



This in-class activity was developed in conjunction with Lightbox interviews with [C. Dale Young](#) and [Emilia Phillips](#). For more information, please see www.lightboxpoetry.com.

Getting Lost in the Wunderkammer

In her Lightbox interview, Emilia Phillips discusses the benefits of using a *Wunderkammer*, or cabinet of curiosities, as a writer: “It’s here where mystery exists, where the poem exists. I keep my cabinet of curiosity not for knowing but to indulge in unknowing.” In this in-class activity, we’ll gather our own collection of strange items and use them to unlock new spaces for thinking about the directions of our poems.

Preparation

The class must assemble a Wunderkammer, a cabinet of strange objects, weird photographs, and other ephemera; strange charts or graphs that seem odd or inexplicable; medical illustrations or bizarre vintage advertisements; outmoded technologies; things people used to use in their everyday lives, but no longer do. It should be something that, while interesting, is somewhat bizarre or bewildering, difficult to fully comprehend on first glance. You might have writers actually bring in these objects, or you might assemble a digital Wunderkammer on a class website or through email. It’s useful if everyone brings in at least two objects.

Part I

Read one or two poems by Emilia Phillips: [“Dream of the Phone Booth”](#) and [“Bertillon: Three Measurements.”](#) What curiosities might you imagine inspired these poems? What information about objects do the poems reveal? What remains a mystery?

Part II

Writers should be assigned two curiosities from the class Wunderkammer at random. It’s preferable, if possible, that the writer not receive a curiosity which he or she has contributed.

Part III

In your notebook, write in response to each of the curiosities you’ve been given. At first, you might consider your observations about the curiosity’s physical description. But, eventually, you’ll want to imagine something deeper: what the object was, who used it, what was its history, how did you come to find it, where? Write about each of your curiosities for ten or twenty minutes. Brainstorm how these curiosities might form the basis of a new poem.