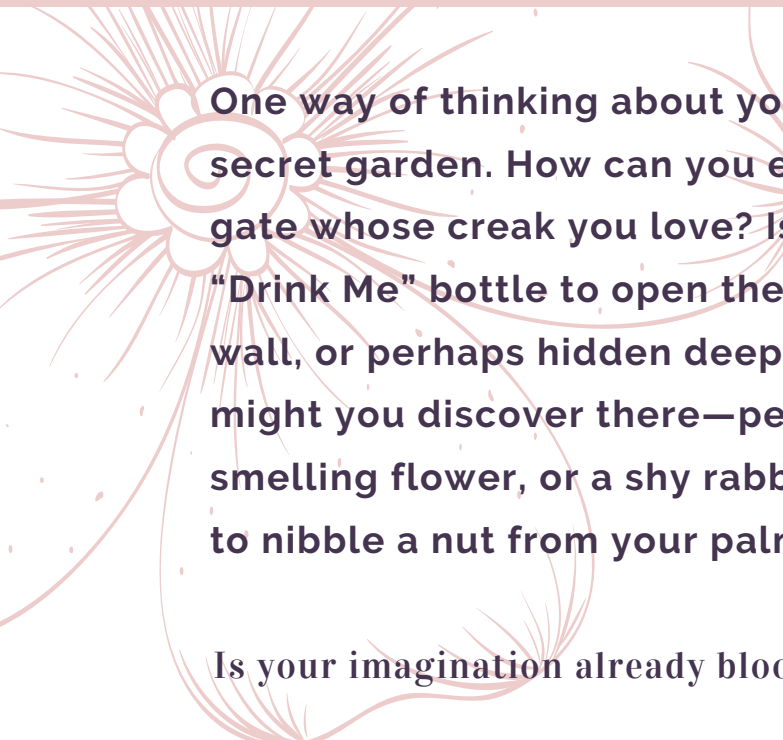


UNLOCKING THE SECRET GARDEN

TEN WRITING EXPLORATIONS



One way of thinking about your creativity is to envision it as a secret garden. How can you enter that space—through a rickety gate whose creak you love? Is there a magic key, or perhaps a “Drink Me” bottle to open the door? Is it surrounded by a high wall, or perhaps hidden deep in the heart of a forest? What might you discover there—perhaps a colorful bird, a sweet-smelling flower, or a shy rabbit that simply needs some coaxing to nibble a nut from your palm?

Is your imagination already blooming as you consider these questions?

Every garden—and every story—needs tending in order to flourish. One of the best ways to deepen your craft, get to the heart of your story, and weed out what's not working in your very own Eden is to get some creative dirt under your fingernails. How do we do this? By writing, of course! Here are 10 lusciously generative writing exercises that you can use in any way you wish: practice your craft, untangle a plot snarl, get to know your characters better...you name it.

Here's to your beautiful, blooming garden!

Lisa Papademetriou & Heather Demetrios

NOTE: THIS PACKET WAS PUT TOGETHER IN PREPARATION FOR A RETREAT
LISA AND I LED IN AUTUMN 2019. IT IS NOW YOURS TO ENJOY!



The Explorations

Directions: These exercises can be done in any order, on an as-needed basis. They can take as little as ten minutes, or you can write until the cows come home. (Just don't let them step all over your petunias!) We've separated them into two sections: Unlock and Cultivate.

Unlock will help you do two things:

- **Get “unstuck” and back in flow with your story and craft or generate some new ideas.** Whether you're working on something or seeking out a new story, these exercises will have you covered.
- **Play creatively.** Get some new ideas, connect dots about your character and story, see what curiouser and curiouser elements you can bring out in your writing. Light, fun, free.

Cultivate will help you dig, plant, and prune the essential elements of your story:

- **Prepare the earth so the roots have room to grow.** Develop backstory, understand motivation, and unearth the desires that drive your characters and plot forward.
- **Let your story moments bloom** by experimenting with elements of craft.



UNLOCK

WITH HEATHER
DEMETRIOS

Exploration #1: Story Jinni

One of my early book deals came out of this simple prompt: "Write the first scene of a book in which a character has a problem." Problems are part of what makes a story GO. Your turn: Write the first thing that pops into your head, just like I did—I saw a jinni stuck in her bottle, and she couldn't get out. Hello, *Exquisite Captive*, the first of what became a fantasy trilogy with HarperCollins!

Exploration #2: Getting In Your Character's Skin

Take a scene or chapter from your WIP and re-write the whole thing in verse. Why? Poetry is most excellent for working with emotion and sensory details because it's all about conveying feeling and clarifying a moment through imagery and the five senses. In approaching a tricky scene—and especially one in which you don't feel connected to your characters or the emotional heart of the events—prose poetry is an invitation to truly re-vision the work. Unlock important information, deepen writing on a microscopic level, get in your character's skin. Need some inspiration? My favorite novel-in-verse is *The Watch That Ends The Night* by Allan Wolf.

Exploration #3: DJ Your Story

This exercise has three parts. First, create a playlist for your story—think of it as your book's soundtrack. No story? No problem. Make a playlist of the vibe you're feeling right now. Want to write an anti-hero story? Find the most villainous music you can. Once you have your playlist, sit down, close your eyes, and let your imagination fly as you listen to it. Jot down images, scene possibilities, feelings, setting, action scenes—anything that comes to mind. Now, write the scene that has come most clearly to you, with or without the music playing in the background.

Exploration #4: What do your characters take for granted?

This one's all about world-building, but it can help you understand your protagonist better, too. What your characters take for granted says so much about them and their world and it's a great way to create a genre fiction or historical universe without all that info dumping. For example, if you're writing a sci-fi and they DON'T take clean water for granted, that tells your readers we are solidly in the future. I cribbed this question from author David Mitchell, who says establishing what your characters take for granted is a great way to help your readers understand the difference between their modern world and the world that you are building. Writing realism? Use this question to go deeper into your character's heart: WHO do they take for granted? What about their life do they take for granted? Bonus points if you write a scene in which you take those things away. See what they do. Guess what? You just worked on plot and character SIMULTANEOUSLY.

Exploration #5: Endowed Object

An endowed object is an item that holds powerful meaning for a character. It could be the ring their dead mother gave them that always reminds them that alcoholism runs in their blood too. It could be the friendship bracelet the friend they are now on the outs with made them. Or their lucky jeans. Endowed objects are a great way to jump into some interesting backstory territory for a character, but it can also give you lots of story ideas for the book itself. Think of an object that could be meaningful to your protagonist (or give a totally imaginary brand new character something special). Now, answer these questions:

- What is the object?
- Where did it come from?
- Why is it important to them?
- How would they feel if they lost it?

Write a scene in which they lose that object. Or they decide to get rid of it. Or they find it, after having lost it years ago. See what this opens up for you about this character, secondary characters, and the book.

CULTIVATE

WITH LISA PAPADEMETRIOU

Exploration #1: The Things in This Room

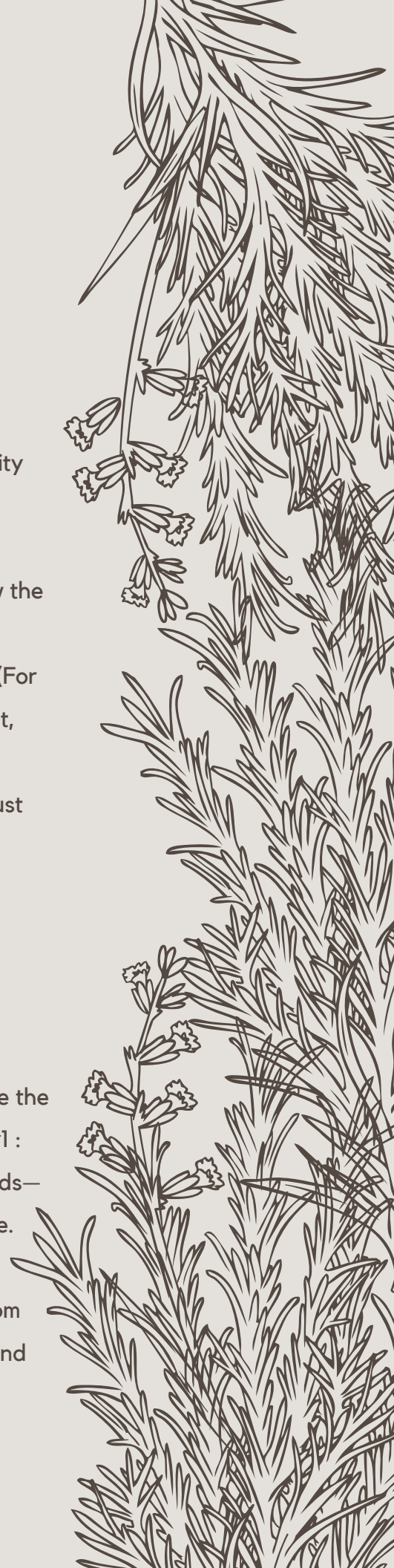
This prompt employs timed lists.

Settings are opportunities; everything in your setting holds possibility for moving your plot forward. First, imagine a room. Take out your phone or watch, and give yourself thirty seconds to name as many objects in the room as you can. At the end of thirty seconds, review the list. Choose one or two objects from the list, and for another thirty seconds, imagine things that could happen that involve the object. (For example: a kitchen contains a toaster. The toaster could: make toast, catch on fire, provide a home for a mouse family, etc.) These ideas might be fantastical, outrageous, or obvious—don't edit yourself. Just keep listing. Finally, choose one event, and write a full scene.

Exploration #2: For Better and Worse

This prompt employs timed lists.

A plot is an arrangements of moments in which things get better or worse for one or more of your characters. For this prompt, you have the option to begin with the situation you used for Unlock Exploration #1 : Story Jinni. Take that problem (or a new one), and—for thirty seconds—imagine as many ways as possible that the situation could get worse. Then—for the next thirty seconds—list as many ways as possible in which the situation could get better. Finally, choose one episode from each list and write a scene in which the situation initially worsens, and ends at a moment at which it gets better, or vice versa (initially improves, only to end in disaster).



Exploration #3: The Mood of This Place

Mood uses sensory details (sights, sounds, textures, smells) to provoke an emotion in a reader. These details are "hot" words that trigger an emotional response. Begin by choosing a strong emotional state that you wish to play with in this piece. You might choose rage, fear, joy, relief, melancholy, grief, or any other emotion. Next, make a list of objects that might provoke or symbolize that feeling. Next, make a list of adjectives that are associated with that feeling. Finally, choose a setting and describe it using your "hot" words. (Do not name the emotion you hope to provoke.) If you would really like to play, do the exercise again, only this time choose an opposite emotion. Describe the same setting, but in a way that evokes the opposite emotion. (For example, if you want to provoke fear, you might describe tree roots as "writhing and snakelike." If you want to provoke fun, you might describe the same roots as "curling like ribbons.")

Exploration #4: The Way I See It

Every character has a worldview. Some see the world as a place full of magic. Some see the world as full of danger. Create a character with a definite worldview. Now, imagine the moment in which this view was formed. What happened? Who was there? What conclusions did the character draw from this event? (The conclusions might or might not be correct.)

Exploration #5: The Secret

All characters have secrets. Imagine a secret for your character. Next, write a scene in which the character toys with the idea of confessing or revealing the secret. What might tempt them to tell? What might hold them back? Is there anyone who knows the secret? Are there any circumstances in which keeping the secret would be worse than revealing it?



Want To Stay In Your Secret Garden?



I hope you enjoyed unlocking your secret garden and cultivating to your heart's content.

If you liked these exercises, then you are going to LOVE digging into exploratory and generative work with me, whether in one of my courses, or one-on-one mentorship. We go deep in craft, process, lifestyle, mindset, mindfulness, and more.

See you soon-

Heather

Here's to
blooming!



Find out more at heatherdemetrios.com