



This writing prompt was developed in conjunction with Lightbox interviews with Solmaz Sharif and Tyehimba Jess. For more information, please see [www.lightboxpoetry.com](http://www.lightboxpoetry.com).

## **Let It Matter What We Call a Thing**

Solmaz Sharif's collection of poems, *Look*, makes use of words and phrases lifted from the *Department of Defense Dictionary* to explore the way language holds power over us as citizens. But, according to the book's description, "Sharif refuses to accept this terminology as given, and instead turns it back on its perpetrators. 'Let it matter what we call a thing,' she writes. 'Let me look at you.'" For this writing prompt, you will create a poem out of a glossary of six words of your choice, with a goal of commenting on, exploring, critiquing, undermining, or somehow transforming the given definitions, contexts, and uses of these words. All six words should come from one particular realm of experience, for instance, from politics, from cooking, from music terminology, from science, from fashion, from whatever you choose. Perhaps some of these [examples](#) of jargon will inspire you. Write a poem that strings together these words. You might examine Sharif's poem, "[Look,](#)" as an example. Challenge yourself. Rather than write a poem about the world of the words' origins and typical uses, try importing them into a new landscape, a new territory of imagery and feeling. See if you can transform these received words, even giving them new definitions and new power, in the context of your own poem.