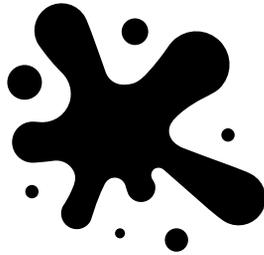


How To

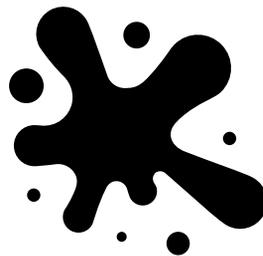
Show Don't Tell



WHEN WRITING POETRY...



How To Show Don't Tell



WHEN WRITING POETRY...

Topic for Day #1 - Use strong images that express the feeling of what you want to say

In my published book of poetry, *Furniture is Disappearing*, the title poem describes a partner moving out of the home that I had shared with him when the relationship broke up. The main themes or feelings I wanted in this poem were absence and regret. The repeated images in this poem of items disappearing from the rooms conjures absence in a metaphoric way which makes it more potent than me simply stating, I was sad when he moved out, or something similar. These are the opening lines of my poem:

***While you are making soup all day
Furniture is disappearing
Gone is your table used as a desk
Your TV cabinet is empty of DVDs***

The poem continues to list the household items being separated and reclaimed, building to the lines:

***Can you please give it back
My unwitting optimism***

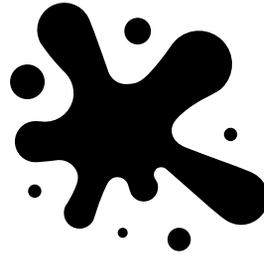
Now this bit might seem tricky, because here I am stating something blatantly, but it works because I have done the prior work of setting up the mood using the metaphor of physical things disappearing. It's okay to have one or two blatant or literal moments in your poem if they are well balanced with other less obvious ways of saying things. It shows the reader you can tell it like it is, but you also can be more nuanced where necessary. Those things in combination will give you more options as a poet, and as a result you will create better poetry.

SO - what are your takeaways from DAY 1?

How will you use this new knowledge in your poetry, starting now?

How To

Show Don't Tell



WHEN WRITING POETRY...

Topic for Day #2 - Rewrite in a different way

This is a quick tip, but a good one. If you have noticed that your default mode is to tell rather than show what is going on in your poem, then use this idea to shake things up. First, write your poem as you usually would. That is to get your first thoughts safely down on paper (or computer). Now that you have captured them, you can have a go at rethinking them - and even perhaps rewriting them.

A good question to have in the front of your mind as you rethink is: ***how can I say this in a more unusual way?*** Or, ***how can I use a metaphor to say the same thing?*** We touched on metaphors earlier, but we did not explain what they are.

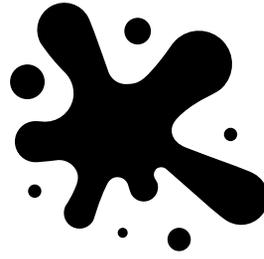
So here we go: ***a metaphor is when you say something IS something else.*** For example, the moon is a lump of cheese. You're not saying that it is LIKE a lump of cheese, in that case we would be dealing with a simile. You can equally use metaphors or similes to spice up your poetry, but metaphors tend to have more power, and they eradicate the use of the word like, which is neater.

So, anyway, when you've written your first draft, and then you have rethought your poem, and come up with some more original ways of saying things, you should be well on your way to showing more and telling less.

Give it a go, put this tip into practice today!

How To

Show Don't Tell



WHEN WRITING POETRY...

Topic for Day #3 - Invite Your Reader to Step into a Feeling

Sometimes you can use plain language in a way that suggests emotion. For example, in the song Perfect Day by Lou Reed, the language is so restrained, but the choice of words is very deliberate and suggests meaning and images in a very subtle way:

***Just a perfect day
Drink Sangria in the park
And then later, when it gets dark
We go home***

***Just a perfect day
Feed animals in the zoo
Then later, a movie too
And then home***

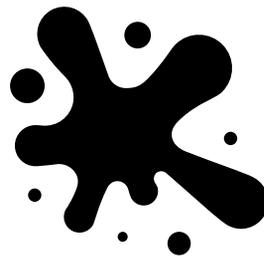
The smallness of these people's lives seem to be suggested by the simplicity of the words used. "Feed animals in the zoo" sounds sad and feeble to me. "Then later a move too" sounds like it wants to be fun but is somehow a disappointment. In this way it is not just the images and plain language used in a clever way but the tone of the poem that really gives an impression of meaning and emotion.

When you're seeking to show don't tell, think about your reader a bit and how you want them to feel. We don't feel through being told. We feel through images and through carefully chosen words that suggest meaning rather than telling the reader what to feel. We suggest a feeling to the reader for them to step inside.

How can you invite your reader to step inside the feeling of your next poem?
What words suggest the meaning you want to show?

Have fun with playing with this technique!

How To Show Don't Tell



WHEN WRITING POETRY...

Topic for Day #4 - Taking Words Away

When you've got your poem draft as good as you can get it, let it sit for a day or a week or a month - depending on your time schedule. Many poems need time to sit so that our eyes can be refreshed enough to look at them from a point of view that is both kind yet critical.

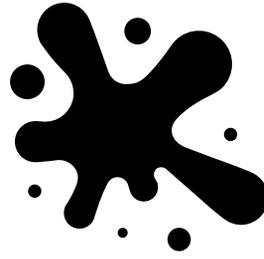
One of the unique qualities of poetry is that it is often very brief. This means that each word in a poem must have a strong reason for being there. It is amazing to me how often I'll write a poem and be able to cut out ten words that I previously thought were essential, but are now clearly not needed at all. What allows me to do that is the clarity created by letting the poem sit for a time before I look at it again.

The point of reducing the number of words in a poem is to get rid of any bits where the flow or music of the poem is interrupted by excess words. Fewer words also usually means that the words that remain are given the space to be more powerful. Sometimes, you just don't need a lot of words to say what you want to say. Often simple and easy to read is best.

So try it out, let a poem sit and then revisit it. See if there are any words you can cut out!

How To

Show Don't Tell



WHEN WRITING POETRY...

Topic for Day #5 - Look For Other Examples

It's always good to spread your wings (and influences) and listen to some music you haven't heard before, go visit a gallery or read someone else's poetry. It's all important grist for the mill - your creative muse is working all the time and all the art you put into yourself will come out in your own work. So put some quality stuff in there!

Read, enjoy and analyse the lyrics and poems of other artists. See how they do what they do and then try to copy their techniques. I don't mean copy their art exactly. I mean, pay attention to their poetic devices - the methods - and try similar methods in your work and see if it suits your writing.

Often the most startling periods of creative growth come about due to a new input, a new influence, so don't overlook the importance of this fifth lesson in ***how to show don't tell!***

Try experiencing some new poetry, literature, music, film or other art today!

How can you bring those influences back to your poetry?