



LESLIE LOPEZ BIO

I am an artist and poet living in Houston, Texas, since 1980. After graduating from LSU/Baton Rouge with a B.F.A., I began writing because there were things I wanted to express that I couldn't say in my paintings. I received a Grant from the Cultural Arts Council of Houston for Poetry. Some of my poems have been published in *Innerview/Houston*, *Encodings*, *Conditions: Seventeen*, *Focus*, and *Eye Prayers Press*.

I believe that even though writing and painting are solitary activities, they gain greater meaning when they are shared with the public.

ARTSEED

I am impressed that ArtSeed has enabled so many students and participants to learn and engage in creating their own expressions of art. I have known Josefa Vaughan since 1980 and have seen how she has engaged the people around her with her own experiences from the art world beginning from when she was a young child. With Josefa, students have an enthusiastic and knowledgeable teacher.

LESSON

Title: "Writing a Free Verse Poem" Date: July 24, 2020, Friday Time of day: 10:00 am

Materials/Prep: Paper, Pen or Pencil. Dictionary or Thesaurus (optional).

Introduction/Goals: Focus on writing Free Verse. The Goal is to create one poem before the end of the session and to share your poem with the participants.

Attached are a few of my poems as examples of Free Verse:

How to Write Free Verse:

At first glance, free verse is one of the easiest forms of poetry to write. It certainly is among the most enjoyable and free-flowing. You just sit down and throw your soul and observations onto a piece of paper, breaking lines at random...right?

Not so fast. Like the practice of freedom itself, free verse can be challenging. The key is to correlate the rhythm of your subject with the rhythm of your natural voice. A natural poetic voice is lyrical and metrical, with accents and pauses that are as prevalent as those written into the strictest of classic verse forms. While the cadence, line counts, stanzas, and syllables per line are not mandated by tradition, the actual presentation of the poem is deliberate.

Five Steps to Writing Free Verse:

Nevertheless, follow your instincts. The best way to write free verse is to start with wild abandon and funnel your choice of words and movement through a tightly-focused editing process. Try these five steps to unleash your inner poet:

- Choose your subject and write about it. Get it all out. Stay deep and true to the rhythm of the poetic movement rolling through you, but get everything about the subject down on paper.

- Check your rough poem to see if anything is missing. If you need to add a line, or even a stanza, do so. If you're missing a metaphor, simile, or turn of phrase, add it.
- Read the rough poem aloud. Free verse is a rhythmic dance with voice and words, so check the sequence of lines and make sure that one flows into the other.
- Move through your poem with an editor's pen and make sure you've selected the words that give proper accent and cadence to the overall poem.
- Read the poem aloud until it flows like honey and you *feel* it inside. That's a sure sign of a well-completed piece of free verse.

Activity: Write a poem about a place you have visited or a specific experience you have had.

Vocabulary: Don't try to use fancy or complicated words. Instead write how you felt when you were visiting a place, what was around you, who was with you, how does it relate to your life now. Notice how Free Verse does not rhyme.

Closing: If you want to learn to write poetry, you must read the work of poets. "A Poetry Handbook," by the poet Mary Oliver is a very good guide to understanding and writing poetry.

Successes: To have learned something new about poetry and Free Verse and to enjoy writing your own poems. And to, hopefully, continue reading poetry and making it a part of your everyday life.

Challenges: Do not use clichés (ex: the dog howls at the moon), don't use rhymes, pay attention to imagery and line breaks within the poem, and the voice of the poem.

Relevant Artist(s) and Distinguished People: Some of my favorite poets are: Adrienne Rich, Mary Oliver, W.S. Merwin, Denise Levertov, Elizabeth Bishop, and Sylvia Plath.

Here are a few links to poems by some of the poets mentioned above that I like:

<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/olli/class-materials/2017Summer.MindfulnessWk1.pdf>

<https://poets.org/poem/fish-2>

<https://poets.org/poem/spring-perhaps-hand>

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42529/clouds-56d22115c93b4>

<https://poets.org/poem/twenty-one-love-poems-poem-iii>

A few painters I like the work of are: Elizabeth Murray, Sonia Delaunay, Georges Braque, Agnes Martin and Vincent Van Gogh.

I am always willing to discuss art or writing with anyone who is interested.

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War

the graceful way you wake,
lilies blooming from
isolated sleep,
the wanting of words not yet given,
our bodies lie on this steep cliff.
for hours we have rolled into one
another's softness.

the words flow from your heart
as though there is no weakness within.
you speak of passion,
executions in prisons
you once observed,
the boy bolted to a fence
and stabbed.

bed with you is like
disasters of earth, the
crumbling of buildings
crashing against my right
side, where you touch,
kneeling, undressing
as fire stripped men, women,
maybe, even children,
if not secretly cloaked,
of their flesh and bones
raked to road side.

i deny war ever
could exist outside our
room, your hair falling
like water upon my hair,
your mouth stained with
blood not of your body
but of imprisoned passion.
that curing wave, pouring rain,
arms reaching for silver trees.
you are the valley of these trees,
their home, their parent.
i am as a child, my mouth coming close
enough to mark land of your back
as light splits cliff's
soiled throat.

Leslie Lopez

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**The New England Poems No. VI
In Vermont, Writing**

in late winter, facts are hard.
full-bellied mountains capture
you bending by a stream, the
only water available.
holding your youngest close,
the snow, she presses against
warm shoulders, your hand
passing over face, eyes,
so light, appearing yellow.
voice moving sky's shuffled
sounds, you tell me of a stream,
hand-shaped, cupped with berries,
the transparent way it is contained
then overflowing.
there is everything but rain
within your eyes.

i could be an alien, to you,
darkness, hoofed, approaching
at a wrong hour, or blistering
wind licking your back, my own
sounds marked within spine,
a moment when shame could be
a flock of geese flying overhead.
instead, we are young, senses
for another, delicate. in small
lines, transparent combinations
and understandings, hands touch,
red flows outwards,
there is everything but rain
within your eyes.

Leslie Lopez

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Upon Losing You

finding no doors within oak forests
finding no rain within her voice
I attempt to render her muse
within the east wind,
immortal embrace of mine

steadfast mountain,
night's white angel,
morning moving the darkened
patterns of voice
over our faces

as the mountains
pale with fear
still somehow blow hymns
across azure sky
and the soil speaks

only to her closed lips
do my eyes open
answering hers,
the stillness of small wings
intertwined with damp leaves

clinging to winter's
final breath,
white of night riding
the silvery circle's thin web
looping her voice into rain.

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