



This in-class activity was developed in conjunction with Lightbox interviews with [Jericho Brown](#) and [Malachi Black](#). For more information, please see www.lightboxpoetry.com.

Leap of Faith

In his interview, Jericho Brown writes, “Poems allow us to be faced with the human condition of doubt. At every linebreak is a moment in which we cannot be completely certain of what has happened or what will happen.” In this activity, we’ll experiment with the uncertainty of starting with a line and moving away from it, and the certainty of working towards a line we already know.

Part I

Refer to “[Prayer of the Backhanded](#)” by Jericho Brown or “[Quarantine](#)” by Malachi Black (or to any other poem you are intrigued by). Choose one sentence, line or phrase that you find particularly interesting, engaging, or thought-provoking and use it to begin a new piece of writing in class. You can choose to take this piece anywhere you wish, but you must begin with one fixed line and figure out where you’re going.

Part II

Trade the draft you wrote in response to part one with one of your peers. Once again, choose one line that strikes you as especially interesting and full of energy. This time, you’ll write a new draft with the purpose of ending on your classmate’s line. What do you need to do in order to arrive at this place? What movements must your writing make, what places or images must it visit?

Part III

Now that you’ve finished your drafts, come together as a full class to reflect on these two writing experiences. What’s different about starting somewhere and not knowing where you’re going compared with knowing where you will end up without knowing how to get there? Did you have to employ different strategies in these two exercises? Were you surprised by any of the places you visited along the way? Consider sharing some of the results of these exercises out loud as a class, comparing notes about how it felt to write each piece.