

Twenty Little Poetry Projects by Jim Simmerman in The Practice of Poetry, Behn and Twichell

1. Begin the poem with a metaphor.
2. Say something specific but utterly preposterous.
3. Use at least one image for each of the five senses.
4. Use one example of synesthesia (mixing the senses.) (“Morning taste the way a rock felt kissing me on the eye.”)
5. Use the proper name of a person and the proper name of a place.
6. Contradict something you said earlier in the poem.
7. Change direction or digress from the last thing you said.
8. Use a word (slant? foreign language? baby talk?) you’ve never seen in a poem.
9. Use an example of false cause-effect logic.
10. Use a piece of “talk” you’ve actually heard (preferably in dialect and/or which you don’t understand.
11. Create a metaphor using the following construction: “The (adjective) (concrete noun) of (abstract noun). It will be something like this: The blue boat of happiness.
12. Use an image in such a way as to reverse its usual associative qualities (“happy as headstones”)
13. Make the persona or character in the poem do something they could not do in real life.
14. Refer to yourself by nickname and in the third person.
15. Write in the future tense, so that part of the poem seems to be a prediction.
16. Modify a noun with an unlikely adjective. (toy rocks)
17. Make a declarative assertion that sounds convincing but finally makes no sense. (I’ll have to forget him to know where he’s gone.)
18. Use a phrase from a language other than English.
19. Make a nonhuman object say or do something human (personification.)
20. Close the poem with a vivid image that makes no statement but that “echoes” an image from earlier in the poem.

Open the poem with the first project and close it with the last. Put the rest in whatever order you’d like, giving each project at least one line. Try to use all twenty. Toss anything that doesn’t work. Feel free to repeat those you like. Fool around. Enjoy. There may be fodder for several poems in here.