

Poetry & Wellbeing Workbook



How to use this workbook

Welcome to this Poetry & Wellbeing slow seminar! It was created by [Rebecca Hurst](#), a writer and Creative Manchester researcher. If you have questions or comments please email Rebecca at: rlhurst70@gmail.com.

This self-directed workbook is divided into three 20 minute blocks:

A. Reading a Poem

An Evening Walk When Spring is Already Old
by Jason Allen-Paisant

B. A short introduction to free-writing

C. Writing your own 'An Evening Walk' poem

You can complete the workbook in a single 1-hour session, or divide it into two or three shorter sessions. Try to find a time and place where you won't be interrupted. You will need a pen and paper, and a timer. (It might take you longer than 20 minutes to complete a session, and that's fine!)

Why creative writing for wellbeing?

Expressing yourself and crafting an object are both ways to relieve stress and emotional turbulence. Research has shown that the physical act of writing creates 'a pathway to memories, feelings and thoughts', and that creativity enables us to 'explore, clarify and make connections with the present.' For more information on the health benefits—both physiological and psychological—of creative writing you can visit my [Substack, The Slow Train](#), where I publish short essays about my practice-based research in this field.

What to do after completing the workbook?

This workbook offers you an opportunity to pause, reflect, and reconnect with yourself. It also offers creative tools for future wellbeing. On The Slow Train website you will find some additional resources for developing a creative writing practice as a method of reflection and self-development, and as a tool that can help support mental and physical wellbeing. A book I recommend if you would like to learn more is: *Writing Alone and With Others* by Pat Schneider.

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A. Reading a Poem

(20 - 30 minutes)

We will begin by reading a poem. Please have your pen and paper ready.

1. Read the poem below and ask yourself **what leaps off the page?** Let your response be quick, maybe just a single word or image. Write it down.

An Evening Walk When Spring is Already Old¹

by Jason Allen-Paisant

On the third of June
I re-enter the woods

The trees' souls
have bloomed into canopies

There is volume
not just skeletons

Breeze passes into the placenta
of this womb

There is hiding place
in the trees

and the birds sing differently
the leaves

have become a sea
in my body

2. Read the poem again **outloud**. Does the poem change when you are hearing it as well as looking at it on the page? Make a note of your thoughts.
3. Now read the poem one last time. **Pay close attention** to the shape of the poem on the page, and to the the images and sounds the poet creates. What do you feel reading the poem? Write down your ideas and feelings.

***Congratulations! You've finished
the first part of this workbook!***

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¹ Allen-Paisant, Jason, *Thinking With Trees* (Carcenet, 2021) www.carcenet.co.uk

B.

A short introduction to free-writing



(20 - 30 minutes)

You will need a pen and paper, and a timer; a kitchen timer is ideal. You can also use your phone, but turn it to Do Not Disturb before you begin.

Free-writing is a tool that is helpful for reflective, expressive and creative writing. You can use it to start your own regular writing or journaling practice. When free-writing try to...

- > Write without self-editing or critiquing your words.
- > Try not to cross things out, just keep going.
- > Tangents are good!
- > Don't worry about grammar or spelling.
- > Or writing in complete sentences.
- > See where the words take you.
- > Keep your hand moving across the page.
- > What you write doesn't have to be true.
- > Trust yourself.
- > Relax and enjoy the process!

Now write the words I REMEMBER at the top of a clean sheet of paper.

Set your timer for 10 minutes and start writing. Use I remember ... as a starting place or prompt.

In her book *Writing Down the Bones* Natalie Goldberg suggests:

Write lots of small memories. If you fall into one large memory, write that. Just keep going. Don't be concerned if the memory happened five seconds ago or five years ago...

When the timer goes off, stop writing.

Congratulations! You've finished the second part of this workbook and completed your first piece of creative writing for wellbeing!

C.

Writing your own poem



(20 minutes)

You will need a pen and paper, and a timer.



Write the title 'An Evening Walk' at the top of a clean sheet of paper. Take a moment to reflect. Is the walk you are going on based on a real or imagined place? Perhaps you are walking somewhere familiar — to the end of your garden, or along the canal with your dog. Or maybe this is a walk in your imagination; a place you have always wanted to visit or that is completely invented. Like Jason, you can be specific about the time of year as well as the place. What is the weather like? Use all your senses. What do you hear, smell, see, and feel on your walk?



Set a timer for 10 minutes and begin writing. Use the freewriting technique you've just learned to create a first draft. Write quickly.

Try not to edit as you write. Keep your hand moving and let the ideas flow. Have fun!

When the timer goes off stand up, have a stretch. Maybe make yourself a hot drink. We're almost done!



Sit down again and set a timer for 10 minutes. Now it's time to redraft and edit your poem.

You might do this by typing it up on a computer. Editing can mean changing a word or two, clarifying an image, and adding or adjusting the line breaks². Try reading the poem out loud. Again, have fun! Think of this as playtime for your brain.

When the timer goes off, **stop writing.**

Congratulations! You've written a poem and finished the workbook!

If you would like to help with my research, please complete this short survey about how you used the workbook. [You can link to the survey here.](#) Thank you!

² A line break in poetry refers to where the line of text ends on the righthand margin. In a poem where this break occurs is usually decided by the writer, rather than dictated by the width of the page. Look again at the first four lines of 'An Evening Walk When Spring is Already Old': On the third of June / I re-enter the woods / The trees' souls / have bloomed into canopies... I have replaced the line and stanza breaks with a forward slash (/) to help show how Jason's poem works. Now look back at the original to see how line breaks have shaped the poem. How did these breaks affect your reading the poem out loud? Finally, you can [read more about the poetic line here.](#)

Contact and further assistance

Rebecca Hurst

Rebecca Hurst is a writer, opera-maker, illustrator, and researcher. She is the author of a poetry collection, *The Iron Bridge*, and a poetry pamphlet, *The Fox's Wedding*. Her music theatre work in collaboration with composers has been widely performed in the UK and Europe. Rebecca has a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Manchester, and in 2022-23 was a Creative Manchester post-doctoral fellow researching the potential of creative writing for well-being. In partnership with Lime Arts she works with staff and patients at Wythenshawe and North Manchester General Hospitals.



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Workbook
is available
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