

Poetry Workshops for the Workplace

Introduction

Poetry and/or Creative Writing

This workshop will address how poetry and/or creative writing can be utilized as a means of reducing workplace-related stress and dysfunctional conflict. Regardless of whether we are talking about individual stress reduction or “team stress reduction,” poetry and/or creative writing can be a relatively harmless way of either/both relieving stress and/or igniting creative energies. Both outcomes promise to lead to both productive and meaningful results in the workplace. So, what is the relationship between poetry and/or creative writing, stress reduction and/or inspiring the creative process in the workplace?

Poetry can refer to writing practices that range from writing in a free-form, stream of consciousness that is typically associated more with creative writing to strict adherence to rhyming and syntax that are associated with providing the parameters for formal poetry. In this simulation that focuses on diversity, our efforts will be to key in on two (2) aspects related to diversity:

- A. How policies and practices associated with and promoting the selection, training, promotion and general well-being of Blacks and People of Color in the workplace can become part of the organizational culture of an employer.
- B. How “diversity-friendly” poetry and/or creative writing can be utilized to both reduce workplace stress and/or ignite creative energy that can be transferred to both the employee’s and the employer’s well-being in the workplace.

This section of the workshop focuses on (B): the potentially productive role of poetry and creative writing in the workplace.

Here are examples of creative writing that are:

- 1. Stream of consciousness/short stories.**
- 2. Poems with “mid-range” adherence to the formal definition(s) of poetry and**
- 3. Formal poems which follow at least most of the expectations and informal rules associated with the field of poetry.**

1. A Short Story that is Creative in Nature

“Yaya Morfopoulos”

Written by Richard Morfopoulos Age 14

My great-grandmother is a native of Constantinople who has lived in this country for the last seventy-eight (78) years. She arrived in this country at the age of sixteen (16). At the time this woman had no command of the English language and she was accompanied by a husband that she hardly knew.

If asked, my great-grandmother will tell the story of how she met her husband. After her mother had asked her for her opinion of the man, Yaya was told that this was the man who her parents had agreed for her to marry. Many of us have wondered how a sixteen (16) year old girl in 1904 felt about having to travel to a strange country with a husband that she did not know and did not choose. She will tell you that it was not a matter for her to consider, that the choice, then, was not for her to make. Tall, dressed in white, my great-grandfather was an older man (15 years her senior) who had been to America.

Yaya is not easy to understand. She has always had a thick accent that her experiences in America have never managed to dilute. She is a soft-spoken woman in a loud family, and she knows that she does not have to raise her voice to gain our attention.

It is here though, here in her basement apartment, that we can find traces of Yaya’s true nature. The apartment is owned by the son of a woman who came over in the same boat to America as Yaya. The son conveniently forgets to ask Yaya for a very modest rent. Yaya always remembers to pay it.

I know that Yaya’s apartment has changed over the last eleven (11) years. There is the air-conditioner that is now at the end of her living-room, the tomatoes that now grow in her garden and the carpeting in the storage room that suspiciously resembles the carpeting of my old bedroom. However, no matter how many changes we can find in Yaya’s apartment, it is still the same apartment that it was.

Her garden will always have grape vines that slowly wrap around the wooden net above her outside terrace. The hallway has always had grey pipes that run below the height of its ceiling. I am the only male in my immediate family who does not have to stoop below these pipes. The other male members of the immediate family have physically outgrown this apartment that seems to be quite spacious for a woman who is four feet and eleven inches tall and ninety-four (94) years old.

It is Yaya's living room that most reflects her true nature. The furniture in the living room is not new, but it is fresh and clean. Though the couch is probably older than any piece of furniture in my house, it seems unworn when it is covered by a plain, white embroidery. Is it the arrangement of the furniture in the room that never changes or is it merely my perception of the furniture that remains the same? The room may now include an air-conditioner and a television set (they were presents given to her), but the identity of the room has never been threatened by them. Just as the growing collection of pictures of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren slowly wrap around and redecorate her living room, so do the new additions to the room that come with time. This is still Yaya's room.

I can remember visiting Yaya when I was nine (9). I was able to spend the day alone with Yaya and after completing several hands of Gin Rummy and several crossword puzzles, we decided to sit out near the garden and talk. Yaya has always spent a large portion of her summers tending to the grapes, cucumbers, apples and pears that she has planted. On this hot summer day, a nine (9) year old boy and his eighty-one (81) year old great-grandmother busily planted a harvest of pear trees (the family enjoys Yaya's jellies and jams every summer despite the arthritis that has limited some of her activities).

The day soon faded. Instead of having Yaya walk to the bakery for some bread, I assured her that I could do so. The bakery is two (2) blocks from her apartment. Charcoal-red apartment houses thread the distance between her apartment and the bakery. These charcoal-red apartments seem to be carved out of the street because of these apartments' color. The elements of these apartments appear to have been slowly dug into these structures, giving them a look of permanence.

I gradually realized on my way back from the bakery that I had wandered far away from Yaya's apartment. My wandering abruptly came to an end when I knew that I was lost. Eventually I found my way back. Yaya was anxiously awaiting in the apartment for me and when I saw her, I was hit with a wave of relief and guilt. I was extremely upset because I thought I had disappointed and upset Yaya, so I broke down.

Yaya opinion has always been and continues to be extremely important to me. It is not often that I can talk to someone who has confronted such hardships. She is to be respected, but not because she has suffered. The reason Yaya should be respected is because she has accepted and endured so many traumatic experiences with an unpretentious dignity. And yet, she can still cheat you in a card game and then manage to cut up the dirt for her garden after lunch.

My great-grandmother is listened to by all of us. Even the children on her block call her Mrs. Yaya. Our dilemmas and challenges are usually mundane when compared to some of Yaya's past experiences. Yaya is a model to us all because she has managed to sail through whatever chaos she has encountered without losing sight of herself. Perhaps her example of grace is why Yaya does not need to raise her voice when the family gathers. (Morfopoulos, 1976)

Discussion Questions/Exercises:

1. Do you have anyone in your life that you celebrate such as “Yaya?” How are/were they “special?”
 2. How has their influence helped “make you the person that you are?”
 3. Would you be willing to write a short story about them before we resume this workshop at a follow-up time?
-
- 1B. Would you be willing to share what you wrote (all your stories should be printed out) with the group that you work with?
 - 2B. In terms of the qualities of your “special person” such as Yaya, how do you feel the workers who are in this workshop discussion share these positive qualities? Please discuss with the group, addressing your feelings by telling the individuals in the work group who are part of this workshop why you believe this similarity in qualities with your “special person” is the case.
 - 3B. How can you and your colleagues in this workgroup that you have singled out concretely start to build upon these “positive feelings” in the weeks, months and year that is ahead?
 - 4B. Draw up a single sentence summary of the main strength of the relationship you have with each member of this workgroup related to these positive attributes just identified in 3B.
 - 5B. How can you capitalize on these strengths and weaknesses in each case to build greater trust and reduce conflicting behavior with your workplace teammates here on current and future projects you are assigned to/that you select to work on? Write these down in private reflection. Plan on sharing these with your teammates in our follow-up session.
-
- 1C. Please share your feelings and thoughts with each member of your workplace team in this workshop as we start the third (3rd) meeting of this workshop.
 - 2C. What reactions are you all receiving from each other? Do share right now with the group.
 - 3C. After these feelings and thoughts are shared, what concrete strategies and actions can you and/or the work group devise that “will keep this positive energy ignited” in the future?
 - 4C. Please document your findings. If the trainer seeks this done in a structured format with guidelines to follow, please follow them if possible.

2. Poems with “Mid-range” Adherence to the Formal Definition(s) of Poetry

Rich Morfopoulos Age 14

The Light

You have given us a mind
Sacred paths for us to find
You have captured our imaginations
Without you, the world faces desecration

You need no mediators
Yet for you, we are gladiators
Mistaking your love for our wrath
Fighting wars on your behalf

You are the rainbow in the rain
Without you, life is not the same
It is time to reach out to the sky
And learn from you, the reasons why

Bring back the day
Show us the way
In our hearts and in our minds
We can transcend
The word mankind

We cannot afford to fight
For a world of love with just our might
Time to create heaven here on earth

And with your love we can give birth
To all the lives worth transformation
No poverty, war, nor damnation

Ideals worth your divine grace
Will surely save our human race
It is not too late for us to glisten
The eternal light that has arisen
If the world would only listen

We can all see you, we know your name
Your grace is not just for the chosen few
Time to safely reach for the eternal flame
Make a world that learns to take your cue

Bring back the day
Show us the way
In our hearts and in our minds
We can transcend the word mankind.

Discussion Questions/Assignment:

1. Healthcare professionals, let us see if you can attempt to write your own poem that is related to any positive aspect of your workplace.
2. Why did you choose this topic to be the theme of your poem?
(see <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theme>)
3. How does this poem accurately reflect something that is truly positive about where you work?
4. Would you be willing to read your poem to your work group? If so, please do so.
5. What aspect of your poem here are you most proud of (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/poet%20laureate>)
6. What do you like most about each of your other work group partner's poem? Please explain this to each member of the work group participating in this workshop.
7. What additional and related, creative point might you wish to share with the group?

Write/send your poem in.... for consideration to be selected for the next edition.