



# **World Above: Free Poetry Night**

## *The First Four Years of Prompts*

*by Barbara Daniels*



# World Above: Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #1: The Power of No

Negative words can be powerful: “No man is an island.” “Do not go gentle into that good night.” We find out what God is by hearing about what he’s not in R.S. Thomas’s “Via Negativa”:  
“Why no! I never thought other than / That God is that great absence / In our lives, the empty silence / Within, the place where we go / Seeking . . . .”

Mystics have followed this *via negativa*, and we can follow them in our poetry by employing the power of no to examine reversals, the flip sides of things. This can be a sneaky way to incorporate something surprising or forbidden.

1. Choose a first line that contains a grammatically negative word such as *no*, *nothing*, *not*, or *never*. Use a line of your own or one of these:

I don’t normally dress this way.

or

Nothing is better than chocolate pie.

or

Nobody stopped me.

2. Use at least three more negative words in your poem, such as *won’t*, *shouldn’t*, *can’t*, *neither*, *nowhere*, *none*, *no one*, *nobody*.
3. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
4. Challenge for the Delusional: Include four of the following words: raspberry, fingernail, Arizona, sequin, ash, ear, match, aluminum. Note: You can change the form of these words (for example, change “ear” to “ears”).

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, March 25<sup>th</sup> at 7pm with Rachel Eliza Griffiths at Dante Hall**, 14 North Mississippi Ave, Atlantic City, NJ. Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajaniels@comcast.net)



## World Above: Free Poetry Night

### Prompt #2: What the Body Knows

In “Having it Out with Melancholy” Jane Kenyon mentions her dog’s elbows and head and her own foot: “The dog searches until he finds me / upstairs, lies down with a clatter / of elbows, puts his head on my foot.” We almost feel the dog’s comforting presence in our own bodies.

Body parts can be the basis for intriguing similes and metaphors: A fork “resembles a bird’s foot / Worn around the cannibal’s neck,” in Charles Simic’s “Fork.” In David Hernandez’s “Proof,” a poem about a man claiming to have wrestled a bear and won, “a scar is proof and so began / the slow striptease of a pant leg / rolled to his knee. There, he said. / And his story sparkled on his flesh.”

“Mouth” is a poem by Robert Wrigley about a woman with her hand inside a ventriloquist’s dummy: “she could open that mouth / all the way and tilt back the empty head of him /and laugh, and laugh, from the gut, from the heart, / which was nothing more or less than her fist.”

Suggestions for your poem:

1. Choose an experience about which you had strong feelings. Invent a character who is more prone to mistakes than you are, and put him or her in your situation.
2. Mention two or more body parts in your poem: foot, hand, eye, ear, mouth, teeth, lips, elbow, thumb, neck, knee, thigh, eyelashes, nose—or others of your choosing.
3. Include two or more of the following: an animal or bird, a scar, the name of a body of water (such as a lake, creek, or ocean) and the name of a flower or plant.
4. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
5. Challenge for the Delusional: Imagine that you have a ventriloquist’s dummy in your lap and write a poem in which the dummy comments on you and one of your experiences.

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> at 7 pm with Warren Longmire at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Avenue, Atlantic City, NJ. Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).**



## World Above: Free Poetry Night

### Prompt #3: Try to Praise the Mutilated World

Poems can take you to places you've never been and give you a powerful sense of the emotional meaning of these places. In "Try to Praise the Mutilated World" Adam Zagajewski urges, "Remember the moments when we were together / in a white room and the curtain fluttered. / Return in thought to the concert where music flared." Nancy Willard takes us to a hardware store in "Hardware Store as Proof of the Existence of God":

I praise the brightness of hammers pointing east  
like the steel woodpeckers of the future,  
and dozens of hinges opening brass wings,  
and six new rakes shyly fanning their toes,  
and bins of hooks glittering into bees,

In "Song of Myself," Walt Whitman moves from one place to another: "Where burial coaches enter the arch'd gates of a cemetery, / Where winter wolves bark amid wastes of snow and icicled trees / Where the yellow-crown'd heron comes to the edge of the marsh at night and feeds upon small crabs." Repeating an opening word or phrase in successive lines (as Whitman does with "where" and Willard does with "and") is called anaphora. Using anaphora can give your poems a chant-like power and help you to generate one line after another.

#### Suggestions for your poem:

1. Choose a place you have strong feelings about. Use your title to make the location clear.
2. Consider visiting the place to gather specific details. In your poem describe what you hear and feel as well as what you see.
3. Praise (or try to praise) three or more specific things you find in the place you choose.
4. Start most of the lines in your poem with the same word, such as "where."
5. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
6. Challenge for the Delusional: Include the name of a famous person (living or dead), a tool (such as a wrench or a rake), and the name of a bird or animal.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, May 27<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm at Dante Hall**, 14 North Mississippi Avenue, Atlantic City, NJ. Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above: Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #4: Where Have All the Flowers Gone?

Remember the red-hot candies you used to eat as a child? Your Tickle Me Elmo toy, cap guns, Barbie doll, first videogame? You can reclaim these losses in a poem. The Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz wrote “O my love, where are they, where are they going / The flash of a hand, streak of movement, rustle of pebbles. / I ask not out of sorrow, but in wonder.” The hare he saw run across a frozen field and the man he saw pointing to it in Wilno, Lithuania, in 1936 both are gone.

The medieval French poet François Villon wrote “Where are the snows of yesteryear?” Even earlier, the Old English poem *The Wanderer* asked the same kinds of questions:

Where has the horse gone? Where the rider? Where the ring giver?  
Where are the seats at the feast? Where is the laughter in the hall?

(translation David Daniels)

The theme of this kind of poem is called *ubi sunt*, Latin for “where are.”

1. Write your own poem about things that have been lost. Begin your poem (or one or more of its lines) with “Where are” or “Where is.”
2. Collect lines and phrases based on your own memories of losses. If you have diaries or journals, look through them for ideas. Try eavesdropping on people. Read for inspiration, using scrap paper to jot down wording your reading makes you think of.
3. Pull three of your scraps of paper from a hat, your pocketbook, or a pile of papers on your desk. Find ways to leap from one of the ideas to the next within your poem.
4. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
5. Challenge for the Delusional: Add a misheard song lyric to your poem. For example, “This is the dawning of the age of asparagus” instead of “This is the dawning of the age of Aquarius.” Or “The ants are my friends and they’re blowing in the wind” instead of “The answer, my friends, is blowing in the wind.”

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, June 24<sup>th</sup> at 7pm with Michael Broek at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Ave, Atlantic City, NJ.**

Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net)



# World Above: Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #5: The Heart is Shaped like a Hungryman Dinner

Here's what I know: I am good  
at déjà vu but bad at karaoke. I am good  
at Magic 8-Ball but bad at bicycle-built-for-two.

Axiom, from the Greek meaning “No rebuttals,” meaning “Whatever I say is true.”

For instance, the heart is shaped like a Hungryman dinner,  
indestructible as Styrofoam & always divided.

In these lines from Julie Marie Wade’s “Psalm in the Spirit of Dragnet” she jumps from naming things she’s good and bad at to providing a false definition of “axiom.” Later in the poem she incorporates more false definitions, claiming that “axiom” means “No facts, ma’am, only interpretations,” and “tops in food.” These lies and leaps make the poem more interesting.

1. Start a poem with a list of some things you’re good at and some you’re bad at. Surprise your readers with some unexpected skills, such as playing the ocarina, pitching curve balls, spending pennies, and confronting deadly animals.
2. Pick an interesting word, such as “arduous,” “caterwaul,” “watermark,” or “pinnacle.” Invent three or more outrageous definitions of your word, and include them in your poem. Use these false definitions to comment on some of the other claims in the poem.
3. Include the brand name of a food item (such as Twinkies, Grape Nuts, Friskies, or Slim Jims), a word or phrase in another language, and a comment about the heart.
4. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
5. Challenge for the Delusional: Rewrite your poem by reversing its order, putting the last line or sentence first and your current first line or sentence last. Then change most claims you’ve made to their opposites. In Wade’s poem that would mean saying, “I am no good / at Magic 8-Ball” and “the heart is not shaped like a Hungryman dinner.”

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, July 22nd at 7pm with Ona Gritz and Daniel Simpson** at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Ave, Atlantic City, NJ. Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net)



# World Above: Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #6: The Haibun—Marrying a Prose Poem and a Haiku

*This mountain one of rocky steeps, ancient pines and cypresses, old earth and stone and smooth moss, and on the rocks temple doors locked, no sound. Climbed along edges of and crept over boulders, worshiped at temples, penetrating scene, profound quietness, heart/mind open clear.*

*Stillness—  
the cicada's cry  
drills into the rocks.*

Matsuo Bashō, translated by Cid Corman  
and Robert Hass

Summer is a good time to try your hand at a haibun, a Japanese form made up of one or more paragraphs of prose relying on images (what can be seen, heard, touched, tasted and maybe smelled) plus one or more haiku. Remember haiku? You may have written one in school: a first line with five syllables, a second with seven, and a final one with five. A haiku often mentions the natural world and includes a sudden surprise. Don't feel you have to stick to the syllable count. Consider using Robert Hass's translation of Kobayashi Issa as a model: "Don't worry, spiders. / I keep house / casually." In a haibun, the haiku extends, comments on, and contrasts with the more densely written, concrete prose poem, forming a satisfying whole.

1. Take a real or an imaginary journey, and recount its key moments in a brief paragraph.
2. Attach a haiku that captures a memorable moment in your journey.
3. Include the name of an insect, a specific tree, and a house of worship, such as a church or temple.
4. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
5. Challenge for the Delusional: Rescue a failed piece of prose you wrote by combining it with a haiku that seems at first to be about something different. As you work on marrying your paragraph to a haiku, revise the prose to put it in the present tense, cut unneeded words, and emphasize what the poet Maxine Kumin called the furniture of a poem—those sturdy words that are specific enough to provide a poem's inner structure.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, August 26<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Adam Wiedewitsch at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Ave, Atlantic City, NJ.** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net)



# World Above: Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #7: Whereas Everyone Can't Be a Lamplighter

*Everyone can't  
be a lamplighter.*

*Someone  
must be the lamp*

from Andrea Cohen's "Lit"

1. Start a new poem with "Everyone can't." You might try "Everyone can't be a cowboy" or "Everyone can't have the gift of tact." Then surprise readers with a counterclaim: "Someone must be the cheerful cow" or "Someone must master the art of the insult."
2. Try writing short lines, grouping them in stanzas of two or three lines each.
3. Include the name of a specific animal, such as a possum or an anteater.
4. Praise something that isn't usually praised, as when Stephen Dunn praises "the brilliance of moles carving tunnels / under lawns, feeling their whiskery way / as they go."
5. Repeat some vowel sounds as Andrea Cohen does with the a sound in "can't" and "lamp." This strategy, which is known as assonance, will provide some subtle music for your poem.
6. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
7. Challenge for the Delusional: In your title and in the poem itself include a formal conjunction or conjunctive adverb the way Stephen Dunn uses "whereas" in "Whereas the Animal I Cannot Help But Be." You might choose a word such as "subsequently," "nevertheless," "accordingly," "nonetheless," "moreover," "furthermore," or "conversely." In the rest of the poem use less formal words to contrast with the term you choose.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, September 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7 pm with Emma Bolden at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Ave, Atlantic City, NJ.** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net)



# World Above: Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #8: Stridulation Poetry

The sounds animals make by rubbing body parts together are called “stridulation.” In Jessica Jacobs’ “Stridulation Sonnet,” she goes beyond “tiger beetles, crickets,” and “velvet ants” to a sapsucker drumming chimney flashing and “the wind’s papery / come hither through the locust leaves. The roof / arcing its tin back to meet the rain.” Her poem ends

*The bed’s soft creak as I roll to my side.  
What sounds will your body make against mine?*

What do you hear right now? Try a poem of your own that focuses on sounds, real and imagined.

1. Write a fourteen-line poem (rhymed or unrhymed) that features sounds. Go outside or visit an unfamiliar indoor space and incorporate what you hear into your poem.
2. Pick up something from the street, the ground, or the floor and add it to your poem—such as a bicyclist’s lost glove, a doll’s high-heeled shoe, a tiger beetle, or soft dried grasses dropped from a blown-apart squirrel’s nest.
3. Aim for roughly ten syllables per line.
4. In your poem, move from sounds to something that has personal meaning for you—perhaps a wish you have, a loss you’ve experienced, or a vivid memory.
5. Look for an unfamiliar word to use in your poem or its title as Jessica Jacobs uses “Stridulation.” Consider *epigraphy*, *conjugation*, *scrupulous*, *feckless*, or *arduous*.
6. End your poem with a question.
7. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
8. Challenge for the Delusional: Write your first draft on something unexpected. Try a big piece of poster paper, a discarded paper towel roll, or the back of an envelope. Watch to see how the unusual writing surface influences your poem, and try to follow that new direction.

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, October 28<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Therese Halscheid at Dante Hall**, 14 North Mississippi Ave, Atlantic City, NJ. Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net)



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #9: The Witches Are Combing Their Hair

The witches are combing their hair  
 gold thread, strangle tare, hellbine  
 the witches are combing their hair  
 per ací, per allá cap ací, cap allá

Nicole Zuckerman's poem "Les Bruixes Se Pentinen" includes lines from a Catalan nursery rhyme, some translated, some not. The poem urges "hide your children / star the gate / float the moon" and includes mysterious words and lines that readers can't be expected to understand. Try a poem of your own that incorporates words or ideas from a nursery rhyme. Include some surprising twists that readers won't expect.

1. Start your poem with wording from a nursery rhyme: "Ring-a-round the rosie, a pocket full of posies, Ashes! Ashes! We all fall down," "Mary had a little lamb," "Little Jack Horner sat in the corner," "There was an old woman who lived in a shoe," "Rock-a-bye baby on the treetop," "Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn," "London Bridge is falling down." Or choose a line from another nursery rhyme you remember from childhood or find online.
2. In your next lines move to more adult concerns, telling readers something new and surprising about the nursery rhyme character or situation you choose.
3. Repeat one of your lines so that it forms a kind of *refrain* (a line that's repeated like the chorus of a song.) This repeated line could give your poem incantatory power like a spell in a magical ritual the way Zuckerman's "the witches are combing their hair" does.
4. Try eliminating punctuation except for commas as Zuckerman has done in her poem.
5. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
6. Challenge for the Delusional: Include a word or line from a language your readers may not know. (Poetry that mingles languages is known as *macaronic* verse.)

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, November 18 at 7 pm with Cole Eubanks at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Ave, Atlantic City, NJ.** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net)



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #10: Barberism

*It was light and lusterless and somehow luckless,  
The hair I cut from the head of my father-in-law,*

*It was pepper-blanced and wind-scuffed, thin  
As a blown bulb's filament, it stuck to the teeth*

*Of my clippers like a dark language*

“Barberism,” a poem by Terrence Hayes, is about cutting someone else’s hair. Later in the poem Hayes says, “Someday all the hair on the body will fall away.” In “Only as the Day Is Long,” Dorriane Laux also writes about hair as an emblem of loss: “Her atoms are out there, circling the earth, minus / her happiness, minus her grief, only her body’s / water atoms, her hair and bone and teeth atoms.” Have you ever attempted to cut someone’s hair? Survived a really bad haircut? Tried a surprising wig or strange new hair color? Undergone chemo that caused the loss of your hair? Noticed your hair thinning or graying? Gotten a new look that made you feel gorgeous?

1. Write a poem about hair. Start with a line or two describing the hair itself.
2. Include some similes like Hayes’s comparison of hair to “a blown bulb’s filament” and to “a dark language.” (A simile uses “like” or “as” to compare two things that are fundamentally different from each other.)
3. Open a book of poetry or a dictionary. Close your eyes. Let a finger fall on a word, and include that word in your poem. If it’s a common word you would’ve used anyway (such as “the”) try again.
4. Partway through your poem correct or reverse yourself: “No, it was . . . .”
5. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
6. Challenge for the Delusional: Write your poem in another person’s voice—the viewpoint of a family member remembering the history of your hair or someone who has seen changes in your life as she or he cut your hair over the years or a stranger seeing your hair for the first time.

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, December 16<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Nancy Reddy at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Ave, Atlantic City, NJ.** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net)



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #11: The Gift

I was seven when my father  
 took my hand like this,  
 and I did not hold that shard  
 between my fingers and think,  
*Metal that will bury me,*  
 christen it Little Assassin,  
 Ore Going Deep for My Heart.  
 And I did not lift up my wound and cry,  
*Death visited here!*  
 I did what a child does  
 when he's given something to keep.  
 I kissed my father.

Li-Young Li ends “The Gift,” a poem about his father tenderly removing a sliver from his hand, by writing about what he didn’t think and do and then what he did do—kiss his father. Hoped for gifts are described in Charles Wright’s “Clear Night”: “I want to be bruised by God. / I want to be strung up in a strong light and singled out. / I want to be stretched, like music wrung from a dropped seed. / I want to be entered and picked clean.” Have you ever received a memorable gift—or longed for one?

1. Write a poem about a gift, perhaps one you gave or received or one you longed for.
2. Look at the titles of four books you have piled on a table by your bed or gathered on a shelf or in an e-book reader. Use most of the words in the titles in your poem.
3. Include at least two body parts the way Li-Young Li uses “hand” and “fingers.”
4. Tell what you (or the narrator of the poem) didn’t do and then did do.
5. Include a simile like Charles Wright’s “like music wrung from a dropped seed.”
6. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
7. Challenge for the Delusional: Make an unlikely purchase at a dollar store or thrift shop and use it as the subject of your gift poem.

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, January 27<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Lois Marie Harrod at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Ave, Atlantic City, NJ. Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net)**



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #12: My Dog Mars

His brain simplified itself  
saddening everyone but he  
asked us children  
don't you remember my dog Mars  
who met me on the road  
when I came home lonesome  
and singing walking  
from the Czar's prison

Like the brain of her father in Grace Paley's "My Father at 89," this poem seems to have been simplified, reduced to essentials. Try doing something similar. Write a poem in which an animal accompanies someone, perhaps a family member. If you can, keep it simple. Surprise yourself and your reader by ending on something unexpected as Paley ends on "the Czar's prison" here.

1. Put a person in your poem and give him or her an animal companion.
2. Have your person say something that reveals his or her personality or situation.
3. Try using line breaks as Paley does, substituting them for punctuation and ending most lines on important words.
4. Find a surprising ending of your own or use one of the following images in your conclusion: a snake skin, chandelier, black marble, sketchpad, or lobster.
5. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
6. Challenge for the Delusional: Find a personal ad online or elsewhere and use the details in your poem. Here are three examples: "Thirty-something woman with motorcycle helmet seeks man with Harley Davidson." "Wanted. Someone to go back in time with me." "Good home wanted at once for eight-year-old boy. Country preferred."

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, February 24<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with John McDermott at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Ave, Atlantic City, NJ. Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net)**



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #13: Moral. Sick of Morals

*Direct quotation: I will not waste a single hot dog. Not one.*

*Inference. Speaker holds tight rein, low self-esteem.*

*Paraphrase: Collecting, that seems to be all you care about. Collections are for capitalists.*

*Silence.*

*Inference. Speaker's fighting a losing battle against the wrong enemy. Siege mentality.*

In "Picnic Violations" Dara Wier labels each new move in her poem, which seems to be based on what she considers unacceptable behavior at a picnic. She ends the poem with "Moral. Sick of morals," refusing to make her observations add up as a reader might expect them to.

1. Write a poem about what you or an invented narrator hears and sees at an imaginary event such as a picnic, yard sale, office party, or poetry reading. Include some outrageous behavior. Reveal what the poem's narrator secretly thinks about what happens.
2. Find a location for your event by closing your eyes and dropping your finger onto a map, ideally an old paper map though an online map will do. A small town is best. Start your poem with two details you imagine about the place, one from a distance and one close up.
3. Label three or more of your lines. Wier includes "tactic," "reference," "observation," "recommendation," "situation," "solution," "prediction," and "anecdote." Use these labels or others of your own choice such as "violation," "hypothesis," and "speculation."
4. Surprise readers with unexpected moves. For example, Wier throws in "Salutation. Hey, how you doing?" Mix up the order so that nothing occurs predictably.
5. Use some lines that are much longer or much shorter than the others.
6. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
7. Challenge for the Delusional: Include five of these words: grape, necktie, finger, spoon, spindly, red, vodka, slap, jacket, hot dog, and Atlantic.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, March 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7 pm with Diane Sahms-Guarnieri & G. Emil Reutter at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Ave, Atlantic City, NJ. Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).**



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #14: I Am the Rind

*4 daughters*

*i am the sieve she strains from  
little by little  
everyday.*

*i am the rind  
she is discarding.*

*i am the riddle  
she is trying to answer.*

*something is moving  
in the water.  
she is the hook.  
i am the line.*

*Lucille Clifton*

Burton Raffel's definition of a poem in *How to Read a Poem* is "a disciplined, compact verbal utterance." What kinds of discipline can you impose on your own poem? How can you make it more compact—perhaps by removing all adjectives as Lucille Clifton has done in "4 daughters"?

1. Write a four-stanza poem in which four voices speak for themselves—such as four musical instruments, four people you once dated, four spirit animals, four former teachers, four seasons, four rap stars, four junk foods, or four Presidential hopefuls.
2. Identify each voice with a different object as Clifton does with a sieve, a rind, a riddle, and a line. Pick surprising, memorable objects.
3. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
4. Challenge for the Delusional: Pick one of Clifton's stanzas and use every word of it in your poem (but in an entirely different order).

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, April 20<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Donna Vorreyer at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Ave, Atlantic City, NJ.**

Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net)



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #15: Struck like a Gong

I have to tell you,  
there are times when  
the sun strikes me  
like a gong,  
and I remember everything,  
even your ears.

The six short lines that make up Dorothea Grossman’s “I have to tell you” give a vivid sense of how the speaker feels and include one specific thing she remembers: “your ears.” What would you like to tell a cousin, the mayor of Atlantic City, the rapper Fifty Cent, a friend from middle school, the person who was your worst romantic mistake, or someone else?

1. Freewrite a list of what you could tell the person you choose, filling three handwritten pages. If you’re freewriting at a computer or a device with a screen, see if you can do so with the screen dimmed so you don’t keep looking back at what you’ve written. Use specific details, including whatever comes to mind and not censoring yourself. Start each sentence (and the poem) with “I have to tell you.” Choose a few of the most surprising details to use in your poem.
2. Compare yourself to a musical instrument. Do you ever feel like a ukulele, a harmonica, an ocarina, a xylophone, a lute? Provide a hint about why you feel this way.
3. Include a body part, such as lips, eyes, a toe, an elbow, a thigh, an artery, or a lung.
4. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
5. Challenge for the Delusional: If you want to write a longer poem, look up additional meanings and etymologies (word histories) for three of the words in your poem, and include ideas from this material. For example, the word “gong” imitates the sound of an ancient Malay instrument, an “ear” might be a spike of wheat, and one of the original meanings of “tell” was “count.” Adding these kinds of ideas will complicate your poem.

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, May 18<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Kimmika Williams-Witherspoon at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Ave, Atlantic City, NJ. Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net)**



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #16: Seeing Elvis

My wife lives in Boston.  
My father and mother live by the sea.  
My sister lives by a river.  
She stands in the kitchen  
and looks out and sees  
her living son climbing the tree,  
her dead son walking on water.

In the last part of “Prayer,” Richard Jones lulls us with simple unpoetic statements and then springs his last line on us. His sister sees the impossible, “her dead son walking on water.” Jones names this poem “Prayer,” but his prayer is unspoken. Instead he talks about his thoughts as he tries to fall asleep, his distance from those he loves, and the cows he sees from his window.

1. Write a poem in which you, a family member, or a friend sees or does what he or she would most like to see or do though it is impossible or at least very unlikely. Would your mother like to see God? Or Elvis? Does a friend half-secretly hope to find a hundred dollar bill in the gutter? Would you like to tame a zebra or an opossum? Start your poem with this act (rather than ending with it as Jones does) and continue with a vivid account of what happens. Try to show rather than tell by using details that appeal to the senses.
2. Repeat some sounds the way Jones repeats the e sound in “sea,” “sees,” and “tree” and the short i sound in “lives,” “river,” and “kitchen.”
3. Use a title like Jones’s “Prayer” that does not describe what your poem does, except perhaps by implication. “Anthem,” “Petition,” “Curse,” and “Blessing” are possibilities.
4. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
5. Challenge for the Delusional: Eavesdrop. Write down four phrases or sentences you overhear in a restaurant, at work, or on the street, and incorporate one of them in your poem.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, June 29<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Sham-E-Ali Nayeem at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Ave, Atlantic City, NJ. Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).**



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #17: Seeing Elvis

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 My father and mother live by the sea.  
 My sister lives by a river.  
 She stands in the kitchen  
 and looks out and sees  
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In the last part of “Prayer,” Richard Jones lulls us with simple unpoetic statements and then springs his last line on us. His sister sees the impossible, “her dead son walking on water.” Jones names this poem “Prayer,” but his prayer is unspoken. Instead he talks about his thoughts as he tries to fall asleep, his distance from those he loves, and the cows he sees from his window.

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4. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
5. Challenge for the Delusional: Eavesdrop. Write down four phrases or sentences you overhear in a restaurant, at work, or on the street, and incorporate one of them in your poem.

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, July 20<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Nicole Ross Rollender at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Ave, Atlantic City, NJ.** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #18: Choose Pleasure

“Pleasure so often evades accurate description. Nevertheless, sometimes just by trying to describe pleasure we make ourselves happier, thereby creating another form of pleasure.”

—Lee Upton

From the almanac  
of last things I choose you,  
as I have done before.  
And I choose evening

because the light clinging  
to the window  
is at its most reflective  
just as it is ready  
to go out.

—Linda Pastan

At the end of Linda Pastan’s “The Almanac of Last Things,” she chooses “you” and “evening.” The poem begins with her choice of a spider lily, the Song of Songs, January “with its chill / lessons of patience and despair” and “August, “too sun-struck for lessons.” Another woman poet, Lee Upton, reminds us that describing pleasure can make us happier.

1. Write a poem about choices, using “I choose” (or he or she chooses) in some of your lines. Gather ideas for your poem by free writing for ten minutes, starting each new sentence with “I choose.” Emphasize pleasure in your poem. Use vivid details.
2. Include the name of a flower, a part of a sacred text (such as the Song of Songs, which is from the Hebrew Bible) or other book, a month, and a time of day.
3. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of Challenges for the Delusional, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
4. Challenge for the Delusional: List six synonyms for every noun, verb, and adjective in your poem. Rewrite your poem using random choices from your list of synonyms. Then do another version incorporating the words from your lists that work best in your poem.

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, August 24<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Michael H. Broder at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Ave, Atlantic City, NJ. Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).**



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #19: Falling in Love with an Object

The world is full of wonderful things, and they make excellent material for poetry. Richard Wilbur's poem "Love Calls Us to the Things of This World" praises laundry drying, comparing it to angels and describing it as clothing for nuns and "the backs of thieves." In his poem "Memento Mori" Billy Collins writes about the objects in the room where he writes:

Not one of these things will attend my burial,  
not even this dented goosenecked lamp  
with its steady benediction of light,

though I could put worse things in my mind  
than the image of it waddling across the cemetery  
like an old servant, dragging the tail of its cord,  
the small circle of mourners parting to make room.

Choose an object that interests you. Describe it as carefully as you can, using all your senses (though you might not want to actually taste your object).

1. Imagine that you or a character you invent (or another object) has fallen recklessly in love with this object. Write a love poem, emphasizing the irresistibility of the object.
2. Include the name of a geographical feature such as a lake or desert, an item of clothing, and a question you may or may not answer in your poem.
3. Include comparisons like Collins's "like an old servant" and waddling goose.
4. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
5. Challenge for the Delusional: Imagine the object has rejected you. Write a poem from its point of view. Or recast your poem so that it could be understood to be a love poem to a person instead of an object. Try writing with your nondominant hand since that may slow you down enough to lead you to details you might not otherwise discover.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, September 28, 2016 at 7 pm with Naomi Extra at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Avenue, Atlantic City NJ** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #20: The Naked Rose

In *Ordinary Genius* Kim Addonizio points out that poets write about what we don't know, not what we know. Asking questions is one way for us to learn more about mysterious subjects.

Tell me, is the rose naked  
or is that her only dress?

Why do trees conceal  
the splendor of their roots?

Who hears the regrets  
of the thieving automobile?

Is there anything in the world sadder  
than a train standing in the rain?

This poem, “The Book of Questions III,” written by Pablo Neruda and translated by William O’Daly, is made up entirely of questions. Try a poem of your own that is based on questions.

1. Start with a question about a topic that is mysterious to you, such as quantum physics, desire, epic poetry, the periodic table, vandalism, verb conjugation, or hangovers.
2. Speak directly to someone in your poem, perhaps someone you talk to regularly but don't really understand or someone you can no longer communicate with.
3. Include a specific kind of flower (such as a peony or a hibiscus) and a form of transportation, (such as a skateboard, hang glider, or Corvette).
4. Look for some related images or echoing sounds to connect the questions to each other.
5. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
6. Challenge for the Delusional: Rewrite a poem you aren't entirely satisfied with by turning some statements into questions. Reverse the order of the poem, starting with the last line.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, October 26<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Sam Cha at the Noyes Arts Garage, 2200 Fairmount Ave., Atlantic City NJ**  
Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #21: Sneaking Up on Your True Subject

My ex-wife's out in California.

I wish she was over on Bank Street,  
up on the second floor,  
and I was on the way there  
to call to her from the sidewalk.

There's a cypress on that block, two honey  
locusts and an oak. I love those trees  
like my own brothers.

Charlie Smith begins “Illustrated Guide to Familiar American Trees,” with “I don't get it about the natural world. / Like, greenery, / without people in it, is supposed to do what?” He returns to his title idea only at the end of the poem, which is given above. Try writing a poem using indirection as he does, zigzagging your way to the true subject you discover as you write.

1. Draw a timeline that includes some events from your life. Choose one of the events and freewrite for five minutes, starting most of your sentences with “I remember.” Add some sentences about the event that start with “I don't remember.”
2. Write a poem about the event on your timeline with a title such as “Official Book of Magical Creatures,” “Field Guide to Edible Wild Plants,” “Build Your Own Skate Park,” “Keys to Better Oil Painting,” “Guidebook to Comic Book Prices,” or “How to Fix Everything.”
3. Begin your poem with a complaint about your title idea the way Charlie Smith begins with “I don't get it about the natural world.”
4. Include a wish for something that is probably impossible like Smith's wish about his ex-wife.
5. End by returning to the topic given in your title.
6. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
7. Challenge for the Delusional: Write a second version of your poem that is exactly half as long as the first version. Then do a third version that is twice as long as your original.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, November 16<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Edwin Romond at Dante Hall, 14 North Mississippi Avenue, Atlantic City NJ** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt #22: Tuning the Salt Rim of Saturn

A text dropped in the brain's pail rattles the way astrophysicists say they can hear the birth of time tuning the salt rim of Saturn. For example, *Finnegans Wake*. For example, horoscopes, and the little notes folded into cookies. The Society of Prophetic Archeologists argues that all arguments are subject to confirmation bias. In this course we will venerate the subjective mind, or rather, examine how subject / object share the fuzzy circumference of a lone spotlight beneath the proscenium arch. There is no reliable narrator. For example, tea leaves or cloudbursts in the shape of ladybirds.

What is going on here? In this quotation from the poem "Corrective Lenses" Gregory Pardlo mimics and parodies a course description that might appear in a college catalog. But this isn't a course we could sign up for. It's an invention that shakes up academic jargon and makes us wonder what, in fact, we should be studying. Try a poem of your own that uses an unexpected form such as a course description, an index, a website's description of an item of clothing, or a section of a test, such as the test for getting a New Jersey driver's license.

1. Pardlo's poems have been described as "information dense." Start your poem with enough information so readers know what form you're mimicking (and perhaps making fun of). Use some of the language that would be expected in your chosen form, but also surprise us with unexpected details, such as a "lone spotlight."
2. Relate your details to a main theme as Pardlo does with prophecy.
3. Repeat some sounds as in "time tuning the salt rim of Saturn,"
4. Include two or more of the following: a planet (such as Saturn), the name of a book (such as *Finnegans Wake*), an invented organization (such as The Society of Prophetic Archeologists), and an insect (such as a ladybird).
5. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
6. Challenge for the Delusional: Include some sentence fragments that begin with "For example." Make these examples of what you like best about the world or what you like least.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, December 14<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Lauren Yates at Dante Hall**, 14 North Mississippi Avenue, Atlantic City NJ  
 Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



## World Above Free Poetry Night

### Prompt #23: How to Triumph Like a Girl

I like the lady horses best,  
how they make it all look easy,  
like running 40 miles per hour  
is as fun as taking a nap, or grass.  
I like their lady horse swagger,  
after winning. Ears up, girls, ears up!  
But mainly, let's be honest, I like  
that they're ladies. As if this big  
dangerous animal is also a part of me,  
that somewhere inside the delicate  
skin of my body, there pumps  
an 8-pound female horse heart,  
giant with power, heavy with blood.  
Don't you want to believe it?  
Don't you want to tug my shirt and see  
the huge beating genius machine  
that thinks, no, it knows,  
it's going to come in first.

Write your own how-to poem using Ada Limón's "How to Triumph Like a Girl" as a model. In your poem celebrate something or someone you admire. It could be something as simple as a beautiful day or as complicated as new kind of robot.

1. Start with a title like Ada Limón's. Consider a title such as "How to Dance the Tango," "How to Raise Chickens," "How to Forage," or "How to Build a Dog House."
2. Instead of doing what your title announces, sneak up on your topic as Limón does, by saying what you like. Repeat "I like" three times in your poem.
3. End with two questions.
4. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
5. Challenge for the Delusional: Open a book at random, close your eyes, and let your finger fall on five different words. Use three of them in your poem.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, January 25<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Grisel Acosta & Vincent Toro at the Noyes Arts Garage.** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 24: Amazed by All that Is Terrible

Dear Dick: There are some mornings the sun  
 seems too bright too early, then others  
 when it appears it will never wake:  
 the mornings I spend here are too few,  
 and bright or no I want to walk these  
 streets daring all that is terrible here  
 to amaze me.

In “Letter to Hugo from Easton,” Louis McKee writes about the beauty of the Delaware River and the pain of a breakup. Along the way he describes some fishermen and his own writing.

1. Write your own letter poem. Start by making a list of everyone you’ve ever known—or at least as many as you can think of in five or ten minutes.
2. Mark up the list—a W for people you knew well, an E for those you feel strong emotions about.
3. Pick one of the people from your list and freewrite to that person for five minutes, starting most of your sentences with “I would like to tell you.”
4. Using material from your freewriting, write a letter poem to the person you choose, starting with an apparently off-topic complaint like Louis McKee’s “the sun / seems too bright too early.”
5. McKee writes: “A couple dozen fishermen are up / to their hips in this calm stretch / of the Delaware. This is safe water: / from my stone bench the scene is beautiful.” Locate yourself by using vivid details to describe a specific place, such as a bench by a river. Use a place in your title as McKee uses Easton.
6. Mention a loss in your letter, such as a house you had to move away from, a friend you lost, a song you can’t listen to anymore. McKee mentions a breakup with someone named Christine and says “I’m singing more / and I think better than before. The songs / are different now that they’ve found this pain, / and my voice has gotten gruff.”
7. Include two body parts. McKee uses “hips” and “throat” (“My throat hurts”).
8. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
9. Challenge for the Delusional: Write about something forbidden. Use sentences starting with “I’ll never tell you” to generate ideas for your poem.

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, February 22<sup>nd</sup> at 7 pm with Cortney Lamar Charleston at the Noyes Arts Garage.** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 25: Plunge In

Now, rubber ducks fan out  
 by the thousands  
 into the river.  
 I am overwhelmed. Not to change  
 anybody's mind  
 but there is a choice: plunge in,  
 swim out  
 make a broad net  
 of my body,  
 begin collecting the debris,  
 trapping ducks  
 in my floating clothing.

Rubber ducks fan out through these lines, the first part of a poem by Susan Alkaitis, "I Have Just Kissed You." It's a surprising way to express how having kissed someone might feel.

1. Write about how you (or the speaker in your poem) feel just after doing something, such as finishing the laundry, breaking up with someone, locating lost keys, or sighting a whale.
2. Make a big list of things that might represent your experience. Write very fast, faster than you can think, to short circuit your internal censor. Include surprising images from your list in your poem.
3. Use uneven line lengths as Alkaitis does. Notice that the line breaks call attention to the words at the ends of the lines: "thousands," "river," "change," "net," "body," and "floating clothing."
4. Aim for verbs that can be pictured (like Alkaitis's "plunge in," "swim out," and "trap").
5. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
6. Challenge for the Delusional: Include four of the following words: hand, duck, petal, aluminum, ladder, rhinestone, persimmon, vodka, lips, octopus, egg.

Meena Alexander has written: "There's no monetary reward for poetry, but the reward, I think, is a kind of grace, a clarification of the everyday. Because that's what poetry is really bound to, the stuff of our lives." Aim to provide this kind of clarity and connection in your poem.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, March 22<sup>nd</sup> at 7 pm with Cool Women Revise History at the Noyes Arts Garage.** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarjdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarjdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 26: Without Shoes

My friends without shields walk on the target

It is late the windows are breaking

My friends without shoes leave  
 What they love  
 Grief moves among them as a fire among  
 Its bells  
 My friends without clocks turn  
 On the dial they turn  
 They part

The lines above begin W. S. Merwin’s “My Friends.” Write your own poem about a group of people—friends, foes, lovers, brothers, aunts, children, teachers, coworkers.

1. To find surprising material for your poem, tear out pages from old magazines or search for images on the internet. Look for photos that interest you for some reason or that cause strong feelings—pictures you like and pictures you dislike.
2. Freewrite phrases and sentences that describe what you see in the photos and what you might hear, smell, touch, and maybe even taste if you were there. Be specific. If you wish, include what you imagine might be outside the frame of the photo. Keep writing even if your ideas don’t seem especially good to you. Your goal is to generate a lot of language.
3. As you begin to shape your poem, repeat words the way Merwin repeats “My friends” and “without.” Choose material that communicates strong feelings. Run some sentences together.
4. Add some action verbs even if you have to make up things that aren’t in your photos.
5. Put in a correction: “No, you were never the stars nor the trembling darkness.”
6. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
7. Challenge for the Delusional: Include two of the following: a favorite thing you wear, an annoying habit, best memory, worst memory, and a place you liked to hide when you were young.

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, April 26<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Cynthia Arrieu-King at Stockton’s Noyes Arts Garage.** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 27: The Strolling Melon

### Metaphors

I'm a riddle in nine syllables,  
 An elephant, a ponderous house,  
 A melon strolling on two tendrils.  
 O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!  
 This loaf's big with its yeasty rising.  
 Money's new-minted in this fat purse.  
 I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.  
 I've eaten a bag of green apples,  
 Boarded the train there's no getting off.

Can you guess the answer to the riddle Sylvia Plath poses? Metaphors (comparisons that don't use "like" or "as") provide clues to the answer: This is a poem about pregnancy. Choose a subject of your own (such as a paperclip, coat hanger, kitchen sink, medicine cabinet, abandoned house, truck, or beach). Pack your poem with metaphors.

1. Start your search for a subject by listing your favorite five objects—which might you be willing to share or even give away? Which couldn't you live without? Which one truly represents you?
2. Plath's use of "in nine syllables" draws attention to her use of nine syllables in each of her nine lines, a clue to the answer to her riddle. Try writing your own poem in syllabics, choosing an odd number such as seven, nine, or eleven syllables per line. This will keep you from falling into predictable iambic pentameter and will provide a useful off-kilter structure.
3. Include four nouns and verbs from Plath's poem, perhaps "tendrils," "apple," "board," and "stroll."
4. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
5. Print and cut up your finished poem, rearranging the lines till you've found a better sequence.
6. Challenge for the Delusional: Make your poem a riddle. Move some adjectives to words they don't belong with to create new associations and dislocations: ponderous purse, yeasty house.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, May 24<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Kirwyn Sutherland at the Noyes Arts Garage.** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 28: Buccaneer Work

When I hurt you and cast you off, that was buccaneer work:  
 the sky must have turned on the Bay that day and spat.  
 We'd tarried on corners, we'd dallied on sofas, we were  
 in *progress*, do you see? Yet stormcloud bruises bloomed

where once we touched. The walls swam under minty fever;

In these lines from the beginning of “Sorry” by Roddy Lumsden, the speaker describes his actions as “buccaneer work,” admitting he’s been as violent and cruel as a pirate. Write your own apology poem, perhaps in the voice of a character you invent.

1. Confess something you (or your character) did or failed to do. It could be something minor, such as eating plums someone might have been saving (as William Carlos Williams does in “This Is Just to Say”) or it could be disastrous. Address your poem to the person who was wronged.
2. List five of your favorite words, such as “dallied,” “tinsel,” “frippery,” “egret,” and “brigand.” Put them all in your poem.
3. Compare what you (or your character) did to a kind of crime: “That was street crime,” or maybe abduction, poaching, mugging, cyber crime, perjury, or treason. Add some specialized language related to the crime you choose. Do some research to find this language.
4. Lumsden’s speaker claims both he and the person addressed in the poem did wrong, and he specifies punishment, walking alone at night for the other person but of himself he says, “I will hang with my enemies, out on the long shore, / our brigand bodies impaled.” Show that both the speaker and the person addressed in your poem are at fault, and propose some punishments.
5. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
6. Challenge for the Delusional: Incorporate a secret message by making your poem an acrostic. This means starting each line of your poem with one of the letters in your message. For example, if your message is “I still love you” the first line will start with I, the second with s, and so on.

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, June 28<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Roberto Carlos Garcia at the Noyes Arts Garage.** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 29: I Believe

I believe in magic. I believe in the rights  
of animals to leap out of our skins  
as recorded in the Kiowa legend:  
*Directly there was a bear where the boy had been*

as I believe in the resurrected wake-robin,  
first wet knob of trillium to knock  
in April at the underside of earth's door  
in central New Hampshire where bears are

though still denned up at that early greening.

“Credo,” by Maxine Kumin lists and elaborates on beliefs, some of them likely, some extremely unlikely. She uses her poem to celebrate spring in New Hampshire, including horses that “skid to a stop, their nostrils // level” with her mouth, and “black crumbles / of ancient manure that sift through” her fingers, “plumes of carrots,” the “clamber of peas.”

1. Write a poem that celebrates a season. Use sentences starting with “I believe” to provide some of your poem’s structure. Try to move back and forth between concealing and revealing your true beliefs and feelings.
2. Include a surprising detail from a legend, fairy tale, nursery rhyme, or urban legend, and declare it to be true as Kumin does with the Kowa legend about a boy turning into a bear.
3. List twelve objects you see around you or have observed recently. Add four to the poem.
4. Partway through the poem turn it in a different direction, changing the mood or focus.
5. Try to write twice as many drafts of the poem as you usually do.
6. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
7. Challenge for the Delusional: Rewrite your draft to make it a rhyming, metered poem.

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, July 19<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm with Joel Dias-Porter at Stockton University’s Noyes Arts Garage.** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 30: Invitation

O crows circling over my head and cawing!  
 I admit to being, at times,  
 Suddenly, and without the slightest warning,  
 Exceedingly happy.

On a morning otherwise sunless,  
 Strolling arm in arm  
 Past some gallows-shaped trees  
 With my dear Helen,  
 Who is also a strange bird,

With a feeling of being summoned  
 Urgently, but by a most gracious invitation  
 To breakfast on slices of watermelon  
 In the company of naked gods and goddesses  
 On a patch of last night's snow.

In this poem, “Heights of Folly,” Charles Simic describes being invited to breakfast. Write your own invitation poem, perhaps an invitation like Christopher Marlowe’s “Come Live with Me and Be My Love” or something a bit more everyday like “Inviting a Friend to Supper.”

1. Use a title to set up the situation: “Inviting My Sister to Climb High Point Mountain with Me,” “It’s My Birthday,” or “Asking the Dog to Keep My Secret.”
2. Put your speaker in motion as Simic does with “Strolling arm in arm.”
3. Include something ominous like Simic’s “gallows-shaped trees.”
4. Break some rules as Simic may be doing with “O” and an exclamation point.
5. Consider joking around a bit in your poem as Simic does in this poem.
6. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
7. Challenge for the Delusional: Start and end your poem with the same word or phrase—or rhyme the opening and closing as Simic does with “crows” and “snow.”

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, August 23 at 7 pm with Jonterri Gadson at Stockton University’s Noyes Arts Garage.** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 31: Dear Skull

beloved braincase, body's bleeding heart  
helmet law

dear ribs thick with implied meat, disused central  
railroad, reverse spec house unplumbed  
to propitious frame

dear double-strung forearm, dear violin bow,

dear pachyderm-eared pelvis,

dear barnacle spine—

In “Dear Skull” (the first lines of which are given above), Emily Van Kley addresses her own body. Try a poem that speaks to your body—possibly your toes, spleen, or knees.

1. Talk the poem before you write it, recording it on a phone or other device.
2. Start several lines with the same word as Van Kley does with “dear.”
3. Include some vivid metaphors like Van Kley’s “violin bow” and “barnacle spine.”
4. Add specialized language from another field as Van Kley does with “reverse spec.”
5. Van Kley ends her poem with her body refusing to “cheer or mourn” respiration or cartilage “as it trundles away.” End your poem with a refusal your body makes.
6. Set the poem aside and rewrite it from memory. See what you come up with that can be incorporated into your original version.
7. Revise the poem in four different ways: make it twice as long, then half as long. Change the line lengths and in another revision the stanza structure.
8. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
9. Challenge for the Delusional: Write the poem from the point of view of a body part.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, September 27, 2017, at 7 pm with Claudia Cortese at Stockton University's Noyes Arts Garage.**

Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 32: Speech Is a Mouth

Locate *I*  
*love you* some-  
 where in

teeth and  
 eyes, bite  
 it but

take care not  
 to hurt, you  
 want so

much so  
 little. Words  
 say everything.

*I*  
*love you*  
 again,

then what  
 is emptiness  
 for. To

fill, fill.  
 I heard words  
 and words full

of holes  
 aching. Speech  
 is a mouth.

In this poem, “The Language,” Robert Creeley writes about love and language. Try a poem of your own that links two concepts such as love and music, loneliness and architecture, intimacy and machinery, work and grammar, loss and human anatomy, or bad habits and meteorology.

1. Use one of your ideas in your title (as Creeley does with “The Language”) and introduce your second idea early in your poem.
2. Try very lean, narrow lines like Creeley’s. Eliminate most adjectives. Include body parts.
3. Partway through raise a question that sends the poem in a new direction.
4. End with a metaphor that links your concepts as Creeley does with “Speech / is a mouth.”
5. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
6. Challenge for the Delusional: Include a word in your poem that hints at your poetic method or aesthetic. For example, you could include the word “repeat” if your strategy relies on repetition. Or you might use a word like “condense” or “deny.”

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, October 25, 2017, at 7 pm with our own Emari DiGiorgio.** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 33: First Thaw

You must think this house is the world,  
the oven door a dark mirror

in which to learn your face.  
We've been inside so long, you don't know

a living thing when you see one  
through the window: grackles

blacking the dead grass,  
sycamores bone-white and eerily

double-jointed. I bundle you  
to my chest and step outside, opening

the umbrella. This is the world:  
a room that goes on and on—

Maggie Smith's "First Thaw" (the beginning of which is given above) is about taking an infant outside. Smith claims that the world is "a room that goes on and on." Try a poem of your own that defines something someone else misunderstands: love, home, regret, joy, guilt, memory.

1. Consider starting your poem as Smith does: "You must think . . . ."
2. Tell the other person why misunderstanding the term you're defining is causing trouble.
3. Add a related definition (the way Smith defines the oven door as "a dark mirror").
4. Pick three objects from a junk drawer or a car's glove box, and include them in the poem.
5. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
6. Challenge for the Delusional: Make your poem one long sentence. Try putting line breaks in some unexpected places to vary the pacing of your poem.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading on Wednesday, November 15, 2017, at 7 pm with Antoinette Tidjani Alou.** Questions or concerns about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).





# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 35: The Rubber Crotch

First, are you our sort of a person?  
 Do you wear  
 A glass eye, false teeth or a crutch,  
 A brace or a hook,  
 Rubber breasts or a rubber crotch,

Stitches to show something's missing? No, no? Then  
 How can we give you a thing?  
 Stop crying.  
 Open your hand.  
 Empty? Empty. Here is a hand

To fill it and willing  
 To bring teacups and roll away headaches  
 And do whatever you tell it.  
 Will you marry it?

Sylvia Plath's "The Applicant" (the first part of which is above) might be interpreted as presenting a parody salesperson badgering someone, probing for insufficiency, making an offer, and closing the deal. Write a poem in which you address someone, exploiting that person's weaknesses to persuade him or her to do or buy something. Visualize the action in the poem as if it is a play. Push your rhetoric beyond what you would normally consider acceptable.

1. Pose several rude questions. Repeat some words (like "No, no?")
2. Move to the body, including basic physical details such as hands, breasts and a crotch.
3. Ridicule the flaws in a value system as Plath mocks ideas about marriage.
4. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, author of *Challenges for the Delusional*, available from Jane Street Press, for this idea.)
5. Challenge for the Delusional: Find the rest of Plath's "The Applicant" online or elsewhere, and write a poem responding to the poem from the viewpoint of the applicant. You might start with "I'm not your sort of a person" or "Yes, I'm your sort of a person."

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading at the Arts Garage in Atlantic City on Wednesday, January 24, at 7 pm with Cynthia Dewi Oka.**

Comments about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 36: Moments like that, you can love this country

A Spanish girl in a white party dress  
strolls the levee by the muddy water  
where her small sister plunks in stones.

Beyond a low adobe wall and a wrecked car  
men are pitching horseshoes in a dusty lot.  
Someone shouts as he clangs in a ringer.

.....

In the moment when the locusts pause and the girl  
presses her up-fluttering dress to her bony knees  
you can hear a banjo, guitar, and fiddle

playing "The Mississippi Sawyer" inside a shack.  
Moments like that, you can love this country.

John Balaban has written about heart-breaking experiences during the Vietnam war, but in these lines from a poem of his from the 1990s, "Passing Through Albuquerque," he helps us see what there might be to love about our country. Write a poem on the same theme. The poet Jane Hirshfield says "Originality does demand courage." Follow her advice. Be brave.

1. Locate your poem in a place you know well and use its name in your title. Visit the place to gather details or if you can't, look for images of it on the internet or among your photos.
2. Aim for about ten syllables in each line. Include the name of a song, a sound such as "clangs in a ringer," and a word you invent (like "up-fluttering").
3. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, prompt writer for *More Challenges for the Delusional*, Diode Editions, 2018, for this idea.)
4. Challenge for the Delusional: According to *The Washington Post*, policy analysts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have been told that the use of seven words and phrases will be prohibited: "vulnerable," "diversity," "entitlement," "transgender," "fetus," "evidence-based," and "science-based." Use one or more of these words in your poem.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading at the Arts Garage in Atlantic City on Wednesday, February 21, at 7 pm with Patrick Rosal.** Questions or comments about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 37: The Bagel

I stopped to pick up the bagel  
rolling away in the wind,  
annoyed with myself  
for having dropped it  
as if it were a portent.  
Faster and faster it rolled,  
with me running after it  
bent low, gritting my teeth,  
and I found myself doubled over  
and rolling down the street  
head over heels, one complete somersault  
after another like a bagel  
and strangely happy with myself.

In “The Bagel” by David Ignatow, the narrator drops a bagel and ends up somersaulting after it. Try a poem of your own that begins with an ordinary action and spirals into a surreal experience.

1. Vijay Seshadri says of writing one of his poems, “It was the feeling of the thinking that I wanted.” Show your feelings changing in your poem as Ignatow does with “annoyed,” “gritting my teeth,” and “strangely happy.”
2. Include two or more of these words: bruise, milk, horse, reason, bride, words the poet Tess Gallagher had to use in a poem in order to be accepted into a crowded writing workshop.
3. Fill your poem with action as Ignatow does with “dropped,” “running” and “rolling.”
4. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, prompt writer for *More Challenges for the Delusional*, Diode Editions, 2018, for this idea.)
5. Challenge for the Delusional: Find a truly terrible poem—perhaps one of your own or one you find on the internet—and transform it into something unrecognizably better by adding a surprising surreal experience, communicating feelings, and improving word choice.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading at the Arts Garage in Atlantic City on Wednesday, March 28<sup>th</sup>, at 7 pm with John Hoppenthaler.** Questions or comments about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 38: It lifts us it holds us

If this bowl is always empty  
 If it breathes if it's lung  
 If a horse can rise from the ashes

Saul was a sailor on the boat to Damascus  
 He did not know what he was  
 Paul turned to a voice it rose up from the waves  
 It chained his boat to the darkness

A man finds ash & he makes it a man  
 A horse finds ash in a horse  
 It lifts us it holds us it breaks us again  
 Scatter him into the harbor

Saul was a Roman who wanted to destroy Christians. In this poem, “harbor (the conversion),” Nick Flynn alludes to Saul’s conversion—He became Paul, a powerful advocate for Christianity. Choose a person from history or myth, and focus your poem on a key event from his or her life.

1. Write three stanzas. In the first one, start each line with the same word, such as “if” or “when.” In your second stanza recount the key event you’ve chosen, and in the last one go beyond that event to images and ideas that enlarge its meaning.
2. Include some invented but meaningful actions, such as “It chained his boat to the darkness” and “A horse finds ash in a horse.”
3. In each stanza run some of the sentences together to provide a propulsive rhythm.
4. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, prompt writer for *More Challenges for the Delusional*, Diode Editions, 2018, for this idea.)
5. Challenge for the Delusional: For a week record your dreams as soon as you can after waking. (Some people try to write them down without opening their eyes.) Select details from this dream journal to incorporate into your poem.

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading at the Arts Garage in Atlantic City on Wednesday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, at 7 pm with Ysabel Y. Gonzalez.** Questions or comments about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 39: Creation Story

I'm not afraid of love  
or its consequence of light.

It's not easy to say this  
or anything when my entrails  
dangle between paradise  
and fear.

I am ashamed  
I never had the words  
to carry a friend from her death  
to the stars  
correctly.

The lines above, which begin Joy Harjo's poem "The Creation Story," don't seem to be about creation, and the rest of the poem doesn't address that topic directly either except to say "The stars who were created by words / are circling over this house." Write your own poem by following the pattern in Harjo's.

1. Freewrite using the words that start three of Harjo's stanzas: "I'm not afraid of," "It's not easy to say this," and "I am ashamed." Include the most striking wording you come up with in three stanzas in your own poem.
2. Use a title that assigns your poem to a character from literature or life, such as "Macbeth in Sicklerville" or "Eleanor Roosevelt at Atlantic Cape Community College."
3. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, prompt writer for *More Challenges for the Delusional*, Diode Editions, 2018, for this idea.)
4. Refer to creation in your poem, picking up an image from one of your earlier stanzas as Harjo does with "stars." Use words that create pictures, such as "dangle" and "carry."
5. Challenge for the Delusional: Paste part or all of your poem into Google Translate and work back and forth between languages until you find words or phrases you want to use in your poem. For example, "O taste and see" eventually became "Taking is good."

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading at the Arts Garage in Atlantic City on Wednesday, May 16, at 7 pm with Bernadette McBride.** Questions or comments about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 40: But This Is Different

Is It Still the Same

young woman who climbs the stairs,  
 who closes a child's door,  
 who goes to her table  
 in a room at the back of a house?  
 The same unlighted corridor?  
 The same night air  
 over the wheelbarrows and rain-tanks?  
 The same inky sky and pin-bright stars?  
 You can see nothing of her, but her head  
 bent over the page, her hand moving,  
 moving again, and her hair.  
 I wrote like that once.  
 But this is different:  
 This time, when she looks up, I will be there.

In this poem Eavan Boland remembers herself as a young woman. The poem tells us she was on her own as a writer but that young women today are not alone in the same way. Write a poem describing a young person doing something difficult.

1. Use visual details such as “wheelbarrows and rain-tanks.”
2. Look for adjectives that suggest metaphors: “inky sky,” “pin-bright stars.”
3. Ask some questions. Add the line “But this is different” and say what is different now.
4. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, prompt writer for *More Challenges for the Delusional*, Diode Editions, 2018, for this idea.)
5. End the poem on a word that rhymes with one or more earlier words as Boland does with “stairs,” “air,” “hair,” and “there.”
6. Challenge for the Delusional: Write a version of your poem in which every line ends (or almost ends) with the same consonant sound, such as the consonant N. Ellen Bass’s “Gophers” uses the N sound at the ends of lines in “stained,” “leaning,” “skinny,” “brains,” “listen,” and other words. You might want to search online for this poem.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading at the Arts Garage in Atlantic City on Wednesday, June 20, at 7 pm with Kirwyn Sutherland.** Questions or comments about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 41: What Work Is

We stand in the rain in a long line  
 waiting at Ford Highland Park. For work.  
 You know what work is—if you're  
 old enough to read this you know what  
 work is, although you may not do it.  
 Forget you. This is about waiting,  
 shifting from one foot to another.  
 Feeling the light rain falling like mist  
 into your hair, blurring your vision  
 until you think you see your own brother  
 ahead of you, maybe ten places.

In these lines from the beginning of “What Work Is,” Philip Levine brings us to work with him. Later in the poem the narrator describes his brother getting up early after a night shift at Cadillac so he can study German in order to sing in a Wagnerian opera, “the worst music ever invented.” The narrator goes on to ask himself how long it’s been since he told that brother that he loves him. Write a poem about the worst job or task you ever had to do. Did you clean out a flooded basement for a cantankerous neighbor? Work the line at a chicken processing plant? Sell candles door to door? Help readers feel we’re there with you struggling to get the job done.

1. Jog your memory by sketching a floorplan or map of your workplace. Add notes on memories you have related to what you include in your floorplan, possibly including a secret place.
2. Mention the weather and a kind of music.
3. Include surprising information about a family member, like studying German to sing Wagner.
4. Signal a reversal and add the tone of your own voice with a short statement like “Forget you.”
5. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, prompt writer for *More Challenges for the Delusional*, Diode Editions, 2018, for this idea.)
6. Challenge for the Delusional: List twelve objects from the world of your poem. Count down to your birth month and start your poem with that object.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading at the Arts Garage in Atlantic City on Wednesday, July 18, at 7 pm with Peter Mishler.** Questions or comments about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 42: Ode to the Book

Book, when I close you  
I open life.  
I hear  
half-severed shouts  
in the harbors.  
Copper ingots  
cross the sandpits,  
slide down to Tocopilla.  
It's nighttime.  
Among the islands  
our ocean  
throbs with its fish.  
It touches the feet, the thighs,  
the chalky ribs  
of my country.  
The whole night sticks to its shores  
and with the daylight  
it appears singing  
as if it had wakened a guitar.

The lines above open Pablo Neruda's "Ode to the Book." (Stephen Miller translated it from Spanish into English.) Neruda invented elemental odes, which are written in short lines and are passionate about ordinary objects such as socks. Write your own ode praising and addressing an object, perhaps a coat hanger, a jalapeño pepper, a thimble, an eyelid, or a cup.

1. Include body parts (like Neruda's "the feet, the thighs"), a town, and a musical instrument.
2. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, prompt writer for *More Challenges for the Delusional*, Diode Editions, 2018, for this idea.)
3. Challenge for the Delusional: Honor a book you admire by choosing 10 of the words for your poem from it. Or, if you're feeling especially delusional, write your whole poem with words you find in the book you choose. (Mary Jo Bang has written poems using this strategy.)

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading at the Arts Garage in Atlantic City on Wednesday, August 15, at 7 pm with Shamar Hill.** Questions or comments about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarjdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarjdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 43: Dawn Parting

I do not know where either of us can turn  
 Just at first, waking from the sleep of each other.  
 I do not know how we can bear  
 The river struck by the gold plummet of the moon,  
 Or many trees shaken together in the darkness.  
 We shall wish not to be alone  
 And that love were not dispersed and set free—  
 Though you defeat me,  
 And I be heavy upon you.

These lines from the beginning of Louise Bogan’s “Leave-Taking” establish it as part of a tradition of poems known as aubades (or albas) in which lovers part at dawn. Ezra Pound’s “Alba” is three lines long: “As cool as the pale wet leaves / of lily-of-the-valley / She lay beside me in the dawn.” Today, aubades are about subjects as diverse as a daughter leaving her mother to go to college, squid fishing, and refugees evacuating Saigon during the Vietnam War. Write your own dawn poem, focusing on lovers who must separate or presenting another kind of parting.

1. Use “Aubade” or “Alba” in your title and set your poem at dawn or just before it.
2. Repeat a phrase like Bogan’s “I do not know” to begin two of your lines.
3. Use a word that may not be familiar to your readers as Bogan does with “plummet.”
4. Kenneth Patchen ends his aubade “As We Are So Wonderfully Done with Each Other” with “A waterglass on the bureau fills with morning . . . / Don’t let anyone in to wake us.” To end your poem, choose an image like the waterglass and combine it with speaking to another person.
5. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, prompt writer for *More Challenges for the Delusional*, Diode Editions, 2018, for this idea.)
6. Challenge for the Delusional: Make your dawn poem a sonnet. Use 14 lines of roughly ten syllables each. Rhyme them following the abab, bcbc, cdcd, ee pattern of the Spenserian sonnet or dispense with rhyme to create what is often called an American sonnet.

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading at the Arts Garage in Atlantic City on Wednesday, September 19, at 7 pm with Emily August.** Questions or comments about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 44: What Ely Was

The mauve, the ocher of canned tamales, the dark silt of gravy burning, the hominy's white knuckles; fats that made a surface gleam like a pigeon's neck, like a spill of gasoline, melt-down crusts of oleo on the tuna casserole, roast that was blackened to a piece of macadam, a singed field, a roof shingle. The cool unguent of jam upon a spoon, but every sweet thing has a sting. It was good for you, this needle, this pin. Under the beautiful blue glass dome of plum preserves was the bite of penicillin. I longed for chocolate both sweet and bitter, fried green plantain, mustard, onion, red tomato, rice and black beans in a pot, Moroccan olives with cayenne, Haut-Brion, cabbage and ham. Somewhere some green coast exported all I wanted of all I wanted, a kingdom where my hunger fit, both mind and body, all of it.

In this poem Lynn Emanuel uses food to create a sense of what her hometown, Ely, Nevada, means to her. Use food to bring your hometown to life or try a list poem on another topic, such as what not to say at a wedding reception, what makes dogs happy, what you can't remain silent about, or places you never plan to return to.

1. Aim for fourteen or fifteen lines. Halfway through, turn your poem in a new direction as Emanuel does with "but every sweet / thing has a sting."
2. In the last two lines move to a topic you contrast with the one you're writing about the way Emanuel contrasts "some green coast" with Ely, Nevada.
3. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, prompt writer for *More Challenges for the Delusional*, Diode Editions, 2018, for this idea.)
4. Challenge for the Delusional: Follow two of the suggestions Richard Hugo provides in *The Triggering Town*: Write your poem about a town you know nothing about, and "End more than half your lines and more than two-thirds your sentences on words of one syllable."

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading at the Arts Garage in Atlantic City on Wednesday, October 17, at 7 pm with Keisha-Gaye Anderson.** Questions or comments about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 45: The House in Winter

Here,  
in the year's late tidewash,  
a corner cupboard suddenly wavers  
in low-flung sunlight,  
cupboard never quite visible before.

Its jars  
of last summer's peaches  
have come into their native gold—  
not the sweetness of last summer,  
but today's,  
fresh from the tree of winter.  
The mouth swallows *peach* and says *gold*.

Though they dazzle and are gone,  
the halves of fruit, the winter light,  
the cupboard it has swept back into shadow.

As inhaled swiftly or slowly,  
the sweet-wood scent goes out the same—  
saying, *not world but the bright self breathing*;  
saying, *not self but the world's bright breath*.  
Saying *finally, always, gone*,  
the deep shelves of systole and diastole empty.

Or perhaps it is  
that the house only constructs itself  
while we look—  
opens, room from room, *because* we look.  
The wood, the glass, the linens, flinging themselves  
into form at the clap of our footsteps.  
As the hard-dormant  
peach tree wades into blossom and leaf  
at the spring sun's knock, neither surprised  
nor expectant, but every cell awakened at that knock

In this poem, "The House in Winter" by Jane Hirshfield, winter sunlight coming in at a new low angle reveals a cupboard bright with jars of canned peaches and then a whole house. Write a poem about a house, apartment, or room you know well, revealing something surprising about that place.

1. Refer to a food and a season. Consider letting something inanimate speak in your poem.
2. To heighten and complicate the poem, use devices such as italics, dashes, uneven line lengths, surprising line breaks, and unusual words (such as Hirshfield's "hard-dormant" and "systole" and "diastole").
3. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, prompt writer for *More Challenges for the Delusional*, Diode Editions, 2018, for this idea.)
4. Challenge for the Delusional: Choose one of your successful poems and list what that poem does well and what's missing from it, such as appeals to the senses (like Hirshfield's "sweet-wood scent" and "clap" of footsteps). Aim to build on your strengths and remedy your weaknesses in this poem. Thanks to Cat Doty for this idea.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading at the Arts Garage in Atlantic City on Wednesday, November 14, at 7 pm with Umar Timol.** Questions or comments about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 46: How Shall We Live?

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountain and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.

In this poem, “Wild Geese,” Mary Oliver gives some advice about how to live. Write your own advice poem, telling people what they don’t have to do and suggesting what might be comforting.

1. Choose three poems you like and from each pick the word that is most important to you in the poem. Include these three words in your poem.
2. Tony Hoagland has written that “poems are hierarchical.” This means some lines and images are more important than others. As you revise, locate your poem’s best moments and try to position them effectively, perhaps at the beginning or end of your poem.
3. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, prompt writer for *More Challenges for the Delusional*, Diode Editions, 2018, for this idea.)
4. Challenge for the Delusional: As you fall asleep or wake up, look for images to include in your poem. Aim for some mystery, imagination, sorrow, mercy, cruelty, self-love, art, and truth.

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading at the Arts Garage in Atlantic City on Wednesday, December 12, at 7 pm with Echezonachukwu Nduka.** Questions or comments about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 47: Ars Poetica

I once met an Australian novelist  
 who told me he never learned to cook  
 because it robbed creative energy.  
 What he wanted most was  
 to be mute; he stacked up pages;  
 he entered each day with an ax.

What I want is this poem to be small,  
 a ghost town  
 on the larger map of wills.  
 Then you can pencil me in as a hawk:  
 a traveling x-marks-the-spot.

In these stanzas, which end the poem “Ars Poetica,” Rita Dove compares what a novelist wanted with what she wants for her poem (and in an earlier stanza what an essayist wanted). Her title means “the art of poetry,” but Dove describes this poem as an anti-ars poetica. She says the hawk at the end is a “sly warning”: “Don’t Fence Me In.” Write your own ars poetica or anti-ars poetica to enact some ideas about poetry. Rely on images that appeal to the senses.

1. Start with a story about someone you met or invent. Demonstrate (rather than state) that you might disagree with this person’s ideas about writing. Employ a surprising image like the ax the novelist brought each day to his stacked-up pages.
2. Express a goal for your own poem through an image like Dove’s ghost town.
3. Use irregular line and stanza lengths, and mention the name of a country.
4. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which (Thanks to Peter Murphy, prompt writer for *More Challenges for the Delusional*, Diode Editions, 2018, for this idea.)
5. Challenge for the Delusional: Christian Hawkey used a 12 gauge to shoot an open book by the Austrian expressionist poet Georg Trakl and left another book by Trakl to decompose in a jar filled with rainwater. He used the fragments of language that remained in his own poems. Use a similar destructive strategy, such as tearing up a page of a Sunday newspaper, to gather language for your poem.

**Don’t miss World Above’s next open mic and featured reading at the Arts Garage in Atlantic City on Wednesday, January 16, at 7 pm with Peter Murphy.** Questions or comments about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).



# World Above Free Poetry Night

## Prompt 48: Why Performers Wear Black

Because there is no black flower.  
 Because they are brides.  
 So that their hands can reach out of earth.  
 Because this is not practice.

Because they have agreed  
 not to talk with their mouths.  
 Because they know that sound  
 carries best at night:

the dip of feeding oars,  
 the loons' tremolo cry,  
 a whisper muffled in a woman's  
 hair, on the far dark shore.

In this poem by Lola Haskins she surprises us with reasons artists wear black. Write a poem of your own that answers a question in a startling way: Why do insects bite? What makes the tectonic plates in the earth's lithosphere shift and collide? Why are friends loyal to each other? Why do people die?

1. Start four or more of your lines with "because," and include a body part such as hands.
2. Include some sounds as Haskins does with "loons' tremolo cry" and a muffled whisper.
3. Use only one comma and put it in a surprising place so readers pause unexpectedly.
4. Tell a secret and a lie, and never tell which is which. (Thanks to Peter Murphy, prompt writer for *More Challenges for the Delusional*, Diode Editions, 2018, for this idea.)
5. Challenge for the Delusional: Joey De Jesus redacted (edited) 122 pages of a law governing Puerto Rico to make it into a sestina, called a palimpsestina because it's made from found language. Do something similar by finding information about your poem's subject and redacting it, eliminating words and phrases. Incorporate part of what's left into your poem. Find a way to credit your source, possibly in your title or in an epigraph. De Jesus ~~crossed out~~ the title ("PROMESA") as a clue to how the poem was written.

**Don't miss World Above's next open mic and featured reading at the Arts Garage in Atlantic City on Wednesday, February 20<sup>th</sup>, at 7 pm with Analysis.** Questions or comments about the prompt? Contact Barb Daniels [barbarajdaniels@comcast.net](mailto:barbarajdaniels@comcast.net).