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Long Poem Sample Assignment

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English 4305

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Poem Draft (5 copies) due at beginning of class

A Poem About Words

Reading Matthew Zapruder's long poem "Come On All You Ghosts," we discussed how the poet concludes by arguing about whether poetry matters, eventually asserting that it does, leaving behind "this machine/anyone with a mind/who cares can enter." This stanza alludes to William Carlos Williams definition of a poem as "a small or large machine made of words."

If a poem is a machine made of words, then what are words made of? How might researching the history of a word, its meanings and origins, and how it has changed over time, create deeper layers of significance in our poems?

1. Read Matthew Zapruder's poem Erstwhile Harbinger Auspices
2. Select three words that you want to research for your long poem.
3. Access their entries in the online OED, found here: http://libguides.trinity.edu/poetry
4. Write a draft of a poem that incorporates, directly or associatively, a root/origin/meaning meanings of each word. Also use three questions in the poem. Ideally these will be ones that come up for you as you develop understanding of the words.
5. Finally, write a reflective paragraph on what you discovered in researching the etymology of your chosen words, and how that did or didn't enable you to create an original definition using the tools of poetic craft.