**Journal Writing – Term 2**

**Requirements: to complete at least 10 journal entries, in class and at home. To select at least 1 journal entry to develop into a polished piece, following the writing process: pre-writing – draft – revise – edit - publish**

**What is a journal?**

A journal is a written record of your thoughts, experiences, and observations. You can write in your journal daily, or only when you feel the urge. You can write with a fountain pen in a leather-bound book if that inspires you, or you can write with your lucky pencil on the backs of dollar bills if you are both superstitious and rich. It's entirely up to you.

Our whole lives we are told to write a certain way, to use a number two pencil and stay within the lines, to fill up exactly three pages with our thoughts on a specific theme, being sure to include topic sentences and a conclusion. Journaling is different. With journaling, there are no rules, no rights or wrongs. You might decide to share parts of your journal, but, fundamentally, your journal is for you. So you're in charge. Your journal is a space where you're absolutely free to express yourself.

**Why keep a journal?**

Here are just a few of the reasons for journaling:

* Preserve memories. It's amazing how quickly we forget. For instance, try remembering in detail your day exactly one week ago. Can you remember what you wore? What you ate for lunch? What you felt and thought about? Try an experiment. Write down in detail everything that happened to you today. I bet you can keep going for a dozen pages or more. But if you try to write about yesterday, you might have trouble filling up more than a couple of pages. And if you go to the day before yesterday, you probably have even less. We are constantly losing pieces of our own lives, pieces of ourselves. A journal is a way of keeping them.
* Improve your writing. Generally, the more you write, the better a writer you become. Writing regularly makes writing easier, and it helps you develop your own writing voice. Even if your journal is just for yourself and it doesn't matter how "good" it is, journaling builds muscles that you can use for other kinds of writing. And the fact that it is, generally, for your eyes only makes your journal an ideal laboratory for experimenting with new styles, techniques, and subject matter, increasing your range as a writer. Your journal is also a place to collect ideas and material for creative writing. All of the sights, sounds, tastes, and feelings you record, the overheard pieces of conversation, the people you were watching in the street -- all of these can be recycled in stories and poems. These observed details will give your creative writing the texture of reality.
* Sharpen your senses. Writing about your experience can make you a better observer. When we know we're going to write about something, we pay a different kind of attention to it. Keeping a journal gets you in the habit of noticing the details of your daily life. The result is like a heightening of the senses, as you observe the world with greater richness and complexity.

**What to write?**

You can use your journal as a general record of your daily life. Or you might prefer to focus on a certain topic such as your garden or your reading or current events. You can write about your experiences, your thoughts, your memories. You can use it to collect material to use in fiction writing and poems. Some people keep notebooks next to their beds and write down their dreams.

There's no right or wrong way to keep a journal. The journal is for you, so you get to set the rules. Experiment, try different approaches, different kind of subject matter.

If you don't know what to write about, take a walk and make notes on what you observe around you: the buildings and people or the plants and birds, the weather, the look of the sky, the look of the ground (grass? wildflowers? pavement? dirt/pebbles? what color?), the sounds (cars? birds? wind? your own breath?), the smells (cut grass? car exhaust? sweat? wood smoke?), the shards and scraps that collect in the gutters. In every scene, there are an infinite number of details to notice if you pay close enough attention.

Another way to generate ideas: take a general theme -- let's say, *Fear*.

Then spend five minutes breaking that theme into subcategories; for example:

* Things that scare me
* Things I do when I'm afraid
* Techniques for overcoming fear, etc.

If you want, you can break some of those into even smaller categories. For example, "Things that scare me" could be subdivided further:

* Scary movies
* My nightmares
* Irrational fears and superstitions
* Fear of failure
* People I'm afraid of, etc.

Each item in your list is a topic that you can write about in your journal. With this system, in less than an hour, you can come up with enough writing topics for a whole year of journaling.

JOURNAL WRITING PROMPTS

 The best lesson my grandparent (or parent or any relative) ever taught me was...

 Tell five things you'd like to do on your next birthday.

 In 20 years, I will be...

 Tell about an event in your life that has caused a change in you.

 I was most angry when...

 If you could design one room in a house to suit only your needs, what would it look like?

 Describe your perfect vacation.

 My worst mistake was...

 If you and your best friend could have a free limo for 24 hours, where would you go and what would you do?

 You have the freedom to travel to any city or country in the world. Where would you go and why?

 What would you do if you were Prime Minister of Australia?

 You have an extra $100,000 to give away; you cannot spend it on yourself. What would you do with the money?

 [using a current local controversy] Do you agree with the decision? Why? Would you change if anything? What?

**Journal prompts - all about you**

1. What kind of day are you having, and why?
2. What's your favourite colour, place, food, book, song, or movie, and why?
3. What do you like to do? How does it make you feel?
4. Where are you happiest? Describe that place.
5. What's something you're good at? What makes you good at it?
6. What do you consider to be your culture, and how do you feel about it?
7. What would you change about yourself or your life? Is there a way for you to change it?
8. What is your relationship like with various members of your family?
9. If you have brothers or sisters, how are you similar to them or different from them? What about with your friends?
10. What are your views on religion?
11. What keeps you up at night worrying? Are your worries realistic? Is there anything you can do about them?
12. Do you have a philosophy of life? If so, what is it? If not, what is your method for making important decisions?
13. In what areas are you optimistic, and in what areas are you pessimistic?
14. What are your most prized possessions?
15. Who is someone you miss?
16. What is something someone else has that you envy? Describe it and your feelings about it.
17. What is a book, movie, song, or television program that has influenced you, and how?
18. What is a mistake people often make about you?
19. What's something you disagree with about the way you were raised?
20. What's your favorite: season, color, place, or food? Describe it.

**Journal prompts - daydreams**

1. Describe your dream: job, man/woman, house.
2. How would you like your life to be when you're older?
3. What would be the guest list at your dream party? What would the various guests talk about?
4. What magic power would you like to have? How would you use it? What would it feel like?
5. If you won the lottery, what would you do?
6. What's a country you'd like to visit? How do you imagine your time there?

**Journal prompts - Memories**

1. What's something you were afraid of as a child?
2. What's something difficult you had to do?
3. What's an embarrassing moment that happened to you?
4. Who is someone you've lost? What are some of your memories about that person?
5. What's something that helped to shape your outlook to life?
6. Describe your teachers at school.
7. Describe your best childhood friend and your relationship with this person.
8. When you were a child, how did you imagine your adult self?
9. What's your earliest memory?
10. What are some of the memories you associate with springtime? With summer, fall, and winter?

**Journal Prompts - Write about your first...**

1. Day of school or college
2. Crush
3. Date
4. Home
5. Pet
6. Job

**Journal prompts - Write about any of these life milestones:**

1. Graduation
2. Wedding or divorce
3. Pregnancy
4. Childbirth
5. Job or career change, retirement

**Journal Prompts - What memories are brought by the following smells?**

1. pine needles
2. cut grass
3. sunscreen
4. cinnamon
5. pencil erasers
6. vinegar
7. newly-vacuumed carpet
8. orange peel
9. mothballs
10. roses
11. a new car
12. frying bacon
13. damp paper

**Descriptive writing prompts**

Describe:

1. The view out your window (light, shadows, colours, the look of the sky, the look of the ground, what's there)
2. The current weather outside (how the wind moves, how it smells, temperature, how it changes the way things look)
3. Your physical appearance
4. Your room and house
5. The home of one of your friends
6. Someplace you've worked
7. The street where you live
8. Your first love or your current partner
9. Someone you think is really attractive or really unattractive
10. Someplace you have travelled
11. A plant or animal that you can see right now
12. Every place that you have been today
13. The last meal you've eaten or your favourite food
14. Your parents or grandparents
15. Your favourite place to relax
16. An animal or plant that you can go look at right now

**Tips for better descriptive writing**

A great description makes the reader see, smell, feel, hear, or taste what you're describing. The keys to effective description are:

* **Careful observation.** The reality of things is often different from what we assume. For example, when beginning artists try to draw a human face, a common mistake is to place the eyes at the top of the head because that's where we imagine the eyes should be. But if you actually measure a face, you'll find that the eyes are closer to the center. Good writers look beyond their assumptions and really examine the subject of their writing. This allows them to write descriptions that come get much closer to the real world.
* **The right details.** If I tell you that my living room contains a sofa, a lamp, a desk, and a desk chair, that doesn't give you much of a mental picture, does it? So far, I could be describing almost any living room. What if I tell you that the sofa is two feet from the desk and that the desk is made of synthetic wood with metal legs and is approximately two feet high, about six inches higher than the seat of my desk chair? This is additional information, but it doesn't do a lot to help with your mental picture. You need to know what's unique about my living room. If you visited my living room, what details would you carry away in your mind? Well, you might remember my ugly second-hand sofa, the colour of scrambled eggs, with a hole worn in the seat that fills with breakfast crumbs. This sofa is not only distinctive, it also conveys a larger picture. For instance, it lets you know that I am not living in a palace. And that my housekeeping leaves something to be desired. This conversation is getting embarrassing, so I will move on to the next point...
* **The right words.** Think of the words "glowing" and "glittering." Both refer to light, but they are different. Something that "glows" has a light that shines as from within. Lit windows glow. Healthy skin might seem to glow. Something that "glitters" generally reflects many tiny points of light. Diamonds glitter. Icicles glitter. The word "glow" sounds soft, and the word "glitter" sounds hard. The word "glow" sounds warm, and the word "glitter" sounds cold. Pay attention to the feeling of the words you choose as well as to their meaning.

1) **Write to music.** Play a piece of music that has no lyrics, and write in your journal about the lyrics you think would fit it best. This can be the beginning of a poem. Does the music stir up memories? If it were the soundtrack for a movie, what kind of movie would it be? Write part of the story.

2) **Try different points of view.** Italo Calvino wrote a short story in which his character, Marcovaldo, followed stray cats from through his city, seeing the alleys and rooftops from a cat's perspective. Experiment with describing the world around you from different points of view. How would your home look to a child, for example? Think about the details that would attract a child's attention that might not interest an adult. How about you -- how might a stranger describe you? What aspects of you might a stranger that your parents or spouse would overlook? In what ways would the stranger be wrong?

3) **Collect words.** Did you hear a word that you liked? An expression that caught your attention? In Spain, where I live, people say things like, "I was more lost than an octopus in a garage." That's quite a mental image.

Keep a list of interesting words that you can use as poem starters. You might do a little research on the origins of words and phrases in the list. Many words have curious stories behind them. How does the word sound to you? What images does it bring to mind? Does it have more than one meaning? How does it feel in your mouth? How is it different from similar words? What does it remind you of? Write about it.

4) **Focus your attention.** Spend a day concentrating on just one of your senses -- smell or sound. Or a day paying attention not to objects, but to their shadows and reflections. A day looking specifically at people's hands, the differences in their textures, their movements, the way they act. A day looking at the way people walk. Focusing your attention will lead to new discoveries.

5) **Read actively.** Reading can lead your mind in new directions. Of course, you don't want to copy anyone else's creative writing, but you can use it to inspire new ideas. Maybe a novel you read makes you curious about a foreign culture, a historical event, a certain lifestyle. Do some research on this topic -- it could be the beginning of a story. Maybe a book gives you a fresh perspective on something in your own life or experience. Write about it. If you're a poet, you could try "writing between the lines" of a favourite poem. Write new lines for that poem, and then turn them into a poem of your own.

6) **Collect creative writing ideas.** Stay alert for material you can use in creative writing. Jot down names that you might like to use for a character, places you see that would be a dramatic setting for a scene, an interesting way of describing something, possible topics and themes. Then when you're ready to write fiction or poetry, you can go back and mine your journal for ideas.

And last, but not least…

Consider word choice and phrases. Experiment. Get excited about language. Make up some words if you want! Flip things around. Let Yoda guide you. “Laughing, I wasn’t” “Funny, it’s not.” “Feel the force, you must.” How detailed can you get? “The cat’s ear was scratched and there was a bit missing, most probably from a fight with a tomcat. Its tail flicked angrily, defending its ground with a deep growl.”