

Rare Bird Erasure

Inspired by *Rare and Elusive Birds of North America*, a book by William Burt
by Saraiya Kanning

Grade Level: High School, Middle School

Time Frame: 60 minutes

Objective: To use words from a book on rare birds to “treasure hunt” for words that can be recycled into a new poem.

Required materials: Copied pages of William Burt’s *Rare and Elusive Birds of North America* OR copies from another book that the instructor thinks would make good word-finding material, pencil, sharpies, markers, oil pastels, other art supplies with which to “decorate” the poem page.

Sequence of Activities:

Introduce the idea of an erasure poem (5 minutes)

Erasure poems use words from another source to create a new poem. Poets.org provides a useful description: “Erasure poetry, also known as blackout poetry, is a form of found poetry wherein a poet takes an existing text and erases, blacks out, or otherwise obscures a large portion of the text, creating a wholly new work from what remains.”

Today we’ll use a page from the book *Rare and Elusive Birds of North America* to search for a new ordering of just a few words, thereby creating our own poem!

Share examples with the students. This can include examples the instructor has made or examples from the below links:

<https://www.dreampoppress.net/lisa-huffaker/>

<https://www.dreampoppress.net/kt-herr/>

<https://www.dreampoppress.net/rachel-shabalin/>

Notice how these poets circled just a few words to create new meaning from the text, then used art to black out or “erase” the remaining text.

Individual Time to Create! (30-40 minutes)

Each student receives a copied page from the book. They should then circle 5-10 words to create new phrases, sentences, and thoughts. They need not read the whole page or understand what the page is about. Instead, they should think of this as a word hunt, a treasure hunt! Which words stand out to them? Which words would sound interesting in a poem? Are there strings of words that work well together? Remind them that

occasionally using “and” or “is” can help the poem flow. Remind students not to randomly circle words – the words they choose should make sense in some way when read together. The meaning can still be abstract, but each chosen word or phrase should interact in some way with the chosen words that precede and follow. Students can even use arrows, as shown in one of the examples, to help the reader know the order and flow of the words selected from the text.

Once the words are circled or singled out in some way (a box works too), students should use the art materials to create images, patterns, or designs around the words. They should be careful not to cover the words they have selected. Any art material that is available works for this part of the lesson, including but not limited to:

markers and sharpies
crayons
collage
paint

Share (15 minutes)

Invite students to share their work with one another. They can leave their erasures at their table and walk around and look at each peer’s work (like an exhibit).

Modified Lesson for Visual Impairment:

Provide text in braille. Students can then circle their chosen words/phrases using puff paint or some other raised paint-like material. Students can use textured objects, beads, and paper to create the art surrounding their chosen braille words. Puff paint takes several hours to dry, so this lesson plan is best suited for several small sessions.