Learning Descriptive Poetry – or Imagery Poems

In order to imagine, we begin with an image. The imagination gets triggered by images and descriptions when we read, making us feel as though we are in the scene. You can think of imagery as an entryway into a poem.  The images and descriptions also make up the stuff of the poem: the surprising, sumptuous, practical, and impractical items (such as shorts, some sunscreen, that elm tree, and your grandmother’s pearl earrings) packed within.

Last summer was full of

Mid-thigh shorts in blue

Some sunscreen

Under the shade of an elm tree

By a circular pool with my grandmother,

She wore pearl earrings,

Even by the pool,

It makes sense, then, that if you want to write poems that are engaging and lively, you should start with learning how to craft an image and to develop your skills of description. Even more so if you want to write a good story, essay, journal, or letter to a friend. You will need to describe things to make people feel as though they are there with you.

Try this preliminary three-part exercise: (**Hand in your paper at the end of class)**

1. Sit in a public space for at least 15 minutes. Choose a place others are passing through (a school quadrangle, coffee shop, library, bus stop, etc.). Try to observe, using all five senses, what is happening around you. Record, in list form and in as much detail as possible, at least 20 different images that catch your attention.
2. Then, spending at least 15 minutes on your own in a quiet space, go inward. Think of strong sensory memories and try to capture—again in list form, and without worrying about providing explanatory context for a reader—those memories in language, conveying the strongest sensory details.
3. Attempt to create 5 examples of figurative language from your list of ideas and images.

Or you can try this exercise:

1. Take 5-10 minutes to take some pictures of objects (not people) you find interesting, unique or beautiful.
2. Flip through the pictures and select one or two. Then complete steps #2 and #3 from the activity above.