

Palermo Writing Workshops

In these workshops we will make stories and poems by playing games. In the final workshops you will ask you to invent your own word-games for our group to play.

Game 1: 'Separation'

(Preparatory material: 40 sheets of A3 paper, 20 pens, instructions translated into Italian and Arabic)

Instructions

1. Write a word in your own language (or in a second language) in large letters on a single sheet of paper
2. Practice performing that one word to the group (thinking about its sound and its shape)
3. Now, tear the piece of paper in half so that your word is divided down the middle
4. Give one half of your word to someone else in the group
5. Everyone should have half of their word and half of someone else's
6. Go round the group sounding out these new reconstituted words
7. Talk to the group about how you could use these words to make up a new language
8. Create a story or a poem involving these "made up" words
9. What kinds of meanings can you create from these acts of separation and re-joining?
10. Write down a new set of words that another-group could use to repeat this game in a different context.

Extension exercise: Can you invent a related game that involves the splitting and recombination of larger bodies of texts to make stories/poems?

Game 2: 'Secrets'

(Preparatory material: 40 sheets of A3 paper, 20 pens, instructions translated into Italian and Arabic)

Instructions

1. Think of a word that begins with the same letter as your name. This could be a word in English or in your own language. The word simply has to hold significant meaning to you. You do not have to disclose the significance of the word to the group
2. Walk around the room in random directions
3. Each time you pass each other whisper your word into someone else's ear, as if they were both confessing and listening to a secret (possibly to music)
4. Try and remember as many of the words that you heard.
5. Or, can you translate the words you heard into similar sounding words in your own language?
6. Write a story or invent a poem using the fragments you have recorded and translated.

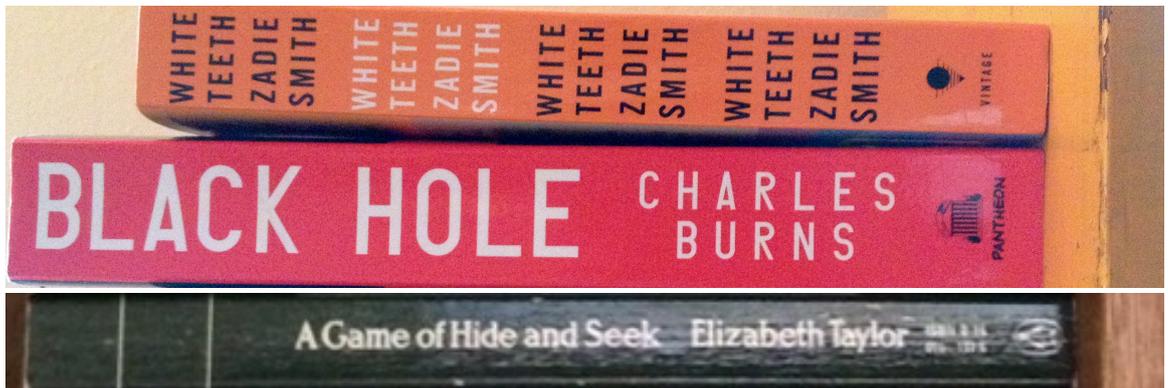
Game 3: 'Spine'

(10 old paperback books (Steve to provide) / rules translated into Italian and Arabic)

Instructions

1. Walk around the room, curling and straightening, your back at various intervals. Feel your spine curve and flex.
2. Think about what your spine is doing.
3. Think about the work your spine has done today.
4. Think about the places your spine will carry you in the future. What will your spine let you see?
5. Create a title for a story based on your thoughts about your spine.
6. In front of you are 10 books. They all have words ('titles') on their spines.
7. Work together to rearrange those spines into various stories of different lengths (fill in the gaps in sense if necessary).

For example, after doing steps 1-5 the title for my story is **'Inside the Pockets of my Spine'**, and with these book spines:



I came up with this first line for my story 'Inside the Pockets of my Spine'

When the universe awoke I played a game of hide and seek inside the white teeth of the black hole.

Extension exercise: Can you invent a similar game that involves gathering together the words found on labels, signs and adverts?

Game 4: 'Mobile'

Preparatory materials to make a mobile:

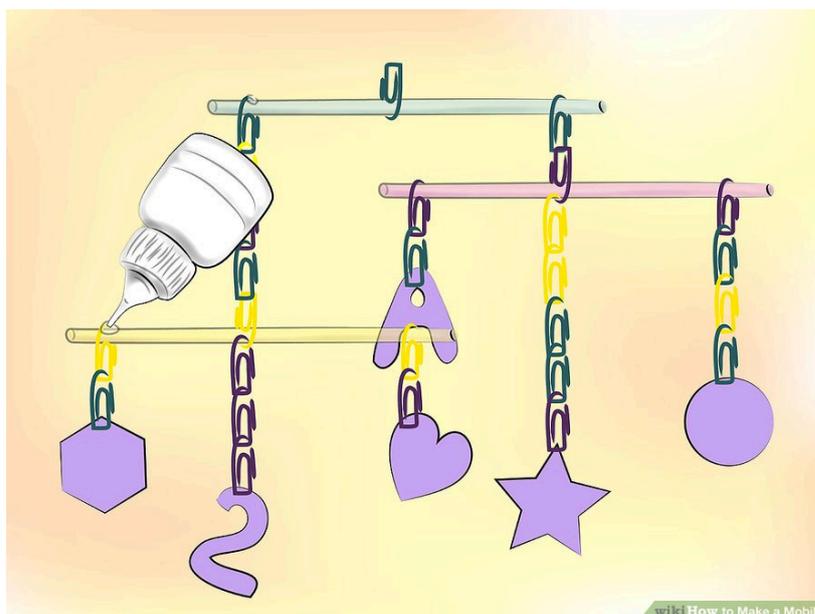
- 50 x paper clips
- cotton thread
- 50 x drinking straws
- 10 x scissors
- 10 x coloured card in 3 different colours cut into various shapes
- 3 x roles of sellotape

Quennet hand-out (below)

Instructions translated into Italian and Arabic

1. Read the Quennet hand-out, explaining the quennet form and its shape.
2. Divide into groups of three.
3. Each member of the group works on creating a stanza of a single Quennet
4. Each line from each stanza of the Quennet is written onto pieces of pre-cut card of various sizes
5. The group then have to make their Quennet balance and hang on a complex mobile or a more simple string-like mobile

One example of a possible mobile:



QUENNETS Handout (Sheet 1)

The form used in these poems is one invented by Raymond Queneau in his 1975 book *Morale élémentaire* or *Elementary Morality* a form which has come to be called the “elementary morality” or, after Queneau, the “quennet”, as it has one more line than a sonnet. David Bellos summarises the poem’s structure in the following way:

Three two-line stanzas, line 1 of each consisting of three phrases and line 2 of one phrase, each phrase formed by a noun-adjective pair

followed by

Seven lines of at least two and not more than seven syllables

followed by

One two-line stanza conforming to the same constraint as at the start.

Rhymes, assonances, and repetitions between phrases and the ‘middle lines’ (what Queneau called the ‘refrain’) are not regulated but positively encouraged.

“Elementary Estuaries”, a sequence based around estuary walks in Essex, uses Queneau’s form relatively unchanged: the form’s appearance on the page, suggestive of receding flatnesses, seems perfectly adapted to the depiction of estuarine landscapes. “Mauerweg”, where the subject is the Berlin Wall, and “Waterlog”, which follows in the footsteps of W.G. Sebald’s *The Rings of Saturn*, adapt the form more freely to their own ends. The former uses a more block-like prose version of the form, while the latter stretches it out into a long thin form, reminiscent of the walk poems of Richard Long.

QUENNETS Handout (Sheet 2)

***From* ELEMENTARY ESTUARIES**

Blue buoy	Untampered simile	Black buoy
	Grey water	
Still creek	White knight	Cold stream
	Red rubble	
Grey sky	Yellow contamination	Blue sheep
	Light breeze	

Birds
silhouetted
on the
mudflats
lights
on the
Colne

Still buoy	Outstretched branches	Cold sheep
	Icy pool	

***From* MAUERWEG**

Clear sunlight. Scavenging chaffinch. Bird twitter. Freewheeling bicycle. Cream taxi. Grey stone. Golden statue. Red elephant. Orange taxi. Large family. Passing music. Red light.

Amongst the tourists two dishevelled men make their way collecting empty bottles from bins.

Leaf litter. Back pack. Bleached hair. Blue sign.

QUENNETS Handout (Sheet 3)

From WATERLOG

Vulgar errors

Pink bangles

Brampton urns

Brantano footwear

Marble brain

Alice bands

Urne burials

Biffa bin

Vulgar bangles

Plastercast skull

Yellow marigolds

Itinerant skull

Watching the

Thomas

Browne

memorial,

outsized

marble

eye

Illuminated interior

Plastic bangles

Hidden secrets

Vulgar bandanas

Game 5: 'Gap'

(Preparatory material: 40 pieces of card the size of a postcard, or paper, in two different colours)

Instructions

1. Split into two groups. Divide into pairs.
2. Each pair in one group writes the opening line of a story, trying to use no more than twelve words, each pair in the other group writes the closing line of a story (any language).
3. Openings and endings are read out.
4. Openings and endings are written on card. Cards thrown into pool. Each pair pick one card (an ending if they wrote an opening etc.).
5. Using this and their own sentence they link one sentence to the other by a short narrative (any language).
5. Feedback.

Game 6: 'Hours'

Instructions

1. Use the Oulipian formula "The hour of..." (eg. "The hour when the sky darkens, and it begins to rain") to write a sentence of your own.
2. Go round the group, sitting in a circle, speaking the sentences.
3. Repeat 2, with the addition of a musical instrument.
4. Try to explore your sentence for its sound qualities.

Game 7: 'Gilgamesh Showed Enkidu'

Instructions

1. In *Gilgamesh and Enkidu*, the king Gilgamesh welcomes his friend Enkidu, the Wild Man, to the city.
2. Imagine what someone visiting a city for the first time might be shown by a friend visiting the city. Make a list.
3. Use the formula "In the city, Gilgamesh showed Enkidu..." or "Gilgamesh showed Enkidu..." (eg. "Gilgamesh showed Enkidu the fast cars") to describe what Gilgamesh shows Enkidu.
4. Share your results (possibly with music).

Game 8: 'In Gilgamesh I See'

(Preparatory material: 20 photocopies, colour if possible, of the three paintings (below) for the group to look at)

1. The original epic of Gilgamesh recounts the adventures of Gilgamesh, the Sumerian king who reined around 2700 BCE, and his companion, the warrior Enkidu.
2. Scenes from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* have inspired many twentieth-century Western artists, including Karl-Otto Götz, Willi Baumeister and Anselm Kieffer.
3. The Guggenheim Bilbao Musea holds Kieffer's 'Gilgamesh and Enkidu In the Cedar Forest II'. Their website states: 'Kieffer does not offer a linear recounting of the ancient story, but rather isolates specific passages and images, which he then reassembles and recomposes to reflect his personal memory of the Third Reich and German tradition.'
4. Kieffer drew inspiration from the story of Gilgamesh but mixed his knowledge of the story with his personal experience of war and German art, can you do the same?
5. Spend **5 minutes** looking at one of the three paintings below. Let your eye drift over the image. What details are you drawn to? What do these paintings remind you of?
6. Invent a few sentences inspired by one of these paintings, and draw on any memories of your own. Begin each sentence with the phrase 'In Gilgamesh I see'.
7. For example, after looking at 'Painting Two' I wrote: *In Gilgamesh I see islands covered in dark sand. The sand is a photograph of the childhood I forget.*
7. Share your results (possibly with music).

Painting One

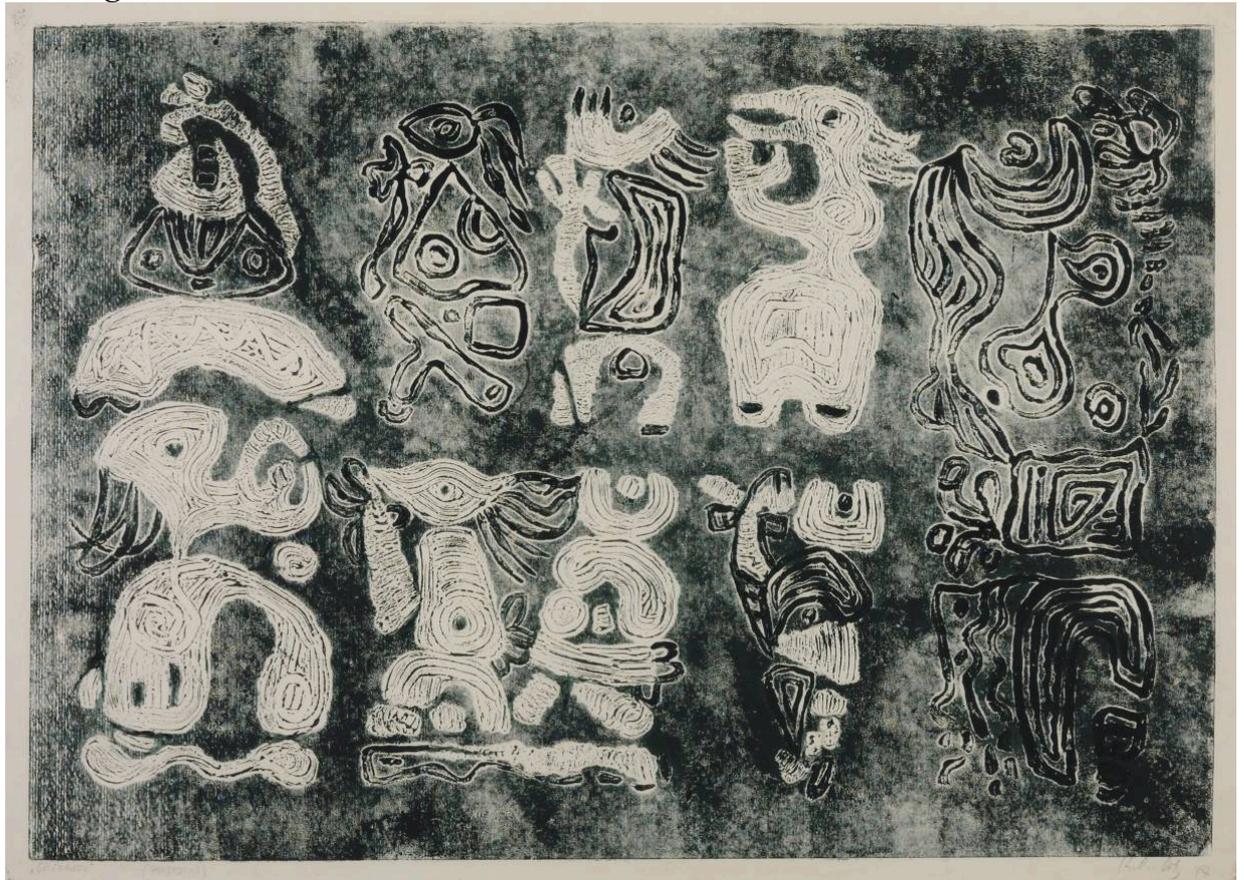


Figure 1: Karl-Otto Götz, 'Gilgamesh' (1947)

Painting Two



Figure 2: Willi Baumeister 'Gilgamesh And Enkidu' (1943)

Painting Three

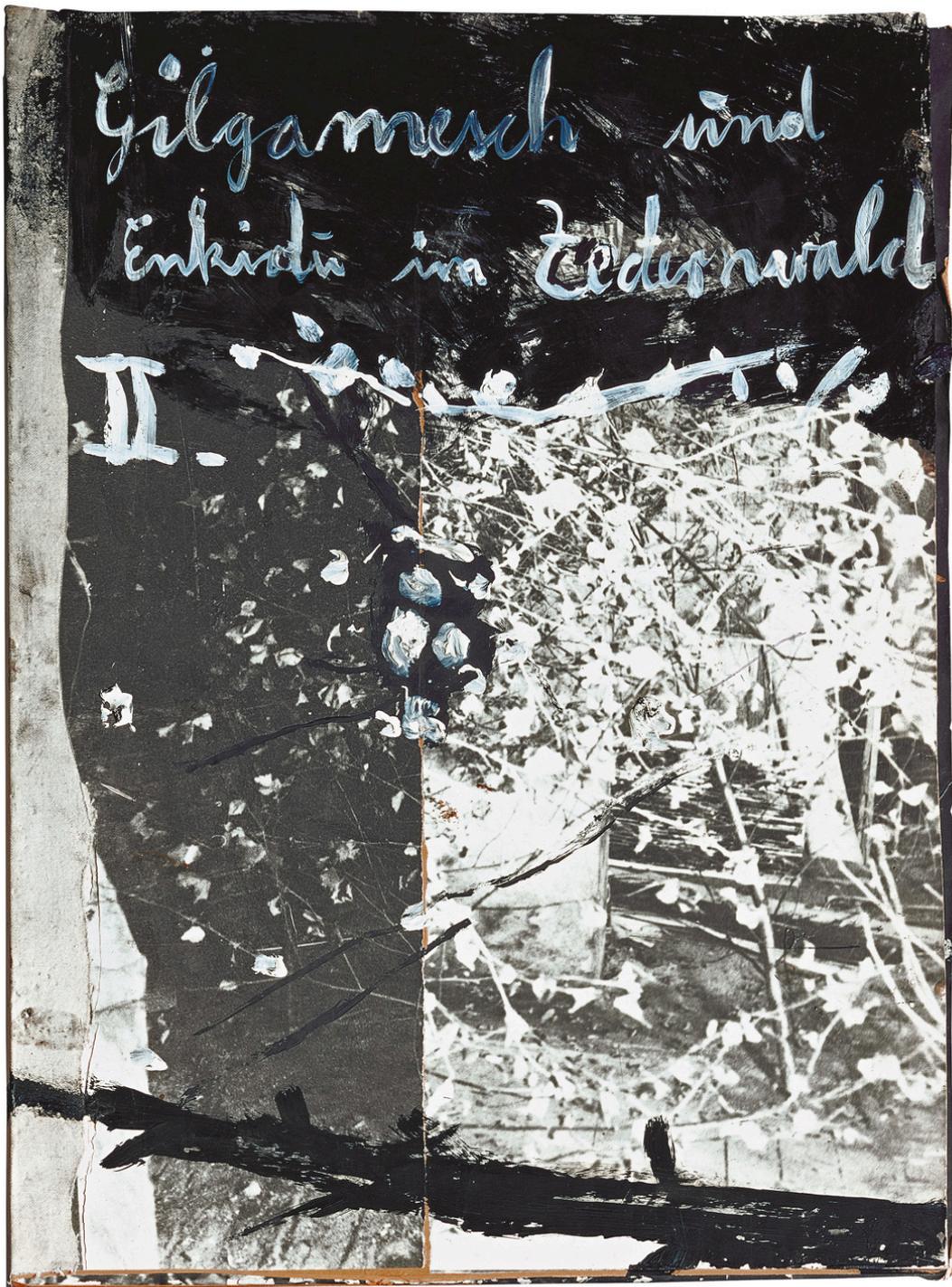


Figure 3: Anselm Kiefer, 'Gilgamesch und Enkidu im Zedernwald II' (1981)

Game 9: Recipe

(Preparatory Materials: 1 x cooking book in English (Steve to provide) 1 x Cooking book in Italian)

1. Here is the definition of the word 'Recipe': A formula or prescription for making some combination, mixture, or preparation of materials; a receipt; especially, a prescription for medicine.
2. Here is a recipe poem by the American poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti called:

Recipe for Happiness Khaborovsk or Anyplace

One grand boulevard with trees
with one grand cafe in sun
with strong black coffee in very small cups.

One not necessarily very beautiful
man or woman who loves you.

One fine day.

3. Recipes — a simple list with proportions — can be as concise as poetry.
4. Here is my recipe for 'A Healing Bowl of Morning Porridge':

A Healing Bowl of Morning Porridge

Take 50 grams of oats
as the sun hits

Put oats in a pan
as the pigeons flock

Pour in the milk
as the moon shifts

Bring to the boil
as the ant crawls

Take a pinch of salt
as the honey comes

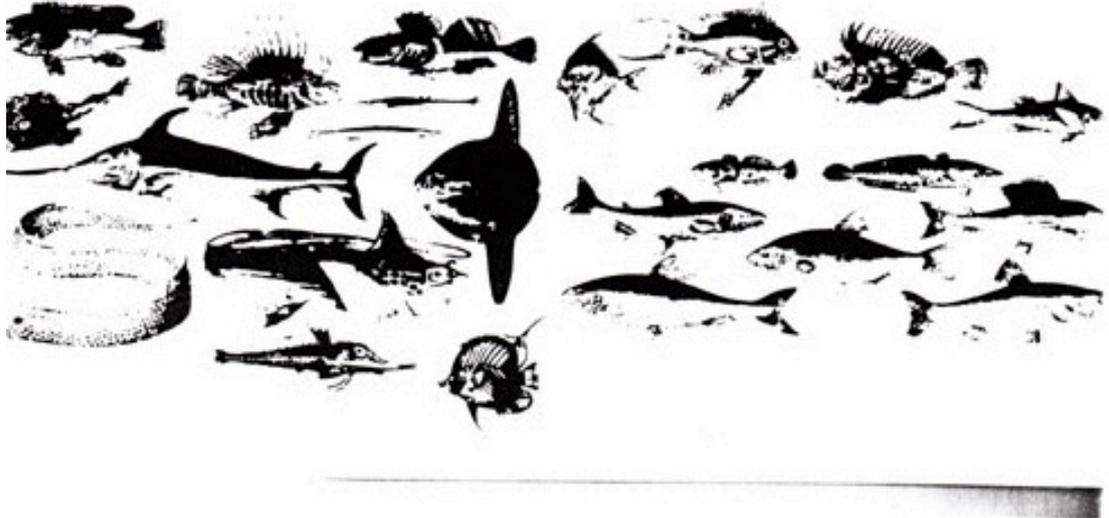
4. Can you write, invent or remember a recipe for something you can either eat, experience or imagine?
5. Can you write a recipe that will heal someone?
6. If you are stuck for ideas make your own recipe for 'happiness' or a dish you eat when you were younger.
7. Think of some food you could make and sell alongside your poem

Game 10: 'Alphabet of Fishes'

Preparatory Materials: 20 x photocopies of 'Alphabet of Fishes' and a recording of the poem to be played out: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgzHQs0ZiFU>

ALPHABET OF FISHES

askal	barfas	canker	dranick
ehoc	frango	girrock	hump
illeck	janny	kelnak	lagatta
mehal	nifflin	owl	pothrick
quin	rauner	sllllwhlg	talver
valsen	wiggle	yawn	zart



1. In this poem the British poet Bob Cobbing makes an alphabet of fishes. Can you make your own 'alphabet of fishes', or an alphabet of other animals that you might find deep in the sea or deep in the forest?
2. Arrange your alphabet into a grid
3. Perform the grid to other people, and get them to join in? (possibly to music)

Game 11: 'Invention'

1. For the next session you will be the teacher.
2. We want you to invent your own 'word game' to play with the group that is based on an idea, a set of images, a memory, or a phrase that is particularly important to you.

We now need to think about the following:

3. How are you going to introduce yourself at the start of the workshop?
4. How you are going to describe your game to the group?
5. What are the crucial instructions or steps for your game?
6. Do these instructions need to be written down or is there a better way to communicate your 'game'?
7. How long (in minutes) will each of your activities last?
8. Do you need to prepare any materials in advance?
9. What do you want your participants to have produced by the end of the workshop: A story, a poem, an image or a song?
10. Will your participants be working by themselves during the workshop or with one another?
11. After playing your game, do you want to change anything about it?