

English 110 AK  
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### **Lessons for a Writer**

Writing in parables gives a poet the flexibility to address numerous issues in few words. The title “First Lessons” in the book Prime Time Apparitions by R. Zamora Linmark is abstract rather than concrete because the title does not say what the first lessons are about and whom they are meant for. When I first read the title, the picture of learning at High school came to my mind. A close investigation of the figures of speech reveals a simple set of instructions for writing poems. The poem emphasizes that one can learn to become a better writer. [R. Zamora Linmark in “First Lessons” uses imagery and verbal irony to describe how a writer can discover the topic, then through diction and allusion, tells the writer how to write a poem that will leave a lasting impression on readers.]

To come up with the arguments of a topic, the writer must exhaust searching all sources of knowledge including himself. Linmark draws the writer’s attention to the walls of his/her apartment “Pay attention instead / to the walls of your apartment building”. The image of the apartment walls causes the writer to ask what is new on the wall that he has not seen before. The writer comes to the understanding of seeing the same things on his apartment walls but from different points of view. Each time the writer’s perspective about his apartment wall changes, the way he sees the intricate details on the wall will also change. Linmark is encouraging the writer to contemplate different perspectives of approaching a topic to discover a valid argument or thesis. Next, Linmark advises the writer to research the argument further by visiting the “Palace of spines”. The image of “Palace of spines” symbolizes a library. The library will be a secondary

source of research for an argument and will also help support the arguments with concrete reasons. In the following stanza “steal with the intent to replace”, Linmark uses opposites steal and replace to convey verbal irony. The use of the word steal personifies the human characteristic of learning and replace is figurative of paraphrasing. While doing research in the library, the writer will learn new information and then rephrase the information in his/her own words. “Why suddenly your eyes / are breathing as the earth does after a morning rain” is a simile that describes the process of reading similar to breathing. As air enters and leaves the body through the nose so does information through the eyes. Like earth soaks the morning rain, the mind becomes receptive of the information through eyes. “Record the landlady who nightly quizzes her husband how well he knows her” is figurative and describes the process of gathering information through the auditory sense. The use of the word record is a connotation, suggesting that the writer gains knowledge not only by searching oneself or reading in the library but also by listening to conversations of other people.

The arguments determine what the writer will write about and the diction determines how the writer will write. “Remember this: humans lie and chickens lay”. Here Linmark uses diction to convey to the writer to not use homonymic words - words that sound almost the same but have different spellings and meanings like lie and lay. Linmark in the following stanza “Avoid words like oozing because everything / oozes not only blood but love and lust” is telling the writer not to use homophonic words – words that sound the same, have the same spellings but different meanings. Use of homonymic and homophonic words will confuse the readers, cause frustration and result in readers losing interest in the writer’s work. Linmark grew up in Hawaii watching television portraying conflicts between Cowboys and Native Americans where the Cowboys were always the heroes and Native Americans the villains. “By this, I don’t / mean

navigating the seven clichéd seas or / horseback-riding the Alamo with Wayne gunning down Mexicans and tomahawks” Linmark makes reference to the cliché of cowboys being the heroes and native Americans being the villains and advises the writer not to use clichés. Clichés in poems reflects poor interpretation of the truth. As in the above cliché Native Americans are not always the villains and the cowboys are not always the heroes. Linmark also cautions the writer to not to underestimate the intelligence of the reader because readers will figure out the meaning of the writer’s poem by analyzing imagery, allusion and diction and will question the credibility of the writer. Clichés will diminish the writer’s credibility and the poem will not be genuine. Readers will not read a fake poem and using proper diction in text structure will have better impact on readers than clichés. The stanza “Put aside Carver and Bukowski / for the meantime; that rum and coke too,” makes reference to the allusions of Raymond Carver and Charles Bukowski. Carver and Bukowski were American born poets who both had to overcome problems of alcoholism; thus, the reference to the rum and coke. Carver’s poems were based on his own experiences, and Bukowski’s poems were introspective in the beginning and later shifted towards more expressionist style of writing (Chinaski). Linmark warns the writer not to pay too much attention to the style of poems written by poets like Carver and Bukowski because they are American Poets and the style of their poems are influenced by their surrounding. Keeping in mind Linmark is Filipino born poet, raised in Hawaii, he uses sarcasm to comment that Carver and Bukowski were great poets, but they were drunkards. Linmark is trying to say that non American poets can be as good as Carver and Burkowski if they use their culturally rich surroundings in their poems style and not copy styles of American Poets. By drawing the writers attention to the allusive ghosts of Hamlets father and Emily Dickens who always returned back to haunt, Linmark is implying that a writer’s surrounding will always be reflected in the style of

his/her writing, so their copying another poet's style will be futile. Linmark is encouraging non American poets to not be shy in expressing their poems containing unique style rich with their cultural surrounding.

In conclusion, the process of writing a poem can be learned. The images used by Linmark in his poem "First Lessons" shows a smooth transition for acquisition of knowledge within oneself to referencing sources at the library. The use of verbal irony and simile describes that knowledge can be gathered by reading and listening. References to diction and allusion emphasizes the clarity when writing a poem and to avoid the intimidation of poems style by not paying too much attention to style used by great poets.

#### Works Cited

- Chinaski, Henry. Charles Bulowaski (1920-1994). Books and Writers. 2003. 10 November 2007. <<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/bukowski.htm>>.
- Linmark, R. Zamora. "First Lessons." Prime Time Apparitions. New York: Hanging Loose Press, 2005.