

Stanzas & Free Verse

Warm-up

“Why talk and say the unsaid words in haste when silence can speak the unspoken words?”
— Ernest Agyemang Yeboah

Think about this quote from Yeboah and the idea of unspoken words; what is Yeboah trying to say here? What is meant by spoken and unspoken words?

What does this quote mean to you? What do you think of the power of unspoken words? How does the idea of unspoken words relate to poetry?

Create a short piece using this quote as your stimulus. Remember, this is just a warm-up to get the creative juices flowing. Write whatever comes naturally or to mind when thinking about this idea.

You have **5 minutes**.

A 'stanza' is what we call the differing paragraphs of a poem. In Italian, the word 'stanza' means room.

Poet Billy Collins described the stanzas of a poem as rooms of a house: "You're taking the reader on a tour of the poem, room by room, like taking someone through your house and describing it."

The use of stanzas can reveal a great deal about a poem, as the rooms of a house can reveal a great deal about the person who lives there.

Poems always have a structural framework in place. Stanzas are apart of the poems architecture. Sometimes you'll see stanzas of two lines, three lines, four lines or one long stanza.

Free verse poetry is poetry that does not follow a set rhyming scheme, meter, or pattern. In free verse poetry, stanzas can serve several purposes:

The organization of related ideas. Topics and themes discussed that are similar will often be grouped together by the poet.

A way to create a pause or add tension, or to set a mood. A break in between stanzas may signal a shift in mood or emotional tone.

A way to add emphasis to related lines. A break in the stanza can put emphasis on either the line either before or after the break.

To show one thought coming to an end and another beginning. As the poet moves onto the next thought, they might progress onto a new stanza.

Some poets use stanzas to create a shape or pattern on the page, providing a visual to the poem.

Lets take a look at some free verse poetry written in stanza and figure out why the poems have been written this way.

Sometimes I need to reach—deep like taproots
Burrowing through the darkness of hardpan dirt—

I would want to establish strength; root-like,
anchored in the hopes of solidity.

Forsake the contamination of instability.
Prove I'm the poet of each line of prose.

Who needs the weakness of low self-esteem
when your fingers can grip the heart

- Free Verse Ode to Birth or Rosebuds by Linda J. Wolff

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,

- Still I Rise by Maya Angelou

You are the kindest thing
that ever happened to me,
even if that is not how our tale is told.

When everyone else told me I was
destined to be a forgotten nymph
that nurtured flowers and turn meadows gold,

you saw that the ichor that resides in me
demanded its own throne.

You showed me

How a love like ours can turn
even the darkest, coldest realm
into the happiest of homes.

- Persephone to Hades by Nikita Gill

The most important part of incorporating the use of stanzas in free verse is that each stanza needs to have intent.

Whether it's being used for narrative, theme or performing reasons, there needs to be a reason for why a poet chooses to structure their poem in a particular way.

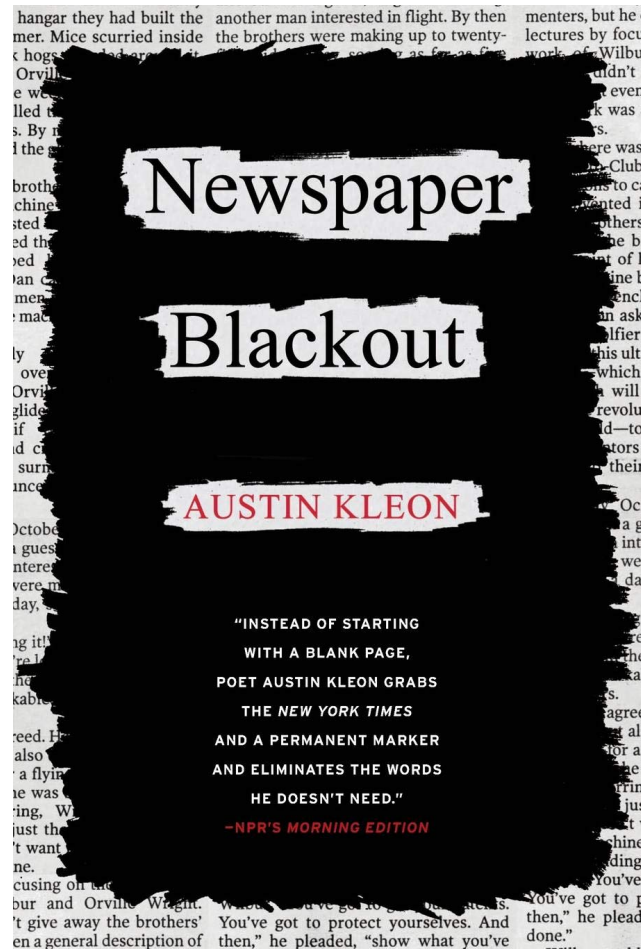
I want you to now try your own hand at writing with stanzas. You can approach this multiple ways:

Look back at one of your own previous poems – is there anything to be gained by incorporating stanza into your poem? Are there tweaks or changes that can be made to the writing itself to better the use of stanzas within it?

Or you could create an entirely new poem – this could be about anything you want it to be, what's important is that you incorporate the use of stanzas within. Do you want to use stanza for emotional or narrative reasons?

You have **7 minutes**.

We've looked at examples of stanza in free verse, but these examples still follow a line by line format. In free verse, which allows for complete create control over the structure of a poem, there are other more interesting ways to incorporate stanza.



“Newspaper Blackout” is a series of poems by Austin Kleon. The beauty of these poems is that they are not written by Kleon himself.

Kleon would take newspaper articles and black out all but a few words on the page in order to make a poem.

Through this practice, Kleon would create entirely new poems from unrelated newspaper articles. The inclusion of so much black space on the page creates an interesting and eery atmosphere for the reader.

"I mean, yes, we're sinking,"

But

the

music

is

exceptional

- Kleons most famous poem, "Overheard on the titanic".

The vast size of this
empire

has made
a target
over the
Sun

s
o
d
o
n
t

worry about

a
unified
strategy

skip over
system s

Avoid Debt

decline

anonymity

schedule

fun and

collapse

to

the

music

Nothing

is like

I

think

it

is

I

never

imagined

anger

it is the machine that kills

In the style of Austin Kleon, I want you to try your hand at what has been called 'Blackout Poetry'.

The best way to approach this exercise is to use a newspaper, magazine, or even a book you don't mind writing in. Using a sharpie, a pen, pencil, or marker, follow Kleon's idea of taking words from the original text to create a new piece of poetry.

If you want to use a piece of text that you don't want to write in, you can instead write on a separate piece of paper or device but still following Kleon's rules: Words will have to be used in the order they appear in the original text.

You have **7 minutes**.

Compassion and love go hand in hand

By Polly Castor

In Ridgefield, the clergy association, community members, and First Selectman Rudy Marconi are involved in a townwide effort to become a "City of Compassion."

More than 70 cities globally, including Danbury, have already affirmed the Charter of Compassion. While compassion cannot be legislated, I believe that encouraging it can help raise awareness of its power, necessity, and inherent blessings.

Often the idea of compassion gets mixed up with sympathy and pity. I would describe the difference with a metaphor. Imagine someone in a deep hole; pity walks by and is sorry they are down there but does nothing about it, sympathy climbs down in the hole to keep them company, but compassion lets down a ladder so they can climb out.

I think compassion is how we all want to be treated. It is inseparable from the golden rule, which is common to all religions: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

As a Christian Scientist, it is clear to me why compassion is an indispensable element of the moral code that holds civilization together. Far from being a lordly gesture from a superior to someone less fortunate,



Hearst Connecticut Media file photo

Polly Castor

nate, I believe compassion is actually born of our essential equality as children of God.

In my denomination, we look to the first chapter of Genesis in the Bible to understand ourselves. God is described there as the Creator, and we are the creation. We are made in God's "image and likeness" — all of us without exception designed to be "very good" — complete and blessed, treasured and needed.

I understand this to mean our true nature is God-like (even though we don't always act like it). Also, we refrain from attributing human qualities to God — such as being vengeful, wrathful, punitive, critical, indifferent or judgmental. Instead, Christian Scientists understand God as divine Love — good, benevolent, infinite, ever-present, and all powerful — which leaves no room for anything unlike itself.

As reflections of God, I

believe we must know what God is like (and not like), in order to know our own true identity. With God being divine Love, we as the outcome of that must be loving too. To me, this means that at the most fundamental level, compassion, or reaching out in helpful consideration and unconditional love, is our most natural state.

Why then, doesn't it seem that way? I would say this disconnect comes from misidentification; we forget who we (and others) really are. We can mistake ourselves as limited, competitive, callous beings, defending our turf in an unpredictable world.

I think it can be easy to fall into that trap, so I feel we must humbly extend empathy and patience to others who find themselves in that floundering mind set, and strive to model a better way.

It is as if each of us were made as a purely transparent pane of glass. Somehow, mud gets spewed on the window, but the mud is not us — nor is it those we look out upon. However, if we leave the mud on the glass long enough, that lack of clarity affects how we identify ourselves and how we experience the world.

So if I find myself mistaking anyone as inferior, unlucky, or unworthy, I can simply clean up my own proverbial glass, and that

remedies the problem. I get out the universal solvent of divine Love and shine up my lens, not only for myself, but for how much better everything else will look.

I've noticed that those who seem to lack compassion need only to realign with their highest purpose, which is to be a transparency for God. I have found that the more closely I live congruent to my original, spiritual origin, the easier it is to include all in that sphere of unchanging, always available, charitable love.

I don't want anyone to see me incorrectly, or treat me unkindly, because of a mired perspective. So I make darn sure my own outlook is as clear as possible. It feels great to scrub up my concept of myself as God's image and likeness, and to remember that good is available and true for everyone else as well.

That's when I've seen compassion bloom, so that I can effortlessly "love my neighbor as myself." With no one left out of the inclusive embrace of divine Love, compassion can be shared joyously and mutually.

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