

# Creative Writing Workshop Activities

by Laurel Nakanishi

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*Welcome to National Water Dance 2020! We are delighted that you are a part of this nation-wide, site specific arts event. In order to widen the conversation, we will be offering creative writing workshops in schools, colleges, and community centers across the country. Please feel free to use this lesson plan to engage your community with National Water Dance.*

## **Materials**

White Board or Poster Paper

Dry-erase Pens or Markers

Lined Paper

Pencils

For optional Memory Scavenger Hunt game: list of questions projected on board or printed for each group

For optional social media sharing: cellphone with camera (and social media account)

## **Procedure**

Begin by introducing yourself and National Water Dance. Describe the nature of this workshop: an open time to explore writing, creativity, and the things of this world that bring you delight. The ultimate goal of this workshop (and of National Water Dance) is to forge a deep and abiding love for the Earth, and from this place of love and connection, take action in our various communities.

## Activity 1: Building the Beloved Community

If your group is able, stand in a circle and hold hands. Describe the intention of this circle: to introduce ourselves to each other, ourselves to the land, and the land to us. Begin by saying something about the land that you stand on. What landforms or waterways surround you? What was this place called in the past/what is it called now? What weather moves through this place? Etc.

Now, ask participants to introduce themselves to the land and each other by sharing their three names: their given name, the place on this land that they call home, and the name of someone they are bringing with them today (that someone who is here in spirit). Listen carefully as each person shares.

After everyone has shared, thank them. And then ask the participants to close their eyes and share three breaths together (in unison). It may be helpful to count with each deep inhale.

## Activity 2: Looking Deeply

*Depending on the age of your participants, choose between the following activities:*

### **Elementary and Middle School: Three Changes**

In this game, a participant must spot the three changes that another participant has made to their appearance. Begin by choosing one participant as an example. Ask this person to come forward and look carefully at how you are dressed today. Encourage them to pay close attention and notice all of the details of your hair, jewelry, footwear, etc. Then, send this person to the back of the room and have them close their eyes. Change three things about your appearance (for example, you could take off your glasses, untie a shoe, tuck in your shirt, etc.). When you are ready, invite the participant back. They must identify the three changes. Repeat with other participants as the “Changer” and the “Guesser.” As you play, emphasize the importance of paying attention and noticing details about the world around you.

### **High School and College: Listening**

In this game, participants pay attention to sound. Distribute pieces of scrap paper and pencils. Instruct participants to listen closely to the sounds in the room (or outside) for a full 2 minutes. After listening, ask participants to write down all of the sounds that they heard. Next, break students into small groups of three and have them share their sounds. Ask groups to write checkmarks next to the sounds that they all heard, and circle the sounds that were unique. Ask groups to identify the most interesting sound that they heard and share it with the large group.

## Any Age: Memory Scavenger Hunt

In this game, participants travel through their memory to complete the “scavenger hunt.” In groups of three or four, participants take turns answering questions and noting down their answers (each person will answer 3-4 questions). Once they have finished the questions, groups will use markers and poster paper (or a whiteboard) to make a picture of the places they traveled to in the discussion (think treasure map).

1. What is one smell that you remember from your childhood?
2. Who told stories in your family?
3. Did you have a secret hiding place? Where was it?
4. What is your favorite kind of weather and how does it make you feel when you're in it?
5. What do you see outside your window at home?
6. What is one sound that you remember from your childhood?
7. Where do you feel most safe?
8. When is the last time that you saw something and thought, “That is my favorite color”?
9. Where is the first place that you remember traveling?
10. What is one food that brings back a specific memory?
11. Where do you most enjoy walking?
12. What brings you delight?

## Activity 3: Circle of Expression

On a whiteboard or large piece of paper, make a word wall. As a group, brainstorm words that answer the question: “What brings you delight?” After filling the paper/board, clear the room of desks and tables (or go outside) and make a circle. Ask participants to be aware of those around them and take care not to bump them. Explain the rules of “Circle of Expression”: There are two positions in this game, “Off” and “On.” When the group is in “Off,” your hands are at your sides and your eyes are focused on the ground. When the group is in “On,” you will turn and take a frozen shape based on one word. This shape should be completely still. Please have both feet on the ground and do not lay down on the ground. Do an example with one participant: “When you hear the word ‘on,’ turn and freeze in a shape that shows *sunshine*... On! ... And off!”

Choose active and interesting words from the Word Wall. When students are frozen in “On,” walk around the inside of the circle and generally state the kinds of shapes and expressions you see. Don't make people hold the shapes for too long! If a word is particularly interesting you can ask participants to make a new frozen shape based off of that same word, “Think of another way to show ---”

## Activity 4: Writing Delights

Now it is time to jump into writing. Participants will write monostich poems (a poem that only has one line!) about delights that they encounter in their everyday life. Begin by discussing all of the ways that the earth cares for us. You may talk about the trees that produce the oxygen we breathe or the sun's warmth. Ask participants, "How does the earth care for you? What sorts of things support your life?"

Next, ask participants to think about one thing in the world that brings them delight. After allowing some time for thought, ask participants to share their delights. Choose one participant's delight as an example. Write the delight on the board, and then brainstorm some more details to add to the line of poetry. For example, many people start with short items: "The sun." Or "Chocolate chip cookies." Encourage the group to think of details and add them into the line on the board. Ask participants to think of adjectives to describe the moment and verbs that will make the line active. For example: "Wow! The fluorescent yellow sun beams its light down to the ground and makes the plants all grow." Point out that this is a monostich poem. Define monostich poem: a poem that consists of only one line (the line can be long or short and it can have a title).

Ask participants to write at least five monostich poems. Encourage them to follow their stream of consciousness, free-writing their ideas and observations. If someone appears to be stuck, encourage them to look around the room and choose one delightful thing. Or they could think about their day so far and write down one moment of delight. After most of the participants appear to have written at least five monostiches, encourage them to pause and read through what they have written. Then, ask them to return to their poems and add details.

## Activity 5: Sharing

After participants have had sufficient time to add details to their monostich poems, instruct them to select one monostich as their favorite. Ask them to write this poem at the bottom of their paper in their best handwriting.

Now, gather together in a circle to read these poems out loud in a call and response fashion. Ask each participant to read their poem. After they finish, instruct the group to respond with one word: "Yes!" Then the next person reads. Try to create a rhythm with the reading.

You can choose to record this reading and post it to social media with #NationalWaterDance. Or, ask participants to carefully rip out their monostich poem (it should be written at the bottom of their page). Then ask participants to take a photo with their monostich (or artfully arrange it somewhere) and post it to social media with #NationalWaterDance.

## Activity 6: Reflection and Gratitude

If your group is able, stand in a circle and hold hands. Thank your group for their presence and work. Ask each person to share one thing that they are grateful for and one way that this experience might connect to an issue that they care about. End by thanking the group again.

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### Created by Laurel Nakanishi

Laurel Nakanishi is a poet, essayist, and teacher from Honolulu, Hawai'i. She is the author of the award-winning book *Ashore* and the chapbook, *Mānoa|Makai*. You can find her poetry and essays in national magazines, such as *Orion*, *Fourth Genre*, and *Black Warrior Review*. Laurel lives with her family on the island of O'ahu.

(808) 284-7456

laurel.nakanishi@gmail.com

[www.laurelnakanishi.com](http://www.laurelnakanishi.com)