

WHEN THE WORLD BECAME QUIET

Nature Writing with poet Polly Roberts

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ART GALLERY
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EXCHANGE

NATURE WRITING WITH POET POLLY ROBERTS

Polly Roberts is a nature writer, but what does that mean? In this workshop Polly will offer nature as a spark to prompt creative writing. We will look to the outside world for inspiration as well as create landscapes from the imagination. We will explore how characters relate to nature and how a different world might affect what happens.

You will need:

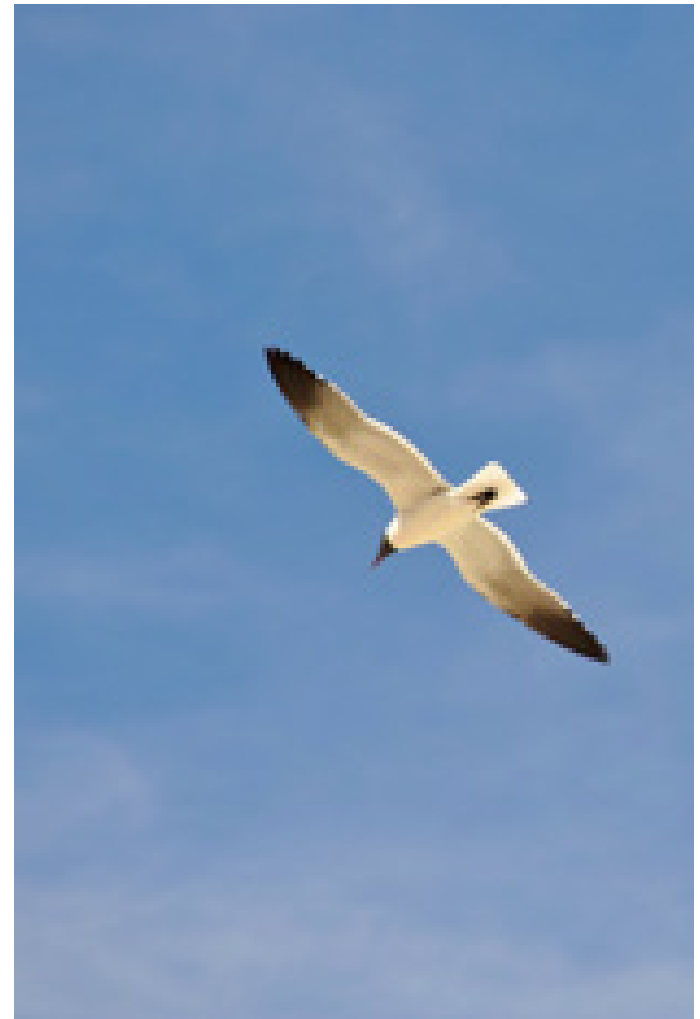
- Paper
- Pen or pencil
- A piece of card or cardboard (an old cereal box will do)
- Stanley knife or a pair of scissors
- A timer (you can use a phone or a kitchen timer, otherwise aim to write about one page per exercise)

If you do not have access to art materials at home be adventurous and inventive and find things around the house that may work instead.

Excercise One

Over the last few months, our relationship with the world around us changed. The roads became quieter, there were less people and most of us were spending a lot more time at home. Some people had gardens, others didn't. Some had views of the sea, others could see the windows of the house opposite. On our daily walks some watched birds make nests, while others walked through city streets. Think of what nature you saw over this time.

Set the timer to 5 minutes and write all the words that pop into your head when you think about nature.



Exercise Two

I wonder what you wrote? When we think of nature, it can be both wild and tame. Nature is all around us, even in the most unexpected places if we look close enough. When I was at home for lockdown, I began to notice nature I had never seen before: plants in cracks of concrete, a tree rising above my neighbour's house, ants running along the wall.



1. On your piece of cardboard, draw a square about 4 inches by 4 inches. Draw a smaller square in the middle, about half the size. Cut out the big square and then cut out the smaller square either using a Stanley knife or by poking your pen through the middle and then using your scissors. Now you have a viewfinder!
2. Go for a walk with your viewfinder, either around your garden, your bedroom, or down the road. Hold it up and peer through it. What views do you see? If you see a plant, hold it close and take a look. If you see a photograph, look at a small part of it through your viewfinder.
3. Pick one view and set the timer for 10 minutes. Write a description of what you see through the viewfinder.

Exercise Three

Sometimes, by looking closely at something, or seeing only part of the picture, the world around us can look rather strange. Your descriptions might have been very precise because you could see all the tiny details, or perhaps they were very abstract. What happens when we not only look at nature, but use all of our senses?

Think of a particular memory connected to nature from the last few months. If you can't think of any then use a scene from your viewfinder. Set your timer for 10 minutes.

Write quickly about this memory, but make sure to use all the senses.



What did it look like? Was there a smell? Did you feel anything – perhaps the wind on your face or the grass on your feet? Were there many sounds around you? Could you taste anything – remember even eating a vegetable is relating to nature!

Exercise Four

Our senses can evoke a whole world. Have you ever smelt something and suddenly had a memory rush back? Over the last few months, while unable to travel or visit friends, I found I could close my eyes and return to places I hadn't visited for a long time. Once, my friend dropped around a bunch of daffodils and the smell brought me right back to a field in California!

In this exercise we will use music to travel into nature. It might remind you of somewhere you have been before, or you might find yourself imagining somewhere completely new.

1. When you are ready, [click here](#) and press play. First, close your eyes and listen. See what images come to you. Is there a smell or another sense that rises?
2. Set the timer for 10 minutes and write about the place you imagined when you listened to the music. You might want to listen to the song while writing. Are there any creatures there? Is it wild or urban? Does it have a mood?

Exercise Five

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, many people were reporting having vivid dreams. Did you dream more than usual? Could you remember your dreams?

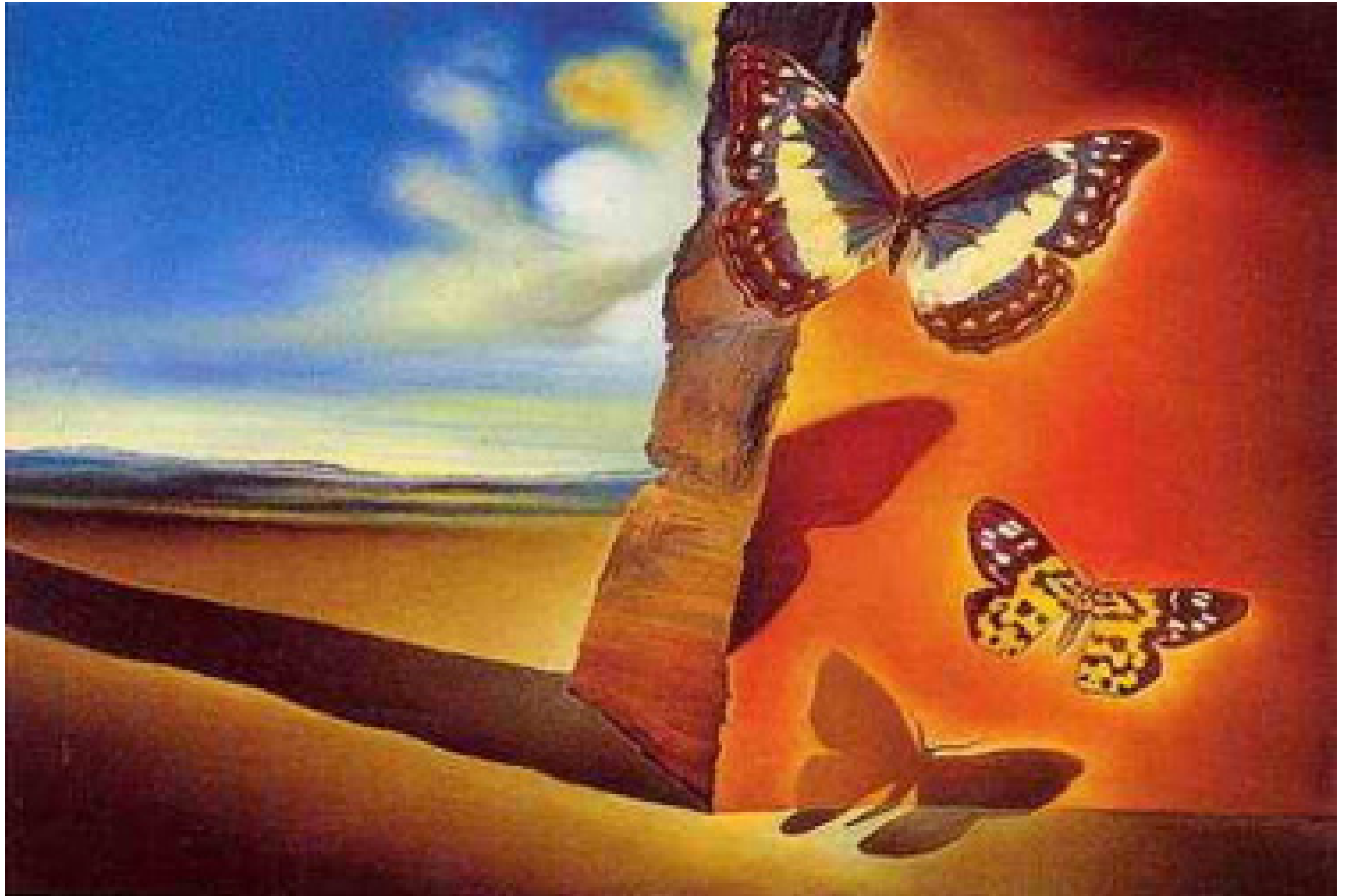
I found that the less I was seeing outside, the more sights I could recall from my memory bank, and at night these would jumble together to create strange new worlds. The artist Salvador Dali often merged real places into his paintings with images from his imagination to create a whole new landscape.

1. Pick one of the following: **Amoracia rusticana** **Myrrhis odorata**
 Primula vulgaris **Paaver rhoeas**

2. Imagine whichever you chose is the name of a place. What would it be?
Is it a beach? A city? Is it busy or quiet? Hot or cold?

What does it feel like to be there?

Set your timer for 10 minutes and write about this place.



Exercise Six

I wonder what your place looked like, and whether anything was going on there? Wouldn't it be interesting to know whether others who picked the same words as you imagined the same type of landscape and inhabitants? It is curious how the sounds of words can ignite certain images, and how we relate feelings to words.

1. Pick one of the following: **child** **adult** **animal**
Take a moment to imagine what they might look like.
2. Pick one of these emotions: **angry** **lonely** **overjoyed**
3. Set your timer for 10 minutes. Write a scene within the place you created in exercise five, where your chosen character is in your chosen mood. What happens? How do they react to this place when feeling this way? If there is sea, perhaps they want to jump in it, if there is a tree maybe they want to hide beneath it, or if there are lots of people maybe they get into a fight. Write and see what happens!



I hope you enjoyed these exercises. You can repeat them by finding a new view with your viewfinder, or writing from your favourite song. The words you were using in the last two exercises were the Latin names for flowers you might know (horseradish, sweet cicely, poppy, primrose); you could open a dictionary, pick a new word, and write from this.

If you like something you have written, we would love to publish it on our website. Submit your work [here](#)

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We hope you have enjoyed these exercises and join again for the next workshop!