

## THE GROUP TITLE PROMPT

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This prompt is a three-phase exercise about titles and how to approach them. It requires at least a handful of people in order to work. I usually do it in a class of at least ten and no more than twenty.

**Phase 1**—After a brief discussion about titles (how much we think about them, sharing titles of poems we like, our title idea generation process, etc), I ask each person in the class or group to share three titles of their own creation with me privately before the next time we meet as a group (generally emailed). These aren't titles of poems they've already written. These are three original titles without an accompanying poem. They are encouraged to come up with whatever type of title they like.

**Phase 2**—During the next class period or meeting, when I've collected the titles from each student, I will write each title down on the board/overhead projector/whatever-is-available-that-will-let-the-group-see-everything-at-once and read them all aloud. I don't acknowledge any titles to their authors. Reading the titles all aloud is fun. Some will be serious and abstract. Some will be goofy. The group is always quite engaged and can be inspired by what the rest of the group has done with their titles.

After reading the titles, I tell them they will vote to get to one title together. I begin this process by asking members of the class to nominate a handful of titles they particularly like. At this point, ownership is meaningless, so if a student nominates his or her own, that's fine. After a few are nominated (the number generally happens organically—usually about 8), the group votes. I usually do this in two waves. On the first wave, I give them two votes to use on any two choices. When we've narrowed things down to two or three, we go with each person getting a single vote on the second wave and the final title they choose is the “winner.”

**Phase 3**—Every member of the group will write a poem with that title and share it with the others. It's fascinating to see how each writer will interpret the prompt and, in the process, the group learns from the other takes on the title.

While I've only done this exercise in creative writing classrooms, there's no reason it wouldn't work well in a writing group, too. I've done it with as few as six people. In that case, I asked them to increase the number of prompts they shared from three to five. The more titles, the better.