



College
of
Humanities

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA,
Arizona's First University

Writing Exploratory Poetry, *Through Space and Time*
The University of Arizona Poetry Center
Poetry Center Reading Series
By Taylor Johnson
Poet-in-Residence
2006-2007

Grade Level: 9-12

Time Frame: At least 1, as many as 4 (Reading/Discussing, Researching, Writing, Revising)

Material Requirements:

To teach this lesson, you will need:

- Photocopies of selected poems from *Budget Travel Through Space and Time* (Goldbarth, Albert. *Budget Travel Through Space and Time*. Graywolf Press: St. Paul, Minnesota, 2005.)
- Board for note-taking, definitions
- Writing materials (paper and pencils or word processors)
- Art materials (for sketches and drawings - optional)
- Photocopier (optional)
- Reference materials, including but not limited to:
 - Print Encyclopedias
 - Online Resources: encyclopedia: <http://www.wikipedia.org/>, word origins: <http://www.etymonline.com/>
 - Books of quotations
 - Dictionaries, including visual dictionaries
 - Thesauri
 - Magazines: *National Geographic*, *People*, *Newsweek*, etc.
 - Books with large color photographs or detailed sketches of objects
 - *News of the Weird*, and/or *The Darwin Awards* (journalistic anecdotes about strange/stupid/fantastic contemporary occurrences)
 - Science books: Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Anatomy, etc.

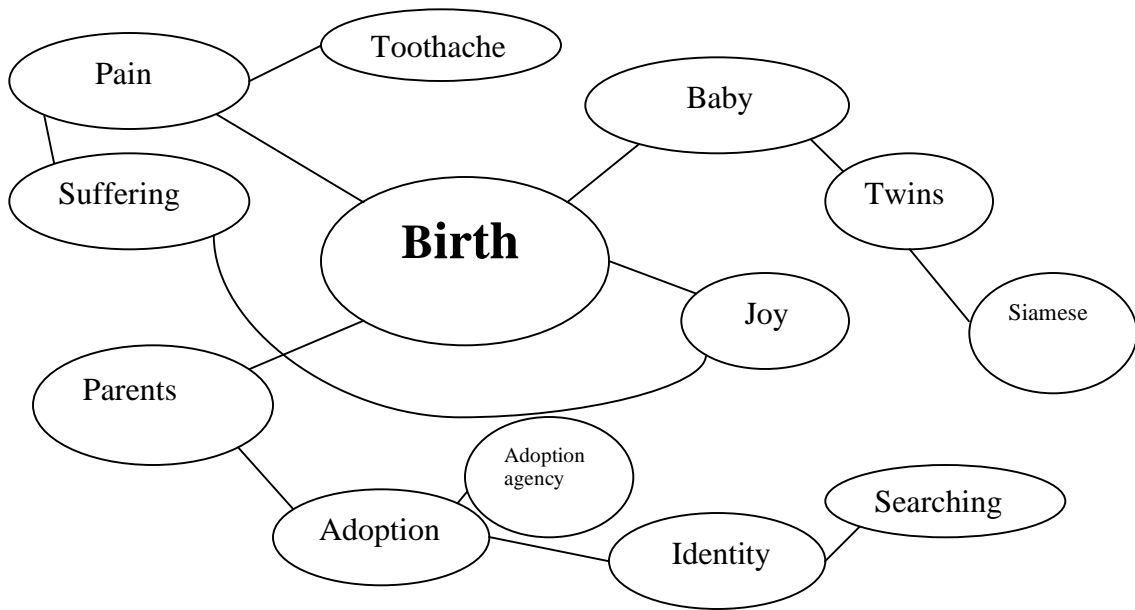
Learning Objectives:

In this lesson, students will have opportunities to:

- Read and discuss poems by Albert Goldbarth
- Research historical events, people, words or objects using reference materials
- Compile research in the form of a “scrapbook”
AND
- Write an original poem that incorporates non-fiction ideas and content (from research) with personal anecdote and storytelling.
AND/OR
- Write a poem which investigates word etymologies
AND/OR
- Write a poem in response to epigraph (a quotation placed at the beginning of the literary work, usually related to its theme)

Sequence of Activities:

1. Before teaching, decide what elements of this lesson you want your students to focus on. I’ve incorporated ideas for three recurring approaches among many of Goldbarth’s poems in this collection, but you may want to zero in on one of them. The most challenging lesson variant would be to present several of the poems for discussion (you’d need more than one class period for this), discuss ways the featured elements in the group of poems are working, and then give the students the option to use as many of the elements in the writing of their own poem as they desire. Or, you could identify and discuss all three elements (epigraph, etymology, history) as present in single poem. Finally, it may be more useful to narrow in on one of the foci, for example, write a poem that explores etymology of a single word, such as “zygote” (using, but being not limited to, the online source listed above to begin an exploration of interesting possibilities).
2. Pass out poem(s) to the students. I suggest three poems from Section 1 to epitomize each suggested topic: “Tuvalu” (epigraphs), “‘Far’: An Etymology” (etymologies), and “Otzi” (histories). You will find other examples of each kind throughout the book, so feel free to select other poems instead.
3. Facilitate a discussion about the poem(s). You may want to pass out a companion worksheet with specific questions about the poem(s) you are using so students have a place to begin. Establish the basics—who, what, when, where, why, and how. (This step you could break into two parts: first, model a process of inquiry about each poem, asking questions about form and content; then, transition to the students working in pairs to answer the rest of the questions before reporting back to the whole class. Following this activity description, I have compiled a list of “questions” in the form of a *Scavenger Hunt* that could apply to any of the poems you use from the Goldbarth book.)
4. Ask students to select a topic (or word or quotation) about which they have an interest or curiosity. Have them brainstorm using idea mapping. For example:



Use the above diagram as a template for exploring multiple ideas as related to a central theme or topic. In mapping your mind's natural inclination to make associations, this pre-writing tool may help even uncertain students begin to dialogue overlapping concepts, make connections, reveal interesting contradictions, or land upon an idea not in mind originally but which is far more exciting than the original. (This brainstorming/idea mapping technique is adapted from the book, *Writing the Natural Way: Using Right-Brain Techniques to Release Your Expressive Powers*, by Gabriele Lusser Rico.)

5. Provide the students with a wide variety of interesting resource materials in order that they may explore and investigate their topics further. Ask them to make lists of quotations, or excerpts, or photocopies of images (if time and/or resources permit), sketches, dioramas, questions—anything they find or generate as a discovery in their research of a topic. (Remind them to cite their sources.) They will keep and compile these fragments to include in a “scrapbook” chronicling the evolution of their ideas toward a poem.
6. Once the students have created their lists and/or scrapbooks of research and ideas, review strategies that Goldbarth uses to integrate his “research” into a poetic exploration. For example, in part 2 of the poem, “Tuvalu,” Goldbarth quotes a Tuvalu elder as saying, “So eventually, in 50 years or so, the islands will disappear. And the people there will also disappear, along with their land.” Then, Goldbarth, or the poet, comments on this observation from the Tuvalu elder. His question about the topic echoes his poem’s central theme when he writes, “Who will remember the taste, or even/ the *idea*, or tava?”...and a few lines later, “—but I have doubts/ that we can pile sandbags of retention in a heap enough/ to stop, or even slow, the slow erasure of the waters/ as they seep across Tuvalu.” His doubts reveal his conflicted emotions about the inevitability of losing and forgetting pieces of history. His emotions and philosophical observations in response to the “scraps” of information, quotations, etymologies, historical summaries, and anecdotes—constitute the form and content of his poetry.

7. Have the students begin working on a first draft of their poems. Invite them to closely imitate Goldbarth's style and strategies. Ask them to be students of his work, insofar that their approach to "talking about" takes its cues from Goldbarth, but their topics will be unique to their own interests, obsessions, preoccupations, and research. Also, suggest that students use their scrapbooks as a guide for how to organize their ideas. Some students may even want to arrange their "snippets" in a visual map on their desks as a way to decide on an organization of their ideas.
8. Tell your class that for the purposes of imitating Goldbarth, it is more important to create a poem that addresses *emotional truths* rather than *literal truth*. Herein lies a paradox: even though they will be using non-fictional research materials to obtain fodder for writing, their materials should not limit their poems. For example: a student interested in Siamese twins may research some accounts of actual Siamese twins from history or recent times, using an online encyclopedia and a textbook of physical mutations, and then end up writing a poem that is in the form of diary entries, from the perspective of what it would be like to spend one's entire life permanently attached to a sibling. Although the poem may include actual quotations from Siamese twins, or excerpts from medical texts about the phenomenon, the emotional content or story will be entirely from the imagination of the student writer. In other words, their research should provide support for their own ideas and concerns. Thus, using excerpts and quotations becomes a way for student poet to talk about their opinions and emotions, even as they connect their exploration to a greater political, social, historical, biological, psychological etc. etc., context.
9. If time allows (you will need extra class period(s) for this), have the students revise and edit their work with the help of one or more writing peers in a constructive workshop setting. Break the students into pairs and have them exchange their works. Each student will have an opportunity to receive criticism as well as give criticism. You may want to provide them with two checklists: one to address basic mechanics of writing; another to address content and theme, e.g. Does the poem effectively include excerpts from the research? Does the poem address a larger philosophical question or emotions? How could the narrative be written more clearly? with more of what kind of details? etc. (There are plenty of resources on how to conduct writer's workshops, as well as sample revision checklists, rubrics, lists of critical questions, so I will leave you to consult your own reference materials to that end.)
10. Suggest or provide opportunities for students to publish their poems. If the "scrapbooks" turn out really spectacular (read: visual) you may want to consider mounting an "exhibit" which displays the scrapbooks and poems.

Resources:

Goldbarth, Albert. *Budget Travel Through Space and Time*. Graywolf Press: St. Paul, Minnesota, 2005.

Rico, Gabriele Lusser. *Writing the Natural Way: Using Right-Brain Techniques to Release Your Expressive Powers*. J.P. Tarcher: Los Angeles, California, 1983.

SCAVENGER HUNT

Read Albert Goldbarth's poem, " _____," and then go HUNTING!

Can you find one (or more) of any of the following?

- epigraph
- event in history
- famous person from history
- geographical feature (think topography)
- name of continent
- name of country
- name of state
- name of city
- historical date
- number
- definition of a word
- quotation
- name of person
- foreign word(s)
- opposites in one poem
- unusual object
- paradox
- metaphor
- simile
- footnote
- word(s) you have to look up in dictionary because you've never seen or heard it

- definition(s) _____

- name of magazine
- name of newspaper
- name of book or author
- name of play or playwright
- name of poem or poet
- name of art piece or artist
- name of film or director
- name of comic book or comic book artist
- name of cartoon
- joke or pun
- political figure
- religious figure

Author Bio:

This lesson was developed to correspond with the Visiting Poets and Writers Reading Series.

Albert Goldbarth has published over 25 volumes of poetry and is Distinguished Professor of Humanities in the Department of English at Wichita State University. Albert Goldbarth read for the Series on Thursday, September 7th at 8pm in the Modern Languages Auditorium.

The Poetry Center also offers a limited number of poets-in-the-schools, an archive of lesson plans, field trips and tours of our special collection library. For more information about our programs call (520)626-3765.



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS



Arizona
Commission
on the Arts

www.poetrycenter.arizona.edu