

## Writing on Grief and Loss

*with a focus on expressive and therapeutic writing*

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- How form and structure can aid writing about difficult subjects
  - Examples:
    - Paula Meehan's "Quitting the Bars"
    - Julia Dasbach ["One Year Later"](#)
- Creating form and shape via the Pongo Poetry Project method:
  - Examples:
    - ["I Just Thought You Should Know"](#) fill-in-the-blank activity
    - [Pongo textbook and methods](#)
      - Methods can be adapted for work in groups and work with adults
      - Writers, teachers, counselors can now become certified in method
- Creating form and shape via prompts/assignments:
  - ["A Snapshot in Time" prompt](#) (Skagit River Valley Poetry in the Schools curriculum)
    - A way to write "about" people you love or miss but struggle to write about
- "Taking Time" with photography
  - Making use of the natural tendency to return to photography of loved ones or even of images that have no apparent connection to one's loss and yet which evoke a response
    - With a personal or sentimental image, read Judith Kitchen's "Lacrimosa" (*Distance & Direction*) and mirror her scaffolding/structure
    - Using image without personal or clear sentimental connection, read Teju Cole's "Gossamer World: On Santu Mofokeng" (*Black Paper: Writing in A Dark Time*) and mirror his scaffolding/structure
  - After writing:
    - Adapt Internal Family Systems (IFS) approach to review what comes up in the writing—what parts might be activated (i.e. shame, anger); what they may need from your most grounded self (if there is time/space)
    - Affirm and trust that act of writing itself can offer relief (even if there is little time/space for interpersonal sharing or processing)
      - Writing externalizes difficult situations.
      - Writing can help us see which parts of us need attention and care.

- The writing itself can be a segue to further connection or creative work, even if loss or grief doesn't come up directly.
- Even if writing offers relief and reprieve, self-care after writing is important.
  - Unlike other forms of self-care (breath, meditation, movement, coloring), it can involve more intellect, headspace, analysis.

#### Other Resources:

- [Hedgebrook Grief and Healing Series](#)
- Skagit River Valley Poetry Foundation - [Poets in Schools Curriculum](#)
  - Includes many options for group work
- [Escribe](#): Spanish-language resources for writers and writing
- A few writers to look to:
  - When using form as a generative tool\*:
    - [A Formal Feeling Come: Poems in Form by Women](#), edited by Annie Finch
    - [Shane McCrae](#)
    - [Terrace Hayes](#)
      - \*Not to perfect traditional form for its own sake but to use aspects of form (repetition, rhyme, meter) to provide a container for overwhelming emotions
  - When using the visual as a way into discussing difficult experiences:
    - Claudia Rankine, particularly [Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric](#), [Citizen: An American Lyric](#), and [Just Us: An American Conversation](#)
    - Teju Cole, particularly [Black Paper: Writing in a Dark Time](#)
    - Paisley Rekdal, [Intimate: An American Family Photo Album](#)
    - Leslie Marmon Silko, *Sacred Water: Narratives and Pictures* (out of print, available via libraries or sometimes on Amazon)
    - Judith Kitchen, [Half in Shade: Family, Photography, and Fate](#)
    - Carolyn Forché, [What You Have Heard Is True: A Memoir of Witness and Resistance](#)
  - When writing about grief, loss, and trauma, more broadly:
    - Edwidge Danticat, [The Art of Death: Writing the Final Story](#)
    - Judith Herman, [Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice](#)

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*Please contact me through my website if you have any questions or wish to discuss methods in more detail.*