Blackout Poetry

What you’ll need . . .

» Old books or magazines
» Scrap paper
» Pencil
» Drawing supplies

Writing poetry can seem intimidating, but it doesn’t have to be! Blackout poetry is a great introduction to playing around with poetry in a fun format. Blackout poems can be created from pages out of old newspapers, magazines, or even books. Poets begin with a page of text and isolate individual words or short phrases to create their found-word poem. Although the poet is restricted by the words already present on the page, blackout poetry is quite flexible in its form. Try experimenting with tone (e.g. silly or whimsical), format (e.g. free verse, haiku), illustrations, and more.

1

Choose an old book or newspaper page with which to work. Skim the chosen page and note any “anchor” words. An anchor word is one that is appealing to you or stands out in some way. Anchor words could be nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. There is no right or wrong anchor word; it’s up to the poet!

With a pencil, lightly underline or circle anchor words. Next, lightly mark any other words or phrases that speak to you or connect to the anchor word in some way. Try to avoid marking more than three or four words in line of text.

2

In minutes the tree, which had stood on that spot for well over a hundred years, lay in splinters on the ground. The Creature leapt, this time covering nearly two miles, and then again. From the apex of one leap, he caught sight of something shining far to the east, and he set out to discover what it was. Night had fallen when the Creature finally came to rest on a high embankment overlooking an interstate highway. The small cluster of speeders fascinated him, and he leapt directly into their path.

After his second leap, he landed with a loud crash on the throughway. He stood up, brushed off his clothes, and made his way to the nearest town. There he met a group of children who were playing a game of “follow the leader.”

“Where’s your leader?”

“The Creature!”

“Why?”

“I found him.”

“What does he do?”

“He throws rocks.”

The children laughed and followed the Creature as he led them through the town. They played games and shared stories, each finding something new and exciting about the Creature.

In the end, the Creature realized that playing with the children was the best part of the day. He returned to the woods and continued his journey, looking forward to the next adventure.

ROGER STERN
The Creature lurched forward toward a huge oak which stood in his path. In minutes the tree, which had stood on that spot for well over a hundred years, lay in splinters on the ground.

Again the Creature leapt, this time covering nearly two miles, and then again. From the apex of one leap, he caught sight of something shining far to the east, and he set out to discover what it was. Night had fallen when the Creature finally came to rest on a high embankment overlooking an interstate highway. The small cluster of speeders fascinated him, and he leapt directly into their path.

A late-model Ford pickup braked and swerved in an attempt to miss the hulking form that stood suddenly in the roadway. The Creature seemed to take this as a challenge, lashing out with a punch that sent truck and driver rolling over and over into oncoming traffic. A cacophony of squealing brakes and car horns was quickly joined by the crunch of metal and the whoosh of igniting gasoline. An approving howl came from the Creature as he charged headlong at the abatement of the highway overpass. With one arm still tied behind him, he struck and clawed at the reinforced concrete, slamming into the weakened supports with his back and shoulders until, finally, the entire overpass fell in a mass upon the crash scene. The Creature looked around him. No signs of life came from the crushed cars and trucks. No other shabby challenges were to be seen. With almost an air of disappointment, the Creature leapt on, following the highway.

Chuck Johnston strolled a yarn as his rig flashed past the road sign reading: sixty miles. He’d have to hustle if he was going to make it there by daybreak. These overnight hauls’re gonna be the death of me! He shook his head. “I’d better get a refill back in Wapakoneta. Chuck rubbed the bridge of his nose. No time to stop now. He shifted another yoke. He’d need some conversation if he was going to keep himself awake. He thumbed the mike switch of his CB. “You Breaker? That’s Chuckie-Jay, anybody got their ears on? Crown?”

“Chuckie, baby! That’s Moon Pie, where you been keepin’ yerself, fool?”

Chuck smiled. It’d been a good six months since he’d last seen Donny Moon. Donny was one of the few white men he knew who called himself “grey” and meant it.

“Yo, Moon! Been down there? Houston in St. Leo. Got me a load on it out here mixin’ this morning, though. ’M headed north on 57 just out- side Beaverdam.”

“Shoot, good buddy, you must be just ‘bout breathin’ down my neck. What’s ya say we hit J. C.’s at Toledo for steak an’ eggs?”

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Copy the marked words or phrases onto a separate piece of scratch paper. Be sure to list words or phrases in the order they appear on your original page from left to right, top to bottom.

Begin composing your poem from your list of found words. Keep in mind that you will be able to blackout parts of words, from beginnings to endings. If you run out of inspiration, go back to your original page and select more words.

On your original page, use a marker to circle the words of your finished poem. Remember to erase any exploratory pencil marks from step two. At this point, you can either leave your page bare or add illustrations. Try adding a drawing that ties into your poem or blacking out any unused words on the page with a marker. Be careful not to cover your chosen words with an illustration or marker. Sign your blackout poem and you’re done!