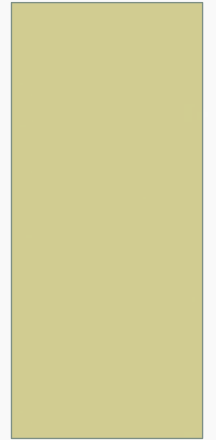


# THE PERFORMING ARTS EXPERIENCE: THE OBJECT LESSON

JOY SULLIVAN, WRITER, PAGES ARTIST-IN-  
RESIDENCE



# A BIT ABOUT ME...

- MA in English/Poetry from Miami University
- Local poet and educator
- Curator of local arts event “Paging Columbus”



# TEACHING EXPERIENCE



- Creative Writing Instructor and teaching artist
- Columbus Academy, Thurber House, Columbus State Community College.

# WRITING ADVENTURES!

Franklin Park Conservatory:  
Writing Sci-Fi Stories

Performing our stories on  
stage!



# ARTIST'S STATEMENT

- "You hold your tongue like a blue parakeet asleep in the cage of your mouth. Now is the time to set it free."
- Poetry, for me, becomes the bridge to access the "unspoken spaces" of the body and spirit. Nothing moves me more than enabling someone to experience their own voice. I feel that even helping a student begin to listen to what is inside them is my most meaningful work.

# MEMORY AND OBJECT

- Proust says that memory “would come like a rope let down from heaven to draw me up out of the abyss of not-being.”
- Objects are the fibers of the rope that link us to ourselves, simultaneously connecting us to our past and future.

# “THE OBJECT LESSON”

- Created and performed by Geoff Sobelle
- Considered a performer, choreographer, director, illusionist.
- Collaboration between installation artists.
- Directed by David Neumen



Image Source: Aurora  
Nova

# CRITICAL ACCLAIM

Image Source: New York Times



*The Guardian*

- “In this offbeat, often surreal and gently whimsical show [Sobelle] looks at all the stuff we lug around with us, and asks whether we need to hang on to everything... an aching sense of the need not just for less, but also for that which is truly valued.”



# THE *NEW YORK TIMES*

- “Ruefully, comically sentimental piece” for finding “a fleeting connective poetry in the seeming randomness of what we hoard.”



Image source: New York Times

# REFLECTION

- Opportunity for conversation around what truly shapes and has shaped our identity.
- What does it mean to unpack? What does it mean to really come home?



Image source: Aurora  
Nova

# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

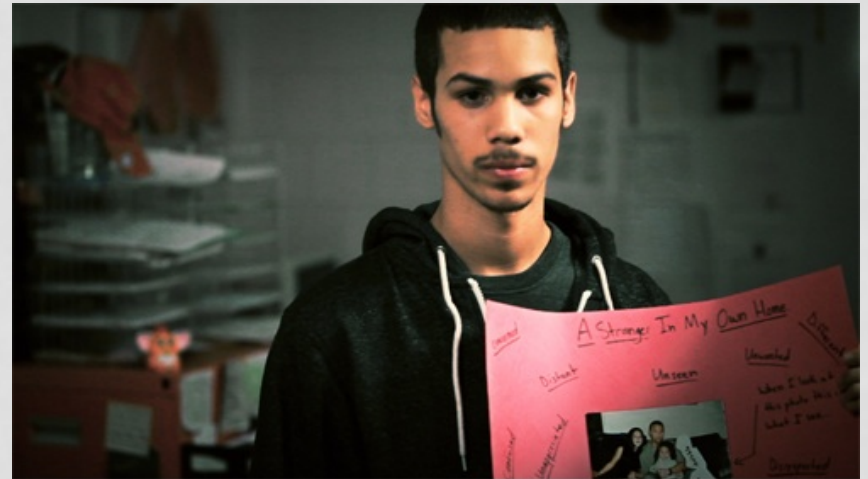
- Do you have what you need?
- Do you need what you have?
- Why are artifacts significant?
- How do objects affect your sense of home?
- What do we hope to bear witness to in the museum of our lives?
- How do the objects we value shift as we age? What remains the same?
- What do we collect? Why do we collect? How is collecting different from hoarding and consumerism?
- Why do objects attract memory?
- What would you consider a modern relic?

# THEMES

- Object as memory—heirlooms that give us access to past and help us preserve identity
- Objects as empathy—early experiences of bonding and comfort
- Object as witnessing and ritual—showing our lives through belonging as symbol (“The Things We Carry”)
- Object as placeholder—finding representations for person and place through object
- Object as community—active, passive, connectors
- Object as personal identity—telling personal narratives via individual artifacts.

# “THE MUSEUM OF OUR LIVES” PROJECT

- The assignment asks high school students to select a different artifact every month, from some point in their lives, and to reflect on that physical object visually and through language.



*Adapted Kim Masterson's "I Live Here Project." Photo courtesy of Masterson.*

# IMPLEMENTATION

- Asks students to explore the museum of their lives via personal artifact.
- Because the reflections vary over the semester, the focus on the artifact can shift as well to consider a range of questions and mediums.
- Goal is to create “a visual diary” of a single experience or series of experiences.
- Artifact may be represented in some medium of the teacher or student’s choosing i.e.. collage, photograph, poem, sculpture, painting, shared with the class, and analyzed in written form.

# PRACTICE

- Take a moment to reflect and write about the object you brought with you, photographed, or have in mind. As you write, consider some of the following questions as they relate to your object.



Photo by Sandy Sueffield

# QUESTIONS

- Why is this artifact significant?
- What stories does it contain?
- Does it help you mentally access a person or a place?
- Does it help you connect to the past/future?
- How has your relationship with this object changed or is changing?
- What does the object reveal about you as an individual?
- How could this object become a symbol or a metaphor for your personal identity?



# VISUAL ART: CULLEN WASHINGTON, JR.



- *Caped Crusader*: Washington often incorporates found objects and scraps into his artwork. Photo courtesy of Washington

# VISUAL ARTIST: CHRISTOPHER NIEMANN

Photos courtesy of Niemann



# OBJECT POEMS

This strange thing must have crept  
Right out of hell.  
It resembles a bird's foot  
Worn around the cannibal's neck.

As you hold it in your hand,  
As you stab with it into a piece of meat,  
It is possible to imagine the rest of the bird:  
Its head which like your fist  
Is large, bald, beakless, and blind.

*Charles Simic, Object poems: The Fork*



# POETRY

- *In the Museum of Lost Objects* by Rebecca Lindenberg
- *Fork* by Charles Simic
- *One Art* by Elizabeth Bishop

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Podcasts:  
<http://www.wnyc.org/shows/lopate/series/story-new-york-10-objects/>
- Audio Essay based on objects: “Object Stories”
- PBS Documentary: Object and Memory

# FEEDBACK AND DISCUSSION

- What themes emerge that might partner with curriculum concepts?
- What texts do you think might partner with these ideas in your curriculum?
- What resources seem the most helpful?
- How do you think you would use the “Museum of Our Lives” project in your classrooms?
- How do you feel students would respond? What might work? What might be challenging?