

Telling Stories in Verse: An Introduction to Narrative Poetry

This workshop is a brief introduction to long narrative poetry works (verse novels) while also reviewing/introducing a variety of poetic forms.

What is Narrative Poetry?

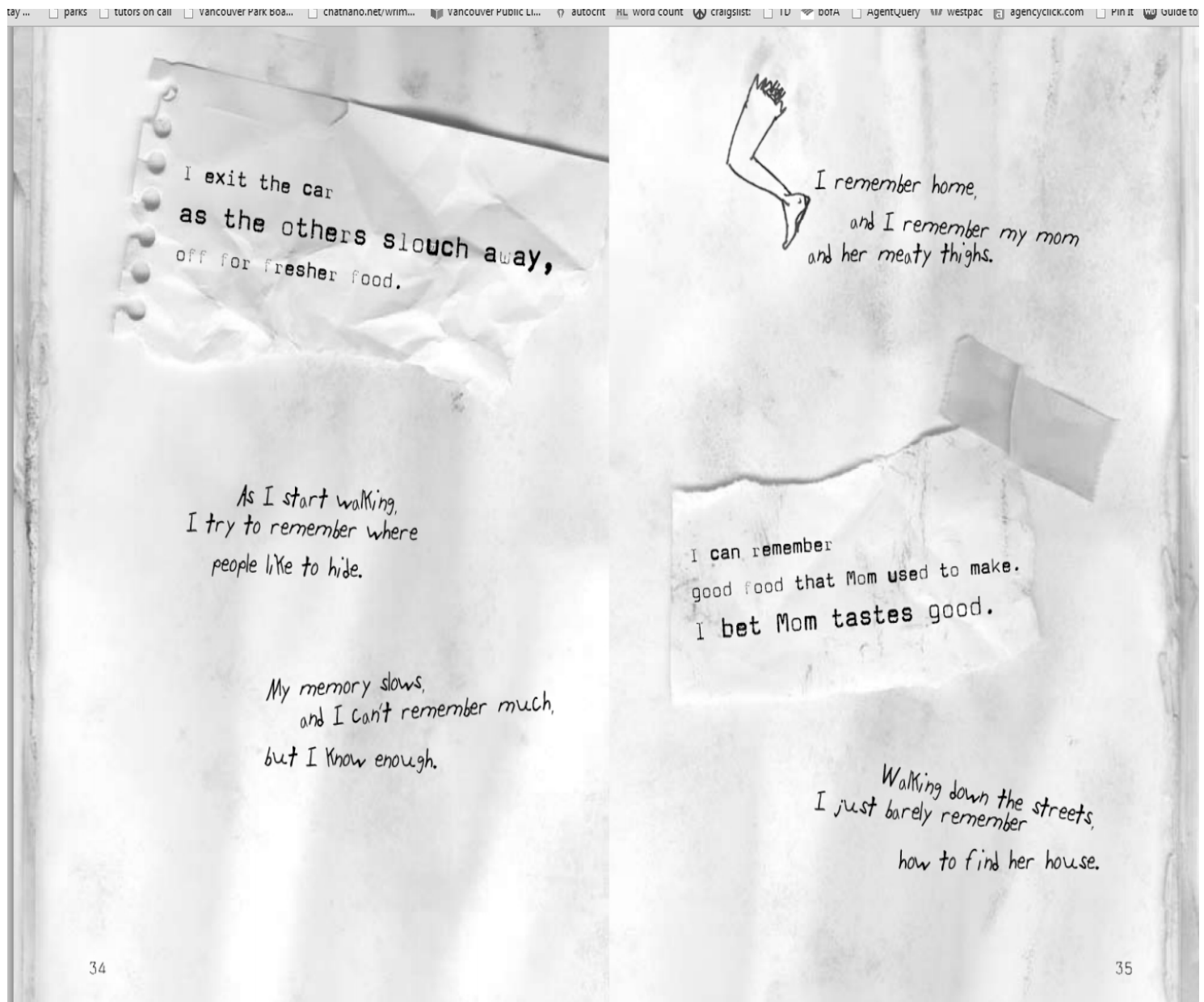
Narrative Poem	Descriptive/introspective poem
<p><i>Intimates</i> by D. H. Lawrence</p> <p>Don't you care for my love? she said bitterly.</p> <p>I handed her the mirror, and said: Please address these questions to the proper person! Please make all requests to head-quarters! In all matters of emotional importance please approach the supreme authority direct! -</p> <p>So I handed her the mirror. And she would have broken it over my head, but she caught sight of her own reflection and that held her spellbound for two seconds while I fled..</p>	<p><i>Habitation</i> by Margaret Atwood</p> <p>Marriage is not a house or even a tent</p> <p>it is before that, and colder:</p> <p>The edge of the forest, the edge of the desert the unpainted stairs at the back where we squat outside, eating popcorn</p> <p>where painfully and with wonder at having survived even this far</p> <p>we are learning to make fire</p>

Longer verse narratives typically mix narrative with descriptive/introspective verse. They are often in present tense and first person, though many contain multiple points of view.

Types of Poetry – Poetic techniques and Forms

Haiku – 17 syllables – 5, 7, 5. Traditionally Haiku are about nature but the form has been co-opted in many innovative ways.

Genre Haiku (horror from Zombie Haiku by Ryan Mecum)





Film review Haiku (above)

Haiku Queries (letters to prospective literary agents)

Dear Agent,

Raven mocks me now
"Never more" he says all night
I think I've gone mad

Signed,
Edgar (The Raven by Edgar Allen Poe)

Dear Agent,

Big fish eats swimmers
Not good for beach-going crowds
Need a bigger boat

Signed,
Peter Benchley (Jaws)

Dear Agent

Boy lives in closet
Then moves to magic castle
Then fights a dark lord.

I think this book will change publishing as we know it
and make me a billionaire. What do YOU think?

Sincerely

JKR (Harry Potter)

Dear Author,

Have query in hand
Afraid I'm not hooked by it
Don't quit your day job

Signed,
Agent

Exercise: Haiku auto-biographies/memoirs, Haiku book/film reviews/summaries, genre Haiku, haiku scene

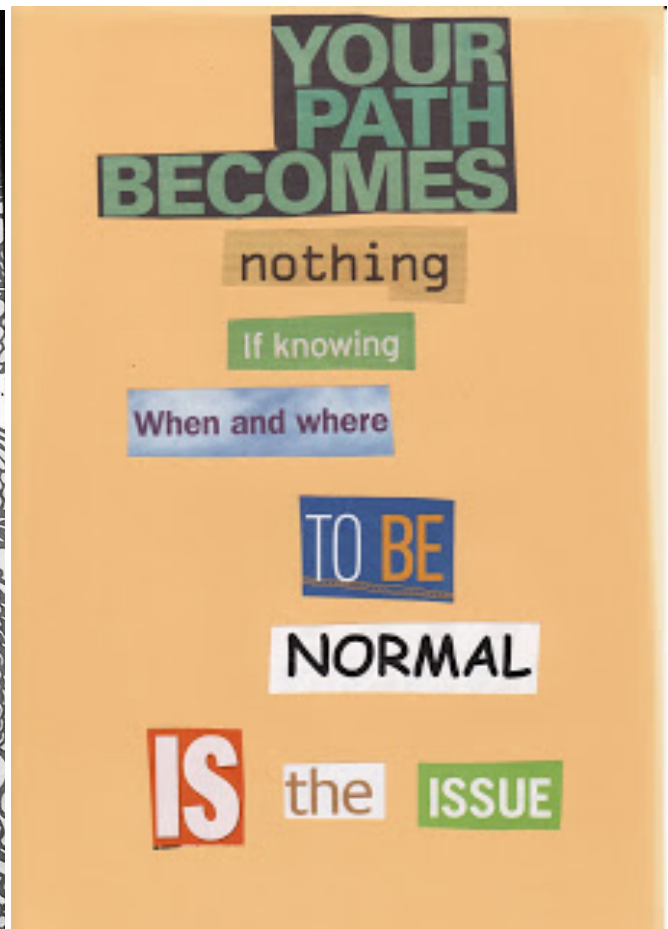
Collage poems – Subvert Advertising Messages



<http://collagepoetry.com/collagepoetry/scan0009.jpg>

<http://laughingatthesky.com/wp-content/uploads/wppa/100.jpg>

Exercise: create a collage poem using pages, phrases and words cut from magazines.



<http://collagepoet.blogspot.ca/2012/09/self-reincarnation-made-from-articles.html>

<http://chickollage.blogspot.ca/2009/03/nothing.html>

Parallel Poems – Poems that mimic the form and/or themes of an existing poem

examples

Original	Parallels
<p><i>Love That Boy</i> By Walter Dean Myers</p> <p>Love that boy, like a rabbit loves to run I said I love that boy like a rabbit loves to run Love to call him in the morning love to call him “Hey there, son!”</p> <p>He walk like his Grandpa, Grins like his Uncle Ben. I said he walk like his Grandpa, And grins like his Uncle Ben. Grins when he’s happy, When he sad, he grins again.</p> <p>His mama like to hold him, Like to feed him cherry pie. I said his mama like to hold him. Like to feed him that cherry pie. She can have him now, I’ll get him by and by</p> <p>He got long roads to walk down Before the setting sun. I said he got a long, long road to walk down Before the setting sun. He’ll be a long stride walker, And a good man before he done.</p>	<p><i>Love That Dog</i>, from LOVE THAT DOG a novel in verse by Sharon Creech</p> <p>Love that dog, like a bird loves to fly I said love that dog like a bird loves to fly Love to call him in the morning love to call him “Hey there, Sky!”</p> <p><i>Love That Instrument</i> <i>Inspired By Walter Dean Myers's</i> <i>'Love That Boy'</i></p> <p>Love that instrument like my fingers love to dance on string I said I love that instrument like my voice loves to have a ring Love to play on ukulele strings Love to call my instrument 'Hey there, my ukulele instrument! '</p> <p>Fox Tail</p>

Original	Parallels
<p>A Pact</p> <p>I make a pact with you, Walt Whitman - I have detested you long enough. I come to you as a grown child Who has had a pig-headed father; I am old enough now to make friends. It was you that broke the new wood, Now is a time for carving. We have one sap and one root - Let there be commerce between us.</p> <p>Ezra Pound</p> <p><i>The Road Not Taken</i> by Robert Frost</p> <p>Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could not travel both And be one traveler, long I stood And looked down one as far as I could To where it bent in the undergrowth;</p> <p>Then took the other, as just as fair, And having perhaps the better claim Because it was grassy and wanted wear, Though as for that the passing there Had worn them really about the same,</p> <p>And both that morning equally lay In leaves no step had trodden black. Oh, I kept the first for another day! Yet knowing how way leads on to way I doubted if I should ever come back.</p> <p>I shall be telling this with a sigh Somewhere ages and ages hence: Two roads diverged in a wood, and I, I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference.</p>	<p><i>John Cretchly Collegiate High School</i> (from AUDACIOUS by Gabrielle Prendergast, 2013)</p> <p>It screams BUILT IN 1962! Low, bland, utilitarian. Like a cheap frying pan. The flag waves listlessly on a rusty pole.</p> <p>I still have Walt Whitman on my mind.</p> <p>I make a pact with you John Cretchly (whoever you are), I say I have screwed around long enough. I come to you a reformed girl, in mismatched shoes Who has a softhearted father and a resolute mother. I'm perplexed enough to try again I don't know what you did To deserve a school named after you. But now that you are words carved into stone I will try to learn from you.</p> <p><i>The Sidewalk Less Travelled</i> (from CAPRICIOUS by Gabrielle Prendergast)</p> <p>There are two ways back to my house I could skirt the park and cross the footbridge by The mansions with their water sucking lawns Grab the express bus to the coffee shop And take a short walk up our street.</p> <p>Or I could board the winding bus, Whitmore And take a tour of familiar places School, the spot where Samir and I ate baklava And the graveyard where Charlotte rests What difference would it make?</p> <p>I choose the first way, the walk Will do me good, the fresh night air The quiet streets, excited crickets Though the other route to be honest Probably involves as much walking.</p> <p>One day I might look back and wonder Why I took this way tonight of all nights I could have done my usual meandering Instead I point myself like a ship's prow And make landfall in front of Genie's house.</p>

Try to parallel one or more of the below poems**Ozymandias** by Percy Bysshe Shelley

I met a traveller from an antique land
 Who said: `Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
 Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
 Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
 Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
 Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
 The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
 And on the pedestal these words appear --
 "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
 Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
 Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
 Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
 The lone and level sands stretch far away.'

How Do I Love Thee? Elizabeth Barrett
Browning

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
 I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
 My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
 For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
 I love thee to the level of every day's
 Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
 I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
 I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
 I love with a passion put to use
 In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
 I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
 With my lost saints, -- I love thee with the breath,
 Smiles, tears, of all my life! -- and, if God choose,
 I shall but love thee better after death.

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
(Sonnet 18)

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
 And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
 And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
 And every fair from fair sometime declines,
 By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
 Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
 When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.
 So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

William Shakespeare

I'm nobody! Who are you?

I'm nobody! Who are you?
 Are you nobody, too?
 Then there's a pair of us -- don't tell!
 They'd banish -- you know!

How dreary to be somebody!
 How public like a frog
 To tell one's name the livelong day
 To an admiring bog!

Emily Dickinson

Found Poetry

This is Just to Say

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

(by William Carlos Williams – not strictly a
“Found Poem” but very suggestive of the
form. Also there MANY parallel poems
based on this one. Search “This is just to
say” on Twitter)

why are Canadians|

why are canadians **afraid of the dark**

When will

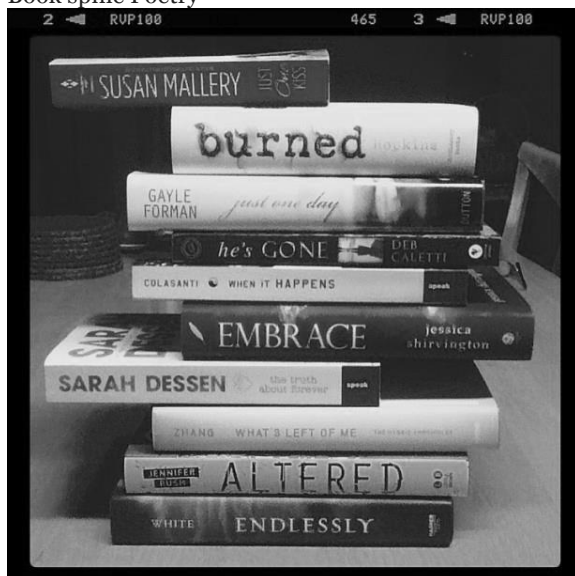
when will **save the world be free**

when will **i die**

when will **the sun die**

when will **you learn**

Book spine Poetry



and if the |

and if the **moon could talk**

and if the **sun refused to shine**

and if the **cloud bursts thunder in your ear**

i will ne|

i will **never leave you**

i will **never let you go**

i will **never let you fall**

i will **never be the same again**

but this to|

but this too **shall pass**

but to this **one i will look**

but to this **man will i look**

and say thi|

and i say **this is love**

Google Poetics (poems discovered in Google
search autofills)

An untitled **Longform Google Poem** by our reader
Cess.

www.googlepoetics.com

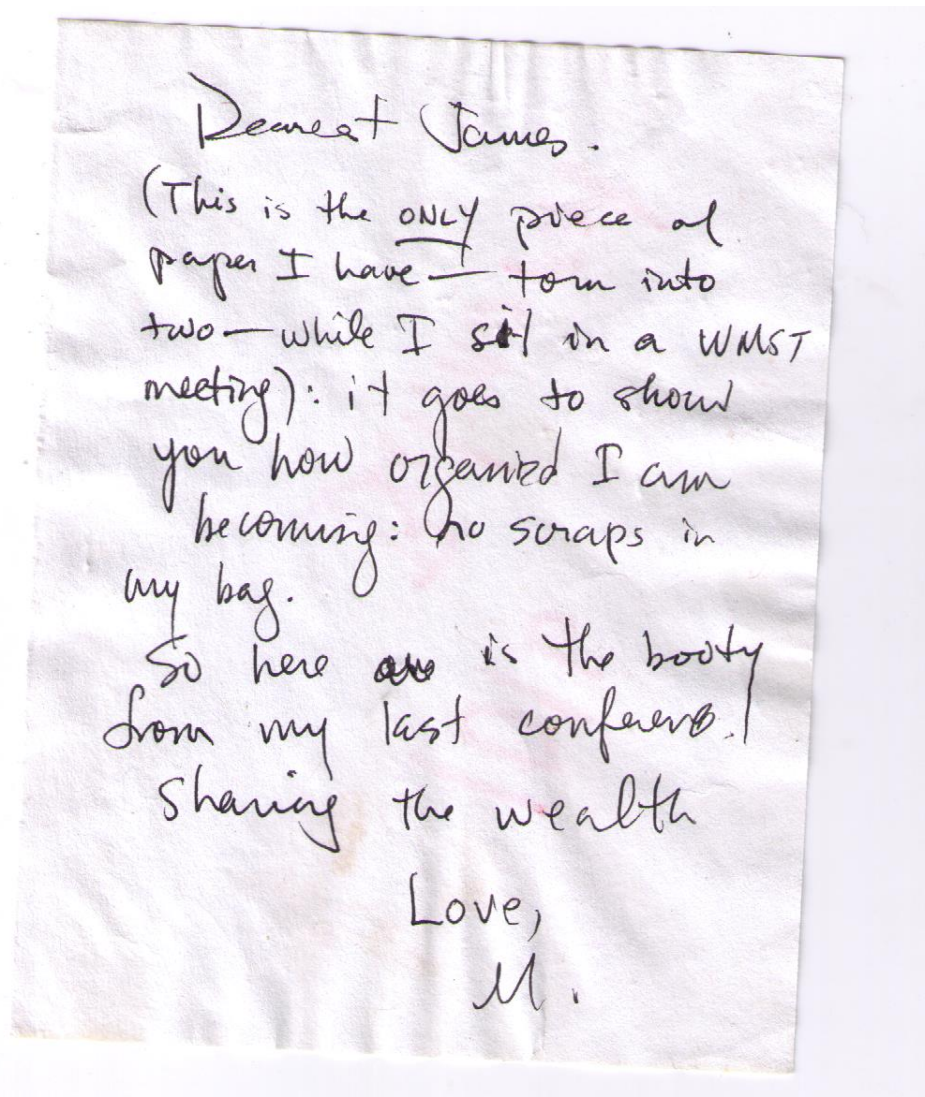
Just one kiss
Burned
Just one day
He's gone
When it happens
Embrace
The truth about forever
What's left of me
Altered
Endlessly

(<http://effortlesslyreading.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/SpinePoetry2.png>)

Found poem (note left in a 2nd hand book)

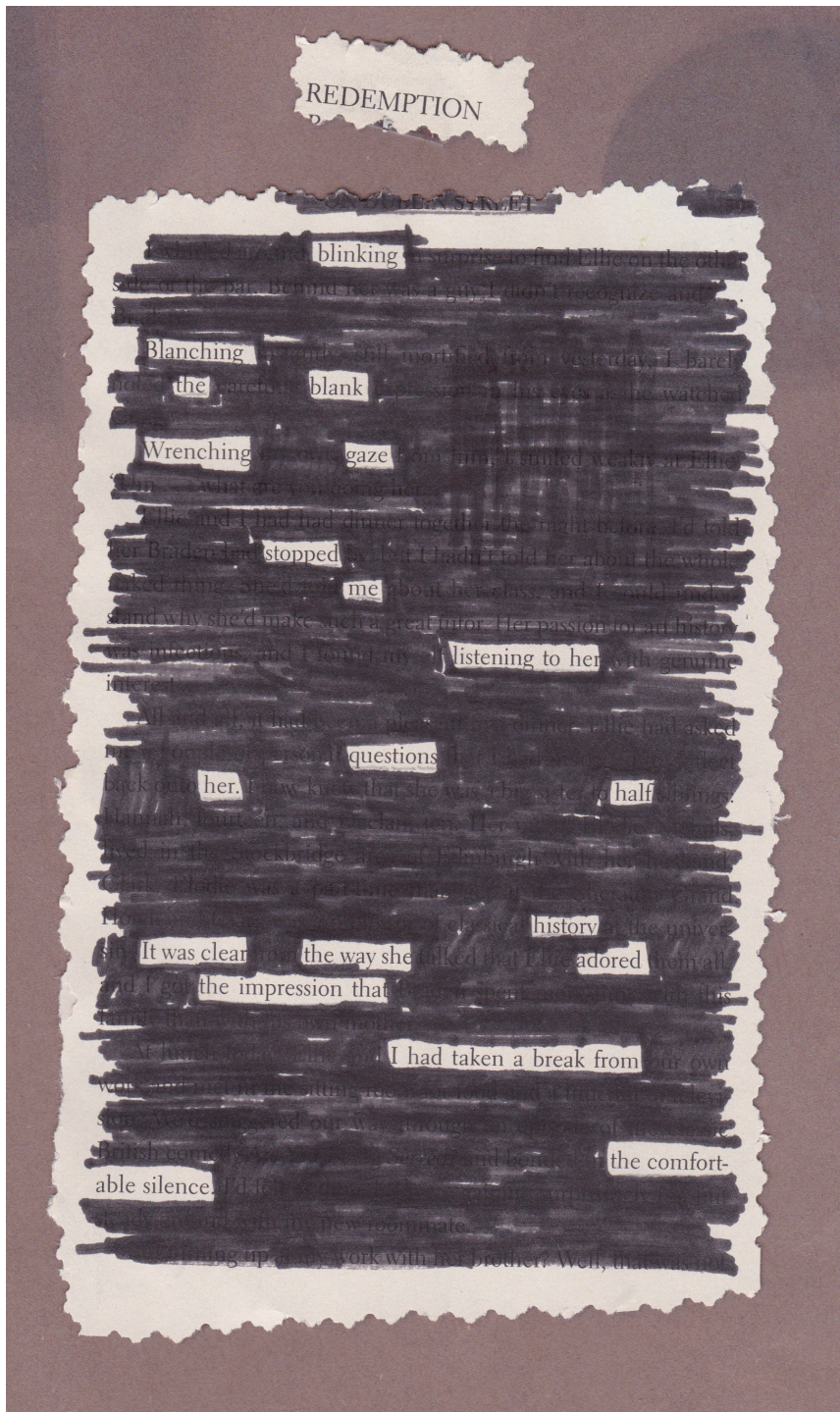
Dearest
This is the only
Piece of paper
I have.
It goes to show
How I am
Becoming
Scraps
In my bag.

© G. S. Prendergast



Erasure Poetry

“**Erasure** is a form of found **poetry** or found art created by **erasing** words from an existing text in prose or verse and framing the result on the page as a **poem**. The results can be allowed to stand in situ or they can be arranged into lines and/or stanzas. (Wikipedia)



Redemption

Blinking

Blanching

The blank

Wrenching gaze

Stopped me

Listening to her

Questions

Her half history.

It was clear the way

She adored

The impression that

I had taken a break from

The comfortable silence.

Found Poem Exercises

Beginner: Take a passage you like from a book and simply copy it out, changing the line breaks. See how line breaks can emphasize or de-emphasize words and ideas.

Intermediate – make an erasure poem from a copied page from a novel, a magazine or newspaper article.

(selected passages can be found here: <http://versenovels.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/foundpoem12.pdf>)

Advanced: Instructions adapted from “Found and Headline Poems” from *Getting the Knack: 20 Poetry Writing Exercises* by Stephen Dunning and William Stafford.

1. Carefully re-read the prose text you have chosen, and look for 50–100 words that stand out in the prose passage. Highlight or underline details, words and phrases that you find particularly powerful, moving, or interesting. Note especially examples that reflect your loving feelings or loving feelings of the subject of the prose text.
2. On a separate sheet of paper, make a list of the details, words and phrases you underlined, keeping them in the order that you found them. Double space between lines so that the lines are easy to work with. Feel free to add others that you notice as you go through the prose piece again.
3. Look back over your list and cut out everything that is dull, or unnecessary, or that just doesn’t seem right for a poem. Try to cut your original list in half.
4. As you look over the shortened list, think about the tone that the details and diction convey. The words should all relate to your theme, whatever it may be. Make sure that you have words that communicate your emotions or those of the person in the prose text.
5. Make any minor changes necessary to create your poem. You can change punctuation and make little changes to the words to make them fit together (such as change the tenses, possessives, plurals, and capitalizations).
6. When you’re close to an edited down version, if you absolutely need to add a word or two to make the poem flow more smoothly, to make sense, to make a point, you may add up to two words of your own. That’s two (2) and only two!
7. Read back over your edited draft one more time and make any deletions or minor changes.
8. Check the words and choose a title—is there a better title than “Found Poem”?
9. Copy the words and phrases into your journal or type them in a word processor. Space or arrange the words so that they’re poem-like. Pay attention to line breaks, layout, and other elements that will emphasize important words or significant ideas in the poem.

- Read aloud as you arrange the words! Test the possible line breaks by pausing slightly. If it sounds good, it's probably right.
- Arrange the words so that they make a rhythm you like. You can space words out so that they are all alone or allruntogether.
- You can also put key words on lines by themselves.
- You can shape the entire poem so that it's wide or tall or shaped like an object (say a heart?).
- Emphasize words by playing with boldface and italics, different sizes of letters, and so forth.

10. At the bottom of the poem, tell where the words in the poem came from. For example, "From UNWIND by Neal Shusterman"

Take Home Narrative Poetry Project –

Re-Telling Through Verse Novel

The verse novel or verse novel is a unique and different style on the traditional novel. Stories we read are often intense, adventurous, heartfelt, funny, or tragic. These stories lend themselves to be retold in the verse novel style. You will be selecting a novel you've read this year and turning it into a verse novel. The requirements are below. Each Re-Told Verse Novel will have the following elements:

- Title
- Front cover should have the title of the novel-in-verse and the title and author of the original work.
- The copyright date of the original work should also appear on this page.

10 Poems that include

- Titles for each
- Use a variety of forms – collage, haiku, rhyme, acrostic, free verse etc

OR

Write your own mini verse narrative with ten related poems, telling a story.

Some ideas include

- an auto-biography (your life story) or memoir of a specific time or event
- something in a specific genre such as horror or science fiction
- fan fiction based on a book you love, but taking the characters through a different story

Use a variety of forms!