



This in-class activity was developed in conjunction with Lightbox interviews with [Tarfia Faizullah](#) and [Phillip B. Williams](#). For more information, please see www.lightboxpoetry.com.

Walking in Witness

In her interview, Tarfia Faizullah writes, “Poetry is the way I see the world, and how I cultivate that seeing...poetry is beautifully adaptive because it can encompass many mediums at once—a poem can be a scene in a play, incorporate other approaches to writing like journalism or criticism, and be presented in the air or on the page, for example. I think it is one of our most intuitive and most ancient art forms. I really appreciate poetry’s flexibility and its depth, and find that a poem can encompass many worlds in a small amount of space.” In this in-class activity, you’ll gather information about a time and a place by using your senses; practice ways of recording; and reflect on how our perspectives shape our writing.

Part I

Break the class into small groups and assign locations around campus or school. Ideally, these will be areas where there is some activity going on. Each group will go to its location for a set amount of time—say, ten minutes—during which you will “witness” the world around you.

Part II

In your assigned location, observe everything around you. What are the qualities of the location? What enters and exits it? Gather as much sensory information as you can. You might experiment with different ways of gathering: jot down notes in a notebook, snap a quick pic, simply mark moments for memory. Also, think about where *you* are in relation to the scene, to the event, to the space you are “witnessing.” Don’t share information or interact with other members of your group.

Part III

Back in class, do some individual writing to draft a poem or account based on the event you witnessed. Select which information you gathered might be in the poem or account. Think about how your own work emphasizes certain elements from your gathering expedition, omits others, or imagines additional information not readily observable at the scene.

Part IV

Share some of these accounts, paying attention to how pieces that witnessed the same event seem similarly or differently focused or presented. Reflect, as a class, about how our perspectives shaped the accounts we recorded and suggest some reasons why that might be.