In J. Ruth Gendler’s *The Book of Qualities*, 70 abstract qualities come to life, walking and talking, borrowing Grandmother’s shawl and telling scary stories late into the night...personification at its best! Precise, specific images reveal each abstract quality more vividly than any dictionary definition.

After you read sample profiles in class, choose one to write about. Check the dictionary and the thesaurus, exploring possible meanings and hunting down synonyms. Gendler writes of these qualities as if they were real people, with weird relatives, bad friends, unique clothing styles, and strange stories to tell. Make your chosen quality a real personality, too. Complete a sensory cluster for your quality—sight, smell, taste, touch, sound. Then write and carefully polish a one-to-three-paragraph personification of your quality. Make every word count on this one!

**Group Writing Assignment:** Sign up for a quality (from the list or an approved substitute). Every writing group must have a different quality--so reserve your choice officially!

1. Check the dictionary and the thesaurus, exploring possible meanings and hunting down synonyms. Share all information aloud within your group.
2. Complete a sensory cluster for your quality—sight, smell, taste, touch, sound.
3. Write a one-to-three paragraph personification of your quality. Revise, proofread, and turn in a final copy.
Courage

Courage has roots. She sleeps on a futon on the floor and lives close to the ground. Courage looks you straight in the eye. She is not impressed with power trippers, and she knows first aid. Courage is not afraid to weep, and she is not afraid to pray, even when she is not sure who she is praying to. When she walks, it is clear that she has made the journey from loneliness to solitude. The people who told me she is stern were not lying; they just forgot to mention that she is kind.

Anxiety

Anxiety is secretive. He does not trust anyone, not even his friends. Worry, Terror, Doubt, and Panic. He has a way of glooming onto your skin like smog, and then you feel unclean. He likes to visit me late at night when I am alone and exhausted. I have never slept with him, but he kissed me on the forehead once, and I had a headache for two years. He is sure a nuisance to get out of the house. He has no respect for locks or curtains or doors. I speak from experience. It takes cunning to get rid of him, a combination of anger, humor, and self-respect. A bath helps too. He does not like to get wet. As a last resort, if you are not near a bathtub, wet your face with tears.

Wisdom

Wisdom wears an indigo jacket. She takes long walks in the purple hills at twilight, pausing to meditate at an old temple near the crossroads. She was sick as a young child so she learned to be alone with herself at an early age. Wisdom has a quiet mind. She likes to think about things inside and out. Sometimes she is looking at the thing she is looking at, and sometimes the thing she is looking at enters through her eyes. Questions of time, depth, and balance interest her. She is not looking for answers.

Innocence

Innocence talks to old people on the commuter train. Sometimes she talks to herself, sometimes she talks to the man sitting next to her hiding behind the newspaper, sometimes she talks to the window, and sometimes she sings a little song. She tells secrets in between her words, but mostly people don’t think they’re secrets because she says them right out. She told me that it takes a lot of sophistication for her to stay innocent. (That was a secret.) Since she affair with Danger, she is not afraid of anything.

Contentment

Contentment has learned how to find out what she needs to know. Last year she went on a major housecleaning spree. First, she stood on her head until all the extra facts fell out. Then, she discards about half her house. Now, she knows where every thing comes from — who dyed the yarn dark green and who wove the rug and who built the loom, who made the willow chair, who planted the apricot trees. She made the turquoise mugs herself with clay she found in the hills beyond her house.
When Contentment is sad, she takes a mud bath or goes to the mountains until her lungs are clear. When she walks through an unfamiliar neighborhood, she always makes friends with the local cats.