

Scavenging for Words with Erasure

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Grade level: 7th

Time Frame: 45-50 minutes

Learning Objectives: We will discuss that language is everywhere and that we can draw from unlikely sources. We will also discuss, and perhaps this is the more important lesson, that as poets we are word “scavengers”—we skim language around us and select words and phrases that stick out to us. Words—whether spoken or written—are all around us. I will explain that it is our job today to skim/scavenge the words we like!

Literary Models: Mary Ruefle’s *A Little White Shadow*, excerpts taken from pages 9-11 and 15-18; and Hoa Nguyen’s poem “Autumn 2012 Poem” from *Tells of the Crackling*.

Required Materials: Poster board with sample text from Katherine Paterson’s *Bridge to Terabithia*, pages 30-31; several scrap pieces of text; markers

Sequence of Activities:

Classroom set up:

Hang up *Bridge to Terabithia* text for us to skim/scavenge; hang up literary model, Mary Ruefle’s *A Little White Shadow*; set up the different types of sources in the back into easy-to-grab piles

Introduction One: Words Are All Around Us (5 minutes)

I will ask the students to think of all the things they did that morning before arriving at school: maybe they got up for a glass of water, then ate breakfast, etcetera. I will ask them to think about their process of getting ready in the morning and ask if at any point in that process they remember reading any words. I will remind them that this might include words we forget about: the words on a tube of toothpaste, a cereal box, on street signs. This will be an important preliminary brainstorm session.

Introduction Two: Skimming and Scavenging (5-10 minutes)

We will discuss that poets are *word scavengers* and search for words everywhere they go: in the grocery store, on TV, etcetera. Poets scavenge their words from several kinds of *sources*: from

books, overheard conversations, the directions of how to lather your hair on a shampoo bottle, and more.

Literary Model Part One (5 minutes)

I will present two literary models. The first will be Noa Nguyen’s poem, “Autumn 2012 Poem” that includes a grocery list towards the end of the poem. I won’t tell them that it is a grocery list but instead ask them first from what *source* they think this poet *scavenged*.

Erasure Exercise (5 minutes)

To introduce Mary Ruefle’s erasure practice we will scavenge words from a *Bridge to Terabithia* excerpt—one of our sources. My directions will be to “roam your eyes over the text and tell me the first word your eyes land on.” I will do this for about four volunteers so that we have a number of words circled. The rest of the words will be erased!

Literary Model Part Two (5 minutes)

I will take down Mary Ruefle’s erasure poem and read it aloud. I will have the students pass the text around and after a few minutes I will be sure to ask them what they notice. *Then* we will discuss what her source is.

Individual Writing (20 minutes)

Prompt: Skim your source for words that jump out at you and circle them. Then black-out/erase the rest. The remaining words make your poem.

There will be several sources to choose from: random pages from *Bridge to Terabithia*, recipes, scientific articles, comics. Students can select their sources from the piles in the back of the classroom.