



Reading Longpre is akin to entering a dream world in which one is called upon to utilize one's investigatory powers, the domain of the poet, while simultaneously remaining still enough to let memory, prayer, lamentation and other forms of excessive language descend in tongues of fire. As if wrestling with angels, *How to Keep You Alive* joins battle with love, forgiveness, expiation and exorcism in a world where narrative untells itself as it spins a web that entangles and enmeshes everything from birth to grave. Formally, work engages kinetically with the page so as to compel a physically ocular engagement with the text, all the while accompanied by the steady thrumming of meditations on the idea of ruin. If "poetry is the practice of ruin" as Longpre writes, then ruin, noun and verb, has never appeared so imbued with possibility – of both life and death.

- M. NOURBESE PHILIP, Author of *Zong!*

TEACHING GUIDE

How to Keep You Alive

by Ella Longpre

978-1937865900 / 120 pages / \$15.95

Recommended Classes:

- Creative Writing
- Creative Nonfiction & Memoir
- Memoir / Anti-Memoir
- Experimental Writing
- Hybrid Forms
- Feminist Literature
- Queer Literature / Bisexual Literature

Keywords:

Hybrid / Memoir / Anti-Memoir / Autobiography /
Experimental / Feminist / Women / Queer / Bisexual /
Tense / Pronoun / Point of View / Form / Motion /
Poetics of Spaces / Representation / Religion

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can a text be composed that is a collage without using the cut-up method?
2. What is the relationship between the larger and smaller font sized texts in this book? How are they read together and separately?
3. How do pronouns function in this text? Which pronouns are static? Which pronouns are transferred or reassigned through the text? Who are they assigned to?
4. How would you describe the narrative arc of this book?

5. Part of the narrative of this book is the actual breakdown of its form. How are the content and form linked in this narrative and how does the form's breakdown relate to the narrator's experience?

6. What is the role of violence in this narrative?

7. How does repetition function in the book?

8. *How to Keep You Alive* is classified as both experimental fiction and autobiography/memoir. Does the hybrid categorization of genre here (fiction vs nonfiction) matter to you as a reader? What is the relationship between genre and narrative?

9. Experimental writing is often described as a text that teaches you how to read it while you read it. How does this book teach you how to read it and what work does it demand of you as a reader?

10. How does the form and layout of the text (ie. shapes and columns of text) inform the order in which you read and the order you make?

Possible Assignments:

- "I can't think of a time I was not _____." Fill in the blank. This is your first sentence.
- Write a page about one space and time. Write a second page about another distinct space and time. Then write a third page in which you take one element from one of your spaces and introduce it into the other space.
- Think about a time you tried to do something and failed. Maybe you tried to do it more than once. Write the narrative of this failure in a page or two. Then, take notes on what you learned through this experience, how it changed you, and how you, now, looking back on it, are affected by it: do you feel shame, nostalgia, pride? How does your body feel when you think about this? what images come to mind? Now, format or organize these notes and the narrative as one piece—where should the notes go? Feel free to get creative and work outside the boundaries of your traditional form.