



This writing prompt was developed in conjunction with Lightbox interviews with Solmaz Sharif and Tyehimba Jess. For more information, please see www.lightboxpoetry.com.

Writing Prompt (courtesy of Tyehimba Jess)

Some of the best prompts have been made up on the spur of the moment. One prompt I use is to require students to research a person who was alive or an event that has occurred at least ten years before their birth, and to write a poem about that person during that time period or about that event. This prompt is more of an assignment than anything - something one might have to research alone for a while before settling on the subject - but it forces the poet out of their own headspace and forces them to think about historical consequence. Because this exercise can be done with varying parameters (10 years back, 25 years back, 100, etc...) it can be useful to lead folks toward understanding more fully their place in the flow of history. I might add that this exercise can also be refined so that the poet researches exactly what was happening in the world on their date of birth - people are generally very curious about the state of the world they were born into, and such a poem could easily employ anaphora such as "Born into.... "