

Elemenopy



Elemenopy – the feeling you get when reciting the middle of the alphabet, is a key ingredient in Colm Keegan’s creative writing workshops, whether working with adults or younger, whether it’s poetry, screenwriting, short stories, rap, or songwriting. Whatever it is, it doesn’t matter. Everything starts with ELEMENOPY.

Remember learning the alphabet?

You’re five or so and thinking, “are you serious?”

The Length of it!

It goes all around the classroom!”

Then a while after that, the teacher points at you and says “Ok, tell me the alphabet.”

You stand up in front of the whole class, probably your first performance ever, and you begin, not knowing if you’ll make it to the end. The Z feels miles away.

A B C D E F G H I J K

ELEMENOPY.

you hit it,

the sweet spot at the heart of the alphabet

the free and easy feeling of just going with it and not caring

You’re thinking Happy Days! I can do this! I’m almost there!

You don’t care, you’re just in it.

That’s Elemenopy. That feeling. The secret ingredient in all great poetry, all great writing, and all great art.

Think about the first time you have to stand up to somebody, somebody you are afraid of, somebody who is putting you down, who has you backed into a corner. You feel your feelings swirl around in your stomach, like wasps in a

jar, you try and keep it in but eventually it gets too much, you feel a heat in your neck or your cheeks go red, you feel the feelings rising up in your throat and before you know it you're saying what you were afraid to say.

It's out.

The other person backs off, agog.

And you're thinking. Woh, did I actually say that?

That sounded great, that was a proper smackdown!

That's Elemenopy.

Or when you fall in love, and there's nothing you can do about it anymore, you have to let them know, you have to go in for that first kiss, you know you could lose everything but it's inevitable, you can't help yourself.

That's Elemenopy too.

Sometimes your life feels like the surface of a still lake, and a moment hits and you feel the ripples flow out from you and back in again. It can be a good thing or a bad thing. Everything syncs up and you're thinking

"I'm alive. This is what it feels like to be alive. I am going through something, and on the other side of what's happening right now I will never be the same again."

When you record those moments, that's poetry.

The poet Ted Hughes was obsessed with catching animals.

He caught foxes, rabbits, birds, frogs, everything.

At one time he went to school with 40 mice in his jacket.

Then he grew up.

He stopped catching animals and started writing poems and he said once that they are the same thing.

Have you ever caught a butterfly?

You don't clap your hands on it and slap it on the table and go, "YUSS! I caught a butterfly! It's a pancake now but so what."

You do it with care, it is a considerate act. You can catch your feelings and your memories the same way.

Have you ever read Seamus Heaney's *Mid-Term Break*?

Everybody feels the same punch in the gut when they reach the last line.

"A four foot box, a foot for every year."

He took that moment and handled it with such humility and grace.

If you catch a moment right, and put it into words, it can live on, it can live longer than you.

There are words written thousands of years ago and the feeling behind them still lives on, every time somebody comes along and opens that book, it's like the butterfly flies back out.

Good writing isn't just about words, it's about Elemenopy. Put the feelings first. Start with the heart, and the art will come.

***Colm Keegan** led a workshop for Fermanagh Writers in April. He hosts the Kingfisher Writers' Retreat in Dublin*

Colm Keegan reads Elemenopy [Soundcloud]

Seamus Heaney reads Midterm Break [Poetry Ireland YouTube]