

Write to the Heart of Motherhood
connecting to our true voice in the middle of our messy lives

Week 4. 'WHAT and HOW'



1) Assignment + Artistic Prompts

2) A Technique to Practice

3) Methods for the Mother-Writer

Hello, wonder Mama :)

Welcome to your *What and How* toolkit for week four! I wish you tenderness and tenacity as you set forth on your unique adventure of experimentation and play, and a warm reminder of this week's theme: **Playing and Working**. I hope you enjoy exploring and clarifying these realms of your creative practice, alone and together. Enjoy!

1) ASSIGNMENT + ARTISTIC PROMPTS:

Your assignment this week is called "YES, AND." In whatever form and length of writing you desire, I invite you to *play*, through the following exercise:

- Choose any ordinary object nearby and write a couple true things about it. "Orion's ball is bulbous and green."
- Build from there by adding imaginative leaps beginning with "Yes, and..." Each sentence, or cluster of sentences, affirms the last, but then goes wherever your

imagination desires. Follow delight...! The building blocks can be true or “made-up,” they can follow logically, or be stream of consciousness. For example, “Orion’s ball is bulbous and green. Yes, and... today we’ll follow the sun across the sky, letting it lead, throwing away phones and screens. Yes, and... tomorrow we’ll wake up and our screens will all have dissolved into a restorative syrup to feed the earth, and begin to heal her — imagine if we tended the ground as we tend our devices, just staring at the soil and what’s sprouting there for hours throughout the day. Yes, and... everything dies, though. Everything dies, eventually, right?” And on and on... just winding your way through whatever ordinary or absurd perspectives arise. Let yourself be surprised as you go!

“Yes, and...” is an improv theater game that is useful in the act of improvisation and also the building phase of any creative process because it only affirms and creates momentum — editing can happen later. Really let yourself go for the ride of simply saying yes to whatever idea has come up in you and wherever it leads. And if you like this exercise, try it out loud with someone you love — about anything. It’s really fun with kids, to make up wild, outlandish stories. Enjoy!

Additional Artistic Prompts:

You may wish to explore these writing prompts within your “yes, and” exercise, or as separate inquiries:

- 1) Make a list of “25 things I’m filling myself with”
- 2) Make a list of “25 things I’m emptying from myself”
- 3) Write an “opposite day” poem full of things that are not true
- 4) Choose someone you are inspired by, alive now or a figure from the past, and write an imagined interview with them, where you embody and speak as both the interviewer and the interviewee.

- 5) Write a poem that never gets to the point. Write a poem that fails at whatever you think a poem should do or be.
- 6) Pick a word that can be both a verb and a noun, i.e. “blossom” and write a poem or paragraph in which you use that word as many times as you possibly can.

2) A TECHNIQUE TO PRACTICE:

Our technical prompts will always be relatively simple and fun to engage. You can practice them on their own, like practicing scales on the piano, simply to develop the skill, or you can include it as a cue and prompt within whatever writing you are exploring.

This week’s technique is *theme and variation*.

Theme and variation is just what it sounds like: you choose a theme — an idea, sound, word, sentence, or phrase — that you will repeat and come back to over and over. Every time to repeat the theme, there will be a slight variation, whether its context — the language, sounds, and ideas surrounding it — or a slight change to the theme itself. Theme and variation, and the use of repetition in general, is a device to subtly establish a sense of intimacy with readers, as it imitates life — it creates a pattern of touching on something enduring (the theme) within the context of impermanence and change (variation).

There is a poetic form called villanelle, which has theme and variation built in. Here’s an example, to get a sense of the feel of repetition within changing context.

THE WAKING

– Theodore Roethke

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?

I hear my being dance from ear to ear.

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?

God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,

And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?

The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great Nature has another thing to do

To you and me; so take the lively air,

And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.

What falls away is always. And is near.

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

I learn by going where I have to go.

3) METHODS FOR THE MOTHER-WRITER:

These are sneaky tricks for connecting to your writing in the middle of your mothering, which I've discovered work for me, and I hope might work for you!

- 1) Put away your computer or your pen and paper, and put on your walking shoes.
Grab your phone or some kind of recording device. Grab some water and maybe

strap on your baby (if you've got one, haha!) or put him or her in the stroller. Get outside. Get in motion. Give yourself some time to just walk, breathe, and look around. Let your body and surroundings speak to you. If and when language starts to form, even just in little bits, speak it into your recording device and then let it go and come back to your immediate environment. Feel the rhythm of your feet hitting the ground and your body getting warm through movement. Keep looking, listening, speaking/recording, and letting go. Later, when you get home, transcribe the pieces of language you cultivated, and either play with weaving them into a thing, or save them for later when you're looking for something to add to another thing you're working on, to spice it up with fresh imagery.

- 1) Same setup – no computer or pen and paper, but have a recording device nearby. Get horizontal — lay down on your back and arrange your legs however feels good to you — extended out long on the ground, or bent with knees knocked in resting against each other, or whatever you like. Take a few deep breaths and literally just stare at the ceiling. Daydream. Chill out. Let your mind wander. Elizabeth Gilbert says this is a mandatory part of her creative process. There is something about being horizontal that allows a softer way in. I love doing “yes, and...” in this position with my creative partner in performance work, held by the ground, with a sense of looking to the vastness of the sky. Take your time, and if/when ideas or language come, don't get up, just record them into your device, and keep resting, daydreaming, and listening. Enjoy!