exercise is adapted from a poet named Sheila Bender, with the original featured in her book *Writing Personal Poetry* (Writers Digest Books; First Edition. March 1, 1999). The exercise is intended for first-year poetry students and is designed as a brainstorming for their first poem.

Prior to class, students are asked to take 10-15 minutes and make a list of 10 interesting things they encountered prior to last class. These observations can be anything, from objects in their immediate surroundings, to interesting interactions with other people or animals, to content they encountered in various media, et. cetera. Students are to bring this list to class.

The class is divided into pairs and asked to write a narrative that incorporates as many of the ten items as they can, with an emphasis on creating unexpected associations and thoughts, helping each other do so. They are given 20-30 minutes and then asked to briefly share their list and narrative with the class, soliciting suggestions. The result of the exercise are then the subject for the students' first poem, which is a personal narrative reinforced through concrete imagery.

I have used this exercise in both seated and online classes and the results have been great. Students are often surprised at the ease with which they can create unexpected associations using this exercise, and how they can formulate an interesting narrative from even the most ordinary of components.