Think about an important, political, environmentally alert issue (there’s not much which isn’t these days!) that is important to you on a personal level. To do this you might choose the last petition you signed, or meant to sign, as a subject. Write a poem, that expresses its issues clearly and explicitly – however uncomfortable this feels! If you alight on a metaphor, then limit yourself to one that is a consistent strand throughout the poem.

Karen McCarthy Woolf
mccarthywoolf.com | @KMcCarthyWoolf
from ‘Human / Nature’

Organise your own poetry-life-drawing class. Ask a real life person to sit for you and make a poem about them in real time. They don’t need to sit for hours, but make sure that you spend real time looking at that person and writing as you do so. You might want to get them doing some kind of activity themselves. Or maybe you want to pose them somehow, maybe with certain objects. You don’t need to write the finished poem in the time they sit for you. You could simply begin to sketch notes and lines about what you see in front of you, and then finish the poem later.

Sarah Hesketh
www.sarahhesketh.co.uk
from ‘Poetry as Portraiture’

Choose a word – ‘mother’ or ‘father.’ What does that word mean to you? Mindstorm for five minutes – you might automatic write without letting your pen leave the page – and just pour out all the things the word makes you think of. Memories of parents (your own and other kids); adverts; fictional characters; images; associations. Think verbs or nouns you associate with the word (baking, the newspaper, darts, weepies, ironing, poolsticks); character-traits (reliable, stern); expectations. Write down scents or tastes or sounds you associate with your own mother or father or yourself as a mother or father. The poem will be called ‘The Mother’ or ‘The Father’. Your notes will be the basis.

Clare Pollard
clarepollard.wordpress.com
from ‘The Poetry of Parenthood’

Draft a prose poem that inhabits a moment from childhood, either real or fictional. If it’s over 8 sentences, revise it down to that as a maximum. This should sharpen its focus. Next, do one of the following:

i) revise your poem into a single sentence, or
ii) revise your poem to make use of anaphora (repeating the beginnings of sentences).

Carrie Etter
carriegetter.com
from ‘Advanced Prose Poetry’
Write a poem titled ‘Dear [x]’, where x might = ‘landlady’, ‘semolina’, ‘sea monsters’, ‘Donald Trump’ – you get the idea. There should be some sort of edgy relationship between the speaker and the object of address; they can’t actually be ‘dear’ in any simple sense.

Dai George
daigeorge.com/publications
from ‘Irony and Edge’

Remember or imagine a scene of cataclysm or devastation. You can research an historical event that you have found haunting. Put yourself into the scene as an observer and, making use of a catalogue or list, take stock of everything you see and hear. Extend your descriptions as fully as you can, and vary your syntax.

Liane Strauss
from ‘Working with the Deep-breathing Line’

Write a poem which explores the ideas about work that you have grown up with. Think back to being a child – how did the adults around you show you what work is? You could choose a particular person in your family or your life to focus on. Consider how you have carried these lessons forward into your own life – either your working life or your creative life. One important thing to remember when writing about work is to make it rich in physical detail. This is especially important when we are writing about concepts that are hard to define, like love or work. Work, even when it is mental work, is a physical activity, and to make your poem really come to life, think about how you can describe the physical reality of work.

Kim Moore
kimmoorepoet.wordpress.com
from ‘What Work Is’

Still stuck for ideas?

Visit www.poetryschool.com for a course or workshop to kick-start your creativity.