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The 15 Sentence Portrait

from Wendy Bishop's *Working Words: The Process of Creative Writing*

This exercise promotes the use of sensory detail for writing attractive, vivid, and flowing essays, stories, or poetry. When any writer needs inspiration, this exercise is quick and helpful.

In the exercise outlined below you are asked to write a portrait, following specific directions, about a person or place you know. The constraints of the directions may help you to discover new aspects of this individual since you are following sentence-level prompts even as you develop your content. Following these prompts keeps you from directing your observations in familiar, perhaps predictable, ways. Take the results of this guided writing and create a collage portrait of that person.

Directions:

1. Picture in your mind a person (or place) you have strong feelings about. You may not like them but you should feel strongly about them. They can be living or dead but they should be someone you know or knew personally rather than a famous character.
2. For a title, choose an emotion or a color that represents this person (or place) to you. You will not mention the individual's name in the writing.
3. For a first line starter, choose one of the following:
 - You stand there. . .
 - No one is here. . .
 - In this (memory, photograph, dream, or whatever), you are. . .
 - I think sometimes. . .
 - The face is . . .
 - We had been. . .



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- Complete this sentence...
4. After your first sentence, build a portrait of this individual, writing the sentences according to the following directions:
- Sentence 2: Write a sentence with a color in it.
 - Sentence 3: Write a sentence with a part of the body in it.
 - Sentence 4: Write a sentence with a simile (a comparison using “like” or “as”)
 - Sentence 5: Write a sentence of over 25 words.
 - Sentence 6: Write a sentence under eight words.
 - Sentence 7: Write a sentence with a piece of clothing in it.
 - Sentence 8: Write a sentence with a wish in it.
 - Sentence 9: Write a sentence with an animal in it.
 - Sentence 10: Write a sentence in which three or more words alliterate; that is, they begin with the same initial consonant: “She has been left, lately, with less and less time to think. . .”
 - Sentence 11: Write a sentence with two commas.
 - Sentence 12: Write a sentence with a smell and a color in it.
 - Sentence 13: Write a sentence with a simile.
 - Sentence 14: Write a sentence that could carry an exclamation point (but don’t use the exclamation point).
 - Sentence 15: Write a sentence to end this portrait that uses the word or words you chose for a title.