



Presentation and training by Richard Gold –

Writing from the Heart: Methods for Therapeutic Poetry with At-Risk Youth

Richard Gold is the founder of the award-winning [Pongo Teen Writing Project](#) in Seattle, and the author of [Writing with At-Risk Youth: The Pongo Teen Writing Method](#) (Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2014). Pongo is a 19-year-old nonprofit that teaches and mentors personal poetry by youth who have suffered childhood traumas, such as abuse, neglect, and exposure to violence. Pongo especially focuses on young people who have a hard time expressing themselves. To accomplish its goals, Pongo runs trauma-informed writing programs inside juvenile detention centers, homeless shelters, psychiatric hospitals, and other sites. Pongo provides its authors with the opportunity to write about the worst experiences imaginable – often for the first time – but in a way that feels safe, offers relief, brings creative joy, leads to openness, and facilitates healing. Pongo has served 7,000 youth (and adults). Pongo’s mission is help its authors understand their feelings, build self-esteem, and take better control of their lives.

Pongo was featured in a national [story on PBS NewsHour](#), that included U.S. Poet Laureate Natasha Trethewey, who visited Pongo’s team inside juvenile detention. Pongo was also featured in an Emmy-winning news [story on KING5-TV](#) (NBC affiliate) in Seattle.

In other honors, as Pongo’s founder, Gold was named a Microsoft Integral Fellow in a presentation by Bill and Melinda Gates. The award was judged by Tom Brokaw (journalist) and the heads of five prominent national foundations. In addition, Pongo received a Seattle Mayor’s Arts Award for its deep and lasting impact on social issues. Richard Gold is a published poet.

Richard Gold has donated his time to this work for over 20 years. In offering presentations and trainings, it is his purpose to encourage, train, and support individuals and writing projects in the successful Pongo model. The following pages include a scenario for a presentation and training, a set of objectives, a description of the audiences served, and other information.

Scenario for Presentation and Training: An individual presentation or training can be scheduled, but the following scenario describes a broader opportunity.

- Richard makes a one-hour presentation, perhaps at a university, about the rationale and methods for therapeutic poetry, where the presentation is open to the public and advertised among social service agencies and colleges, and where any number of people might attend.
- Richard gives a 4-6 hour training that furthers the objectives of the presentation, but principally includes hands-on exercises in Pongo methods, where 15-25 people are accommodated.
- As part of his visit, possibly before the presentation, Richard visits several agencies that serve at-risk populations, to speak with staff and possibly demonstrate a writing workshop with youth or others.
- As part of his visit, possibly before the presentation, Richard visits one or several institutions that serve at-risk populations, such as a jail or hospital, to speak with staff and possibly demonstrate a writing workshop with youth or others.

Objectives:

1. The presentation audience will gain a new appreciation for the power of writing in healing, especially with traumatized populations and with individuals who have difficulty expressing themselves. The complementary and integrative role for writing and shared expression with evidence-based, treatment modalities (such as Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Dialectical Behavior Therapy) will also be discussed.
2. The presentation audience will be introduced to the methodology and outcomes of one successful writing program, as implemented in juvenile justice facilities, homeless shelters, and psychiatric hospitals.
3. The presentation audience will learn how poetry provides a unique youth engagement strategy and may enrich self-awareness, understanding of emotions, camaraderie, and the development of coping skills to use in the future.
4. The presentation audience will be introduced to practical skills, and will be pointed to further resources, for facilitating a poetry program in their work individually and with people in jails, shelters, and psychiatric programs serving at-risk youth and others.
5. The training participants will be offered greater depth on Pongo's approach and methods, in particular through hands-on practice.

Audiences Served: The presentation and training can serve a diverse audience, including:

- Students and faculty in schools of social work, medicine, creative writing, psychology, and education.
- Therapists and teachers who are working in agencies and schools that serve at-risk youth and others.
- Students, therapists, artists, and teachers who are interested in starting writing programs in jails, shelters, hospitals, and special schools.
- Staff in institutions, such as jails and hospitals, who are interested in expanding their programming.

Recent and Upcoming Presentations: Harborview Med. Ctr. (Seattle), U. of Washington, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry conf., Creative Techniques in Traumatic Grief Therapy conf., U. of Pittsburg, Alta Bates Summit Med. Ctr. (Berkeley), Northern Michigan U., U. of Michigan, Restorative Retelling conf., Tulane U., and others.

Sample Poem:

DEAR MOM

by a young woman in juvenile detention, age 13

I just thought you should know what I'm doing now. I'm addicted to drugs and in juvie a lot. I am an unloved person who spends a lot of time doing drugs to feel better and not abandoned.

I just thought you should know how I'm feeling. I just hate you. I hate my dad, too. I hate you because you left me one night when I was 7 and never came back. The police broke down the door to take me to foster care. But even before that you brought home men who hurt me and did bad things to me. I hate you for pimping me out. I hate you for packing my nose full of white powder, which is why I have breathing problems now. I hate you for getting me into drugs. I hate you because I ended up in a gang. I hate you.

I just thought you should know what I've been through. Since the last time I saw you I've been in more foster homes than I can count, but 45-50% of them were abusive. I always ran, but the system found me, didn't believe me, and put me in another, and another. The time that I was going to be adopted was especially important. They came and picked me, and I lived in their house for a week before they found out about my history and they sent me back.

I just thought you should know what I wish for the future. I hope that somehow I can yell at you without having to see you, to blame all this crap on you. Though it would do nothing for me, at least I wouldn't have to hold it inside any longer.

I just thought you should know what I don't miss about you...I don't miss you at all. I'm glad I don't have to worry about you leaving me again and not coming back.

I just thought you should know that there is nothing at all that I miss about you.

I just thought you should know that no matter what, you'll always be my mom, and I'll always love you.

Dedicated to my mom

Presentation Costs: Negotiable (to include travel costs, book purchase, honorarium)

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