

Reflection questions for “The Climate Crisis as a Crisis of Language and Definition” workshop

Our ability to address the climate crisis (our fears, our hopes, our capacity to act and transform the world appropriately) depends on how we define the crisis itself. The prompts below hope to help you expand how you see the climate crisis by asking you to reflect on the land, the language, ecosystems, living beings, and world around you. These prompts hope to expand the marrow of your thinking, the way you see the world. They hope to help you see your self, your loved ones, your ancestors and history as deeply connected and dependent on the infinite systems and ecosystems sprawled across the planet and across history.

In response, you can embark on research to find answers you may not already have; write journal entries or reflections to record your thinking or to find out what you believe; write a poem or radically edit/expand a poem you’ve already written; or engage in any other form of art making or somatic creation.

The questions are grouped by scope and theme—each of them call for wide and rigorous engagement, so focusing on one might prove the most fruitful. But feel free to engage with all of them, one at time, or merge a few of them together. Also feel free to treat these prompts as starting points that your spirit and interests might venture away from. There are no right or wrong questions or answers. These prompts hope to foster radical curiosity, even if it comes alongside grief, frustration, fear, or confusion. Keep going, even if you are lost.

On feeling lost¹:

What is the condition of lostness? How is it openness *and* fear, receptivity *and* guardedness, dread *and* optimism, vitality *and* defeat? How can you cultivate this dual condition? How can you leave the door open? And what is your training in getting lost? How can you grow literate in reading the world, the planet?

On the names for the land:

What are some of the current and past names for the land you inhabit right now? What do those name mean? Who were the people that called it by those names? How were those people’s relationship to the land different to your relationship to the land? Where are those people now? What happened to those people? How did the land change once they left?

On hierarchy and emissions

Race, gender, wealth, class, citizenship/nationality are all types of human hierarchies. What do each of these hierarchies differentiate between (i.e. who is on the bottom, and who is on the

¹ this prompt is curtesy of Matthew Cooperman & Aby Kaupang, via *Big Energy Poets: Eco-poetry Thinks Climate Change*

top)? Where do you land in (or outside of) each of these hierarchies? Who, in these hierarchies, gets the most access to resources and freedom? How do these hierarchies equate to who and what countries contribute the most to the climate crisis/have the most carbon emissions? What would change in your life if hierarchies disappear? What would change across the world?

Prompts specifically writing poems:

1. Write a poem that takes place across billions of years.
2. Write a poem that has the entire world in it.
3. Write a poem about how what is happening to the planet because of the climate crisis is similar to something that has happened/is happening to you, or happened to your ancestors, or the people who once occupied the land you are on.