

:: Oracular Poetry ::

Oracular Poetry is an arts-based healing process that came to me in a time of need. At first, I did it alone. Once I started to see how it could work in a group I did it only in private circles. I tried it in public for the first time at a special gathering of Social Artists on Whidbey Island in 2014. Since then it has begun to travel, seeded in many of the places I have had the honour to work around the world. I'm writing this document as a record of the original intention and instructions. Please do not facilitate this workshop until you have experienced it.

Time: Approximately 2.5 hours for twelve people. Add more time for a larger group.

Purpose:

The purpose of Oracular Poetry is to answer unanswerable questions and solve unsolvable problems through presence, sympoiesis (creating together) and syntactical entanglement (re-solving meaning by re-ordering words). What? Seriously. But you could just say: *the purpose is to listen deeply to your intuition and be of service to each other.*

My sense is that this (at least in part) works because of the strong power of intention to influence perception. The intention starts with the facilitator, travels through the questioning process, is filtered through the meditation, materializes during the writing and crafting and is offered as a gift from and to each participant. So, your intention matters. This is not a "writing game." It's a practice of solidarity, sociality, vulnerability and deep care.

Materials: paper (regular and large sheets), pens, glue, scissors, markers.

Instructions:

- 1) Sit, walk, dance, draw, or talk in partners to uncover an unanswerable question or unsolvable problem. This can be a problem of any size or scale. Let the group know that their question will be worked with in the group and they can't expect to keep their question private.
- 2) Give each person a sheet of paper and a pen. It's okay to do this stage in a personal notebook.
- 3) Set a timer for three minutes. Describe the guidelines for freewriting: Spelling doesn't matter. Grammar doesn't matter. Keep your hand moving. Peel your question like an onion. If you get stuck write, "at the heart of my question is..."
- 4) Give each person a few sheets of paper and a marker. Show them how to fold the paper accordion-style horizontally to make "lines." Instruct them to rewrite their freewrite exactly as it is and keep every word between the lines. It's important that they don't cross over the lines with tall letters like t, f or j. If necessary, they may omit identifying names or details, but it's important to copy the freewrite as closely as possible.
- 5) Once a participant is done copying give them a pair of scissors. Instruct them to cut out each word. Punctuation can be separate, or attached to the word before.

- 6) Once a participant is done cutting ask them to hold all the words in their hands. As they gather up the words tell them to find a comfortable place to sit, close their eyes, and imagine how they would feel if they had the answer to their question. Tell them to transfer that feeling to the words in their hands.
- 7) Once all the participants are done tell them you are setting a timer for five minutes. Talk them through a spacious visualization of how their body, mind, and environment would change if they had the answer to their question. How would their relationships change? How would the world change? Remind them to feel and imagine the change and to transfer that feeling into the words in their hands.
- 8) Call all participants into a circle. They should have their words with them. If you have different languages in the circle they **MUST** be able to read and understand a language of the people on either side of them.
- 9) One by one go around the circle. Each participant will turn to the person on their right and ask, "will you hold this for me, just for now?" and then give their words to the person on the right. It can be a bit of a juggle to receive the words when you are already holding your own! That's part of it. It is important that they ask the question exactly as written above.
- 10) Give each person a large sheet of paper and some glue. Instruct them to uncover the poem in the words and glue it to the paper. They cannot add any words, change the words in any way, or ask the original writer any questions. They do **NOT** have to use all the words. Extra words can be placed in a container. If they finish before the time is up they can decorate the paper. Give twenty minutes for this section.
- 11) Return to the circle in exactly the same positions as before. Begin with the same person who was the first to ask the question. They will read their poem to the person on their left, gifting that person with a poem made of their own words. Take a deep breath together as a group after each poem.
- 12) Once the circle is complete go one more time around in the other direction. Give people an opportunity to share any insight that has come to them about their question. They may share their question if they want to, but they don't have to. At minimum they should share one word about how they feel in that moment.

Tips:

Keep careful track of what stage of the process people are in, and be prepared to coach them since they will likely finish at different times. Distraction and chatting can negatively impact the outcomes of this workshop.

Have enough scissors and glue!

If possible, have thicker markers for the rewriting, not just pens. The final products will be more beautiful.

You need to be in a very relaxed, open, and flexible state to facilitate this process. It's very tender, people are very exposed, and the answers can be startling/poignant.

If you are facilitating Oracular Poetry you may share your experiences, ask questions or make a donation on this website: www.nadiachaney.com