



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
POETRY CENTER

Found News Poem
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Grades: 6 - 12

Time Frame: 60 minutes

Required Resources: I compiled a packet of poems for my students that used the concept of “found” poetry each in a slightly different way. Depending on the age level and the length of discussion you wish to have, you may want to modify, add to, or reduce the number of poems. My packet included:

- a few of the most incomplete Sappho fragments, available online at <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/Sappho.htm> (if you are looking for an excellent book of translations, I recommend Anne Carson’s *If Not, Winter*, but it isn’t available online)
- Campbell McGrath, excerpt from “Train Journal”, from Campbell McGrath’s *Pax Atomica*, found online at: <http://www.jstor.org/pss/25304482>
- Guillaume Apollinaire, “Il Pleut” (“It’s Raining”), available online at <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/article/177216>
- “(Second Hour’s Residue)” excerpt, from Eleni Sikelianos’ *Body Clock* (available online at: <http://www.thedrunkenboat.com/sikelianos.html>). *Note: This poem may read better with a high school audience, but the concept it illustrates, that of “found time” poetry through drawing and writing, and the idea of having multiple versions of a poem--which is the “real” poem? why both?--could still generate a good discussion for younger audiences.
- A page from Joshua Marie Wilkinson’s *Selenography* (available online at: <http://www.sidebrow.net/books/selenography>. Click on “preview excerpt,” scroll to the last page, 6-7, that begins “snow-heavy planks &”--both the photograph and the poem should be shown to students)

- A page of Mary Ruefle’s *A Little White Shadow* (available online at: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/178610>)

- “The Bomb Went Off” by John Gallaher, found online at:
<http://www.poetsagainstthewar.org/displaypoem.asp?AuthorID=23>

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A Note about Found Poetry: Found poetry has its origins in surrealism, a term first coined by the poet Guillaume Apollinaire in 1917 to describe the merging of avant-garde art with technological progress. In writing, surrealism often relies on automatism (involving the automatic, spontaneous, and unconscious), chance, accident, and found objects. While this lesson could work well with a corresponding unit working with surrealism, it can be used on its own quite well, and can be especially freeing for those intimidated by writing poetry.

Supplies:

writing paper
colored paper
scissors
pens/pencils
newspapers, magazines (science magazines are especially fun for this activity)
glue

Sequence of Activities:

Introduction to a found poem, 20 - 30 minutes.

First, ask students, “What counts as a poem?” Make a list on the board. (I let students decide and argue, and I try not to impose on their list, simply to ask clarifying questions. Song came up as a type of poem. The whole thing? I ask. Just the words? What about the music by itself? etc. and on.)

Read aloud some examples of found poems (from the packet listed above). For each, I asked, *Is this a poem?* Why or why not? (My students universally were in favor of all of the poems we read being poems.) Along the way, I explained to them the concept of a “found poem.” Point out how each of the examples has some aspect of “foundness” in it. (Found photos, found text, found time, found fragments, found images, found juxtaposition, found story, etc.)

Reiterate the idea that poetry can be found anywhere. A found poem is when you “find” words and alter them, mix them up, and collage them together to make something new.

I also shared **the following quotes** with them:

“What’s broken commands attention. Glass shatters and there is surprise, danger, sharp edges, and the scattered pieces reflect light in unexpected ways. A disturbance of the wholeness and immediately we are provoked to wonder: what was it before it broke? The contemporary poem has been decisively shattered by various techniques such as fragmentation, juxtaposition, collage, ellipsis and manipulation of space on the page.”

-- [“Origin of the Pieces”](#), from Joan Houlihan’s Blog,
Investigations of and Opinions on Contemporary Poetry

“I am very interested in found language, and I do make use of it...though it’s often hidden, misquoted, slowed down, chopped in half, or faked.”

--Jon Woodward in Conversation with Rae Armantrout from
12x12: Conversations in 21st Century Poetry and Poetics, eds.
Christina Mengert, Joshua Marie Wilkinson

“The found poem is an important form because it reminds us that all language is to some degree found--that writing is always manipulating the already written; reading is always re-reading. If poetry is supposed to ‘make it new,’ poets have to practice creative recycling.”

--Ben Lerner, in a conversation with Aaron Kunin, from *12x12: Conversations in 21st Century Poetry and Poetics*, eds. Christina Mengert, Joshua Marie Wilkinson

Collecting Ideas, 5 - 10 minutes.

Ask students to pick out a magazine or newspaper and leaf through. Pick out 2-3 headlines that interest you and one larger image. Cut it out, along with the articles and anything else that catches your attention.

Writing Activity, 20 minutes.

Assignment: Create a found news poem, using the image they selected as the canvas for the poem (optional).

Ask students to consider the titles they have cut out. They can use them as a jumping off point

to create a headline/title for the poem. They can use the exact words from the headline, or rearrange or change them, cross them out, cut them up to spell new words or come up with something entirely different.

Then, ask students to read the body of the article.

Ask them to find words or phrases that interest them and cut them out or write them down. (You can use any article or a combination of articles, it doesn't have to just correspond with the headline.) They can mix the words or phrases up, string them together, add your own words, black out the text. Encourage students to use any and all of the techniques listed above: fragmentation, juxtaposition, collage, ellipsis, manipulation of space on the page (and anything else they can think of).

Piece the fragments, cut outs, etc. all together to make a "found news" poem. The poem doesn't have to represent reality in this world; it can be futuristic, something out of the past, an alternate reality, whatever. It doesn't have to make linear sense, but even if the poem isn't linear, ask students to consider the conventional journalist questions: who, what when, where why, how, and also speculate on the future implications, the past, etc.

Sharing, 10 - 15 minutes.

Ask students to share found poems with the class. Read the poems aloud. Read others' poems aloud to see how another person might read it. Hold the poems up to show each other what they look like. What kinds of worlds have they created?