13 Ways of Looking at "Something" (inspired by Wallace Stevens)
By Dr. Hadara Bar-Nadav

Getting Started-The First Draft
Choose a favorite object or an object that is meaningful for you. Write 13 ways of experiencing that specific object (a ring, a cell phone, shoes, keys, a house, etc.). Gather as many specifics and concrete details as you can.

You might consider one or more of the following prompts, though feel free to explore:

• Go into your senses and explore the object in terms of imagery: smell, taste, touch, sight, sound, and movement.
• Be inside of the object
• Be outside of the object
• If the object were male, female, or a child
• If the object were a mother or father
• Explore point of view (first person "I," second person "you," third person "her," etc.)
• If a certain narrative presents itself, follow it!
• If a sound or image sequence seems particularly loaded, follow it!

Unpacking
Pick 3 of your 13 ways and unearth any language, stories, details, or specifics that are buried inside of your phrases/lines.

The following questions may help you move deeper.

• When did I first form this perception?
• How was it formed?
• What specific details would be effective to add?
• Which other words (diction) can help me communicate this feeling, idea, or image?

Arrangement & Revision (re-seeing your work)
Select the most effective phrases/lines from your "16 Ways" (the original 13 ways from your first draft, plus the additional 3 items added during the unpacking activity). You might end up with 5 strong phrase, lines, or stanzas, or perhaps even ten. Consider why you selected certain phrases over others. What makes writing more or less effective?

Once you have identified your strongest phrases, begin to arrange them on the page. Ask yourself, what is the best order for these phrases? Perhaps your 12th phrase should go first. At this point, you may find you need to use more or less of your phrases, which is fine. You may even find that you need to generate more writing through unpacking, or make further connections so that the writing flows.

Also consider the form of your piece. Should it be in short lines? Long lines? Should certain lines be indented? What formal choices would best support the content?

And don't forget to choose a resonant title for your poem.
"Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" by WALLACE STEVENS

I
Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II
I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

III
The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV
A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V
I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

VI
Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.

VII
O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

VIII
I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

IX
When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

X
At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.

XI
He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a tear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

XII
The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII
It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

From The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens.

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

La Porte/The Door

The hotel door smiles terribly
What can it mean to me O mother
To be the one clerk for whom nothing exists
Pi-mu couples in the deep sad water
Fresh angels off the boats yesterday morning at Marsei
I hear a far off song fade and fade again
Humble as I am nothing of worth

Child I gave you all I had Work

Translated from the French by Julie Carr and Jennifer Pap
A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS.

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing
strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a
system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not
unordered in not resembling. The difference is
spreading.

A LONG DRESS.

What is the current that makes machinery, that
makes it crackle, what is the current that presents a
long line and a necessary waist. What is this current.

What is the wind, what is it.

Where is the serene length, it is there and a dark
place is not a dark place, only a white and red are
black, only a yellow and green are blue, a pink is
scarlet, a bow is every color. A line distinguishes it.
A line just distinguishes it.

A RED HAT.

A dark grey, a very dark grey, a quite dark grey is
monstrous ordinarily, it is so monstrous because there
is no red in it. If red is in everything it is not neces-
sary. It is not an argument for any use of it and
even so is there any place that is better, is there any
place that has so much stretched out.

A BLUE COAT.

A blue coat is guided away, guided and
guided away, that is the particular color that is used
for that length and not any width not even more
than a shadow.

Dragon

after Montale's "The Eel"

Dragon, siren, prima
prima donna, she flickers
in the cold crushing depths
of the seafloor, on an earth
without water or land,
just acid seas that slosh
above writhing rocks, in trenches
and slits deep as miles
while Earth spins so fast
a day is five hours
and the moon, huge grave
child, dings so close
it drags up tides as high
as Andes then shoves them down
in churning sinks and sumps
and in the dark catalytic
climb of smoking towers
something shifts and catches
and begins to eel its way
through hissing vents, to strain
through capillaries with thriving
torches of Touch this tininess—
the trembling quickens and what
can you do now but finally
recognize your mother?
When you kill it at the edge of the pan, you don't notice
That the egg grows an eye in death.

It is so small, it doesn’t satisfy
Even the most modest morning appetite.

But it already watch, already states at your world.
What are its horizons, whose glassy-eyed perspectives?

Does it see time, which moves carelessly through space?
Eyeballs, eyeballs, cracked shells, chaos or order?

Big questions for such a little eye and such an early hour.
And you—do you really want an answer?

When you sit down, eye to eye, behind a table,
You blind it soon enough with a crust of bread.

RAISINS

Whose veins, whose loves, whose traces,
Whose time evaporated in the wrinkles of raisins.

The cool grains of past summers. You eat them and you eat.
As you would eat the fingertips of god, who holds all.

Reduced to the utter humility of the aged.
Like handfuls of pensioners on a religious trip.

They rise from the table and plunge into your roof.
The whole bunch rises. Truly rises.

Whose arteries, whose fears, whose traces,
Whose gorgling you gulp down with the wrinkles of raisins.

The aged fingers grab you from within.
Choking you until you spit out their name.

PAPER CLIP

You put down the paper confused.
You only now notice the rusty imprint of a paper clip.
A spiral sign for the way inward.

She held together scraps of the world like an invisible thread.
She warmed you, so enveloped in herself. Like a fetus.
Like a snail. Like a body in a mass grave.

Her intention is not to add or take away from the world.
Not a creator, the little paper clip. She only causes contact.
Someone removed her. Who, why—you don't know.

Not how many sheets were lost.
With a finger you go over the trace and start to read again.
Before you open a space within a space within a space.

This poem has no end.