**Introduction to Poetry**  
  
I ask them to take a poem   
and hold it up to the light   
like a color slide   
  
or press an ear against its hive.   
  
I say drop a mouse into a poem   
and watch him probe his way out,   
  
or walk inside the poem's room   
and feel the walls for a light switch.   
  
I want them to waterski   
across the surface of a poem   
waving at the author's name on the shore.   
  
But all they want to do   
is tie the poem to a chair with rope   
and torture a confession out of it.   
  
They begin beating it with a hose   
to find out what it really means.   
  
  
- *Billy Collins*

**Writers Anonymous: A 3 Step Program**   
  
[Step One: Resentment]   
Hi, My name is Quentin.   
I'm a write-a-holic.   
I can't control it, can't curb   
the urge to write.   
I need help.   
I want my life back.   
  
[Step Two: Commitment]   
I write poems on fast food napkins,   
with toothpicks, using ketchup for ink.   
I jot ideas for poems   
on my arms and legs. When I run out of space,   
I use my shoes.   
I make motions   
similar to Michael Jackson's moonwalk   
when I need to erase.   
  
I make up stories   
while making love to my wife.   
She left me. Who needs her?   
She was suffocating my creativity.   
  
I await submission replies   
like an addict, hands trembling,   
head shaking in disbelief.   
Not another bout with rejection!   
I'm manic depressive.   
I'm happy to be here.   
No I'm not.   
  
I live for revision.   
Instead of sex, I have poems.   
I eat feedback.   
  
[Step 3: Contentment]   
As a recovering write-a-holic,   
admitting my problem   
has provided a much needed catharsis.   
Joining this nurturing group has   
  
(Excuse me,   
but are you going to throw away that paper cup?   
That's good paper!)   
  
taught me to reconcile my past   
and move forward.   
  
- *Quentin B Huff*

**POETRY**  
And it was at that age...Poetry arrived   
in search of me. I don't know, I don't know where   
it came from, from winter or a river.   
I don't know how or when,   
no, they were not voices, they were not   
words, nor silence,   
but from a street I was summoned,   
from the branches of night,   
abruptly from the others,   
among violent fires   
or returning alone,   
there I was without a face   
and it touched me.   
  
I did not know what to say, my mouth   
had no way   
with names   
my eyes were blind,   
and something started in my soul,   
fever or forgotten wings,   
and I made my own way,   
deciphering   
that fire   
and I wrote the first faint line,   
faint, without substance, pure   
nonsense,   
pure wisdom   
of someone who knows nothing,   
and suddenly I saw   
the heavens   
unfastened   
and open,   
planets,   
palpitating plantations,   
shadow perforated,   
riddled   
with arrows, fire and flowers,   
the winding night, the universe.   
  
And I, infinitesimal being,   
drunk with the great starry   
void,   
likeness, image of   
mystery,   
I felt myself a pure part   
of the abyss,   
I wheeled with the stars,   
my heart broke loose on the wind.   
  
  
*- Pablo Neruda*

**You Can't Write a Poem About McDonald's**  
  
Noon. Hunger the only thing  
singing in my belly.  
I walk through the blossoming cherry trees  
on the library mall,  
past the young couples coupling,  
by the crazy fanatic  
screaming doom and salvation  
at a sensation-hungry crowd,  
to the Lake Street McDonald's.  
It is crowded, the lines long and sluggish.  
I wait in the greasy air.  
All around me people are eating—  
the sizzle of conversation,  
the salty odor of sweat,  
the warm flesh pressing out of  
hip huggers and halter tops.  
When I finally reach the cash register,  
the counter girl is crisp as a pickle,  
her fingers thin as french fries,  
her face brown as a bun.  
Suddenly I understand cannibalism.  
As I reach for her,  
she breaks into pieces  
wrapped neat and packaged for take-out.  
I'm thinking, how amazing it is  
to live in this country, how easy  
it is to be filled.  
We leave together, her warm aroma  
close at my side.  
I walk back through the cherry trees  
blossoming up into pies,  
the young couples frying in  
the hot, oily sun,  
the crowd eating up the fanatic,  
singing, my ear, eye, and tongue  
fat with the wonder  
of this hungry world.

* *Ronald Wallace*

**Autobiography**

I'm writing 'young and gifted' in my autobiography,   
I figure who would know better than me?  
I'm certainly the former,  
but I'm not so much the latter.  
But no-one's gonna read it,  
so I'm sure it doesn't matter.  
  
When you find that you're the former,  
take pride in how you form.  
And when you find that you're the latter,  
don't let those people walk under you.  
  
I'm writing 'sharp and adult' with my finger on the steam  
on the mirror in my bathroom,  
and I'm applying shaving cream,  
which could suggest that I'm the former.  
But how can I be the latter?  
And something tells me it's the opposite I'd rather.  
  
When you find that you're the former,   
be careful what you phone.  
And when you find that you're the latter,  
don't shake too high, you'll regret it later.  
  
La la la la la  
la la la la la la  
la laaa laaaa la la la  
la la la la  
  
I stayed in school this long but still no-one will tell me why,  
they figured 'who would know better than I?'   
I know I'm a conformer, but I'm sure it doesn't matter,  
my new friends are all adults,  
and my old friends all have scattered.  
  
When you find that you're a conformer,  
take pride and swallow whole.  
But if you're trying to climb the ladder,  
don't let people walk over you,   
because that's just what they'll do.  
And don't let people walk over you,  
because that's just what they'll do.

* Sloan

**What's in My Journal**   
  
Odd things, like a button drawer. Mean  
Things, fishhooks, barbs in your hand.  
But marbles too. A genius for being agreeable.  
Junkyard crucifixes, voluptuous  
discards. Space for knickknacks, and for  
Alaska. Evidence to hang me, or to beatify.  
Clues that lead nowhere, that never connected  
anyway. Deliberate obfuscation, the kind  
that takes genius. Chasms in character.  
Loud omissions. Mornings that yawn above  
a new grave. Pages you know exist  
but you can't find them. Someone's terribly  
inevitable life story, maybe mine.

* *William Stafford*

**Writing a poem is like**

**journeying by airplane**

It’s a long, strenuous battle.

I walk into the airport confident, happy,

with a clear idea of what’s ahead.

But my good mood fades

as I read my ticket.

My eyes squint as I try to decode

the airport hieroglyphics.

Already, I am lost.

I look to loved ones for advice,

but they shrug their shoulders,

so I wave down a professional.

I’m guided where I need to go next

and again, my morale is high.

But again it is soon diminished

as I find myself emptying my pockets

and walking through a metal detector.

The thing beeps its annoying beep

and I start over, again and again,

each time taking off my shirt, my shoes, my belt.

Finally pass through the noise maker

and look up at the mini-TV to discover

all flights are delayed five hours.

I curse to myself

and try to sleep across a row of seats

but can’t.

My mind is focused on this trip.

I will get there.

When I board the plane at last,

a spiffy pilot comes out of the cockpit

and talks some airline gibberish.

I try to catch what he’s saying,

but nothing seeps in.

*If this happens, do this,*

*don’t do that.*

*If you have a problem, do what.*

I wish I had caught that last one

because right now, I have a problem.

I’m the closest I’ve ever been to having a stroke.

My brain has withered to nothing.

My butt aches from the frequent turbulence,

and my legs feel like Jell-O.

I ask the person next to me how long.

“Oh, you’ll be there soon,” she promises.

But I know it will be a good six hours,

not including the layover in Dallas.

I continue to sit.

And sit.

And sit.

My brain feels like Silly Putty

waiting for someone else to mold it back together.

I cannot take another second more of this torture.

And I might have killed myself then,

but my rope didn’t make it through security.

Just then

I spy ground instead of clouds.

I rub my eyes to make sure I’m seeing correctly.

Here it is.

I click my heels as I exit.

I hug random people,

not caring that my luggage is somewhere in Vancouver.

I drop to my knees,

enjoy the sweet taste of victory,

kiss the ground,

look toward the heavens,

thank God.

Tears run down my cheeks.

I look back at the massive plane.

Yes.

It’s done.

* *Liam*

**WRITER’S RESPONSE -**

**What writers have to say about generating text through their poems.**

Instructions:

1. In your group take 5 minutes to read your poem on your own (silent reading).
2. As a group read your poem together (aloud), and discuss the following questions.
3. Record your group’s answers on a piece of looseleaf – this will be passed in (1 copy per group). Remember to identify who said what.
   1. What ideas, feelings, and thoughts does the poem create on a personal level?
   2. What is the purpose of the poem?
   3. What information does the poem express about the writing process?
   4. What information does the poem share about the reading process?
   5. According to the poet, who has the power to work out the answers to questions a-d? The author or the reader?
4. Be prepared to share your answers and response with the class.

**WRITER’S RESPONSE -**

**What writers have to say about generating text through their poems.**

Instructions:

1. In your group take 5 minutes to read your poem on your own (silent reading).
2. As a group read your poem together (aloud), and discuss the following questions.
3. Record your group’s answers on a piece of looseleaf – this will be passed in (1 copy per group). Remember to identify who said what.
   1. What ideas, feelings, and thoughts does the poem create on a personal level?
   2. What is the purpose of the poem?
   3. What information does the poem express about the writing process?
   4. What information does the poem share about the reading process?
   5. According to the poet, who has the power to work out the answers to questions a-d? The author or the reader?
4. Be prepared to share your answers and response with the class.