

Black out poetry and book spine poetry

Both blackout poetry and book spine poetry begin from the words of other people, e.g. a book excerpt, a magazine article, book titles, etc. Upon reading your text selection or book titles, you then muse about and choose the words and phrases that speak to you...they will evolve into your own creation derived from the original source. It becomes yours as moves from text to poetry.

They are two artistic activities that use words in ways that are somewhat abstract as compared to our usual ways of using words that are carefully planned and thought out, such as

- Essay
- Novel
- Letter
- Carefully crafted poem
- Speech

These two techniques approach words in ways that reflect much of abstract art:

- No formula to follow
- Spontaneous
- Playful
- No right answer
- Integrate the “you” of today with whatever the text is (personalize)

Both can be termed “found’ poetry, erasure poetry (this gets political), redacted poetry, white-out poetry. It’s been said that these techniques are literary collage. Call it what you want.

Black out Poetry

You can find much written about blackout poetry but the current consensus is that Austin Kleon brought it to the contemporary artistic scene with his technique “Newspaper blackout poetry.” Apparently, he started it to overcome a bout of writers block. That’s not to say that there aren’t other gurus of blackout poetry....we have a couple of examples to show you, but we will begin with simple.

So what is a blackout poem?

- It is your creation derived from a piece of already existing writing, a magazine article, a book excerpt, the declaration of independence, etc etc.
- Your poem consists of the words/phrases in the text that speak to you today.
- The other words are then blacked out with a marker or crayon or paint.
- Your poem creates totally new meaning to the existing text....it is now a reflection of you.

How to create a blackout poem:

1. Select a piece of text (start short and not too technical)
2. Skim the article
3. Circle in pencil the words or phrases that speak to you today. Keep your eraser handy.
4. Take another look and see if other words pop out for you.
5. With a marker, trace a box around the words you've selected.
6. Go back and look for words that might help your thoughts hang together into a poem, e.g. and, like, a, an, the, if
7. You can also use parts of a word, such as using "just" from the word "justice"
8. Also you can combine letters from two words to make one word that you want.
9. Once you are sure that these are the words you want for your poem, take your sharpie to cover ("black out) all the other words on the page.
10. Don't be afraid of too much black....it's part of your art.

Book Spine Poetry

For book spine poetry all you need is a stack of 5 or 6 books, a pencil and/or a pen. And your loose imagination.

A book spine poem is a poem that you write using the words on the book spines as inspiration. You are not limited to those words...they are merely jumping off points and serve to inspire your thoughts and feelings of the moment. It is your imagination and who you are today that embellish and bring new meaning to the book titles.

Since the titles are the starting point, the first question is often about whether the books are picked randomly or with some thought about how the titles relate to your thoughts and feelings and interests. There is no one right answer, but it seems that if you pick books from YOUR bookshelf, then they will resonate with you. Well, unless you hated the book and haven't passed it on or sold it at Powell's.

How to create a book spine poem:

1. Select and stack approximately 5 or 6 books with the titles facing you.
2. They can be stacked in any order.
3. Make a quick drawing of the stack of book titles.
4. Start to write your poem using the words in any way, in any order, that resonates with you.
5. You don't need to use all the words and of course you can add as many words/phrases as you like as your poem begins to take shape.

6. When is it finished? You'll know

A book spine poem tells a piece of your life story at this moment in time. The poem you write today from this stack of books would likely be very different from what you might write tomorrow or next week or next year. Though the stack of books may remain the same, the fluidity of your life will create different poetry.

Written by Andrea Baker
January 2022