Panel Title: Generative Poetry Workshops: Take ‘Em or Teach ‘Em
Panel: F116
Moderator: L.J. Sysko
Participants: Kim Addonizio, Sandra Beasley, Flower Conroy, & Maya C. Popa
Date, time, & location: Friday, February 9, 2024 9am-10:15am; Room 2103B, Kansas City Convention Center, Street Level

Official Event description:
A generative workshop can get you there or help you break through. This panel addresses best practices from both teacher and student points of view. Teachers: structure a generative workshop and deploy methods beneficial to and inclusive of a wide variety of workshoppers. Students: identify strategies for framing expectations and seek definitions of success beyond yielding a few solid drafts. Panelists will address their own experiences as teachers, students, and the blurred role between.

PANEL OUTLINE:

Opening Moderator Remarks (3 mins.; 9-9:05am):

Good morning and welcome to “Generative Poetry Workshops: Take ‘Em or Teach ‘Em.”

My name is L.J. Sysko, and I am delighted to be the moderator of this morning’s panel, made up of these four magnificent poets: Kim Addonizio, Sandra Beasley, Flower Conroy, and Maya C. Popa. They are here this morning to shed some light on one of the amazing things they do as poets (one among very many)—generative workshop instruction.

Each of them is an experienced generative workshop practitioner: poet-teachers who have led countless students through the process of creating new work.

Our panel description said that generative workshops are a useful if not crucial mechanism for advancing risk in a poet's work: completing a manuscript, refining or even radically altering prevailing style.

Anyone who’s been a generative workshop student knows that they are indeed an elegant force function. For procrastinators, busy professionals, and those short on confidence, you can borrow a cup of your own creative sugar from a generative workshop.

But they're also more complicated than that.

Moving up a layer: crucial permission and safety dwell in the generative workshop. And it is remarkable the degree to which even experienced artists need permission re-granted and safety renewed over time.

Up a layer again—and in case you’re wondering, I think I’m making a case for generative workshops as a psychological proposition, moving in accordance with a sort of Maslow’s Hierarchy
of Needs schema. A poet can let go—of whatever fructifies creative flow, stymies invention, or paralyzes completely. I, for one, love the letting go … of Poetic Worldy Concerns such as standing sentry on the battlements of Submittable or patrolling vigilantly against the permanent midnight of social media. Instead, and oh, the joy, of sitting down among fellows in Zoom’s egalitarian Brady Bunch boxes to muck around with words. It’s there that I can remember what I forgot. Or claim what I never knew. During the writing of my book, I returned to generative workshops again and again to practice and play. Today’s panel is built of teachers to whom I am indebted for those experiences.

Kim, Sandra, Flower, and Maya create environments that foster self-esteem. And then the pinnacle feeling: capacity for risk, which, as you know, is the exalted state Maslow termed “self-actualization.” And so, without further ado, let’s get into HOW generative workshops work, what they’re made of, pedagogical practices and processes, and, most significantly, all of your questions, for which we have reserved plenty of time before we conclude.

- **Question 1 (15 mins.; 9:05-9:20am):** How do you set the tone on workshop Day One? What works best for facilitating a new group of students effectively? Or, conversely, if you feel like it, what are some “no-no’s”?
  - ALL:

- **Question 2 (20 mins.; 9:20-9:40am):** Many people in our audience this morning may be current or prospective workshop leaders, interested in teaching—refining or developing their own generative workshops—and might want pedagogical advice. As workshop leaders, you undoubtedly have prompts that you know work well for a broad population of students and ones that are a little niche, a little unique. We’re going to get into the heart of those instructional choices here in a moment, but I should make note of the fact that our panelists have generously offered to share a favorite a prompt with us. We have **compiled a pdf of these as a supplement** for you to download.
  - Panelists: Feel free to comment on what makes a good prompt.
    - **Option #2:** Are you mindful of planning to pack a punch—prompts designed to jar innovation from its moorings? Or to coax creativity into a warm bath of potentiation? Or both?

- **Question 3 (20 mins.; 9:40-10am):** On the flip side of the wildness of drafting, there’s the critique phase, or, if not critique, the “sharing out” phase of workshop. Let’s talk about how newly-generated work gets critiqued, if at all, in your preferred generative workshop paradigm.
  - KIM and FLOWER: One of tricks of differentiating instruction is to pitch a lesson to about the 85th percentile and then differentiate up and down as needed. You two will teach together at La Romita in Italy this coming June. On the website of that workshop, Kim, you say, “My teaching philosophy is simple. I try to meet you where you are right now, whether you’re a beginner or well-published. My goal is to help you learn the craft that will enable you to express your own vision, to respect you as a writer, and to encourage you to keep exploring…” How do you both think about differentiating for students of varied experience?
  - SANDRA: You were kind enough to compile a supplement for audience members about creating workshops that are mindful of inclusivity, and that is also available as a download. But you also wrote this in our panel’s email exchange, and I wanted to
share it because I think your expression of ambivalence will resonate with all of us counter dependent poets: “The funny thing about generative workshops, for me, is that I often struggle in them. I’m not a big believer in writing relentlessly, regardless of inspiration—and I’ve actually left peer groups (full of amazing poets!) rather than participate outside my comfort zone in terms of the pace or prompt-trading. So I’m very, very sympathetic to the student who is wary of prompts. When I offer prompts in my own workshops, I try to structure them in a way that they can “release” a poem that the person already needed to write, rather than potentially forcing them to generate something alien to their voice or driving concerns.” My question is: how do you get a poet to release a poem rather than forcibly write one?

o MAYA: I remember a moment in workshop as we critiqued one of my peers; you said, “Well, if she took that advice, she wouldn’t be Alexis anymore,” and I thought it was such a sensitive remark—accounting all at once for poetic style and the organic pace of growth, and also asserting a subtle boundary between one student and another during critique. Can you speak to the necessity of balancing participation and facilitator control during critique?

● **OPTIONAL Question 4**: At the top of the program, I said that generative workshops make for an elegant force function for students to produce new work. This can also be true of instructors. Tell us about a time when the boundary between teaching and learning was blurred for you.

● **OPTIONAL Question 5**: Can you share an anecdote about the coolest thing that’s ever happened in one of your workshops related to a prompt? Or perhaps a prompt gone wrong?

● **Audience questions (15 mins.; 10-10:15am)**: We will now open to audience questions. Feel free to ask about structure, practical advice on process, ensuring inclusivity, or anything else that’s sprung to mind.

● **Closing remarks**