

WRITING DOWN THE BONES HOMEWORK GUIDE

Answer the following questions below as you are assigned readings from Writing Down the Bones. Students taking the course for the second time (CW2) should complete the alternative assignment in their journals in lieu of the questions.

Introduction (p.1)

1. Describe the author's approach to writing.
2. What does she mean by "writing down the bones"?

CW2 – What is your approach to writing? How would you describe your writing process?

Beginner's Mind, Pen and Paper (p.5)

1. What does she say about choosing a writing utensil? A notebook?
2. What does she warn against in "choosing your tools"?

CW2 – What are your favorite "tools" for writing? Describe your favorite (types of) pens, paper, etc.

First Thoughts (p. 8)

1. What is the purpose of the author's "rules" for writing?
2. Explain the analogy Goldberg makes between zen meditation and writing.
3. At the end of the chapter, Goldberg quotes the meditation teacher as saying, "When you are present, the world is truly alive." How does this apply to writing?

CW2 – Where do you like to write? When do you write best? Describe your ideal writing locale.

Writing as Practice (p. 11)

1. After reading this chapter, what do you think Goldberg would say to people with writer's block?

CW2 – Write about writer's block—have you experienced it? What do you do to overcome it?

Composting (p.15)

1. Explain Goldberg's analogy of the journal as a compost pile.

CW2 – Make a “compost pile” list of things you'd like to write about. (This may be stream of consciousness...)

Tap The Water Table (p. 32)

1. According to Goldberg, how do you learn to write?
2. What is her complaint about public schools? Do you agree? Explain.
3. Respond to the poem “The Red Wheelbarrow.” What do you think it's about? (Remember: no right or wrong here... just your reaction.)

CW2 – Write a response poem to “The Red Wheelbarrow.”

A List of Topics for Writing Practice (p. 21)

JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT: Choose one of Goldberg's topics and write about it in your journal.

Man Eats Car (p. 36)

1. What is the purpose of this chapter? What is Goldberg's point?

CW2 – Keeping in mind Goldberg's admonition to free your mind and let your brain take you where it will, write about anything you want to in your journal, simply “recording your thoughts as they flow through you.”

Writing is Not a McDonald's Hamburger (p. 39)

1. Explain the title of this chapter. What does Goldberg mean?

CW2 – Create another creative analogy about writing. Begin with “Writing is...” or “Writing is not...” Explain it.

Original Detail/The Power of Detail (p.45, p.47)

1. What does Goldberg say about names?
2. What does Goldberg mean by the statement, “Recording the details of our lives is a stance against bombs with their mass ability to kill, against too much speed and efficiency.”

CW2 – Write about an ordinary object or event using vivid detail.

Make Statements and Answer Questions (p. 93)

JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT: Write your emotion poem using Goldberg's suggestions in this piece.

One Plus One Equals a Mercedes Benz (p.89)

1. Explain what Goldberg means by this bizarre title. What is she advising?
2. Consider this in revision. Go back to your poems. Can you add metaphor anywhere? Try adding a metaphor to one of your poems and record the line below.

CW2 – Using Goldberg's advice to eschew logic, write a paragraph about yourself or someone else entirely in metaphor. (See her example.)

Be Specific (p. 77)

JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT: Goldberg says, "Learn the names of everything: birds, cheese, tractors, cars, buildings." Choose one of these things and write as many different names for it as you can. (Example: BIRDS: cardinal, blue jay, chickadee...)

Syntax (p. 67)

JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT: Find a poem you've written that you're not entirely happy about. Then try Goldberg's exercise, shifting its syntax.

A Sensation of Space (p. 133)

1. What does Goldberg recommend that writers do if they want to write in a particular format (novel, short story, poem, etc.)?
2. OPTIONAL JOURNAL TOPIC: Complete the short poem exercise she suggests. (3 minutes to write each poem; begin each with a title of something your eye falls on.) She suggests writing 10, but you may do fewer.

CW2 – Complete exercise above. Write at least 3 poems of 3 minutes each.

Writing is a Communal Act (p. 86)

1. Considering Goldberg's suggestion that writing is communal, what writers would you most like to model yourself after? Why? What is it about their particular style that you like?

CW2 – Comment on the style of a writer you have read recently and what you liked or didn't like about his/her style.

A Meal You Love (p. 147)

JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT: Read this chapter and try the exercise.

CW2 – Pick a food that you love and write about it in great detail. (Something different than last time!)

Don't Tell, but Show (p.75)

This chapter is so important, we will read it in class!

Claim Your Writing/Trust Yourself (p. 164, p. 167)

1. What does Goldberg mean when she says we should “claim our writing”?
2. What does Goldberg mean when she says we should “trust ourselves” with our writing? How does this apply to a workshop in which other people comment on our work?

CW2– Write a few sentences about a time when you were able to truly claim your writing. What made you confident about it?

Writing in Restaurants (p. 98)

1. What places do you most like to write in? This week, try writing in a different place than usual (a café, a park, a library, etc.) In your journal, note the different place you in which you are writing.

CW2 – If you could go anywhere to write, where would you go and why? [Then try the second part above.]

Rereading and Rewriting (p. 172)

1. What does Goldberg recommend about the process of revision?

CW2– Reread your journal so far this year. Find three lines that you love and copy them down here.

Don't Marry the Fly (p. 60)

1. Goldberg says, “There is a fine line between precision and self-indulgence... Recognize the fly, even love it if you want, but don't marry it.” What does she mean by this?
2. Examine your own personal essay. Is there anywhere you got too entranced in the fly and forgot the big picture? Or, anywhere you were so big picture, you forgot to mention the fly? Respond below.

CW2 – Complete #2 above.

Listening (p. 57)

1. What does Goldberg mean when she says, “Writing is 90% listening?”
2. According to Goldberg, what three things must a person do to become a good writer?

CW2 – Listen to something in your surroundings... the wind, the birds, a song, an overheard conversation... and write about it.

A Story Circle (p. 156)

1. What is the purpose of a story circle? How can it be helpful as a writer?
2. BONUS: Do this with some of your friends or family. Write their stories down in your journal!

CW2-Journal assignment: Write a true story of someone you know. Why has this story stayed with you? Could it be used in fiction?

A Tourist in Your Own Town (p. 108)

JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT: How would you see Rockland County if you were looking at it for the first time? Write a description of a particular place that seems ordinary to you, but this time, really look at it and describe it with new eyes – vivid detail.

CW2 – Create a setting using real or imagined details. Describe vividly.