

Cut Word Poems

By: Taylor Johnson

Education level: *Kindergarten, Elementary, Junior High and/or High School*

Genre: Poetry

Time frame: *One (or more) 60 min period(s)*

Objective: To compose original “found” poems using word and phrase fragments cut from newspapers, magazines, discarded books, recycled handouts, flyers, old manuscripts, and/or any number of printed text sources that can be cut up in advance.

Prior knowledge and skills: None

Required materials: Cut words, construction paper and/or cardstock, liquid glue or gluesticks, distribution methods for the liquid glue (such as plastic food lids and toothpicks or other). Optional additional materials: images from magazines

Literary model: n/a

Sequence of activities:

1. **(5 min)** Explain to the students that they’re going to be creating their own poems using the words and phrases cut out from magazines, newspapers, etc. They’ll each receive a pile of the words from a diverse variety of sources. Alternatively, you can give students the raw pages of magazines, but I find the writing process is much more direct and efficient if they are supplied with the words in advance. For younger students, it is best to pre-cut the words, and to choose words that students are able to read or will understand the meaning of if helpers read them aloud to the students. It is also best for younger students if the size of the cut words is on the larger side; tiny print will be difficult for them to manipulate confidently. Older students can manage smaller font sizes, but it is equally important when cutting out words and phrases to provide a selection that they will find meaningful, interesting, and school appropriate. I also separate out a different bag or envelope of “connector words” like “and,” “a,” “the,” “but,” and so on so they are a bit easier to find when students are looking for them.
2. **(2 min)** Once the students receive their pile of words, instruct and demonstrate how to turn all the pieces right side up so they can see all their options spread out on the table or desk in front of them. If they are working with magazine or newspaper cut-outs, mention that often there are words on both sides of the paper, so they can choose which side to use in that case.

3. **(20-30 min)** After the words and phrases they have received are viewable, explain they will now have some time to slide the cut words around on the desk surface to see how to arrange the words or phrases into new lines or sentences. For the very young or pre-literate writer, it may be necessary for students to get some help reading the words aloud. For older students, it might be helpful to provide a suggested line count so they don't immediately finish after 2 minutes. You can also provide other forms or structures to compose within to add to the challenge, such as to write a haiku or sonnet, or ask them to choose a syllable count for each line or introduce rhyme or another kind of formal structure to the process, such as alliteration, personification, or a shape poem (putting the words on the page into an interesting shape that relates in some way to the content of the poem).
4. **(10 min)** While the composition process is underway, provide students with glue in various or available forms (gluesticks or wet glue with a distribution method provided - I have given toothpicks to even the very young to use as a tool to spread liquid glue onto the backs of the small papers) so they can begin to glue down the words in their chosen sequence onto a paper surface, such as cardstock, construction paper with a high-contrast color to the cut words, such as black or purple, or, even just regular 8.5" x 11" printer paper.
5. Provide the opportunity for students to read their work aloud, offer a chance for them to create a temporary gallery walk so they can read and view one another's creations, or invite them to display their finished creations in a classroom space. You can also choose to have them turn their work into the cover of a composition notebook and affix a protective tape or modge podge over it to keep it from falling apart with use. You can also have older students type up their finished poems and add them to a portfolio of work, as in a creative writing class.

Additional Notes:

If time or interest allows, students can first create a "background" of a visual collage in advance of composing their poems. You can provide whole magazines or pre-selected magazine pages that will suit your class's aesthetic interests, and allow time for students to first cut out and glue down these images onto cardstock or construction paper before they also glue down their cut words.

For the very young, it may be more important to focus on allowing students to simply play with the words and glue them on the page in whatever manner makes sense to them, as these tasks working with letters and words can be a step towards developing emerging literacy skills.

For older students, the composition technique often provides a stepping stone to elevate students' diction and syntax, while still being an essentially original piece of student writing.

You can discuss the concept of “found poetry” as being poems that are composed from the words of others, but which in a new arrangement (and in a small enough unit of reproduction), become the original thinking of the new author.

You can also refer to “ransom notes” as a conceptual framework, not so much for the content as for the visual appearance of a piece of writing composed in a collage format.

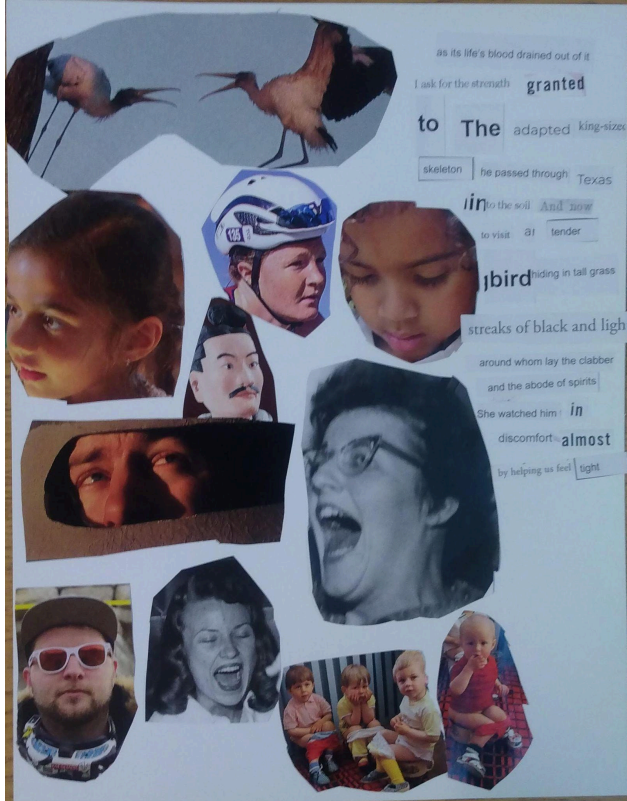
Gallery of Sample Student Work
8th Grade Middle School Students:



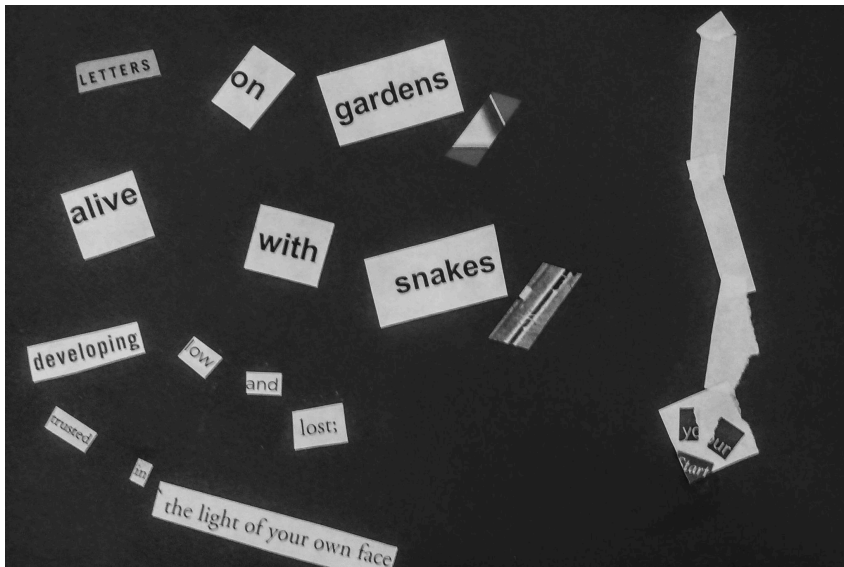
Celeste St. Fleur Rrustemaj



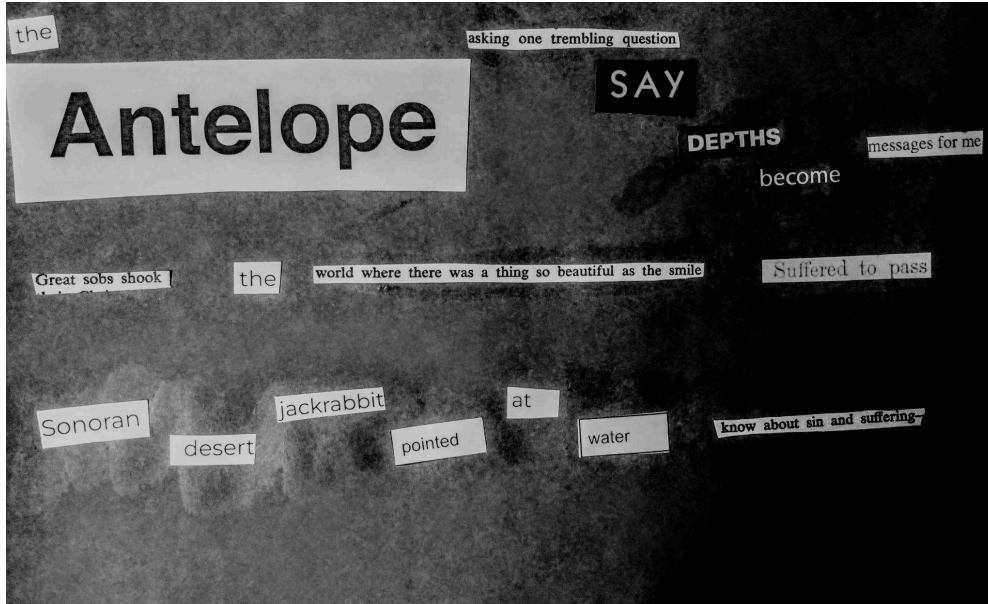
Hayleigh Dubay



Mitchell Drainer



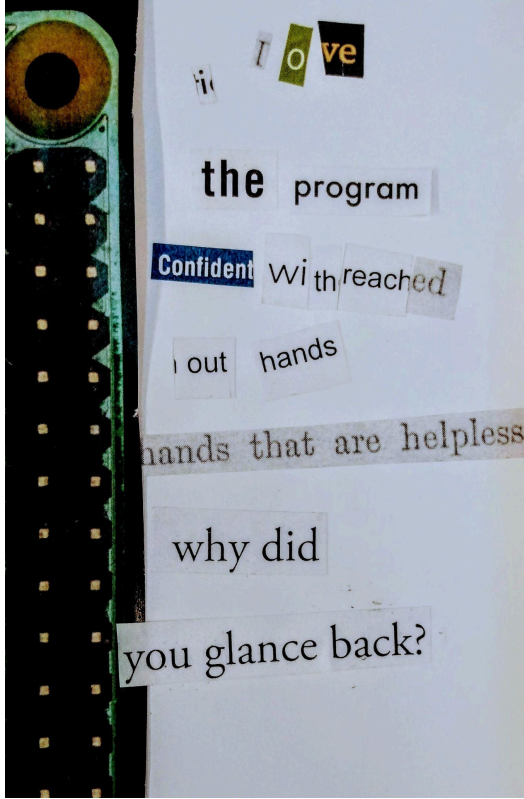
Kyle Campbell



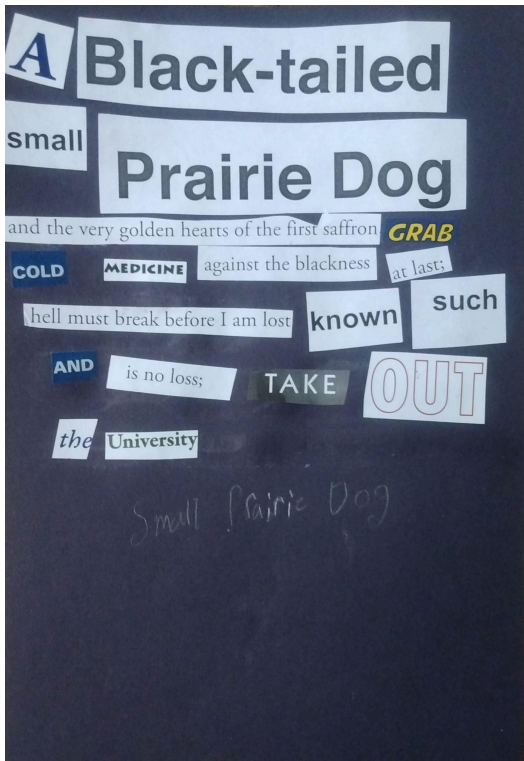
Lily Sierra



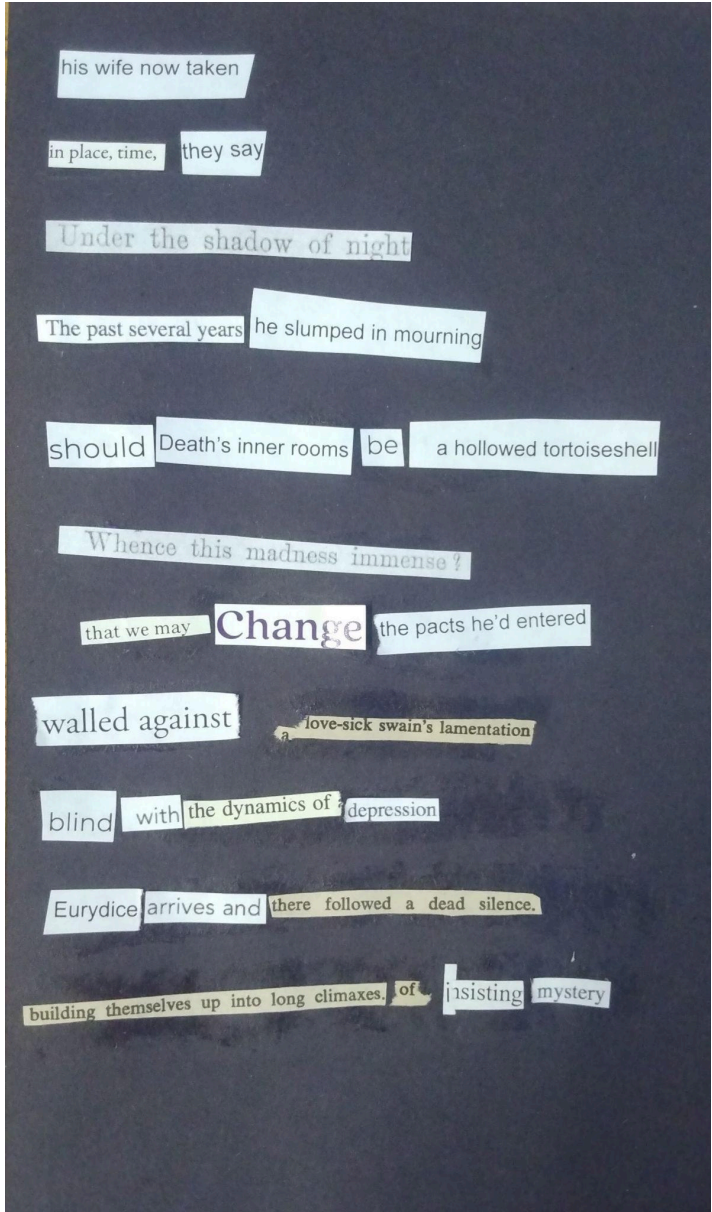
Kimberly Polk



Sophie Dickson



Alexander Perilla

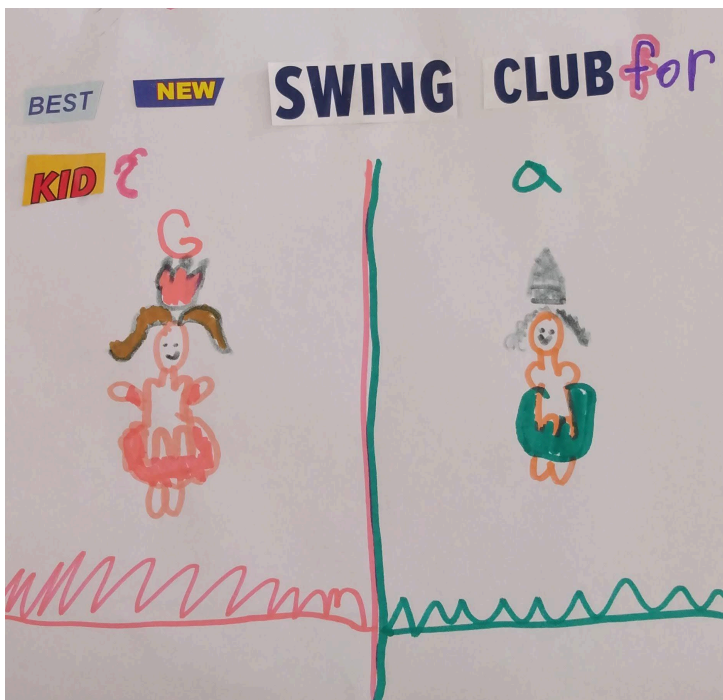


Roman Delgado

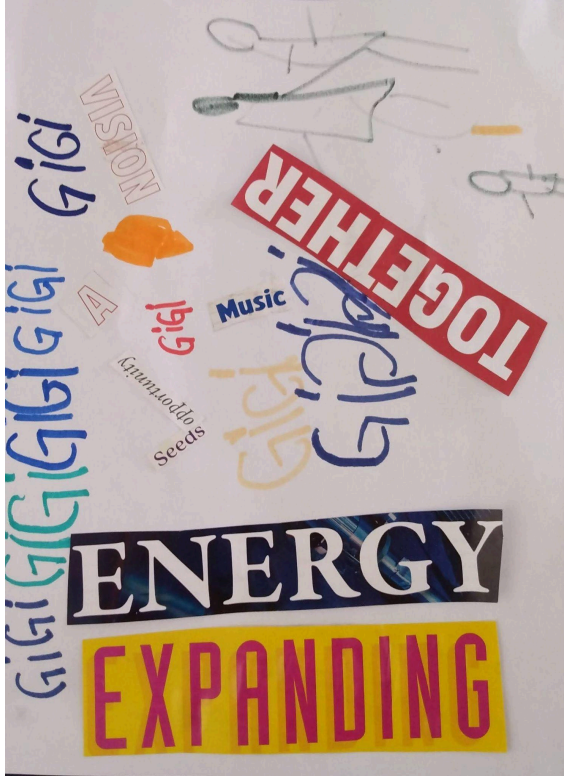
Kinder and First Grade Students:



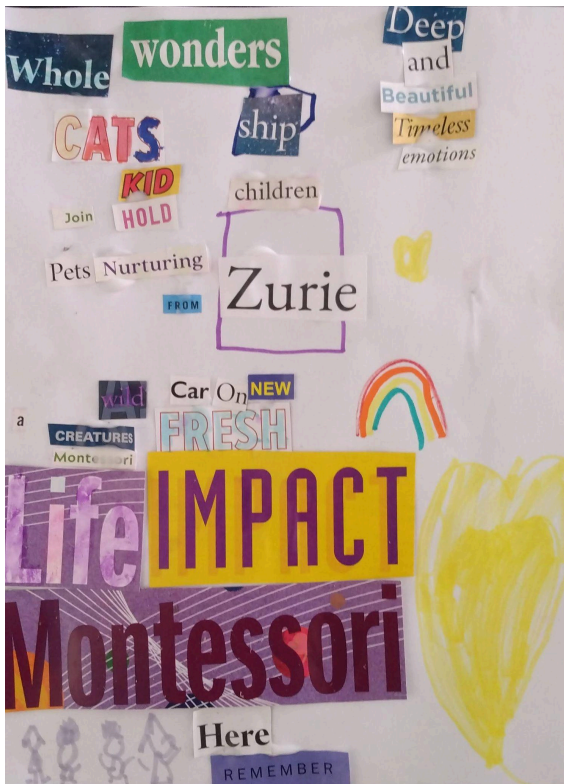
Davian Rivera



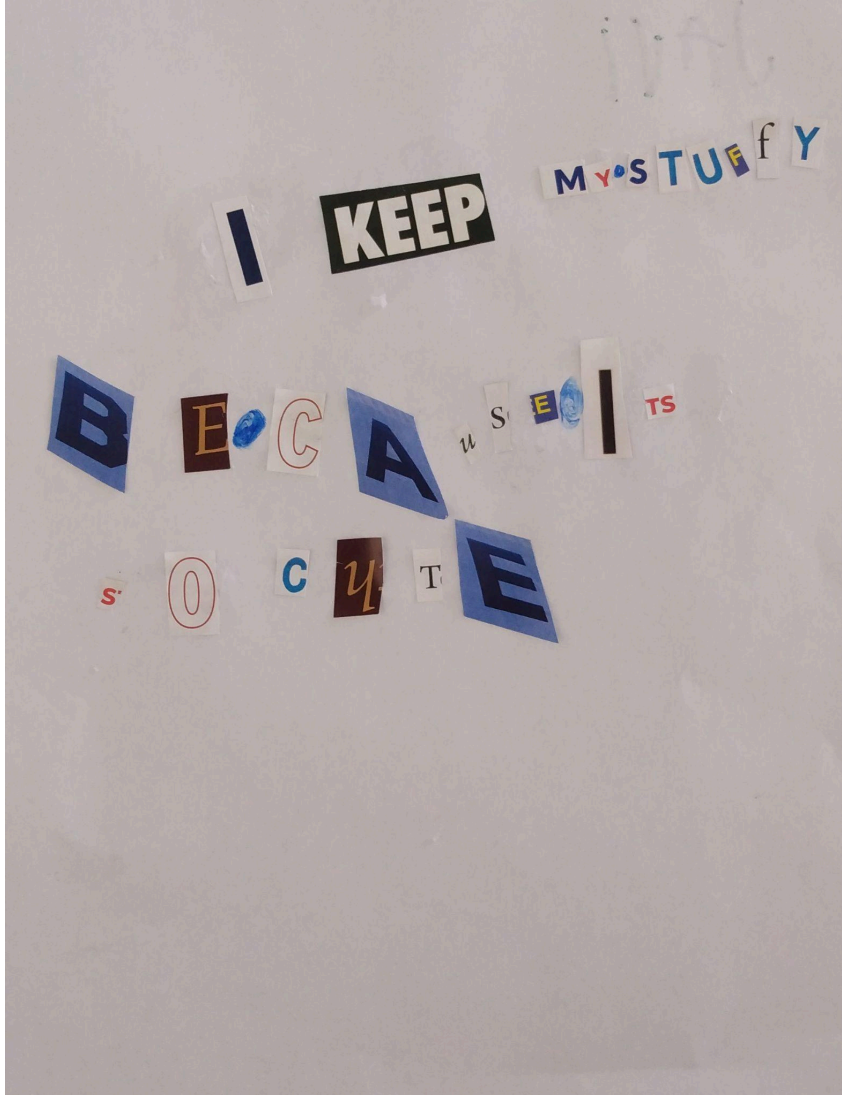
Leilani Mariles-Perez



Gigi Marquez



Zurie Burzley



Javi Celaya-Bruce