**Poetry Workshop Guide – Kelly Stevens, University of Exeter**

[The example below provides an outline of how a session on ageing can be conducted and what you might say to the session’s participants]

**1. Facilitation begins with an existing poem:** Before the session, pick a poem that is relevant to your topic of interest, e.g. ageing. The one used in HAIRE’s workshop can be seen below – including a link to an audio recording of the poem.

Read the poem and invite people to close their eyes to listen.

[Listen to Elaine Feinstein reading "Long Life"](https://www.theguardian.com/books/audio/2010/mar/12/elaine-feinstein-long-life)

Late Summer. Sunshine. The eucalyptus tree.  
        It is a fortune beyond any deserving  
to be still *here*, with no more than everyday worries,  
        placidly arranging lines of poetry.

I consider a stick of cinammon  
        bound in raffia, finches  
in the grass, and a stubby bush  
        which this year mothered a lemon.

These days I speak less of death  
        than the mysteries of survival. I am  
no longer lonely, not yet frail, and  
        after surgery, recognise each breath

as a miracle. My generation may not be  
        nimble but, forgive us,  
we'd like to hold on, stubbornly  
        content – even while ageing.

*Born in 1930 in Lancashire, Feinstein has worked as an editor, a university lecturer and a journalist. As well as 10 collections of poetry, she has written 14 novels, five biographies, short stories and TV and radio plays.*

**2. Facilitate a session on creative writing using prompts.**

**Give the session’s participants some context and examples of how the session’s main topic is spoken about in the poem that you chose.**

**The facilitator in HAIRE’s workshop gave the following background:**

The objects and experiences that belong to the older people we know can help us understand ageing in our cultures.

You can see fine details about ageing in Feinstein’s poems:

* the extraordinary existence of a eucalyptus tree (we might think of this as the woman herself),
* cinnamon bound in raffia (a very personal touch),
* a bush that is “stubby” and perhaps ordinary looking finally produces something as glorious as a “lemon” (old age is something to appreciate),
* finches in the grass (we can infer nature is simple and healing)

These are small “miracles”, things to be appreciated. Details in poetry are what make it personal and yet at the same time universal. The truth of people’s lives come through imagery.

**At this point, the facilitator invites session participants to do their own writing - what the facilitator in HAIRE’s workshop said can be seen below:**

Through poetry, we can get to know each other and get a unique glimpse of what it is like to be older and the things that are shared. Your writing can be as personal as you want it to be. You do not have to share anything that you do not want to.

The idea of your poem will be to really “see” old age. I met someone with dementia who wrote a poem with this line: “**People were coming to see me / But they didn’t see me”.**

* First 10-minute task: Start with “old age is”….just see what comes out. Start with a free-write – don’t worry about spelling/punctuation and try not to think too hard or judge what you are writing. Just let it come out. No one else will see this writing.

**After 10 mins, the facilitator gives the following instructions:**

* Second 10-minute task: Now, use your own voices and experiences. Think of an older person you have a relationship with – family or friend or someone you have connected with in another way – and a time you have observed them coping with an aspect of older age. This could be their attitude in general; food they like/liked to eat; difficulties they have had/still have; stories they tell/told you. You can use a memory going back to childhood, or something more recent. Write a list of ideas/memories.

**After a further 10 mins, the facilitator gives the following instructions:**

* Third 10-minute task: Expand upon the ideas that interest you and have deepest meaning that emerged in your list making. Free-write as much as you can using the following sentence stems to begin your writing. “I see”, “I remember”, “I wish”. There is no right or wrong here – just let the thoughts flow. Repeat each sentence stem until you cannot think of anything more and move on to the next one.

**At the end, the facilitator invites the session’s participants to compile their own poem:**

* Final 10-minute task: choose your favourite lines from what you have written and organise the poem in a way that feels right to you. Repeating the sentence stems will create a natural flow/structure.

**Take a break.**

**3. Finish the session by inviting people to read their poems – session participants do not have to read their poem, but some people might choose to share theirs.**