

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Writing Prompt: Snakes, Spiders, and Bats

Charity Hume · Wednesday, June 11th, 2014

A new writing prompt from Charity Hume

In *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Harrison Ford gets a laugh when, after riding through Amazonian rapids, stealing a grave idol, fighting off warriors and flying through the air like Tarzan, he then confesses that he's mortally afraid of snakes. We may not all be Indiana, but many can identify with his squeamish fear.

In this exercise, list the creatures or settings that especially scare you. My list includes both situations and objects: heights, snakes, dentist appointments... (I could go on!) When you look down that list, one of the entries will have a particular charge of energy. Circle that one and commit to writing about that phobia for today.

Once you've chosen it, stick with it and don't waffle.

Write for a page about this fear, and associate to every time you can remember any physical encounter with this object: the day you stepped on a jellyfish, the time your mother insisted you eat okra. As you write, don't worry if there are several different memories crowding in your mind. Let them lead you to different experiences and fully explore them all as you give yourself permission to remember them in detail. Use every sense you can as you communicate the details. Once you're done, you will have interesting footage. From here, you can consider a story or poem that uses your imagery and feelings. Try to be specific and realistic, as you tell the story of the cockroach you saw your first night in the Brooklyn apartment, the possum on the road, the barn spider that first week in Canada. You can also create a fictional character who shares your phobia. Let your character explain the fear to another character, or write a character's "interior monologue." Use your "footage" freely and give this fictional character a human weakness.



Flor Imperiale, Coral Snake, and Spider, Brazil, by Marianne North, (1873), Courtesy of Wikipaintings

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