**How can I start writing a poem (or reflective writing) during Lockdown?**

*Some ideas and starting points for you.*

I’ll include some poems and prose. It helps me to write if I’ve read someone else’s piece first. It can trigger ideas or ways of writing.

If I didn't write poetry I think I'd explode. - Charles Causley

So - some suggestions, which you can dip into and use as you will.

Start with a free writing time. Write down whatever comes to you. Don’t judge it. Don’t pause. If you hesitate, take a phrase like ‘Today I…’ or ’When it’s over…’, ‘In my kitchen…’ Or you could write in the voice of your house, your front door or your clock.

Be gentle with yourself though. If it becomes tinged with pain, change tack. Choose a more positive phrase.

This is not a poem I hear you say! No, that maybe be true, but it may be the seed bed of a poem or else a satisfying piece of prose.

Take one phase that is important to you and focus on that. More free writing

Or try a pattern, some form that can sometimes push us into creative mode.



**The Triolet Pattern**
Pattern of lines and rhyme

 1 line one

 2 line two

 3 new line

 4 line one (repeated)

 5 new line

 6 new line (must rhyme with line two)

 7 line one repeated

 8 line two repeated

Example - What Hurt You So?

Why do you cry mother?
What hurt you so?

You pace the night garden
Why do you cry mother?
Why do you rip out

Our herbs where they grow?
Why do you cry mother?
What hurt you so?

Anon



**Or an acrostic**

Use the alphabet… and choose a theme like ’trees’, as they’re rather splendid at the moment.

Write a sentence starting with A, then B, then C

Or start with the first letter T then R etc.

An example

**Stillness Acrostic**

Slowly welcome the day.

Take time to honour its beauty.

Irrigate the flowers with love.

Look into the eyes of a fox.

Linger with the words of the day.

kNeel in the chapel of peace.

Explore the gifts of the day.

Succour the sweetness on offer.

Search for things of God.

Sow seeds to enrich the garden.

(I cheated a bit there, but that’s allowed!)



**Rhyme**

Some people think poetry is all about Rhyme! It can be. but it is not easy to rhyme effectively.

I once visited Dylan Thomas’ writing room. What struck me was a piece of blotting paper covered with rhyming words, great long lists. I’ve sometimes tried this, as it gives you a store for finding useful words, if you want to rhyme. It’s quite fun to do as well.

Repeating the same sound, in the middle of the words, assonance, is another tool, or alliteration, using the repeated initial letter. But don’t force it or think too hard about it. It might just come naturally?



I expect you know about simile and metaphor too., when you compare your ‘thing’ whatever it is to something that has some similarity. With simile we say that your object is ‘like’ something else. For metaphor we miss out the word ‘like’ and just write about the comparable object. (see above ‘your poem could grow from the seed bed of your free writing’.)

Examples of simile: -

Barefooted, ragged, with neglected hair, she was a thin slip of a girl, **like a new moon**.

And dance **as dust** before the sun, light of foot and unconfined.

 Metaphor - in the following poem the sinking sun becomes a metaphor first for the woman who is warm hearted and dignified and also for death and dying.

**The Sun goes down**

As the golden light creeps

between green foliage,
as the day ticks quietly by,
I see where she lies.

I see her in her garden room,
sun shining among the trees,
sinking, as it does, before
our sun in the west.

Her sun is going down,
an orange glow, a ball
of fire and warmth, a slow,
but dignified retreat from
the world of trees, flowers,
nurses and children.

The sun will rise again

and again, but Janet’s
surprises have surely
come to an end.

The Bible has many metaphors –

Jesus said ‘I am the gate’

‘I am the light’

Some more examples of metaphor:-

Kisses are the flowers of affection.

The falling snowflakes are dancers.

The calm lake was a mirror.



**Or**

One pattern I want to try is the **Quatrain.**

4 lines to a verse of which 1,2 and 4 rhyme.

A favourite poet of mine Malcolm Guite wrote: -

‘I was also savouring again the elegance of the quatrain form: the way those four-line stanzas work on the ear and the eye,…, the way the first couplet sets up your expectations and the unrhymed third line increases the tension, then acts as a launchpad for the clinching final rhyme.’

Well we can try!



**Maybe just take an important line,** (perhaps you’ll find one in your free writing or you might take one from someone else’s poem, song lyrics or story) Follow this with 3 further lines relating to it. Then, for the next verse, or stanza, start again with your important line. This gives a framework and a pattern, or shape to your writing. It also stresses what matters in this poem.

Prose from naturalist and writer Robert Macfarlane

Spring bulbs push themselves up into flower far earlier than a century ago. Last August’s heatwave in Britain caused the imprints of long-vanished structures – iron age burial barrows, Neolithic ritual monuments – to shimmer into view as parch marks visible from the air: aridity as x-ray, a drone’s-eye-view back in time. The same month, water levels in the River Elbe dropped so far that “hunger stones” were revealed – carved boulders used since the 1400sto commemorate droughts and warn of their consequences. One of the stones bears the inscription “Wenn du mich siehst, dann weine” (If you see me, weep).

**So, you see it’s all about playing**. Trying different patterns maybe or following your train of thought and letting go. In the end it’s what fires you, what excites you or helps that matters. Don’t worry about what anyone else might think. Enjoy it!

I’d love to share your ideas and thoughts, if you’d like to email me. Judy

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**Note: These suggestions and ideas have been provided by Judy Dinnen, Poet and Priest in Wye Dore parishes, MA in creative writing Cardiff, Friend of Ledbury poetry Festival, Poet and Leader for ‘The Creative Arts Retreat Movement.’**