

More Creative Writing Invitations: Invitations to Go Deeper

Borrowed and Adapted From *Room to Write: Daily Invitations to a Writer's Life* by Bonnie Goldberg. Penguin/Putnam: 1996. (Available in the Writing Center)

Write What You Don't Remember

Just as exercising a muscle involves resistance, it strengthens the imaginative mind to approach it from an angle it resists. What you don't remember is material for your imagination to build on. Non-memories may involve parts of the past you have difficulty recalling.

Write the phrase "I don't remember," and fill up a page. If you draw a blank at any point, repeat the phrase "I don't remember," in writing, until something else forms in your consciousness. Notice if one of these non-memories suggests a topic to write about or a section of a piece you're already working on. Notice what subjects of non-memories emerge: are they the same themes you often write about? If not, explore one of the new ones.

(From *Room to Write* "I Don't Remember" p.3)

Write What You Don't See

Some writing begins with a sense of absence, a void, a sense of something missing or hidden. This unseen inspiration can take the form of an object, a person, or a lack of understanding. What you don't see, literally and figuratively, can be what fascinates and motivates you. Purposely avoiding something can have the effect of amplifying its importance, giving it greater power. When writing, it is eye-opening to explore what you don't see or understand as well as what you do. Just as you see with your eyes, instinct, intuition, and imagination, you can neglect to see with these same faculties.

Begin by writing the phrase "I don't see," and follow blindly wherever it takes you.

(From *Room to Write* "Absence as Presence" p.28)

Developing Character

This invitation has two parts...

Part 1: What's the first thing you notice about a stranger who walks into the room? Describing people is a significant part of creative writing. It is advantageous to your descriptions if you're aware of what aspects of a person you pick up on first: physical appearance, personality, style of speech or clothing, habits, etc. Knowing what comes naturally in your character descriptions will remind you of which other characteristics to observe to round out your portraits of people. Pick someone you know intimately or superficially and see on a fairly regular basis. Describe this person. When you are finished, notice what you concentrated on first, what aspects you have included and what you have left out. Did you include a physical description but leave out the way this person talks? Spend another half page on an element of character that didn't appear in the original description, or rework the portrait by beginning with the last category of characteristics to show up in your original description.

Part 2: Just as important as being able to describe another person is the ability to see through her or his eyes. We have the habit of believing that our own perspective is the most compelling way of seeing things and sometimes we limit our writing to this one view. But each time you step out of yourself you discover parts of yourself. For instance, we each walk around with an image of who we are and how others experience us. But what would you notice if you could see yourself through someone else's eyes?

Describe yourself through the eyes of the character that you chose to describe in Part 1. See what you learn.

(From *Room to Write* "What a Character" and "The Eyes of the Beholder" pp. 11 - 12)

Write Away From Regret

How many times a person starts a thought with the phrase "If only!" Having expectations and hopes are acts of the imagination. Sure, for many people, "if only" is a cry of regret. But for writers it can be the source of the next piece; it is the imagination at work again.

Make a list of "if onlys." Fill one page. There may be one that suggests an idea for a new piece. Or, see if linking a few "if onlys" from the list generates something new.

(From *Room to Write* "If Only" p.91)

Write Your Lies

Everyone lies. We're not supposed to, but we do anyway. All of us have lied in the past and we are likely to lie again in the future. Nobody likes to be lied to unless they themselves are hiding from the truth. The power derived from most lies is that ability to withhold, to trick someone else, to control reality. But lies aren't always bad. What was the last lie you were glad you told? Why was it a good lie? What motivates a character to lie is often more telling than the lie itself. You can incorporate the lies that your characters speak more convincingly by beginning with your own motivations for lying.

Today write only lies. They can be absurd ones, such as, last night I had dinner with the President in Honolulu, or the lies you tell yourself and/or others. Without judgment, be a total liar. Or, write down lies you have told and, in retrospect, what motivated you to withhold the truth.

(From *Room to Write* "Lies" p.20)