

A photograph of two children sitting in a hammock, viewed from behind. The child on the left has long blonde hair in a ponytail and is wearing a purple fuzzy sweater. The child on the right has long brown hair in a braid. The hammock is orange and black. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with trees and a body of water.

# *Write with Color: Rediscover Your Childhood Genius*

by Julie Mariouw

"It's never too late to have a happy childhood," said Tom Robbins in his book, *Still Life with Woodpecker*. One of my goals these days is to become less childish and more childlike. And there's a way to make that happen: write with color.

Think of it as playing on the page, finger painting with text. Try mixing color & smell. Use color as a character.

All of these techniques will unleash your inner child – in an acceptable adult way, of course.

Our writing is often black and white. We follow the rules, afraid to surrender to the process. I used to cling to the safety of tradition, fearing what would happen if I allowed the writing to unfold organically. But I intuitively sensed that writing had the power to heal, and I carried a lot

of unprocessed childhood trauma. In other words, I was desperate to find a happy childhood for myself, even all these years later.

Writers need to write in a new way, releasing old constraints. And the more we let go, the more we will heal. People store trauma – especially childhood trauma – in their bodies. And they carry with them stories about those traumas, not even realizing the stories are there. If they let the stories out, they clear a pathway for healing and expansion. There are many ways in which this can occur in the writing process – writing with the senses, writing with metaphor, and writing with color.

In an article entitled “Color Therapy and Healing from the Early 20th Century to Now,” Helen Graham (psychology lecturer and color research specialist) reported on the use of colored light in medicine: “...red light has been shown to be effective in the treatment of migraine headaches and cancer...blue light has also been shown to be effective in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis.”

Laurie Zagon (founder of Art & Creativity for Healing, a non-profit outreach offering workshops in California) wrote about a recent study on brain stimulation therapy with color: “Patients who had been otherwise resistant to treatment have recovered from a wide variety of trauma, depression, and physical pain [after visual brain stimulation with color using a method called ‘Emotional Transformation Therapy].”

So how does the healing power of color manifest in writing? One way is to bring up childhood memories. For example, one effective writing prompt is to hand out a color chip from a paint store. Ask each writer to meditate on the color for a minute or two, letting images and memories, thoughts and feelings arise. Then have them place their colors in the middle of a blank page and cluster – put aside the rational part of the mind and let words and ideas flow freely onto the page. Let the color lead the writer, instead of the other way around.

Writers’ long-buried memories will rise to the surface, and the most unexpected, powerful work will happen. For example, in response to a maroon color chip, I wrote about a maroon leather chair from childhood. This brought up many associated memories, and I was able to process the material through the writing, and use it for a fictional scene.

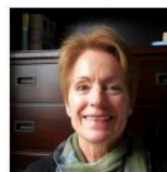
Another good writing exercise is to hand out a small container of Play-Doh, and have the writers work with it. In this case, it is both the color and the physical movement

that are important in bringing out memories. Writing done in this way ends up with a certain rhythm – a result of the writer’s physical actions. In response to this prompt, writers frequently write about physical play from childhood. And color jumps out in unexpected ways – images from a birthday party, a colorful toy, etc.

I once tied strings of multicolored ribbon to round shower curtain-holders and gave them to writers in one of my workshops, and I asked them to move as they were led. Here again, the writing had rhythm, but it also literally had streaks of color running through. For example, in response to this prompt I wrote about the thin, blue arm of a Portuguese man-of-war (poisonous creature similar to a jellyfish) resting on a beach. This brought up other memories, and I again used the material in a fictional scene.

The end goal of all these exercises is to expand writers’ imaginations. Many writers have been stunted and dulled through the traditional teaching of writing. As Gabrielle Rico describes in her book *Writing the Natural Way*, “Often, when children enter school, the intuitive learning strategies they bring with them are not useful in a setting where many children formally come together and order, conformity, and correctness are valued... [This] conventional stage is where many of us get stuck. Our creative potential narrows, and our trust in spontaneity begins to ebb into the river of the commonplace.” There is a great need for writers to re-experience their long-lost childhood wonder.

So borrow paint swatches from a local store, grab some Play-Doh, tie ribbons together, and play on the page. Let color reach into your past and pull stories out of your body; you will feel so much lighter afterward. As Charles Baudelaire wrote, “Genius is the capacity to retrieve childhood at will.” Get ready to dazzle the world!



*Julie Mariouw is a published author, trained Amherst Writers & Artist workshop leader, English teacher, and owner of Wellspring Writing Workshops LLC, through which she offers creative writing workshops in the Ann Arbor area. Julie helps people bypass their internal critics, go directly to feelings and memories, and tap into the healing power of writing.*

[www.wellspringwritingworkshops.com](http://www.wellspringwritingworkshops.com)

[www.facebook.com/wellspringwritingworkshops](https://www.facebook.com/wellspringwritingworkshops)

<sup>3</sup>Gabrielle Rico, PhD, *Writing the Natural Way* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 2000), pp 54-56

