


Through the Muntins

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Reality leaves a lot to the imagination.

—John Lennon

 ne sapphire-sky morning, I sat at my kitchen table, gazing through a window overlooking the garden and an emerald profusion of trees beyond.

My home is an old English Tudor townhouse dating back to 1938, so each pane possesses a muntin located on the glass itself. These vertical elements divide the windows into a grid. (The earliest known use of the noun *muntin* is in the Middle English period, 1150–1500, as a variant of the obsolete *montant*—from the French, literally, “rising.”)

Through the muntins, on a neighbor’s towering oak about 300 feet away, I spied what looked to be an eye in the sky opening into the tree’s luxurious crown.

As a verb, *to muse* is to thoughtfully consider something. Used as a noun, it means a person, especially a woman, who is a source of artistic inspiration. In mythology, the Muses were nine goddesses who symbolized the arts and sciences.

For me, a muse is virtually anything in Spirit’s world that serves to inspire a sense of awe and wonder. How lucky we are that such sources are infinite! Without this element, the imagination might never take off at all. Sadly, many people never tap the wondrous power inside them that provides the means to reveal scientific discoveries, compose magnificent music, craft new worlds through the written word, prepare a feast without a recipe, or possibly even conceive of a plan to return this planet to what the Creator intended when the words “Let there be light” were first spoken.

As an educator for over two decades, I made it my mission to restore the miraculous power of creativity to my pupils. In many cases, they had not been encouraged to develop it, or worse, were admonished to “stop daydreaming,” “pull their head out of the clouds,” and get back to the “real” world.

Perhaps you had an invisible playmate who seemed to speak to you through the soundless sound of an inner

voice that was quite as genuine to your ears as your mother calling you for lunch. If you shared the wonderful things that you and your imaginary friend spoke about with adults and sometimes even other children, you may well have experienced scorn, insults, or even concern that you were “letting your imagination run away with you.”

Before I completed my MA degree in education, I was offered a brief opportunity to teach at a Montessori school and encountered an astounding key to unlock the hearts and minds of my pupils. There was a limited number of children in each class and many fascinating aspects of this system. These included hands-on learning, silent time and particularly “choice time,” when the class could select from various “centers” set up around the room. These areas were dedicated to activities such as drawing, music, reading, writing, and construction. What a boon to free creativity for the lucky youngsters who could afford to attend!

Flash-forward a few years. As in many serendipitous events in my life, I found myself selected to work with gifted children in a system called Talents Unlimited in a public school located in the largest federally subsidized housing development in the nation. There I became a certified Talents Unlimited practitioner, trained in developing creative and critical thinking skills in my elementary school students. Later I worked instructing other teachers and supervisory personnel as a staff developer.

Established primarily by Carol Schlichter based on the works of Howard Gardner, Calvin Taylor, and Robert Sternberg, the Talents Unlimited model was designed to help teachers recognize and nurture the multiple talents of all children. The program allows students to grow their talents as they learn and acquire knowledge in six areas, including productive thinking, decision-making, planning, forecasting, communication, and academics.

The first skill, aptly named “productive thinking,” is involved most closely with the imagination. The steps included are: (1) Think of many ideas. (2) Think of

varied ideas. (3) Think of unusual ideas. (4) Add to your ideas to make them better.

One morning, my class was busy working at the centers I had created at home, based on their suggestions of which topics interested them. Gazing at their complete absorption, it reminded me of a full-on “flow” experience straight out of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s captivating book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. He explains how by concentrating our creative energies within, we can accelerate beyond our everyday abilities into a state of transcendence.

To my eye, the children seemed to shine like balls of energy, projecting total immersion in their task.

In that moment, it was not a huge leap to envision that perhaps we all are centers of expression for the One who creates and sustains the universe. With an open heart I whispered, “Namaste”: “The Divine within me bows to the Divine within you.” Enthralled by that wave of light, I decided to imagine I too was a sixth grader in Mrs. Levine’s class and began writing a play. Every day when it was “Center Time,” I would pull those pages out from the drawer of my desk and keep writing. The finished product was called *A Talent for Friendship*.

Excited by the results, I decided to read the class a few scenes. After that, I asked them to use their productive thinking skills to decide what I should do with the manuscript now. Their many, varied, and unusual ideas led to them producing, directing, creating costumes and props and acting in the play, which they presented in the school auditorium for all the grades to enjoy.

Along with the delight of encouraging the imagination of my students, the most rewarding results came from parents.

They expressed gratitude for my expanding the vision of these youngsters beyond the stultifying violence and crime emanating from their windows and TV screens. Einstein said, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” In other words, when our rational ego intellect generates a problem, we must use our spiritual, creative mind to find the solution.

Now, dear reader, here is your assignment. This article began with a fanciful journey through the muntins of my window to an eye into the sky. Imagine that you are gazing through an eye in the sky. Use your productive thinking skills to list the many, varied, and unusual things you see there and what happens next. (This task touches on another of the six components included in the Talents program: forecasting.) Add to your ideas to make them better.

Perhaps together you and I will envision a way to make our world a safer, wiser, kinder home for all of us. ■

All the Names I'd Like to Give Myself

Call me what you will
but I have names for myself
wishes of who I want to be
dreams of an open face
dancing whole person
able to take the heat
Call me Luna, call me Sol
I'll answer to either or both
because they are me in its entirety
Call me resilient ground cover, murky tide pool,
encouraging firmament, fiery diadem
spinner and spun in the cosmic maze
There is always a world for me, of me, by me
from the words I chose, from the singing
syllables of sound strung together into thought
I imagine myself: a velvet rain forest
in the Amazon at dawn with a dozen squawking
lime-sherbet parrots dining on mango flesh
ripe as the morning
Call me crazy, call me shadow, call me
the beginning of an idea stirring
on the tip of your medulla oblongata
as succulent as fresh bee whiskey
capable of stinging senses
jolting the overgrown glade of your
sleepy life back into existence
Call me what you will

Arlene Gay Levine



Arlene Gay Levine is the author of *39 Ways to Open Your Heart: An Illuminated Meditation* (Conari Press) and *Movie Life* (Finishing Line Press). Her prose and poetry have found a home in *The New York Times*, numerous anthologies, including

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