Personal Universe Deck
The Practice of Poetry (Linnea Johnson)

This exercise involves constructing a list/deck of cards to use as associational sparks for writing.

On a piece of paper, first ask students to brainstorm, writing down as many words that they can think of in a few minutes.

Working from the list, they must place their words into the following categories. If they would like to change or add words as they go along, they may.

- 16 words of each of the five senses (16x5= 80 words)
  - These words must mean, suggest: taste, touch, sight, smell and hearing.
  - i.e. frozen (touch); birdsong (hearing), etc.

- 10 words of motion
  - The words must mean, suggest, motion to them. They do not necessarily need to be verbs.

- 3 abstractions
  - Like love, or freedom, or truth.

- 7 anything else
  - Names, days of the week, and so forth—any word with meaning to the students which does not fit into the other categories.

All words on the list, in the deck of cards must

1. have significance to/for the student.
2. be specific; that is, the word must not be “bird” but “robin,” not “tree,” but “aspen.”
3. sound good to his or her ear.

Use no adverbs. Use no plurals.

When the students have 100 words transferred onto the cards, they should spread them out and start to piece together a skeleton of a poem. Write the poem, the memory, what the cards suggest.

Have students keep these cards in the classroom and add to them as the semester/year progresses for inspiration in ANY type of writing.