

Blackout Poems to Engage Young Readers, Teré Fowler-Chapman
Grade Level: 9-12th Grade

I wanted to honor these times by including the lesson plan format and idea I used when working with incarcerated youth. Specifically, students that have limited to no computer access, make-up work for students unable to attend school for extended periods, and more.

*When students are reading novels, I enjoy using blackout poems to engage students in the reading. I like to use these after introducing a writer, to allow students to pick out words and connect their own lives to the writer. **Instead of choosing an excerpt, try to locate an interview or article about the writer!***

Materials:

- A writer-related news article (For example: ["How a Kid Who Didn't Read a Book Until He Was 17 Grew Up to Become a Literary Star" by Nora Krug | Washington Post](#))
- The worksheet below

Student Needs:

- Pencil
- Black marker, pen

Workshop Time:

- Asynchronous time varies

Hey there!

I get your first sets of poems on Monday! I can't wait, and it feels like it's taking forever. How are you holding up?

Next week you can expect this letter to include group feedback, a couple of lines from classmates that stuck out to me, and the rest will be a personal response to letters I've received.

A quick update: I've been finding poems everywhere and in everything. In the time of waiting for your words, a poem on silence. In collaborations with visual artists, poetry in their images. There are the stories in books, and then there are the words that jump out of them! Poems!

I'm wondering are you finding poems too? Am I confusing you? Let me explain this week's poem.



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First, let's look at this excerpt from another one of Jason Reynolds's books. Before we do that, though, sometimes it helps to see the writer. If you haven't seen Jason, he looks like this:



He wrote this book called “Ghost” that I’m currently reading—it’s excellent. Below is a page from the book! I wonder, when you look at this page, what do you see? Check the story and circle your answer.

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make sure we all knew each other, or at least make sure all the vets knew the newbies. I was still standing back, sort of outside the circle, as Coach started rattling off everybody's name.

"On the girls' side, for the vets we have Myisha Cherry, Brit-Brat Williams, Melissa Jordan, Dee Dee Gross, Krystal Speed . . ." Any girl with the last name Speed had to be fast. Kinda like any dude with the last name Bolt. Coach continued, "Deja Bullock, Lynn Tate, Kondra Fulmer, Nicky McNair." He paused and motioned toward the last girl. "And our newbie for the girls, Patina—but she told me a few minutes ago that she goes by Patty—Jones." Everybody clapped. "Patty, I got high hopes for you, young lady. Let's make it happen."

Then he started calling out the boys' names. First, the vets. "Eric Daye, Curron Outlaw, Aaron Holmes, Mikey Farrar, Freddy Hayes, Josh 'J.J.' Jerome, and Chris Myers. You boys better look out for our newbies, Lu Richardson, Sunny Lancaster . . ." And this was when Coach turned to me. "And as of yesterday, this kid. Castle Cran—"

"Ghost," I cut him off before he could even get the

shaw out. "Just call me Ghost."

Coach gave me a look. Actually, everybody gave me a look. Probably because I didn't have no shirt on, and my pants were rolled to my knees, and my belt was yanked so tight that it made the denim bunch around my waist like genie pants. But whatever.

"I was gonna tell them that, son," Coach said. Then he turned back to the rest of the team. "Lastly, this is your assistant coach, Coach Whit." Coach Whit was the woman with the braids. She also had chubby cheeks, and like I said, she looked too old to be on the team, but she definitely didn't look old enough to be nobody's coach. Then she pulled a whistle from underneath her sweatshirt, so that pretty much meant she was.

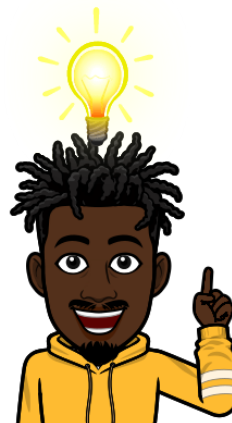
"Give it up for your squad," Coach told us, slapping his hands together. "This is gonna be a great season!" Everybody cheered and clapped for maybe ten seconds before Coach shut it down and told us it was time to get to work.

He divided everyone up into whatever their specialty was. Because most of the other kids had been running track for, like, forever, Coach knew who was a sprinter,

Page 59



A. I see a story, duh.

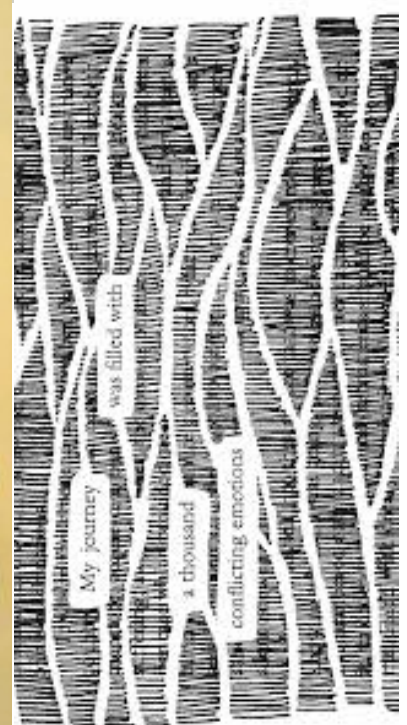
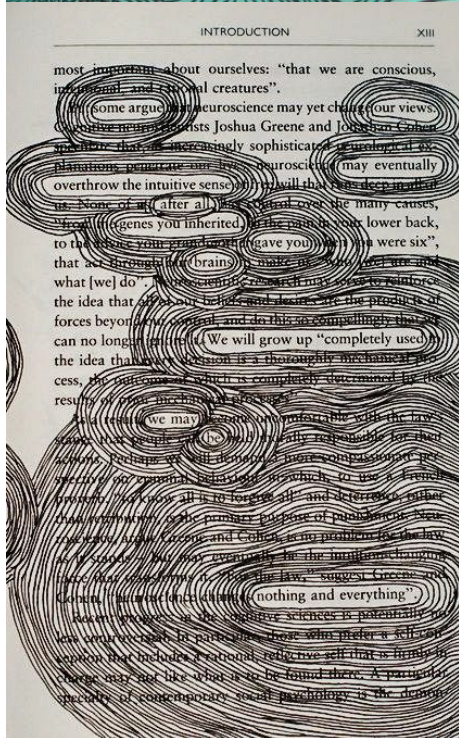
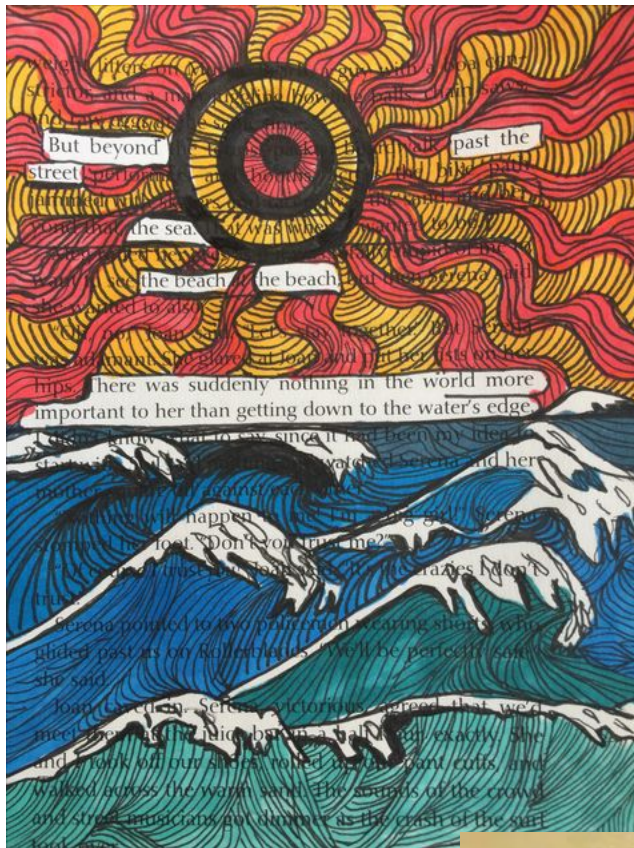


B. I see something else.

Here's another thing about poetry, it's not so much of *what* you see but *how* you see it. Some poets see these words, and they don't see a story at all. Some poets see a story, and to be honest, both perspectives are correct. This week let's talk about the ones that see something else, the ones that see a blank page in these words.

Go to the next page to see what I am talking about.

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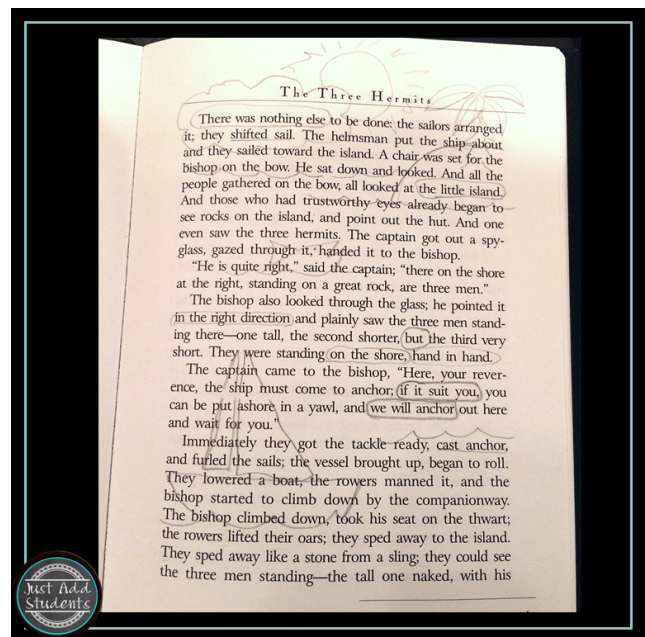
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Pretty cool, right? Circle your favorite poem and explain why that one caught your attention.

We call these **blackout poems aka erasure poems**. In these poems, a poet takes their “pen” (or pencil) and creates a poem out of the already established text—like a page of a book, newspaper, or something like that. **The key thing with a blackout poem is that the text AND redacted (or blacked out) text form a sort of visual poem.** Follow the instructions below to complete this poem.

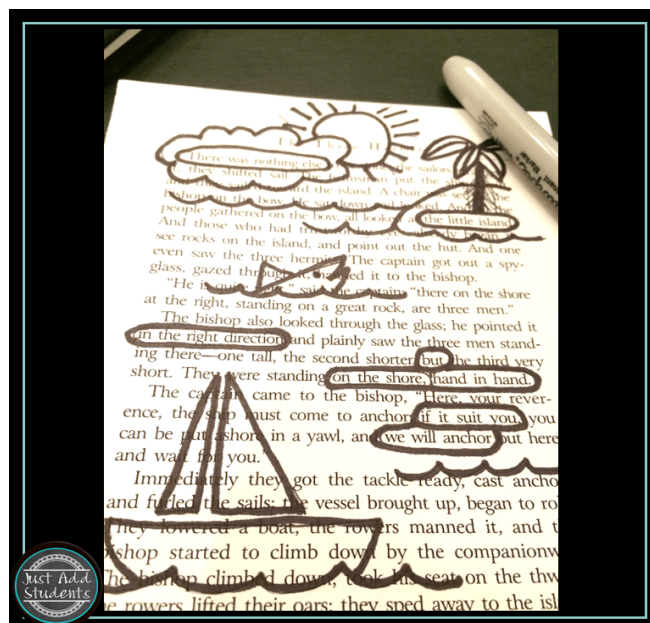
1. First, **read the attached news article.** Using a pencil, lightly circle any words that jump out to you.
2. **Read through the list of words/phrases circled.** Circle additional words create a poem with the words from step one.



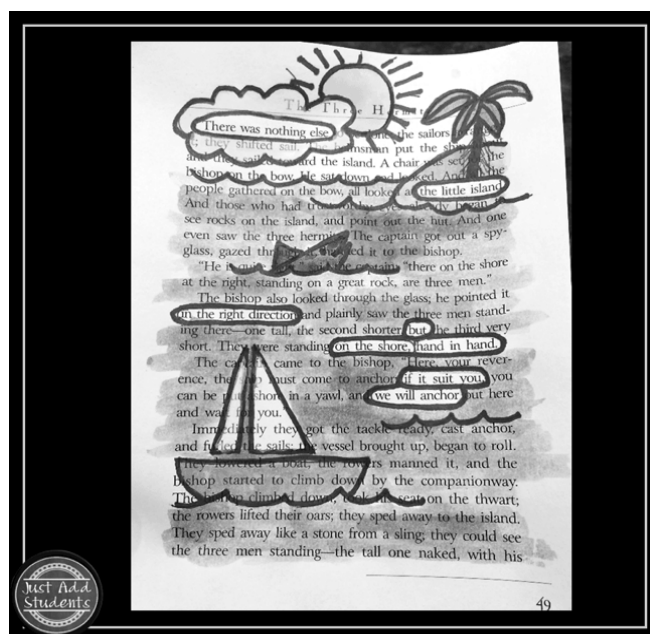
Tip: Remember, we read from top to bottom and left to right, so the words need to be in that order so the reader will understand the poem in the same way the writer wants.

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3. Use your black marker (or pencil) to darken the circles around the lines of words that make up your poem.
4. In the area that is not circled, sketch an image that relates to the poem.



5. Use your pencil (or marker/pen) and shade (or **blackout**) any areas around your poem and image.



Poem Checklist!

Please check these boxes and double-check your work before turning in your poem:

- ☐ I have blacked out words I don't need to create a clear message
- ☐ I have created images that relate to this poem.
- ☐ I have only turned in my blacked-out poem and letter
- ☐ I have only turned in my letter and my poem