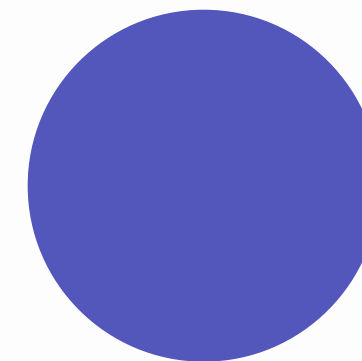


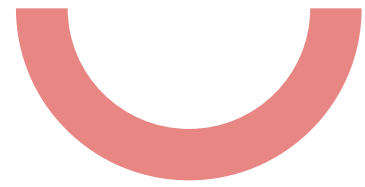
Revise and Shine

12 Strategies to Elevate Your CNF

Leanne Shirtliffe

leanneshirtliffe.com

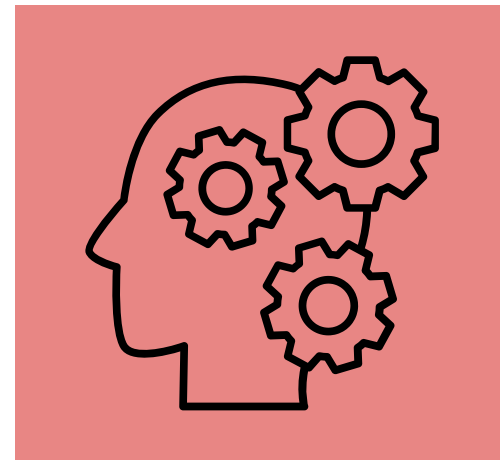




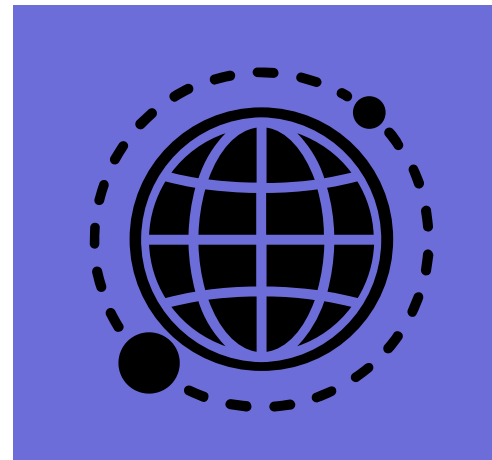
Agenda



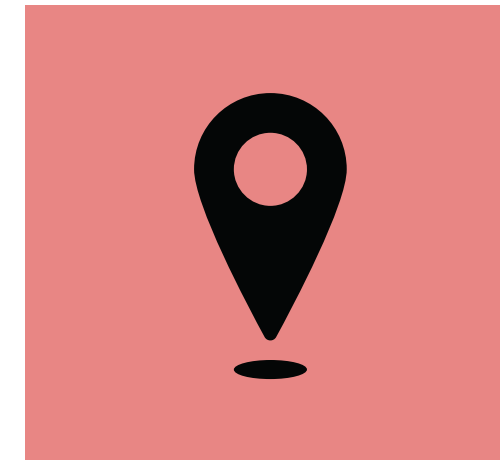
Why me?



Revision
Philosophy



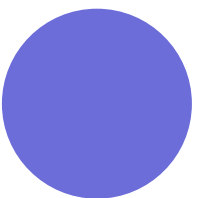
**Global
Strategies**

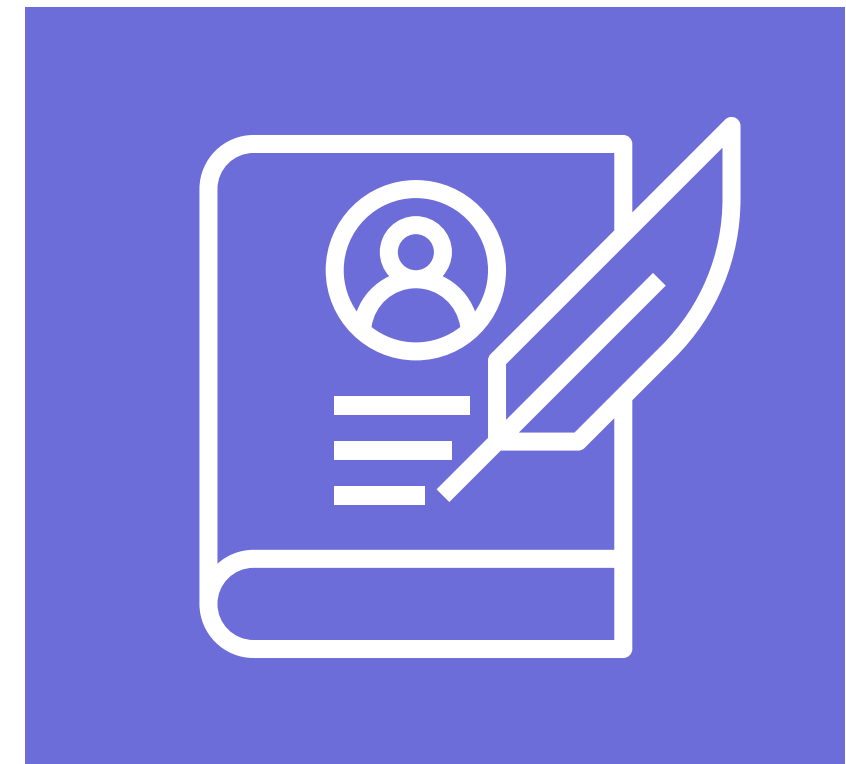
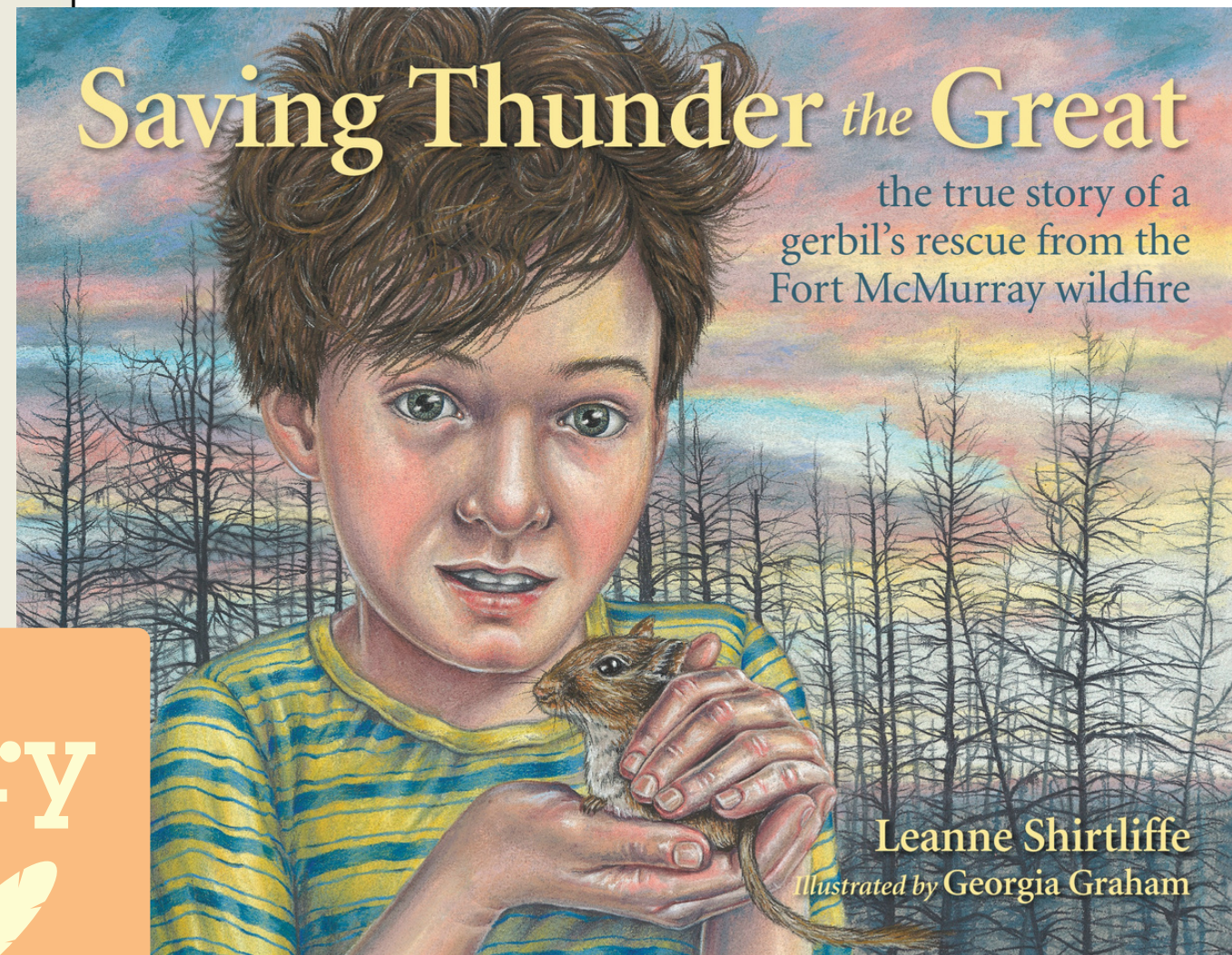
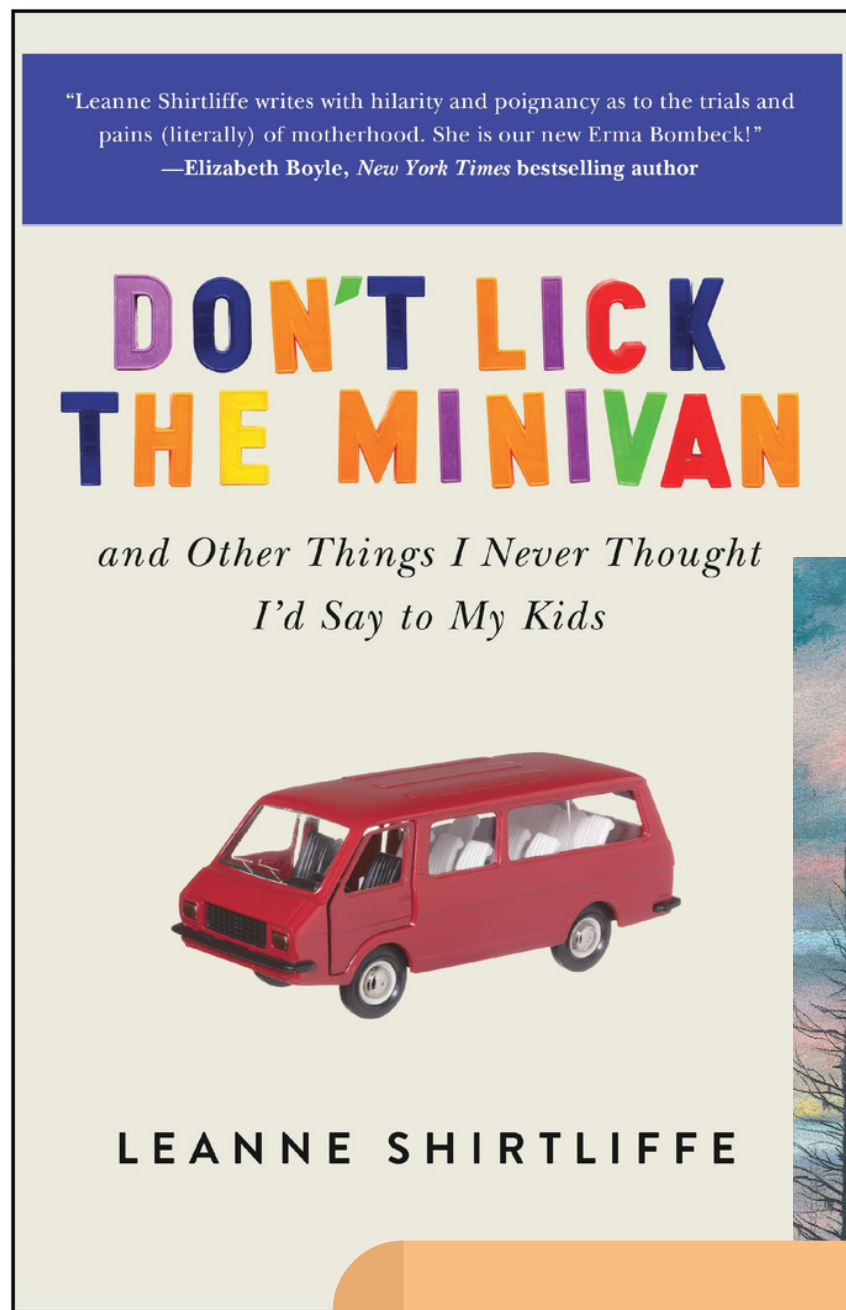


**Local
Strategies**



Q & A





Why me?



Re-VISION Philosophy



- Revise AFTER you finish SFD
- Always make a copy of your original draft
- Play
- Revise one thing at a time (as much as possible)
- Regarding my advice (or anyone else's): take what works/resonates; leave the rest



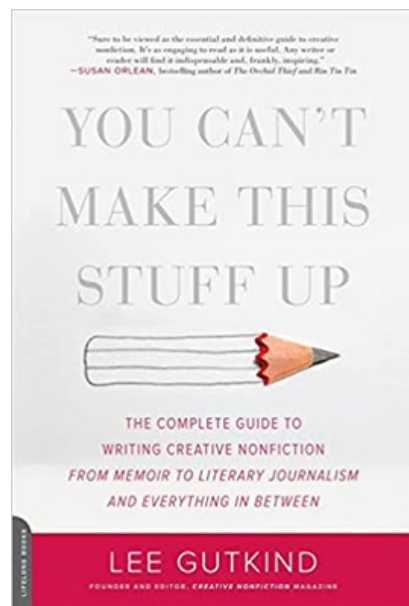
1.

Highlight Scene vs. Commentary

(non-scene stuff)

Scene = the *now*, the action, the sensory details, the showing, the one-time-one-place, the little stories

Commentary = the later, the before, the exposition, the reflection, the ideas, the telling, the so-what



Lee Gutkind calls this "the Yellow Test":

highlight all the scenes in any CNF piece/book in yellow; 50-70% of any CNF should be yellow (exceptions will abound)

Torn Jagged

TASH MCADAM

Writing about you shouldn't be simple. Shouldn't just be word after word tapped down and saved and safe forever. (It should be hot metal and melted plastic, scars that still make me shiver sometimes, when the wind tugs at my sleeves.)

The day I met you, I was sitting outside like I did every day, even in winter. Unyielding stone slid icy fingers through my black jeans, borderline non-school-uniform, dark enough that no one fought me on it. They had enough to fight me on without worrying too much about my outfit. (AIDS was God's punishment for fags, my history teacher told me. He didn't care about my jeans, just my shaved head).

You kicked your jacked-up skateboard over the curb, caught it and sidled up to me, all gangles and angles. I reluctantly looked up, expecting a shove or a word made of razors—the usual. You raised a hawk-wing eyebrow at me and asked for a smoke. I had some three-week-old rolling tobacco wedged in the pocket of my too-big combat jacket. We sparked up and smoked down to singed fingers in silence. (I didn't have any friends before that cigarette. Then and there on after I had you.)

What is there to do around here, you asked me. I told you I was going gay clubbing that night. The word gay rolled over my tongue like a ripe strawberry. Seeds scraping my teeth. Every Friday I went, I said. (It was a bold lie. I'd been once, alone, and it was an unmitigated disaster.)

Yeah, I thought you might be, you said, sucking the last millimetre of bright orange into your lungs with enviable ease. Cupped hands and skinny knee knocking against mine. You didn't mean you thought I'd be going clubbing. Back then, you and I both were just other. And we felt that, deeply. It filled the spaces in between my ribs (the dents left by boots.)

I picked you up at nine, after frantically tidying my car—a Jetta inherited from my sister, affectionately referred to as the Tank. Tape deck with a wire to plug into my iPod shuffle. (That playlist reminds me of you, makes my eyes sting and my rib cage squeeze worse than my binder does.)

I packed that day. A hard bulge in my tight jeans. The first time I'd ever done that outside my bedroom. You gave me electric courage without doing anything much. Your whole, lanky body screamed fuck you, and I took a little of that wild danger for myself, rolled in it. It felt like if I stayed close enough to you, the sun, anyone else would get burned. (I'd be immortal.)

Maybe I took more from you than you had to spare. After all, it's me that's still standing. You're just an echo weighing my bones down. A shadow printed on my skin. But some ties can't be broken, and we swore ourselves to each other with ink and blood and sweat and pain. Fluid.

The club was loud and dark and wild and no one cared that we were seventeen and looked younger. No one cared at all. Not the bouncers who waved us past, or the women who pressed against us on the dance floor. I thought I'd have a heart attack with how close they were.

I used to be a ghost, but I belonged in my body that night. I still have that same body, my memory of you. Nine scars with your prints on them, cold nights and hot knives and vital, violent disregard for anything beyond the moment.

When I rub my thumb over the inside of my left wrist, I feel your long fingers, bird bones. I see the shadows in your dusk-dawn eyes. I loved you in the way I love oxygen when I've pushed my body beyond endurance. (I'm sorry if that was too much.)

You ripped me open, showed me my heart and forced me to face my fears. You forged me into something new in the heat of your suffocating anger. You made me. You raged through life like you were fighting everything—except me—pushing back the trappings people tried to push on to you. The rest of us became insipid watercolours next to your tearing smear of colour. You were bruises and tobacco stains, grazed knees and bitten bloody lips. (A comet through us.)

I miss you every day, every dance. I hold memories of us in my hands, trickling over the pads of my fingers. I look over my shoulder for you, I look at the passenger seat (I always drove, you always took your shoes off and propped your monkey toes on the air vents). I see you in every corner of a flashing, dangerous smile, every broken teenager sobbing. I see you in the mirror, smirking over my shoulder. Chin up, loser, you'll whisper to me. It's all gonna be okay. We'll get out of here together.

We didn't.

ROOM

44.1
Growing
Room
Making Space in Literature, Art & Feminism Since 1975



Featuring:

The 2020 Growing Room Literary & Arts
Festival Keynote from Kai Cheng Thom

Interview with
Manoo Mahale



2a.

Write an elevator pitch

What is it about?

e.g. This is the story of _ who
wants _ but _. And so _

2b.

Write your story's essential question

e.g. How do you sum up a father's
life and a daughter's grief in six
photos?

Then: Reread your CNF with that question/statement at the forefront. What doesn't serve it?



3. Reverse Outline

In the margins of your CNF, record ONE of the following:

- scene vs. non-scene
- the time (present/past/future)
- the action

[Try to ascertain your structure]

Then: Look for patterns. If there is no pattern, would a pattern help?
Is there too much of a pattern?

Try: Make a pattern THEN break a pattern

Try: Taking more leaps. (Poetry can be great at this); must be earned.

TRY

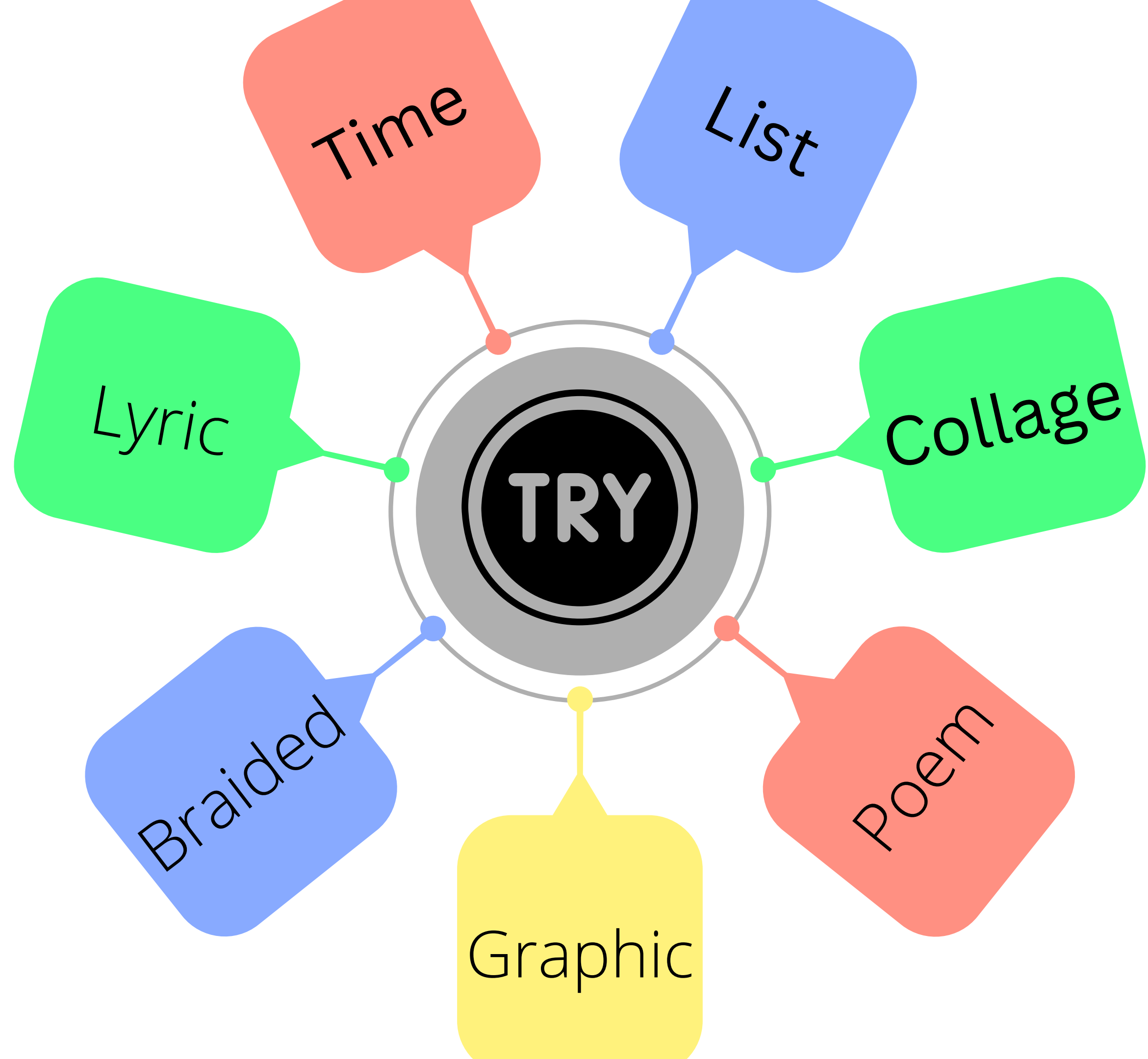
Reverse outline
other people's work.
Steal the structure!

TRY



4.

**Did you
choose
the best
structure
or form?**





5.

Is every sentence true?
Is every sentence fair?

Writer = how do I portray myself?
am I okay if others read it?

Others = how do I portray others?
am I okay if they read this portrayal?





6.

Beginnings

Does your CNF open at the right place?

Try starting in the central action.

Try writing 5 different beginnings.



7.

Endings

Did you end at the right place?

Try lopping off the final paragraph

Try writing 3 different endings.

Try: Use a word or image from your opening in your ending, but change its usage.



8.

Vary Sentence Openings

Common types of sentence starters:

- Subject (should have most of these!)
- Clausal (because, although, once, etc.)
- Prepositional (at, after, in, etc.)
- Adverb (-ly, tomorrow, today)
- -Ing

TRY

Read aloud
the first three words
of each sentence.

Put "to be" openers on trial: "There are," "It is," etc.



9.

Vary Sentence Length

(|| length, too!)

TRY

Reread your CNF,
estimating the
length of each
sentence.

This sentence has five words. Here are five more words.

Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It's like a stuck record.

The ear demands some variety.

Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music.

Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a

harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of

medium length. And sometimes when I am certain the reader

is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable

length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all

the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of

the cymbals—sounds that say listen to this, it is important.

So write with a combination of short, medium, and long

sentences. Create a sound that pleases the reader's ear. Don't

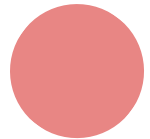
just write words. Write music.

—Gary Provost

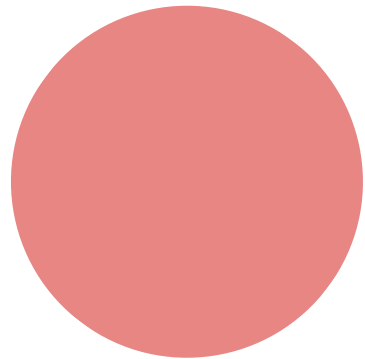


10

Freshen your language.



Make your words
sing at the word
and sentence
level.



I wanted to write someone about women’s smiles, but it felt too cliché.

Smile = first choice, worse choice. Then I thought about different kinds of smiles or things that smile.

First Choice	Second Choice	Third Choice	Fourth choice	Fifth Choice
Smile	Grin	smirk	Flash your chompers	Cheshire cat

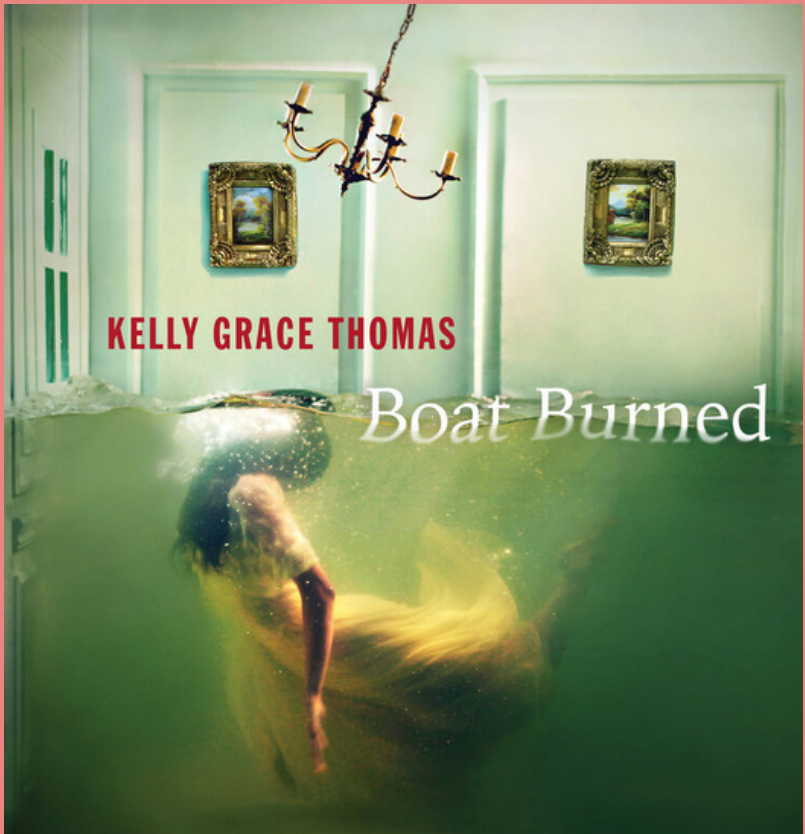
BEFORE: *The women don’t smile the same.*

Ask yourself what is the most interesting version of this. I think it is Cheshire Cat because this is not something I often hear. The Cheshire Cat is mysterious and appears and disappears. Also has a level of confidence that drives Alice crazy. This line was about the women who were empowering themselves so Chesire Cat felt perfect.

AFTER: *The women don’t Chesire Cat the same.*

Refreshing Metaphors

advice from poet
Kelly Grace Thomas

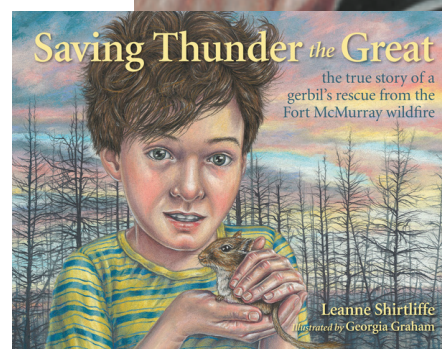
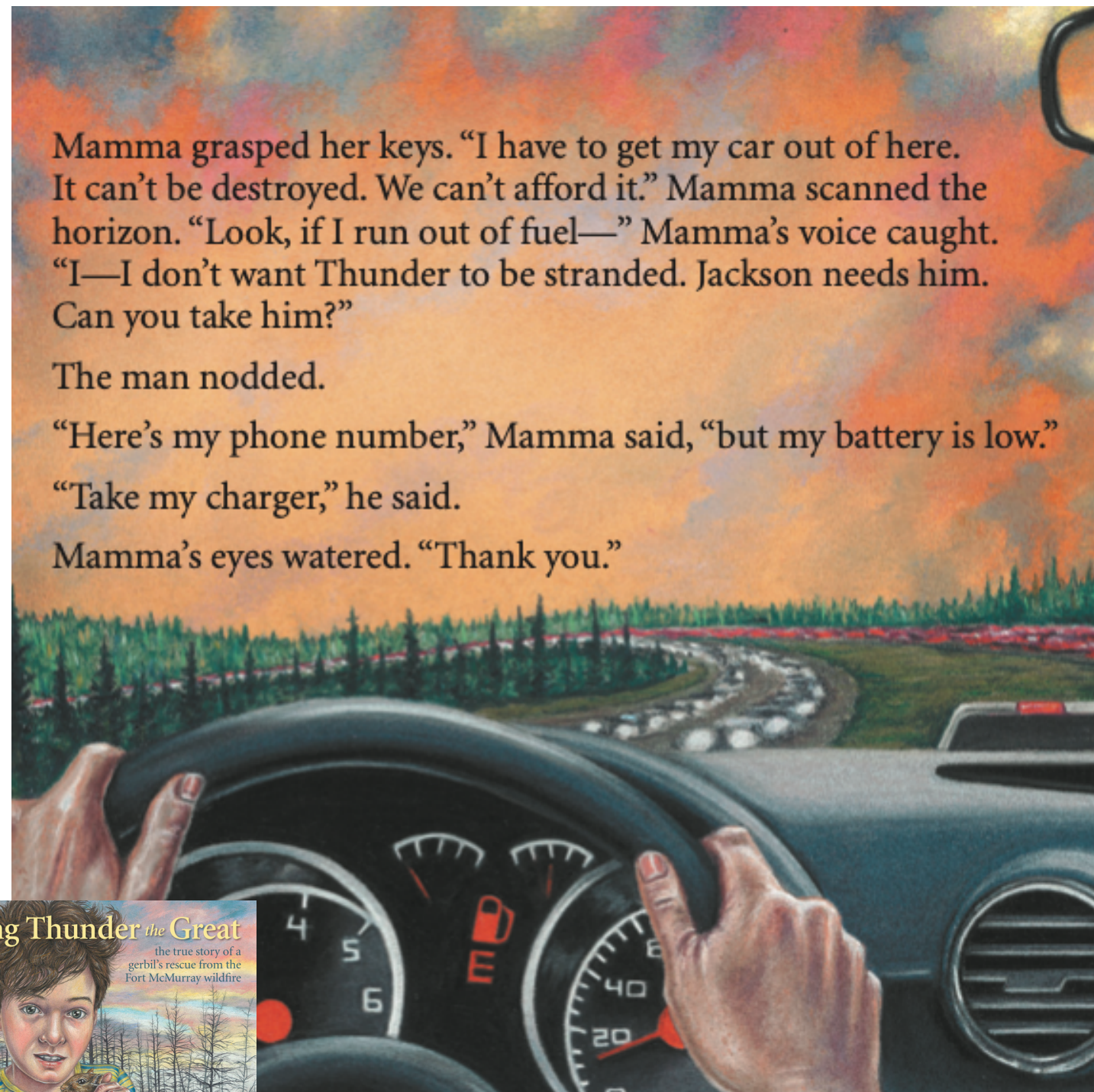


Make Dialogue Count

why my dad didn't want
to be cremated

Well if I can't own
a 6 x 3 piece of land,
then I don't want it.

Leanne Shirliffe
overheard haiku



And Still They Rise *for my son*

He is sick with worry about
it all, about raging wildfires
and acne, about math grades
and gay bashing, about his wandering
eye and rising seas, about what
he will do with his (supposedly)
one wild and precious life.

I am sick with worry about
him, so I offer platitudes like
they're trays of cookies. "Your
generation is better, will change things."
When he says, "No it's too late," I know
there is nothing pristine left
about growing up. Along with old-growth
and hope, we've taken childhood, too.

The Wonder of Word Lists

From Atwood's Nearly

flotsam	hollow	c
wade	drone	r
mellow	djinns	e
doomed	flay-doh	h
cavern	octopi	co
sasquatch	pout	
folkloric	brash	
glophone	hazards	
mildew	lacework	
bone	illusion	
gristle	taiga (?)	
torso	artful	
yammer	sunken	
carry	suite	
circus tent	robot	
mauve	twistable	
arcade	lichens	
leather	lobotomized	
pedestal	scurvy	
baritone	pillowcase	
coda	honed	
emptied	ankles	
sinuous	flickers	
broke	toast	
	ballooning	

RANDOM NOUNS 1

coil	Scrabble	spectacle
season	dose	chorus
mustard seed	futon	furrow
protractor	eclipse	nomogram
glove	spit	

RANDOM ADJ.

fruit-bearing	terraced
corrugated	burlap
god-damn	heat-soaked
solar-powered	traveline
combustible	liquid
kiss-my-ass	unbroke
inert	rumbling
beloved	geologic
palatable	bone-embedded
begotten	abyssmal
holy	splintered
hula-hooped	obscure
screw-top	electric
humdrum	lassid
frontier	
perpetual	

11.



Expand an
image into
a motif;
or, layer
images.

RUMORS SECRETS & LIES

POEMS ABOUT PREGNANCY, ABORTION & CHOICE



EDITED BY CAROL LYNNE KNIGHT & KRISTINE SNODGRASS

LEANNE SHIRTLIFFE



CENTER COURT

for my daughter

1.

She is no cheerleader, no sideline sitter, no
watcher of boys' games. She is center court,
poised for tip-off, hair in an eyes-wide ponytail,
the kind that made her cry the year she took dance
because she was made to be who she wasn't,
to want what she didn't.

She is center court.

On the sideline, bleachers bow with new-leafed oaks,
trunks painted school green. Bare-chested boy-men
and crop-topped birches rustle leaves as these Xs
fight to block shots and box out,
for loose balls and open lanes.

No lesson
except center court conviction.

2.

Crossover, fake, Euro-
step,
left-hand, backboard in
— and one.

Take the foul

to stop the gimme.

Hands on knees for timeout breaths—
opposition's possession.

Plant feet, cross arms into breast armour,
take the hit to draw the charge.

It's bonus, so she steps

to the line,

nods to the flag-waving branches,

sinks two.

3.

She wades through woe
using her body.

She is center court.

Yes

she

is

supreme court.



Read it aloud.

**Read it to something:
a pet, a plant, a stuffy...**





Bonus!

To revise, use the acronym STAR.

S – Substitute

T – Take things out

A – Add

R – Rearrange

SUBSTITUTE

- Overused words (Use a Word Frequency Counter—then “Control F”)
- Weak verbs with strong verbs
- Weak adjectives with strong adjectives.
- Common nouns with proper nouns (the tree / the Oak)
- Dead words (things, nice, good, kind, stuff, a lot)
- Overused phrases (clichés) and unoriginal comparisons
- Misspelled words with correctly-spelled words

TAKE OUT

- Unnecessary repetition (e.g. “I”)
- Unimportant or irrelevant information

ADD

- Specific details
- New information
- Punctuation
- Figurative Language
- Expanded Ideas
- Line breaks / Stanza Breaks / Paragraphs
- Very short sentence
- A “turn” or a “so-what”
- Vary your sentence openers (start with “ly”, start with preposition, etc)
- An interesting title
- Transitional words, phrases, or sentences

REARRANGE

- Switch individual words around
 - Switch phrases
 - Switch stanzas
 - Line breaks
- 

