**The Poetry “Sweatshop”**

*Or forcing the average grade 12 student to create a poem in a timed environment, using “lateral” thinking!*

Most of us don’t feel that we’re “natural” poets, and can sometimes fear writing poetry, compared to attempts at other genres (short fiction, expository writing, even screenplays!)

Let’s consider what poetry tries to do:

As Michael Ondaatje has said, poetry aims to make “the ordinary, extraordinary”, through sensual description, rhetorical technique (including original diction and effective rhetorical device use) and close observation. What combined with some knowledge of how to “free yourself” through lateral thinking, and free association, the focus of today’s lesson, you too can write poetry!

The other aim of poetry, contrary to the popular belief that it is simply “expressing your emotions”, is to make your personal experience “universal “, by considering and describing it in terms that allows anyone “into” the human drama of your topic. Consider the difference between the two phrases below:

1. *I am totally frustrated by people’s dislike of my personality*

(a described emotional state, but fairly “bland” as worded)

1. *My frustration is a barbed wire crown*

(its thorny spikes those who abuse me)

(metaphor and sense description: more exciting, more “sensual”, easier for readers to imagine your level of frustration, and how it might “feel”!)

**Sweatshop Process: Today and Tomorrow in Class**

1. Choose a word from your given dictionary page.
2. Use the definition, synonyms, antonyms, to your advantage, and include them in your mind.
3. Build a mind map, with the items from number 2 above, and through free association, as in my board example.
4. Freely associate ideas, and “build out” your map. Try to get as far away from the original word/ idea as possible!
5. Begin to combine words and phrases that come to mind as you “stare” at your map. DON’T EDIT IN YOUR MIND!!!! Try to write in “free verse” – don’t worry about rhyming.
6. When you think you have exhausted phrasal possibilities on the page, you then have a first draft.
7. Now (tomorrow in class at some point), write a second draft – reorder, edit, delete, add, phrases). Separate your ideas into stanzas (purposeful groups of lines).
8. Type up your second draft, continuing to edit and tighten (which most the time means shorten!)
9. Share you draft with Mrs. Hastie. Your chosen word should be the title, or at least, appear in the poem.
10. Get feedback. Revise one last time! Include this masterpiece in your *Chapbook!*