

Writing With Writers: Karla Kuskin Poetry

Step 2: Brainstorming

Here are a few ideas that may help you get ready to write. I hope you find them useful.

1. Don't think about writing a poem. When I am writing, I don't usually think about writing a poem. I just think about some special thing that is on my mind, and I figure out what I have to say about it. For instance, let's say I want to introduce you to my cat. Here are a few descriptions of her.

Examining the breeze
a package neatly wrapped with tail
flicks a whisker
pleased.

Napping everywhere
stretched in the sun
as if the sun were hers.
Awash in warmth
and furs.

The flow of a cat walking
over the lawn

to place herself like a soft stone
in the middle of the paper
I am working on.

Each of these simple descriptions is a quick picture in words — sort of a snapshot. The lines are short and you can hear rhythm in them, like the rhythm in a song. And I did not always write whole sentences. When you write this way, your writing looks like a poem, and it is.

2. Don't worry about grammar. A poem doesn't have to have complete sentences or paragraphs. Just get your main idea or feeling, or both, down on paper. Later, as you reread, you can fix what you think needs fixing.

3. Read poetry by different poets. Read it aloud and to yourself. As you read, see if you can feel the rhythm a poet has used. Can you tap your foot to the rhythm or drum your fingers to it? Song lyrics are simple poetry set to music. Try making up a tune to the words you have written. Does the tune make it sound like a song?

“Examining the Breeze” from *Near the Window Tree*, © 1975.