

## Women Writing for (a) Change Sample Agenda

*"I write quickly, but I also do not believe in writer's block, because once I didn't have the luxury of believing it. When you only have 20 minutes, you write, whether it's garbage, or it's good ... you just do it, and you fix it later."  
~ Jodi Picoult*

### Gate C22 – Ellen Bass

At gate C22 in the Portland airport  
a man in a broad-band leather hat kissed  
a woman arriving from Orange County.  
They kissed and kissed and kissed. Long after  
the other passengers clicked the handles of their  
carry-ons  
and wheeled briskly toward short-term parking,  
the couple stood there, arms wrapped around each  
other  
like he'd just staggered off the boat at Ellis Island,  
like she'd been released at last from ICU, snapped  
out of a coma, survived bone cancer, made it down  
from Annapurna in only the clothes she was wearing.

Neither of them was young. His beard was gray.  
She carried a few extra pounds you could imagine  
her saying she had to lose. But they kissed lavish  
kisses like the ocean in the early morning,  
the way it gathers and swells, sucking  
each rock under, swallowing it  
again and again. We were all watching —

passengers waiting for the delayed flight  
to San Jose, the stewardesses, the pilots,  
the aproned woman icing Cinnabons, the man selling  
sunglasses. We couldn't look away. We could  
taste the kisses crushed in our mouths.

But the best part was his face. When he drew back  
and looked at her, his smile soft with wonder, almost  
as though he were a mother still open from giving  
birth,  
as your mother must have looked at you, no matter  
what happened after — if she beat you or left you or  
you're lonely now — you once lay there, the vernix  
not yet wiped off, and someone gazed at you  
as if you were the first sunrise seen from the Earth.  
The whole wing of the airport hushed,  
all of us trying to slip into that woman's middle-aged  
body,  
her plaid Bermuda shorts, sleeveless blouse, glasses,  
little gold hoop earrings, tilting our heads up.

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**10:00 Opening the Circle:** *We pass the lit candle* to establish a symbolic boundary for confidentiality and to set our intentions for this class. Soul cards & crosstalk from Public Read-around.

**10:20 Fastwrite:** Re-read "Gate C22," being conscious of Bass' use of language. Notice and underline some of her **verbs**, such as *clicked, staggered, swallowing, crushed*. Pick out some of her strong "muscular" verbs, and try using them in a piece of your own, where you write about a passionate scene you either witnessed or were part of. The *passion* could be a kiss, a birth, a dance, a leaving, a struggle, a decision. Try not to censor your scene. As Jodi Picoult says: "*write, whether it's garbage, or it's good ... just do it, and fix it later.*"

### 10:35 Break

#### 10:40 Small Groups

Kitchen: Christine(F), Maria (T), Tricia (VW), Kim (AB), Kristi (AB)  
Office: Verna (F) , Nan (T), Dawn (VW) , Charlene  
Table: Sylvia (F), Jenny (T), Jennifer (VW), Kathleen, Sandi  
Pink Sofa: Phebe (VW), Karen, Carol (F) , Ann (T), Eugenia  
Green Sofa: Bron, Peggy (F) , Marilyn (T), Antonia (VW)

**11:45 Large Group: One-sentence readaround** from Fastwrite (or not)

**12:15: Announcements / plans for next week - / Soul Cards / Close the circle**

**Next week's Class #9 may look something like this: Greeter: Christine**

Opening & Welcoming /Greenbook / Readbacks / Small Group / Announcements & Closing

WRITING SUGGESTIONS for the coming week, to use or not: These are offerings, not ‘assignments.’ They are optional and sometimes useful to get started.

1. Write two more “passionate scenes” this week, from your memory – or make them up – and write without censoring.
2. Experiment with “muscular verbs” by reviewing your past writing. Look for places where you can eliminate adjectives and substitute strong verbs instead.
3. Friend and teacher Tom Romano suggests reading William Zinsser’s On Writing Well, especially his chapter on “Clutter.” Zinsser says: *Writing improves in direct ratio to the number of things we can keep out of it that shouldn’t be there. “Up” in “free up” shouldn’t be there. Examine every word you put on paper. You’ll find a surprising number that don’t serve any purpose. Play the game of CUTTING 30%. If you have 100 words, get rid of 30. Then, write about how it felt / feels.*
4. Write about PASSION. Do a word-association fastwrite, where you write down anything that comes to mind when you consider PASSION. Organize your subjects, by giving them newspaper-headline titles: E.g., Teacher Inspires 9<sup>th</sup> Graders to Recite Shakespeare; Husband Deserts Family; Wife Enlists Psychic to Locate Husband; Pitcher Scores No-hitter; Limbaugh Slashes Liberals... etc etc.
5. Write a one-page story that begins with this line from the poem: “... the best part was his face.” Or Choose another line from the poem and create a story / poem of your own.
6. Ready for another wild-and-crazy POETIC FORM? Try the SESTINA. See the attached handout explaining it. It’s a bit detailed, but let that be your challenge! “Just do it...and fix it later!”
7. A repeat prompt: Go back over your writing, especially from this Spring Quarter, but maybe back farther. Choose one piece of writing and try “shaping it” in a variety of ways. Save all the varieties and bring them to small group to share. For example, if you choose to work on a journal entry, try turning it into the following: a pantoum; a ghazal; a letter to someone; a dialogue; a one-page story or fairy tale; a character description or profile of a person; a want ad; a recipe; a song; a news article... Use MULTIPLE GENRES and see what happens. Is there a theme or message that keeps repeating itself, no matter the genre? Which genre is the most fun? the most difficult? Is there an AUDIENCE (besides your small group) that might enjoy reading what you’ve created?
8. Bring a piece for our Class Anthology – as polished as you can make it. Bring 25 copies. Ask your small group for advice, if you are undecided about what to contribute.
9. Follow your Muse. 😊