

# HERE WE ARE

A WRITING +  
ART-MAKING  
WORKBOOK

TO PROCESS CHANGE  
+ ALIGN WITH HOPE

**mensen.**  
xoxooooo  
MENSENXOXO.COM

# HI. I'M MENSEN.

I BELIEVE EVERYONE IS INHERENTLY CREATIVE.

Writing and drawing have been the single most important tools in my life to cope with hardship, trauma and change. For 20 years, I have shared my passion for art as a healing tool with communities impacted by trauma, violence and systemic oppression.

I designed this workbook and workshop in March of 2021.

As the one-year anniversary of the Pandemic approached, I observed how the people I care for and the communities around me were struggling to process all that had happened in their lives and where we are now.

The Pandemic is a collective trauma, and it is common that around big anniversaries of change or hardship, we may experience some difficult emotional, spiritual and physical responses.

This workbook and workshop is an offering from me to you and your communities, loved ones and friends.

I hope this small offering helps you not only process some of what you have been through, but to connect with your strength, vision, and hope. I hope it helps you give yourself permission to use your creativity to connect with yourself more deeply.

Please feel free to share this workbook with your friends and community. It's free- but if you'd like to donate to support my workshops,

**you can Venmo me at @mensenxoxo.**

Also, if you decide to share any of your work from this workbook online, I'd really appreciate it if you shouted me out.

**My instagram is @mensenxoxo.**

# TESTIMONIALS

## HERE'S WHAT PARTICIPANTS HAD TO SAY ABOUT JOINING THE HERE WE ARE DIGITAL WORKSHOP.

"The workshop I took with Mensen was phenomenal. It sparked a type of creativity in me that I had not connected with in a long time. She's an amazing facilitator and does a great job at creating an inclusive and open atmosphere to explore and process creatively."

"This was a beautiful and safe space to reflect on, express, and share things I've not given myself the time to do on my own. It was so supportive and welcoming."

"The whole workshop had a nice flow to it- each component built really nicely into the next. The sharing opportunities and discussions were so lovely."

"My favorite part about this workshop was to hear other peoples experiences throughout the pandemic last year and how it has impacted us through now."

"I definitely left feeling amped to do more creative exploration-- experimenting both with process and media."

# WELCOME.

## THIS WORKBOOK IS FOR YOU.

There is no right or wrong way to use this workbook. You can carve out an afternoon and do it all at once, or you can do a little bit each day. The goal is not to make "masterpieces", but rather to use different creative tools to help you create a space and container to help you process your experience of the last year and to align with your hope.

This workbook is best used when you work on the exercises one after the other, rather than skipping around.

## MATERIALS YOU WILL NEED:

One Object that tells a story about something that happened in your life this last year.

Something to write with (journal, computer, phone- whatever you feel most comfortable writing with)

Something to draw with (pencils, markers, pens, blank paper, sketchbook or drawing tablet)

Water + Snacks

## OPTIONAL MATERIALS:

A candle to light to set your intentions each time you sit down to work on the exercises in the workbook.

Soothing objects (play doh, stones/crystals, comfy blanket, essential oils)

Your favorite music, cued up and ready to be the soundtrack to your journey of personal creative expression.

 6 MINUTES

# #MOOD WARMUP

In 6 words only, describe your mood >right now<

For Example:

*What Even Is Life Right Now?*

*I ate food, so I'm fine.*

*Sun does wonders for us all!*

*Another Rainy day, Everyone Go Away.*

*Know Who I am now: Grateful.*

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 6 MINUTES

# #MOOD WARMUP

Draw your mood.

It can be a self portrait.

It can be a sketch of an object or symbol that represents your mood.

It can be just mark-making and colorfields that align with your mood.

**THERE IS NO WRONG WAY TO DO THIS  
AND YOU ARE GOOD ENOUGH.**



 6 MINUTES

# CH-CH-CHANGES

List AS MANY THINGS AS YOU CAN that have changed for you or in your life since the pandemic began.



Look over your list. Take a deep breath.

Now, circle the 3 biggest changes you've moved through this past year.

 6 MINUTES

# CH-CH-CHANGES

In this first box, write a sentence to describe the first big change you circled, and what it has been like for you.



In the box below, draw what this change has been like for you. It can be a symbol, abstract drawing, self-portrait - whatever feels right. As you draw, bring your attention to your breath, the act of drawing, and the feelings that come up.



BIG CHANGE #1



🕒 6 MINUTES

# CH-CH-CHANGES

In this first box, write a sentence to describe the second big change you circled, and what it has been like for you.



In the box below, draw what this change has been like for you. It can be a symbol, abstract drawing, self-portrait - whatever feels right. As you draw, bring your attention to your breath, the act of drawing, and the feelings that come up.



BIG CHANGE #2

🕒 6 MINUTES

# CH-CH-CHANGES

In this first box, write a sentence to describe the third big change you circled, and what it has been like for you.

In the box below, draw what this change has been like for you. It can be a symbol, abstract drawing, self-portrait - whatever feels right. As you draw, bring your attention to your breath, the act of drawing, and the feelings that come up.

BIG CHANGE #3

 20 MINUTES

**WOW.**

You have moved through such big changes this year.

**HERE YOU ARE.**

**Take 20 minutes to take care of YOU.**

Do you need to walk around the block?

Do some more stretching on your own?

Eat some food?

Self-massage?

Jump in the shower right quick?

Want to just keep writing or drawing?

**GO AHEAD.**

**YOU ARE YOUR OWN PERMISSION.**

**YOUR BODY KNOWS WHAT IT NEEDS.**

 10 MINUTES

# (THING): A FREE WRITE

Choose an object that has been important to you this year, and represents something about what this year has been like for you.

Describe yourTHING below.

**Now, you are going to change perspective and become the THING.**

Write a reflective journal entry from the point of view of the THING considering these questions:

How (THING) is feeling

How (THING) describes its relationship to you

How (THING) observes and reflects on you and how you are doing

How (THING) experienced this last year

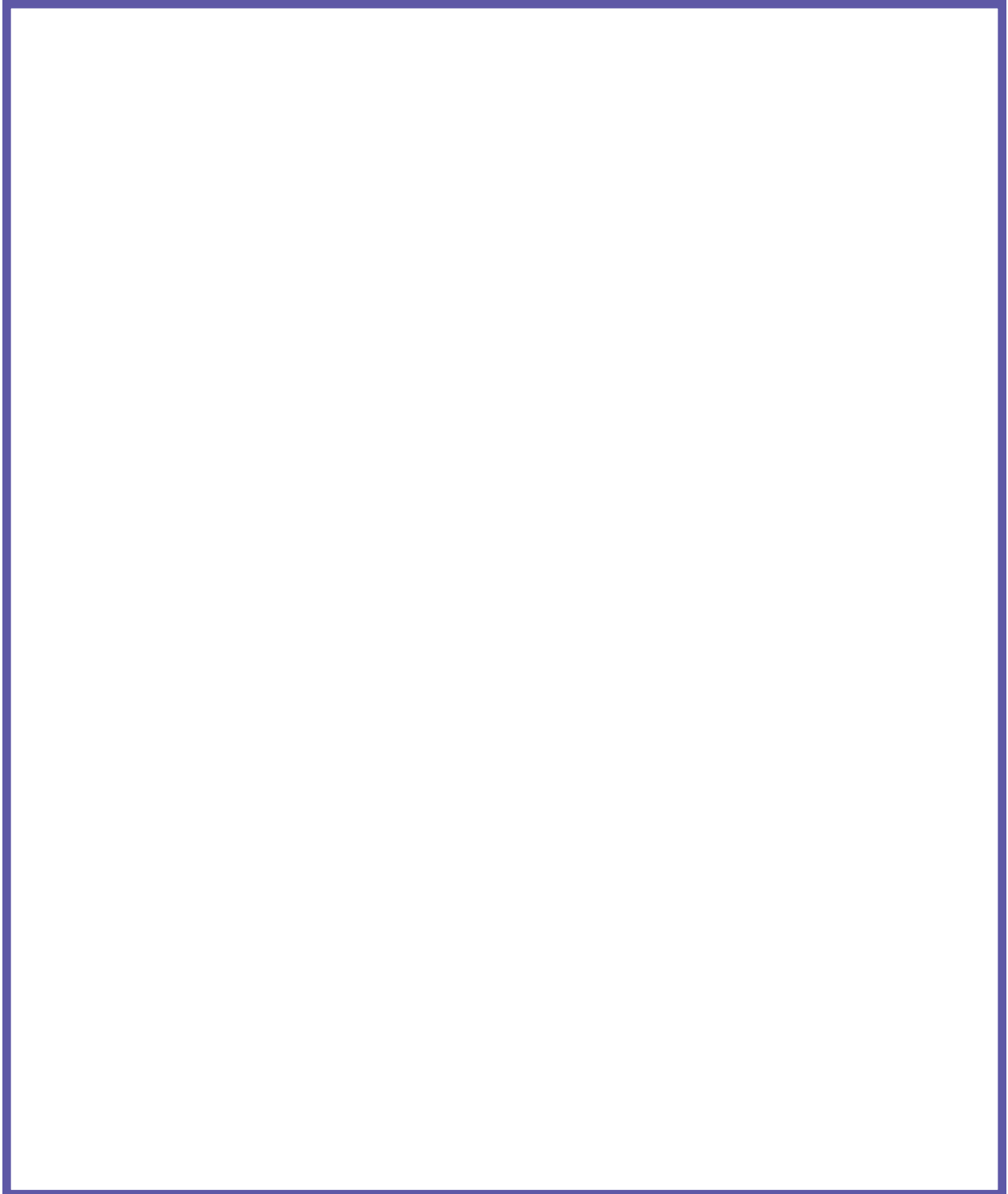
What (THING) has seen you go through this year

What (THING) imagines for the future

What (THING) hopes for you

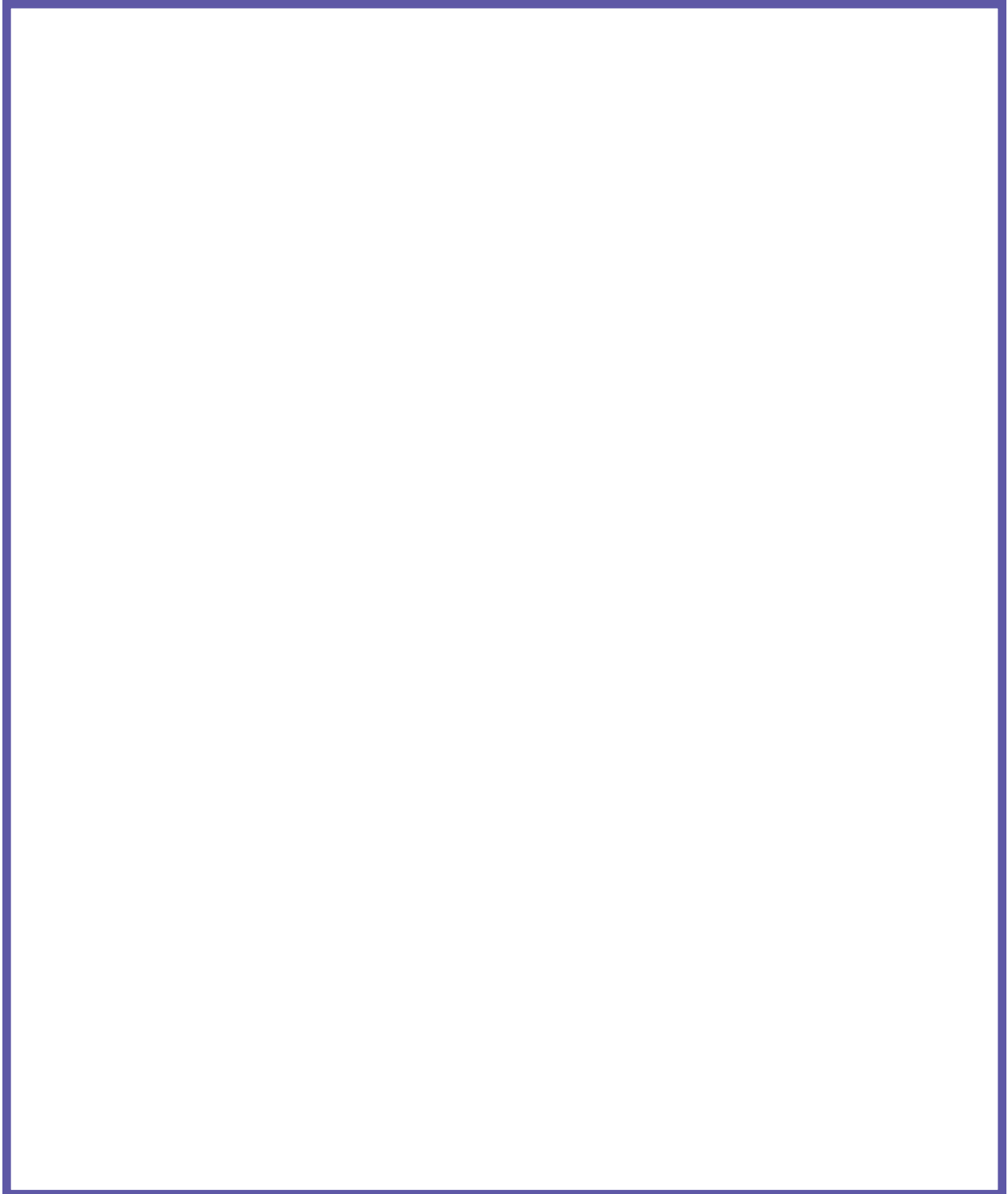
 10 MINUTES

# **(THING): A FREE WRITE**



 10 MINUTES

# **(THING): A FREE WRITE**



 10 MINUTES

# (THING): A FREE DRAW

Now, take a deep breath.

Draw the THING. This doesn't have to be a "good" drawing. Just look at the THING and draw it.

As you draw, focus on the act of drawing: observing the object, the way it feels to draw in your body. The goal here is not to create a photo-realistic drawing, but rather to bring your full focus to the object and the act of drawing. As you do this, pay attention to what you feel in your body. If you feel your thoughts wandering, bring your attention back to observing the object, and how your drawing utensil feels in your hand.



# HAIKU

This year was a lot.  
We need a container.

Let's turn to a Japanese form of poetry that creates a structure for both seasonal and emotional reflection.

## HAIKU IS PRETTY WELL KNOWN.

LINE 1: 5 Syllables

LINE 2: 7 Syllables

LINE 3: 5 Syllables

**IT'S A RHYTHM.  
IT'S A MOOD.**

## LIKE THE SINGING COMING OFF THE DRUMS.

[EXCERPT] BY SONIA SANCHEZ

what is done is done  
what is not done is not done  
let it go... like the wind.

let us be one with  
the earth expelling anger:  
spirit unbroken.





# TANKA

**TANKA IS A BIT LESS KNOWN.**

LINE 1: 5 Syllables

LINE 2: 7 Syllables

LINE 3: 5 Syllables

LINE 4: 7 Syllables

LINE 5: 7 Syllables

**IT'S STILL A RHYTHM.  
IT'S STILL A MOOD.**

**TANKA IS A "SHORT SONG".**

31 Syllables total.

Tankas "Turn."

The poem begins by looking at, describing, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

Then, in line 3, it starts to describe the personal response.

# TANKA

## PERSON OF THE PLAYFUL SONG: (I LISTEN TO STARS) BY TADA CHIMAKO

I listen to songs  
of someone handsome  
At the apex of night  
The Milky Way overflows  
The stars boil over and fall



## TANKA DIARY: AWAKENED TOO EARLY ON A SATURDAY MORNING BY HARRYETTE MULLEN

Awakened too early on Saturday morning  
By the song of a mockingbird  
Imitating my clock radio alarm

Walking along the green path with buds  
In my ears, too engrossed in the morning news  
To listen to the stillness of the garden.



# TANKA

## ON TIME TANKA [EXCERPT] BY JUNE JORDAN

I refuse to lose  
the flame of my single space  
this safety I choose  
between your fist and my face  
between my gender and race

.....

Okay! laugh away!  
I hear you and I accuse  
you both: I refuse  
to choose: All black and blue news  
means that I hurt and I lose.



from my willingly  
rain-beaten hair  
comes a smell . . .  
I belong to no one,  
not then, not now

### **Tankas by Kawano Yuko**

on nights when  
you go off somewhere or other  
I twirl  
a rubber band  
with the point of my pencil

I can't give up in despair . . .  
there is a tree  
in my garden  
with quiet eyes  
and good ears

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: SPRING

Gather some things that you used to keep track of or record your experience of the last year. For example, your cell-phone photos or social media feeds, your journal, your sketchbook.

Take a few minutes to look over your records from March, April and May of last year.

Take some notes on your reflections. What happened? What emotions come up for you? What images stand out?

SPRING

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: SPRING

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of that time for you.

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: SPRING

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of that time for you.

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**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: SPRING

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

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**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: SUMMER

Gather some things that you used to keep track of or record your experience of the last year. For example, your cell-phone photos or social media feeds, your journal, your sketchbook.

Take a few minutes to look over your records from June, July and August of last year.

Take some notes on your reflections. What happened? What emotions come up for you? What images stand out?

SUMMER



 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: SUMMER

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of that time for you.

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: SUMMER

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of that time for you.

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**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

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7 syllables

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looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: SUMMER

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of that time for you.

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: AUTUMN

Gather some things that you used to keep track of or record your experience of the last year. For example, your cell-phone photos or social media feeds, your journal, your sketchbook.

Take a few minutes to look over your records from September, October and November of last year.

Take some notes on your reflections. What happened? What emotions come up for you? What images stand out?

AUTUMN

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: AUTUMN

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of that time for you.

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: AUTUMN

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of that time for you.

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: AUTUMN

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of that time for you.

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: WINTER

Gather some things that you used to keep track of or record your experience of the last year. For example, your cell-phone photos or social media feeds, your journal, your sketchbook.

Take a few minutes to look over your records from last November, December and January.

Take some notes on your reflections. What happened? What emotions come up for you? What images stand out?

WINTER



 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: WINTER

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of that time for you.

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: WINTER

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of that time for you.

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: WINTER

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of that time for you.

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

 20 MINUTES

# HI.

You may be feeling a lot of feelings right now.

**NOW IS A GREAT TIME TO SHAKE OUT YOUR BODY.**

**WIGGLE. STRETCH. SHIMMY. CLAP.**

Then, take 20 minutes to take care of YOU.

Do you need to walk around the block?

Do some more stretching on your own?

Eat some food?

Self-massage?

Jump in the shower right quick?

Want to just keep writing or drawing?

**GO AHEAD.**

**YOU ARE YOUR OWN PERMISSION.**

**YOUR BODY KNOWS WHAT IT NEEDS.**

 6 MINUTES

# GROUNDING WITH THE SKY

Take a few minutes to take a look at the sky outside or from your window. Focus on observing and breathing slowly and deeply. Do you see clouds? The sun? The moon? Stars? Birds? Planes?

Now take a few moments to just free write.

What did you see in the sky?

Did it make you think of anything?

How are you feeling?



 6 MINUTES

# MAKING YOUR MARK.

You are already making your mark, everyday, even if you don't always feel like it.

For the next 6 minutes, just make marks on paper. Scribble, pattern, smudging, color fields. No other goal than to make marks on paper.

Play your favorite song and let yourself just make marks and maybe do a little chair-dancing.



 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: RECENT

Gather some things that you used to keep track of or record your experience of the last year. For example, your cell-phone photos or social media feeds, your journal, your sketchbook.

Take a few minutes to look over your records from the last month or two.

Take some notes on your reflections. What happened? What emotions come up for you? What images stand out?

RECENT

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: RECENT

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of this time for you.

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response



 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: RECENT

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of this time for you.

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5 syllables

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Describe your personal response

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looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: RECENT

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of this time for you.

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looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

🕒 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: RIGHT NOW

Think about today and this last week for you.

Take some notes on your reflections. What happened? What emotions come up for you? What images stand out?

RIGHT NOW

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: RIGHT NOW

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of this time for you.

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: RIGHT NOW

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of this time for you.

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

 6 MINUTES

# SEASONS: RIGHT NOW

Write as many Tankas as you can capturing the spirit of this time for you.

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

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5 syllables

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7 syllables

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7 syllables

looking at, describe, or examining a (THING), image, idea or experience.

**TURN!**  
Describe your personal response

 10 MINUTES

# RIGHT NOW: A FREE DRAW

In response to your writing, draw a picture that represents where you are RIGHT NOW.

It can be a self portrait.

It can be a sketch of an object or symbol that represents where you are TODAY

It can be mark-making and colorfields that align with where you are TODAY.



 6 MINUTES

# HOPE IS THE ANTIDOTE

List AS MANY THINGS AS YOU CAN that make you feel hopeful about the future, regardless of how uncertain the future may feel or be



Look over your list. Take a deep breath. Smile into the future.

Circle the 3 things that make you feel the most hopeful about the future.



 6 MINUTES

# HOPE IS THE ANTIDOTE

In this first box, write a sentence to describe the first big hope you circled, and what it means to you.



In the box below, draw what this hope looks like to you. It can be a symbol, abstract drawing, self-portrait - whatever feels right. As you draw, bring your attention to your breath, the act of drawing, and the feelings that come up.



BIG HOPE #1

 6 MINUTES

# HOPE IS THE ANTIDOTE

In this first box, write a sentence to describe the second big hope you circled, and what it means to you.



In the box below, draw what this hope looks like to you. It can be a symbol, abstract drawing, self-portrait - whatever feels right. As you draw, bring your attention to your breath, the act of drawing, and the feelings that come up.



BIG HOPE #2

 6 MINUTES

# HOPE IS THE ANTIDOTE

In this first box, write a sentence to describe the third big hope you circled, and what it means to you.



In the box below, draw what this hope looks like to you. It can be a symbol, abstract drawing, self-portrait - whatever feels right. As you draw, bring your attention to your breath, the act of drawing, and the feelings that come up.



BIG HOPE #3

 10 MINUTES

# THANK YOURSELF.

To close out this workbook, take some time to write a letter from the perspective of yourself now, to the person you were who went through so many changes this last year.

Thank yourself for all the ways you showed up yourself.

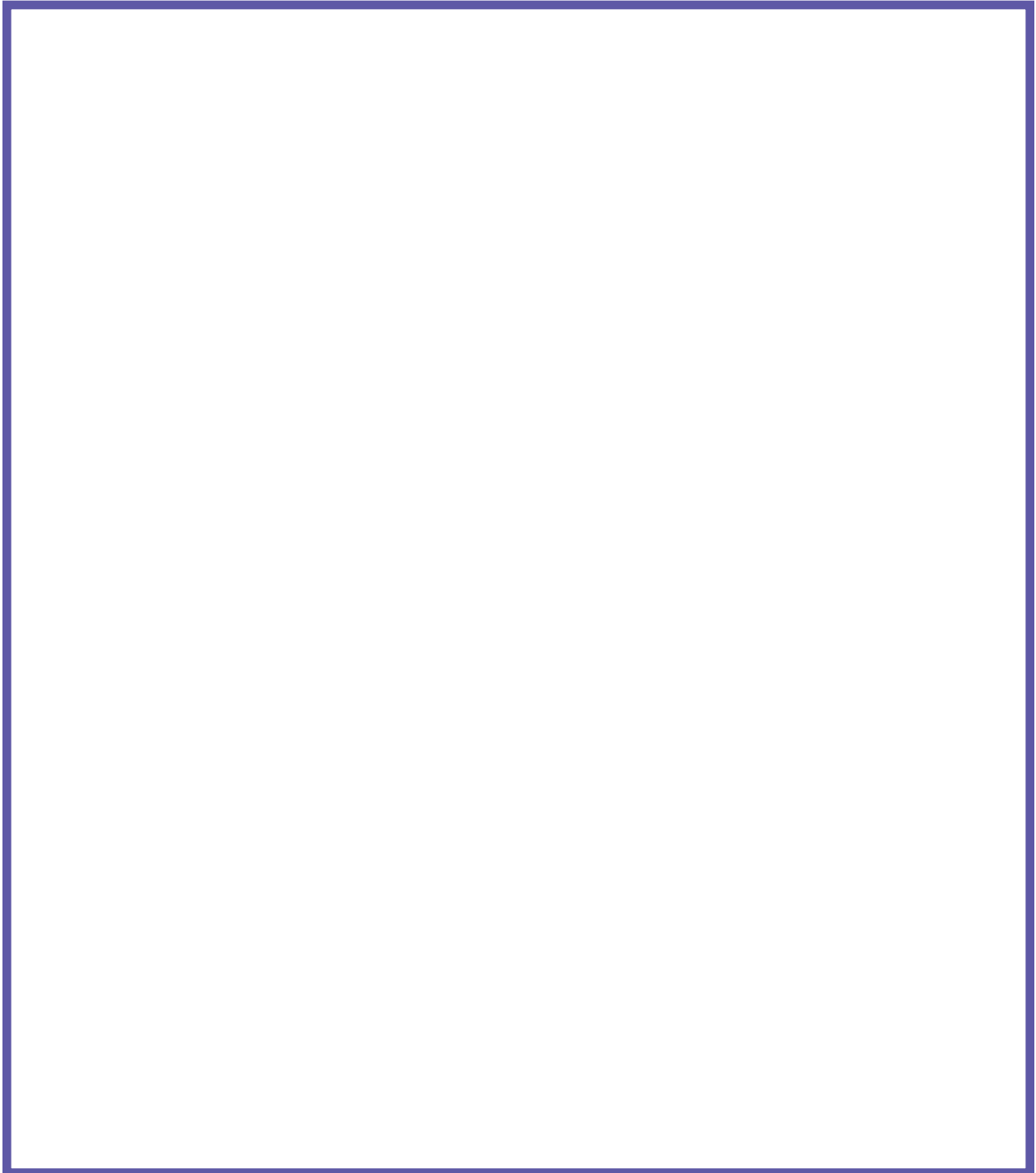
Offer yourself forgiveness for mistakes you feel you made.

And most importantly, tell your past self all the things you are hopeful about as you move into the future.



 10 MINUTES

# THANK YOURSELF.



# ABOUT MENSEN.

Mensen is an artist, designer, writer, educator, facilitator and creative strategist.

Her public practice is rooted in illustration, muralism, poetry, hope and defiance. Through participatory storytelling and design, she collaborates with groups working on Movement and social justice campaigns, memory-keeping and collective healing and liberation.

Mensen has worked in the education, non-profit, media, public arts, and direct-service sectors. She has also worked with local and transnational grassroots initiatives by and for working-class and poor communities, immigrants, LGBTQIA+ people, women, youth and communities impacted by trauma, violence and the legal system.

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## STAY IN TOUCH.

Mensen holds digital workshops, collaborates with communities, consults with organizations, and designs curriculum and training.

FOLLOW HER ON INSTAGRAM @MENSENXOXO

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