City Wide Poets

A Program of InsideOut Literary Arts

Workshop Title: Bad Birds

Level: **Novice Writers**, Developing Writers, Experienced Writers
Duration: **1.5 hrs**

(15 mins) Check in: Describe your natural habitat in detail, For example: the part of my couch where the chaise meets the rest of it, is my natural habitat, always covered in a blanket, usually holding a device, eating popcorn or chocolate.

(15 mins) Resource Building:
- If you created a Frankenstein animal, what animalistic features would it have? Would it be fast like a cheetah, smart like a dolphin, or both? What else?
- List 3 animals that represent who you are today.
- List 3 animals that represent who you are becoming.

(20 mins) Example poem: -
- Read both before discussing
    - Jamaal May - "There are Birds Here" (See attached)
    - Mary Oliver - Wild Geese (See attached)

        - Discussion
            - How are the birds in each poem different?
            - What kind of work are the birds doing? Why birds?
            - Jamaal May's poem is in first person; Mary Oliver's is in second person. Why? How do you know whether you want to write in first or second person? How does changing the point of view affect the message?

(20 mins) Prompt:
- Select a line from one of today's example poems to use as the first line of your poem. Use one animal to symbolize multiple values in your life.

OR

- Write a letter to "future you" about the jungle that is high school/middle school/adolescent life.

- **Online Sharing Options**
    - (10 mins) allow 2 - 3 students to share their work

    - (10 mins) create share-groups of 3 or 4 students. Students should share work among themselves privately (email, google drive, text, etc.)

    - (10 mins) allow all students to share 1 - 3 lines from their writing. Speed is key!

EXAMPLE WORK

"There Are Birds Here" By Jamaal May

For Detroit
There are birds here,
so many birds here
is what I was trying to say
when they said those birds were metaphors
for what is trapped
between buildings
and buildings. No.
The birds are here
to root around for bread
the girl's hands tear
and toss like confetti. No,
I don't mean the bread is torn like cotton,
I said confetti, and no
not the confetti
a tank can make of a building.
I mean the confetti
a boy can't stop smiling about

and no his smile isn't much
like a skeleton at all. And no
his neighborhood is not like a war zone.
I am trying to say
his neighborhood
is as tattered and feathered
as anything else,
as shadow pierced by sun
and light parted
by shadow-dance as anything else,
but they won't stop saying
how lovely the ruins,
how ruined the lovely
children must be in that birdless city.

"Wild Geese" by Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -

over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.