

Dear Teachers,

After bringing poetry workshops into public and private schools for nearly two decades through the California Poets in the Schools program, and after learning from the best (the kids!), I wrote *Rip the Page!* for elementary school-age writers and *Leap Write In!* for the middle school set on up. If you'd like sample experimental lesson plans to try out with your students, check out my top five go-to activities from each book, which I've collected here. These are surefire ways to get kids and teens inspired and excited to pick up a pen and play on the page.

Contact me if you have any questions. My books are geared toward all kinds of learners, from the reluctant writer all the way through to the perfectionist.

With inspiration and a big *thank you* for all that you do for your students!

Karen

P.S. If you're interested in receiving even more ideas, sign up for *The Museletter*, a handwritten, monthly, snail-mailed letter created for individual students, teachers, and classrooms (grades 3–6). *The Museletter* includes writing prompts, book recommendations, sample student writing, and a surprise in each envelope. It's fun to receive and is geared toward keeping those pens and pencils moving. To subscribe, go to www.karenbenke.com.

The following material is from *Rip the Page!* © 2010 by Karen Benke and *Leap Write in!* © 2013 by Karen Benke. Published by Roost Books, an imprint of Shambhala Publications. www.roostbooks.com.

Rip the Page!

Adventures in Creative Writing

Karen Benke



Boston & London

2010

Try This . . .

What Can You Write With?

Forget the usual suspects: pencils, pens, paint, chalk, Sharpie markers, purple crayons . . . What if you could write with *anything* today? What if you could wedge between the fingers of your left or right hand, a memory? Your infinite imagination? The power of creativity? A spinning planet? The state of forgiveness? A tree trunk, or a ray of sunlight? Well, guess what? In the realm of creative writing, you can. There are trillions of possibilities, and they keep on expanding into endless whirling patterns. What can you add to the things *you* can write with today?

What I Write With

I can write with the tainted light of tattered forgiveness
I can write with the smallest stars of the almost-not-seen
I can write with the long sticky threads of sacred spider webs
I can write with the spinning planets of darkness and danger
I can write with my unseen, dazzling trick-up-my-sleeve schemes

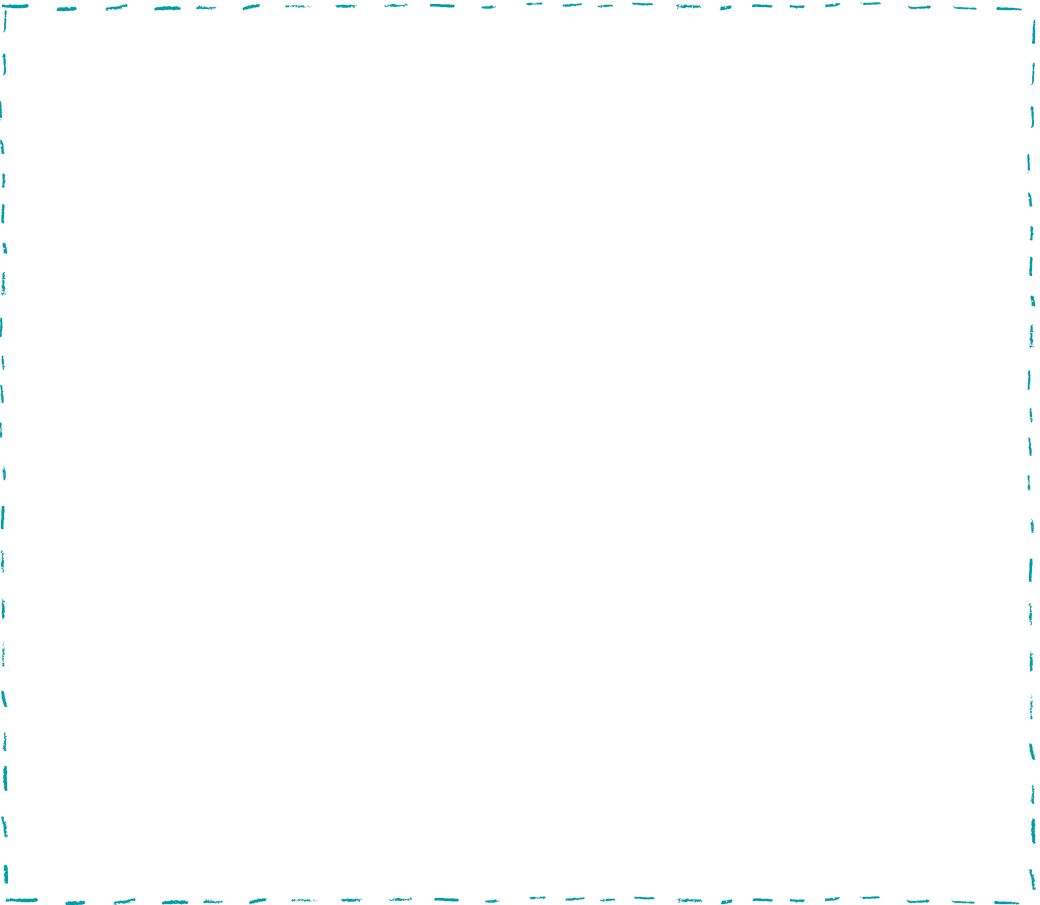
Suddenly a Story

Meeting the President in 5 Words or Less

I met the President. Really. At this party. Standing by the coat closet. He shook my hand. "Karen. Nice to meet you." He shook *my* hand! The President. Well, he wasn't yet. But he would be. And I met him. Can you believe it? I smiled. Then . . . my voice. It caught. You know, how it does. Down around my ankles. I looked at him. Couldn't speak. Not a word. No sound. Not a syllable. No, I did *not* grunt. He waited. Smiled. Kind of concerned. Cute, even. Then moved on. To the woman beside me. She had a voice. "Well, hello there!" He shook her hand. "Carol, nice to meet you." He moved through the room. "Russ, thanks for coming. Sandy, a pleasure." But I was stuck. Right there. In that cramped corner. Wearing a name tag. In such a fancy house. Big vases. Oil paintings. Baby grand piano. People in heels, ties. Trays of tiny sandwiches. Cream cheese, ham. I slid to the floor. I had to . . . crawl. Just to the closet. I reached inside. Found my coat. And my voice. *Don't worry*, it said. *YOU got to shake hands. With the almost-president.* Then I walked home. The long way. With the moon. And my name tag. I couldn't wait. To tell you. Can you believe it? I met the president. Of the entire United States!

Start a story about meeting someone or doing something for the first time. Tell it fast, at a clip, like you're talking to a close friend. That friend who totally *gets* you. That friend you don't have to explain *every little thing* to . . . that friend who doesn't mind when you rush ahead or fast-forward through a thought. In your friend's eyes, you shine. Oh, and just for fun, see if you can tell your story using only 5 words or less per sentence. Afterward, read it and see if you like it. Then go find your friend and read it again.

Your Turn

A large, empty rectangular box with a dashed border, intended for the user to write their story.

Synesthesia or What Blue Sounds Like

Imagine if whenever you heard a bird's song or felt the wind through your hair, a shade of blue or a triangular pattern filled your brain. Syn-es-the-sia is when a person's senses are twisted or crossed. It's when you experience one sense *through* another. Some people with synesthesia see a specific color whenever they hear a particular sound. (Many artists and musicians have synesthesia.) A letter like *z* can cause a bright burst of red the color of apple skin to rush into their head. They might describe their cat's meow as a zigzagging orange. Or they might hear a high-pitched *whirl* or get a metallic taste in their mouth when they draw a series of circles.

Making up answers to these questions might help you spiral closer to understanding synesthesia and the different ways we all see and experience the many layers of our inner and outer worlds.

What color does a star sound like?	A star sounds like _____
What's the taste of a howl?	A howl tastes of _____
What is the smell of a circle?	A circle smells like _____
What color is a baby's cry?	A baby's cry is bright _____
How does white move?	White moves in a _____
What does a whisper look like?	A whisper looks like a _____
What does mischief smell like?	Mischief smells like _____
What is the texture of turquoise?	The texture of turquoise feels _____
What does a new idea feel like?	A new idea feels like _____

Answers from Kids Your Age

Blue sounds like the crack a glacier makes or the earth's heart-beat late at night.

The taste of a howl sits on my tongue and burns; sometimes it stings and makes my eyes water.

The smell of a circle is easy: it's a combination of wet pavement and chalk.

A baby's cry is definitely pink, a bright pink that refuses all other colors except white or gray.

White moves like my mother when she's happy to see me and my sister and hugs us close.

A whisper looks like a long shadow against a wall or a paper doll cut the wrong way 'round.

Turquoise feels smooth and cold and can't wait to be unfolded and warmed up like yellow.

Try This...

The Imagination's World Record

No doubt you've heard of the Guinness World Records, the book that keeps track of *all* the amazing record-breaking feats of who can carve a face into a pumpkin the fastest; who can sit in a bathtub with 87 rattlesnakes the longest; which group of kids can make the most snow angels simultaneously. There are *thousands* of categories and records that have been attempted and set. Except for this one. So how about letting your long and tireless Imagination compete? Take a chance. There's nothing to lose. All you have to do is enter a line or 2 in as many categories below as your imagination's prepared to win.

The Truest Thing

The Hardest Thing

The Flattest Thing

The Softest Thing

The Deepest Thing

The Noisiest Thing

The Most Difficult Thing

The Friendliest Thing

The Saddest Thing

The Highest Thing

The Kindest Thing

The Slowest Thing

The Bumpiest Thing

The Roundest Thing

The Happiest Thing

The Easiest Thing

The Stickiest Thing

The Funniest Thing

Maybe your Imagination will soon hold the record for the most *Things* it can dream up for categories. Or maybe you'll win for an individual line or group of lines. Keep going! You can do it! You're almost there!

*The Imagination's Lines of World Records
(Spoken Out-Loud by Students)*

The highest thing is the blended voices of 12 baboons.

The bumpiest thing is a depressed pancake without maple syrup.

The friendliest thing is an undiagnosed dream.

The easiest thing is catching a tumbleweed on your tongue.

The quietest thing is unwrapping a mummy.

The slowest thing is a bruised snake.

Your Turn

A large, empty rectangular box with a dashed border, intended for students to write their own lines of world records.

Try This . . .

Seek the Hiding

The vowels are missing, and *you* have to find them. Where will you look for *a e i o u*? And what about *y* and *w*? These vowels, they're a cagey bunch. The only clue they've left is that they're *not* hiding together but have scattered in different directions. Where do you start? They can be *anywhere*. Before *w* left, he teased, "you'll never find me." *Y* yelled, "Don't waste your time!" They obviously don't know who they're dealing with. They haven't heard how determined you are, that you'll *never* give up. The rest of the alphabet is counting on you to get them out of this fix. Here's the note the vowels left. (Without *a e i o u*, it's hard to understand.)

"Cnt t 23 . . . nd scrm, rdy r nt hr cm!"

Translation: "Count to 23 and scream, *ready or not, here I come!*"

Clues to Some Possible Hiding Places

In a blade of wheat, behind a smile, around the bend, caught in the past, trapped inside winter, across the aisle from summer, in the middle of autumn, at the beginning of time, between drops of rain, caught in a daydream, under a rainbow,

deep in a pocket, near the end of the road, under the ocean,
taking a nap in somebody's lap.

I looked for A in the hollow of a tree
where the rope swing sways,
down at the creek where Nick and Collie play.
I searched inside the wind, behind the clouds,
between hours and numbers and on the backs
of little-known facts. I scanned the markings of zebras
and peered at the codes within a butterfly's wings.
I was ready to say, *Aw, just forget it; I give up . . .*
when I spotted A curled in lower case, snoring,
taking a nap in my great nana's lap. *Hey, I yelled,*
Scoot over! That's where I get to sleep.

Your Turn

I looked for A. . . .

I looked for E. . . .

I looked for I. . . .

I looked for O. . . .

I looked for U. . . .

Leap
WRITE
In!

Adventures in Creative Writing
to S-T-R-E-T-C-H & Surprise
Your One-of-a-Kind Mind

Karen Benke



Boston & London • 2013

Surprise Yourself Survey

GIVEAWAY PARTY

To get the full value of joy you must have someone
to divide it with.

—Mark Twain

It's been said that the world is run on two economies: a money economy, where the most important thing is counting and keeping track, and a gift economy, where the most important thing is keeping something for a while and then passing it on. Which economy do you live in? Which economy would you *like* to live in? Hint: you know you're living in a gift economy when you're not concerned about making everything "even-steven."

Finish some of the sentence-starters on the next page, then multiply your answers until you have two of everything (or maybe more), and throw a party, giving away a few lines in the form of a poem. Jessica gave away the small road on the right and that distant god in her soul; Madeline, the footsteps of a bear and her lucky hand that she writes with. Alexis gave away her voice as a token of love and trust. Start your poem with "I give you." The "you" can be anyone and everyone. It's OK to answer with the literal kind of truth *and* the stretchy-bendy kind of truth. (You already investigated what stretches on page 3.)

A combination of senses that I like (mix sight, smell, taste, touch, sound words) is:

- warm fur and wild mint, wet sand and a symphony of crickets, butterscotch and the heat of a bonfire, light from a full moon mixed with the distant call of loons above the crash of salty waves.
-
-
-

My ultimate birthday meal (including dessert) is:

My favorite coin and the side (heads or tails) I most often call:

Something small you'd find in my closet or backpack:

A place I feel safe:

A sound from nature that calms me:

My favorite letters and corresponding colors:

My most prized possession:

Here's a recipe for (pick an emotion):

Here's an echo of (pick anything except a sound):

Three things I'd want if stranded on a desert island:

Here's the view from my bedroom window:

An article of clothing I wish I'd never outgrow:

A piece of sporting equipment I regularly use:

My favorite place to play as a child:

The footsteps of (pick a wild animal):

A friend I like to hang out with:

My favorite breakfast cereal:

The Monopoly token I reach for first is:

The day and month I was born:

My favorite playing card in the deck:

Surprise Yourself Survey

YOUR TRUE NAME

Your true name has the secret power to call you.

—Vera Nazarian

Your true name isn't always the name you were given at birth, especially since you had absolutely *no choice* in the matter. Sometimes your true name lives *beneath* your earth suit and looks back at you in the mirror. Finding your true name can hold the power to help you remember who you *really* are. Here are some suggestions on fooling around with words and images to locate it.

My friend Laurel was digging in her garden one afternoon when she found her true name: *Wild-Frizzy-Haired-Woman-Who-Loves-Lettuces*. I've heard kids your age let loose and rename themselves: *Somersault-Sparrow-Who-Flies-Her-Own-Way-Home*; *Turn-Around-Jump-Shot-Shooter*; *Sprinter-Across-a-Sunny-Field-Ablaze-with-Bees*. Even older, taller kids discover their true names, sometimes on an NBA basketball court, like *Metta World Peace*.

If you're having a hard time loosening up enough to find your true name, hang out with a second grader and borrow some silliness, start a pillow fight, or choose a one-word nature name like the counselors at my son's favorite sleepaway camp: Bob-

cat, Osprey, Starfish, Fox. (On the drive home, I named myself Moonbeam, another mom claimed Wildflower.) Ask yourself what nature name is *yours*. Pull on a spirit of adventure. Pick up a pen. Pile on word after word to the beginning lines below. Play with options. Write fast or slow. Say *no sirree* to making too much sense.

My name really means

dreamer who whispers to all that waits beneath the trapdoor of her heart, sure-footed acrobat queen, brave warrior who paints the outline of a mountain around her shiny life.



Here's the story behind the name I was given _____

I was almost named _____

Nicknames I like _____

Today my name means too many _____

Yesterday it meant too little _____

Tomorrow my name might turn into _____

It's the wish of _____

Inside my name is hidden _____

When my mom calls my name, I feel _____

Secretly I know my name is _____

My name was born when _____

My name travels toward _____

Between the letters of my name hides _____

Consider exploring further:

What does your name hold the scent of?

What does your name have the softness of?

Where would you look if you lost your name?

QUATRAINS THROUGH YOUR POET'S EYE

The world is but a canvas to our imagination.

—Henry David Thoreau

To view what's around you *as if* for the first time, it can be necessary to wander away from your everyday life, to get lost *on purpose*, lose track of time, leave home for a while so you can return with fresh eyes and a refocused imagination. So put this book aside, slip off your watch, and take a little walk into the distance of your existence.

Last winter, a group of sixth and seventh graders walked to my house each Wednesday for an experimental writing group. One evening, I gave them the “assignment” to wander around and just look at things. I gave them permission to open doors, peer into closets, check out bookshelves and cupboards. You know, the kind of snooping you want to do in other people’s houses but don’t because it’s “not polite.” I invited them to consider *all* the things they could look at and write about through their poets’ eyes, while paying fresh attention to the world within my house.

(The cleared *and* cluttered spaces.) The idea was to write four lines—or a quatrain—about *one* object they found from their invited snoop and describe it in an entirely different light.

Go on your own snoop or pick something from the list that follows. *Anything* you can reach out and touch is up for grabs. If you ever walk over to write at my house, I'll let you snoop around, too.

On the first line: write the name of your object.

On the second line: compare it with something or rename it in a way that makes sense *to you*.

On the third line: add a dash of detail about what you wrote on line two.

On the fourth line: reassure it, ask it a question, say what it's doing, or what it's *like*.

pencil	bench	storm
candle	moon	mirror
doorway	window	face
dog	book	clock
whisper	shadow	shoe
quarter	piano	sock
cat	stone	wind chime
thumb	toothpick	tennis racquet
key	guitar	soup spoon

Thumb

odd, friendless boy
raised by four aunts,
don't worry, you're not alone.

—Philip Dacey

Clock

hands reach out to pull me in,
a land with a face
and no eyes.

-Mike

Here's another quatrain suggestion: Tip a four-letter word on its side and see what spills out, like Rebecca did.

Time travels through the ages to when
I met you and we tried to
Master being together until the
Exit opened and you fell out.

-Rebecca

Your Turn

POEM PAINTINGS

Sketch like a painter, but with words.

—Ed White to Jack Kerouac

Wander through a gallery, a museum, an artsy friend's house. Stop to *really study* each painting or picture. Linger longer at the ones that pull you in—you don't have to know or say *why* you like one over another, just let your body feel and your eyes decide which painting it wants to stay with. Then gaze a little longer.

One of my favorite poets, Pulitzer Prize winner Lisel Mueller, wrote a poem titled "Imaginary Paintings." This poem illustrates the connection between poetry and painting, showing what close relatives they are. The Greek poet Simonides said, "Painting is silent poetry, and poetry is painting with the gift of speech." (Read this again and let it sink in.)

Many paintings, especially still lifes, are of *things*. Make note of a few things from the paintings that won't let you release your gaze, and write them on an index card. List those words that you can touch and hold with your hands (lemons, sunflowers, mice, cheese). Then attempt to paint—with words—an abstract noun: *The Future, The Past, Happiness, The Present, Love,*

Death, Hunger, The Leap of Faith, The Big Lie. In three to four lines, write how you would *paint* your abstract noun. Hint: for paint, use what you listed on your index card (oak tree, sunset, train, windowpane).

Drop Deeper

- Use brushstroked words—noun-type words, small details, natural objects, surprising and strange verbs—and take magical leaps of thought. Paint with incomplete sentences *and* broken bits of thought, use those collected words on your palette (or from your magic word tickets, see page 159). And don't forget about color. Begin with the line *How I Would Paint . . .*
- Other how-to topics: How to Make a New Color, How to Have a Happy Life, How to Get Rid of Fear, How to Build a Bridge to the Moon . . . (What else can you add to this list?)

From Imaginary Paintings

5. HOW I WOULD PAINT THE LEAP OF FAITH

A black cat jumping up three feet
to reach a three-inch shelf.

—Lisel Mueller

How I Would Paint Happiness

Olivia and me sitting on a freckled rock
by the oak tree in my backyard.
A walk on Throckmorton to Old Mill Park,
eating chocolate ice-cream cones.

—Emily

To order a copy of these books, visit www.roostbooks.com.

If you are a teacher and are considering using *Rip the Page!* or *Leap Write In!* for a class, please make your request for a desk or exam copy directly through our distributor, Penguin Random House, at www.randomhouse.com/acmart/requests.

For wholesale orders, please contact Penguin Random House at 800-733-3000 or customerservice@randomhouse.com.