

## PUTTING MORE POWER IN YOUR POETRY: A VIRTUAL REVISION WORKSHOP

JAYNE BROWN, WORKSHOP LEADER

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### WORKSHOP PLAN:

- WRITING PROMPT TO START SOMETHING NEW
- BRIEF DISCUSSION: CHALLENGES TO REVISION
- REVISION EXERCISES USING EITHER THE NEW DRAFT OR A POEM YOU'VE BROUGHT

### SOME STRATEGIES TO KEEP REVISING YOUR POEMS:

Poet Steve Kowitz suggests you read through a poem you've written and do this:

- Find one line or section you think is successful
- Find one line or section you think is less successful—it might be bland, awkward or a cliché
- Now that the ice is broken, mark any other spots that seem weak.
- Consider whether the poem needs to begin or end in a different place. The best beginning might be several lines in, and the ending might be earlier in the poem.
  - (from *In the Palm of Your Hand: The Poet's Portable Workshop*, by Steve Kowitz)

The “Yellow Pen” test: adapted from Lee Gutkind:

- Go through your poem draft with a colored pen or highlighter and highlight anything that would engage the senses of the reader—an image, a sound, a concrete metaphor—anything that gives the reader an experience.
- Re-write the sections you didn't highlight.
- Take out any places where you explain or tell the reader., instead of showing.
- “Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.” (Chekhov)

More is More: A quote on his Revision Process by poet Stephen Dunn:

A fairly new experience that I've been having is **revision as expansion...** Several years ago, in looking at my work, I saw that I was kind of a page or page and a half kind of poet, which meant that I was thinking of closure around the same time in every poem. I started to confound that habit. By mid-poem, I might add a detail that the poem couldn't yet accommodate. That's especially proven to be an interesting and useful way of revising poems that seem too slight or thin; **to add something, put an obstacle in.**

Mary Oliver in “Revision,” from *A Poetry Handbook*:

One of the difficult tasks of rewriting is to separate yourself from the origins of your poem—your own personal connections to it...[Poems] are imaginative constructs, and they do not exist to tell us about the the poet or poet's actual experience—they exist in order to be poems. John Cheever says somewhere in his journals, ‘I lie, in order to tell a more significant truth.’ The poem, too, is after a more significant truth.

## **10 STRATEGIES FOR DEEP REVISION**

from *The Poet's Companion*, by Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux

1. Turn the poem over and start again. Combine the best of both versions.
2. Change the way the poem looks on the page. Line breaks, stanza breaks, margins, etc.
3. Take any problem lines and rewrite them at least 5 ways.
4. Find where your poem took a wrong turn and rewrite from there, going in a different direction.
5. If the poem has a main controlling metaphor, change it—try a different one and see where it goes.
6. Write a question word in the margin(how, why, where, who, etc.) and answer question in poem.
7. Try surgery. Lop off beginning or end, take out several lines and see if you need them.
- 8/ Shake up the poem and breaks whatever patterns you've gotten into—point of view, syntax, imagery, etc.
9. Radical surgery.: Find the heart, or core of your poem, what it really wants to be about. It might be one line, one stanza, one image. Take out everything else and write again, starting just with the heart.
10. If nothing else works, put the poem away for a while and come back to it later.

### **The Opening Writing Prompt for our Workshop:**

- 1: Start with an extremely mundane activity (washing dishes, for example). Something you do.
- 2: Shift the perspective, enlarge the experience, open a window on something larger.
- 3: Return to the activity or scene of the beginning, although now it is transformed.

#### **Tips:**

- Don't expect to "finish." You're starting something you can keep working with, in this workshop or beyond.
- Show us, don't tell us. Use vivid details to give your readers or listeners an experience.
- Feel free to "lie" about details in service to the larger experience of the poem.