NATIONAL POETRY LIBRARY

Exploring Visual Poetry

An introduction for schools

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

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Introduction to the National Poetry Library

Did you know there's a hidden treasure tucked away on Level Five of the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall? It's a library packed with poetry-related delights – including books, pamphlets, zines and even sculptures.

The National Poetry Library houses the world's largest collection of modern poetry. It is London's only space solely dedicated to the study of poetry. Founded by the Arts Council in 1953, it was opened by the poets TS Eliot and Herbert Read. It moved location several times before settling at the Southbank Centre in 1988, a relocation led by the poet Seamus Heaney.

The library's mission is to promote modern and contemporary poetry. It does this by providing free access to its collection through loans, research, events, workshops and exhibitions. It's free to join. If you want to know more about how your class and school can use the library, there's more information at the end of this resource.

The Poetry Library contains thousands of different types of poems, including sound poems on vinyl, poetry games and even poems in the form of code. Its collection challenges our perception of poetry and who creates it, and supports fun, engaging ways to find out more about poetry.

TS Eliot (1888 – 1965)
American writer and poet and leading figure in English Language Modernist poetry, best known for his influential poem 'The Waste Land.' Was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948.

Seamus Heaney, 1939 – 2013
Irish poet best known for his collection 'Death of a Naturalist.' Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995.

Herbert Read (1893 – 1968)
British art historian, writer and poet. Co-founder of the Institute of Contemporary Arts (the ICA).

About this resource

This resource is aimed at KS2 and KS3 teachers who want to expand their poetry curriculum. It offers interactive ways to help students engage with poetry. The focus of this resource is visual poetry. This is a type of poetry that makes use of shapes or patterns and often uses colour to extend or subvert meaning. By introducing your students to visual poetry, you can help them engage with poetry more widely, and develop their writing, analytical and creative skills.

This resource was created to support teachers taking part in the Imagine the Future project, a large-scale poetry project for Years 5, 6 and 7. It celebrates the 75th anniversary of the 1951 Festival of Britain, which marked the founding of the Southbank Centre. After the Second World War, the government funded this national festival to explore the future and celebrate innovation. The Imagine the Future project includes workshops to help students create poetry inspired by the Festival of Britain.

In this resource you'll find

- a brief history of visual poetry
- suggestions on how to help students appreciate poetry
- four suggested classroom activities
- links to further information and resources.

It includes an introduction from the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) and activities created by visual poet and poetry lecturer Astra Papachristodoulou.

About visual poetry

Visual poetry is a kind of poetry in which the shape, pattern and form of the poem on the page has as much significance as the words of the poem. In many visual poems the poem's words and its shape make each other more meaningful. The significance of the poem is playfully revealed through both reading and looking.

Our brains love to bring together what we can see and what we can read. The relationship between written and visual language is a playground for visual poets, and this poetic form can be accessible and joyful for young people to see, write and read aloud. In the words of art historian Nancy Perloff, 'visual poetry can refer to a history as old as writing itself.'[1] Throughout time, people have woven together the visual and the written, in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs as in the shape poems created by Apollinaire in the early 20th century.

In particular, the Concrete Poetry movement of the 1950s – 1970s has had a huge influence on poetry, art, music and graphic design today. Concrete poetry is a genre in which a poem's visual form is just as important as its words. Emerging in Brazil and Austria in the 1950s, this style of poetry explores the overlap between poetry and typography and can even cross over into music and sculpture. It broke down the traditional boundaries between language and other artforms and allowed poets, artists, designers and musicians to experiment. In a similar way, concrete poetry offers students an exciting way to play with words and create poetry in the classroom.

Another form of visual poetry that began in the early 20th century is erasure poetry, also known as black-out poetry or found poetry. In erasure poetry, poets take existing texts and intentionally erase words and passages to create new texts. These poems may attempt to critique or explore the original source material, or find new meaning in it. Some poets use this form of poetry to explore concealed power dynamics or experiences of oppression, as in former US Poet Laureate Tracey K Smith's 'Declaration.' This famous erasure poem takes its text from the American Declaration of Independence. You can watch Smith give a powerful performance of this poem here.

Thinking as visual poets allows us not only to use words to create art, but also, perhaps, to create new words. Visual poems can allow us to invent language or discover new meanings in the words we see everyday. This is something that poets have done for centuries.

Even brands use visual poetry to capture people's eyes and imaginations. Now it's your turn, as teachers, to explore, enjoy and share this intriguing form of poetry. We hope the enjoyment it brings you is something you'll want to pass on in your classroom.

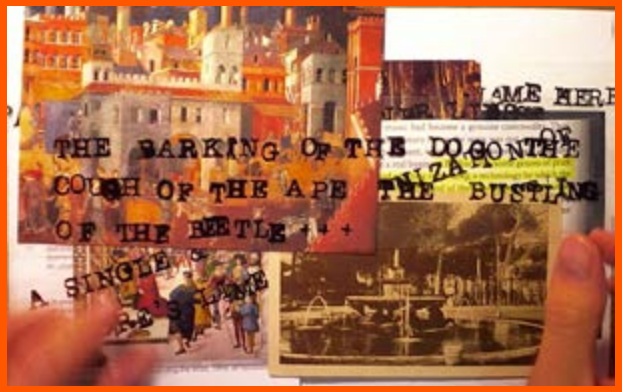
[1] Perloff, Nancy, editor. *Concrete Poetry: A 21st-Century Anthology*. Reaktion Books, 2021.

Examples of visual poets working today

‘Rosa Parks’ by Kate Wakeling uses the powerful image of a fist as a container for a poem about the civil rights activist.

Laura Mucha’s poem looks like a scientist’s petri dish. Hiding in the mould are words that might have been spoken by Alexander Fleming, the inventor of penicillin.

Writer James Wilkes layers images and words to create collage poems.



Building appreciation – exploring poetry together

Before diving into the activities, create a poetry-friendly classroom in which students see, hear and read a wide range of poets and poetry. This will increase their engagement with poetry and build a shared understanding that poetry is for everyone and can be written by everyone.

Begin by sharing your ideas about poetry as a class.

- How do you feel about poetry? What do you think of when the word poetry is mentioned?
- Which poets or poems do you know and like? Why do these poets and poems appeal to you?
- Do you prefer to read, perform or write poetry? Why is that?

Include poetry through the school day.

You can find poems, anthologies or collections in your local library, your school library if you have one, or through a National Poetry Library membership.

- Read a poem a day out loud, simply for enjoyment.
- Create a poetry corner together, displaying favourite poems and those that you think might appeal to your students.
- Respond to a poem through artwork and illustration.

As the students become more experienced at listening to and reading poetry you can begin to revisit their feelings about poetry.

- Which were your favourite poems? What did you like about them?
- Which poems did you find most memorable? Why?
- What have you learned about poetry that you didn't know before?
- Would you like to read more poetry? Why? Why not?

National Poetry Library Little Library © Victor Frankowski

Create poetry journals

Make poetry journals to capture personal responses to poems through writing and artwork.

You and your students can create a handmade poetry journal using plain paper and origami. Here is a guide to making a book like this created by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE)

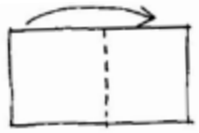
Students can use their journal as a writer's notebook, gathering inspiration and ideas from their reading, experiences, observation and conversation.

If you can do so, model this creative writing process yourself.

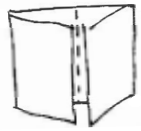
How to make a simple origami book

Take a sheet of A4 or A3 paper…

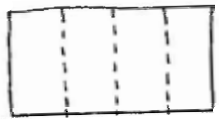
1. Hold the paper in the landscape position and fold the left edge to the right edge. Open out.



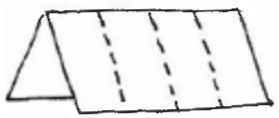
2. Then fold the left and right edges into the centre. Open out.



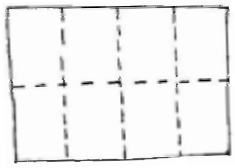
You now have 4 equal panels



3. Fold the top edge to the bottom edge. Open out.

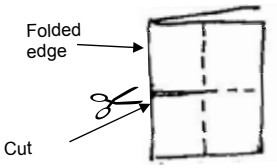


4. You now have a sheet with 8 equal panels.

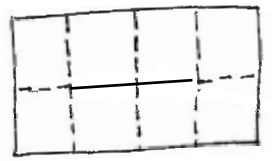


Based on Paul Johnson: Making Books, A & C Black, London

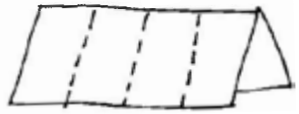
5. Fold the left edge to the right edge. Cut through the centre crease on the folded side—to the width of one panel.



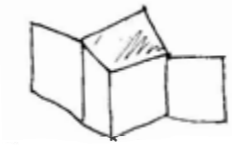
6. Open the sheet out—you now have a cut in the centre of the sheet.



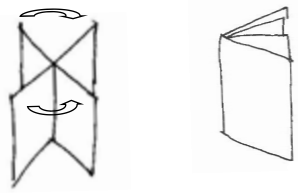
7. Fold the top to the bottom. The cut is on top.



8. Push the left and right edges to the centre—carry on till you have a cross shape.



9. Fold round into a book.



Listening to and looking at poetry

Poetry can be a wonderful way to explore language and vocabulary, including how words sound and how they look on the page. You can reflect on this as you read and respond to poems.

You can find celebrated poets such as Joseph Coelho, John Agard, Grace Nichols, Laura Mucha, Karl Nova and Jackie Kay performing their poetry on the Southbank Centre's YouTube channel or via CLPE.

By **listening to poetry** as it is read aloud, you can tune in to the pace, rhythm and dynamics of the poem. Listening can help you to notice devices used by the poet such as alliteration, repetition and the inclusion of a refrain.

Watch a poet perform or read a poem aloud yourself, inviting students to express their immediate thoughts through open-ended discussion:

- When you hear this poem, what do you visualise?
- What does it make you think about or feel?
- Do you find any words or lines especially vivid or memorable? Why?

By **reading poems on the page**, you may notice the shape of the poem as a whole. You might observe the way certain lines or words are emphasised through the use of line breaks or font size or colour. You can see how rhythm and repetition are used and how text and illustration work together.

Revisit and re-read the poem on the page.

- Does it look as you expected it to? Why? Why not?
- How does looking at the poem affect the way you respond to it? Does it confirm your initial response or challenge it?
- How does the way the poem looks on the page give you clues about the way it sounds when read aloud or performed?

Having listened to and looked at a poem, reflect on the overall impact of the poem on you as readers.

- What do you think the poet wishes to express or convey?
- What idea, image or technique would you say is most important to this poem and why?

You and your students could note your responses in your **poetry journals**. Reflect on the poems that draw you in or explore themes that inspire you.

You can also use your journal to explore how poets use language to create different effects.

- What have you learned about the choices poets make? Can you think of some examples of how they play with the way language looks and sounds to convey ideas or express emotion?
- Can you play with words or lines like this in your own journal? What effects do you want to create for your reader? How can you achieve this using some of the techniques used by published poets?

Introducing visual poetry

Visual poetry contains lots of different genres, including concrete poetry, calligrams and erasure poetry, which we will explore in this resource.

Choose some examples of visual poetry. You can find these in this resource or in the National Poetry Library's online collection. Display the poems on your interactive whiteboard or print them out in colour and showcase them on walls or tables in your classroom.

Ask pupils to share their immediate responses to the poems.

- What do you notice about this type of poetry? How would you describe these poems?
- How are they similar or different to poems that you have read before?
- How do you think you read these poems? Where might you start?
- Are there any poems in particular that catch your eye or interest you? Why?

Now take the time to explore and read each of the poems – on the page and out loud.

Share your personal responses. What effect does each poem have on you as readers? Note your reflections in your poetry journals.

- What does this poem make you feel and think about? What do you like or dislike about it?
- What is at the heart of the poem for you?
- What connections are you making? Does anything puzzle you about the poem?
- What ideas expressed by the poem particularly interest you? Why?

Now revisit and re-read each poem, exploring how the poet has evoked particular effects.

- What do you think the poet wishes to express or convey? How do you know?
- Which poetic devices have been used to create specific effects? Can you spot any interesting uses of rhythm, repetition, alliteration, word play, or spacing and line breaks?
- How does the way the poem looks relate to its content or emphasise its meaning?
- Which poem do you like best and why?

Look closely at how the poem has been arranged on the page and how this arrangement creates meaning. Give the students the language to be able to talk about this by introducing and drawing attention to the **typographical elements** the poet has used. These might include the following.

- the spatial relationships between words and groups of words
- the use of negative or white space
- the placement of lines to suggest movement or enhance rhythm
- the use of typefaces and fonts
- the use of bold, italic and underlines
- the unconventional use of symbols
- the colour of the text and the colour of the background
- the use of pattern and illustration

Now we are going to explore some different forms of visual poetry. We hope they will inspire you to create your own poems!

Activity 1: Concrete poetry

Concrete poetry is a type of poetry where the visual arrangement of the text on the page is as important as the words themselves in conveying meaning.

It merges the boundaries between literary art and visual art, making typographical effects (the shape, spacing, color and size of letters and words) central to the poem.

The poem's form, created by the layout of words, letters and symbols, directly relates to or enhances its subject or theme.

'You/Me/Us' by Bridget Bond (1966)

In this example, the visual arrangement of text on the page is as significant as the poem's linguistic meaning. Layout, typography and spatial design are essential to the poem's expressive power.

'You/Me/Us' uses colour, repetition and spacing to suggest a relationship between two people.

You can draw students' attention to this through layered reader responses.

Responding to poetry

Start by inviting a personal and immediate response:

- What does this poem make you feel or think about?
- What connections are you making – to things you know or have experienced, or other things you may have read or seen?
- What do you think is at the heart of this poem?

Revisit and re-read the poem, reflecting on how the poet has evoked these responses through their use of poetic devices and form.

- What do you notice about the relationship between the arrangement of the poem on the page and the words chosen – 'you' 'me' and 'us'?
- What poetic devices has the poet used (e.g. repetition, opposition) and how have these created meaning?
- What impact do the poem's visual elements have on you? Examples of visual elements might include text and background colour, font size, spacing and pattern.

Creating poetry

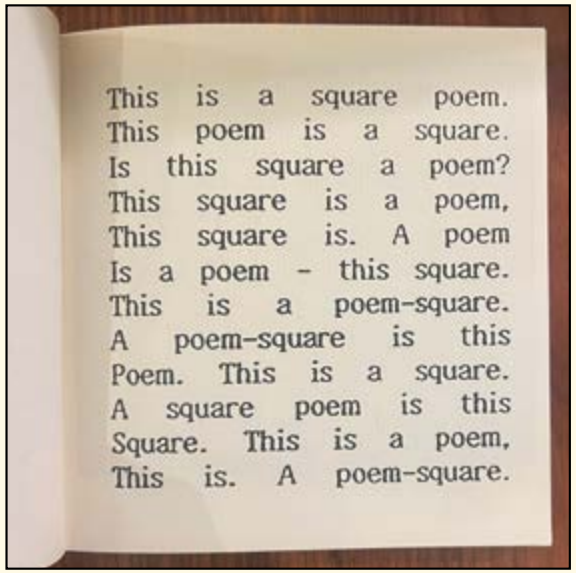
- Ask the students to consider what difference it would make it if they were to change any of the visual elements of ‘You/Me/Us’.
- Through shared writing, try making adaptations to the poem, using different coloured pens and paper or collage techniques.
- Reflect together on how different colours, spacing, arrangement, size and scale might have an impact on the poem’s meaning. Which do you prefer and why?
- Invite students to use their poetry journals to try out different ideas for ‘You/Me/Us’, sharing preferences and responses together.
- Now choose three new words that might work in a similar way to ‘you’ ‘me’ and ‘us’ – two distinct things that also share a relationship, e.g. sun, rain and rainbow.
- Give students plenty of time to experiment with categories such as emotions, weather, historical events and scientific concepts.
- You might reflect on themes inspired by the Festival of Britain and related to the theme of ‘Imagine the Future’.
- Provide writing and art materials so that students can experiment and craft their concrete poems before polishing them for publication.

Activity 2: Exploring shape in poems

A calligram is a poem where the visual arrangement of the words in the poem creates a shape that reflects its theme or subject. For example, a poem about butterflies could be written in the shape of a butterfly. Playing with the shape of individual words can add movement to a calligram. Each line's position on the page, its level of transparency and its colour can transform a poem.

Square Poem by Bob Cobbing (1989)

Bob Cobbing's 'Square Poem' uses the sentence 'This is a square poem' as a starting point for the production of twelve lines of poetry. Each line is based on a different combination of the words in the first sentence, e.g. 'This poem is a square. / Is this a square poem?' and so on. Confined within a tight square frame, Cobbing's poem creates a feeling of movement and musicality through its varied repetition of the same words. Cobbing's work draws on elements from concrete and sound poetry, and uses language as a material or mark.



Waterwheels in Whirl

This poem was the result of an experiment by a group of students in the nineties, inspired by the work of the poet Ian Hamilton Finlay. The students were studying with Ken Cox, a key sculptor in the British concrete poetry movement. This is a striking example of a calligram in which words, colour and shape correspond to each other. It may also be considered a concrete poem.

Responding to poetry

Responding to poetry through performance lifts a poem and its meaning from the page. This may deepen the responses of its readers.

- Organise your students into small groups.
- Provide each group with a colour copy of 'Square Poem' and 'Waterwheels in Whirl'. You could include 'You/Me/Us' too.
- Give students plenty of time to read and talk about each poem together, sharing their personal responses and preferences.
- Ask the students to reflect on how the poems might sound when read aloud, based on the choice of language used and the shape of the poems on the page.
- Experiment with different ideas. Where would you start reading and why? Does everyone agree? What difference does it make?
- Invite everyone to choose the poem they would most like to perform. Create new groups of like-minded students.
- Now ask students to revisit the chosen poem with a performance in mind and begin to make annotations – highlighting words and phrases which might be emphasised.
- How might meaning be lifted from the page through vocal effects (e.g. choral, echo, call and response, individual, rhythmical or staccato, loud or quiet, high or low, etc.)? How can students use actions and movement (e.g. in unison, in turn, large or small) to emphasise a word or the message at the heart of the poem?
- Allow time for rehearsal. Then ask each group to perform for the rest of the class.
- Invite positive and constructive feedback. Then invite the group to make final refinements to their performances. You could record or share these.
- Reflect on which elements of the poem influenced the choices the students made for their performances. How were they influenced by the poem's visual form and language choices?

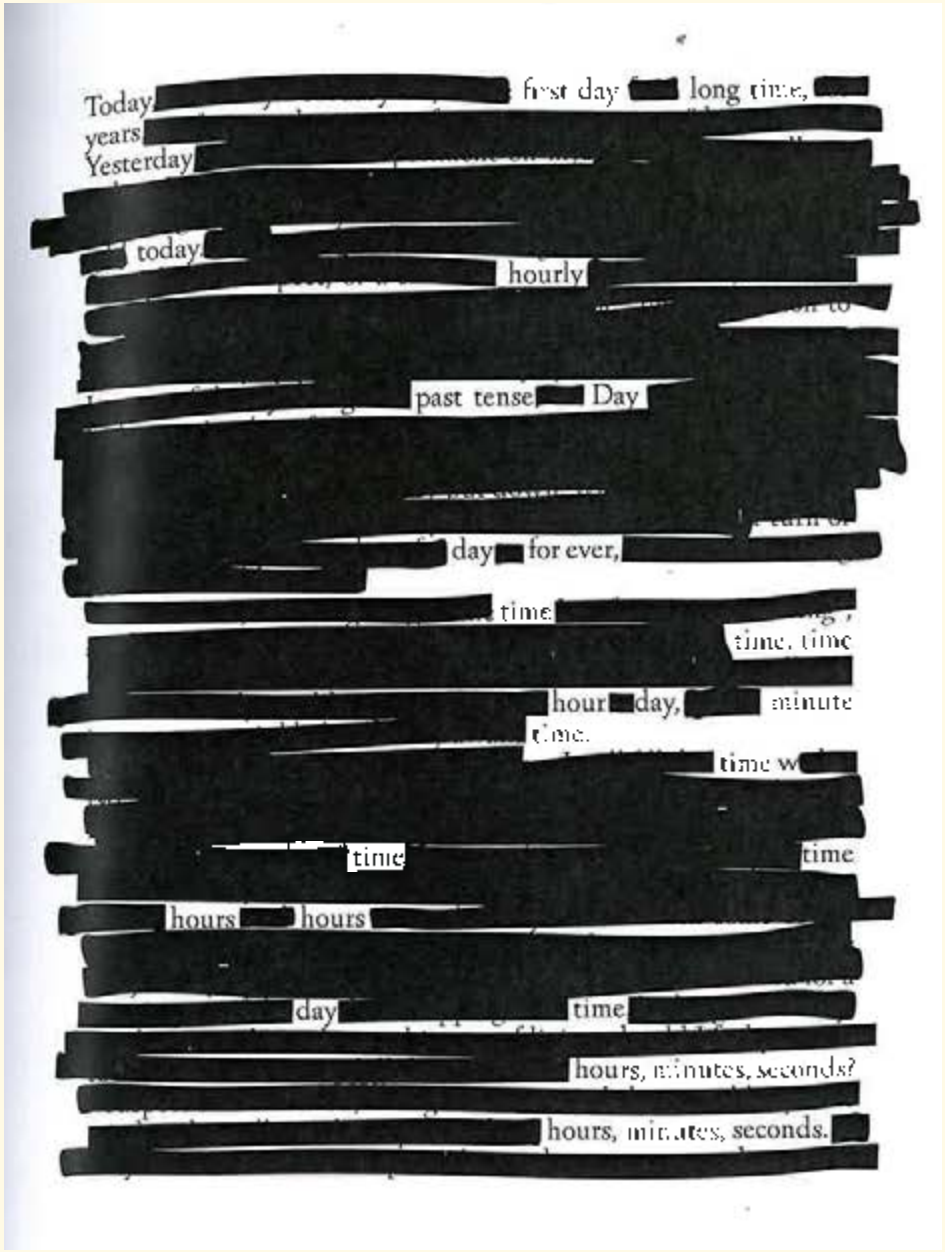
Creating poetry

- Fill a large sheet of paper with possible subjects for calligram poems. You might list everyday or fascinating objects, interesting ideas or concepts, or natural phenomena, e.g. a flame, a waterfall, a tower block, a spring, an eye.
- Invite students to choose the subject that most interests them and, using words and pictures, fill a page with the thoughts, connections, questions and ideas that it inspires.
- Now ask students to home in on one idea, word or phrase on the page and circle it with a pen.
- On a clean page in their journal, invite them to draft one line that could be part of a poem.
- Ask students to reflect on their line and the meaning it conveys. Does this line alone capture the essence of their subject? Do they need another line?
- Encourage them to read the line aloud. Perhaps they could walk around as they do so. Ask them to experiment with the way their line could sound and ask a partner for feedback.
- Provide plenty of time for students to craft their calligram poem. They can experiment with its shape on the page and the use of visual elements like colour, spacing and typography. These features can help a reader to understand and experience what is unique about the subject of the poem.
- Give students access to art materials or computer software. Ask them to polish their poems so that they can be published for a wider audience to enjoy.

Activity 3: Erasure poetry

Erasure poetry, also known as blackout poetry, is a form of found poetry. The 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. Erasure poetry may be used as a means of collaboration, creating a new text from an old one and starting a dialogue between the two, or as a means of confrontation, to challenge a pre-existing text.

Tania Hershman is a writer, editor and teacher based in Manchester.



Section of It's Time: A Chronomemoir by Tania Hershman, 2025

In 2025 Tania Hershman created a new type of book called a 'chronomemoir'. The book, It's Time, was published by Guillemot Press. In Tania's words, it's 'a highly playful and eclectic hybrid book in which I explore what it's like to be a creature living inside time and to have time inside me.'

Responding to poetry

- Give the children the section of It's Time to read, without explanation or introduction.
- Invite immediate responses before discussing the poem's form. What do you notice? Is there anything that strikes you about this text?
- Re-read the poem and invite students to share what they like or dislike about it, the connections they are making, and the questions it inspires.
- Look at the words the poet has chosen to keep and how they relate to each other. How does the use of erasure/blackout create meaning? What theme is explored by the found text?
- Experiment with different ways of reading the poem, based on the meaning of the words, their relationship, and the relationship created by the spacing between them.

Creating poetry

This exercise has four stages: find, select, erase, and reveal. As a writing teacher, you will want to model this process for your students.

- Show your students how to find and choose a section of text that could be played with to create a blackout poem. This could be a passage from a story or non-fiction text relating to an inspiring theme or a piece of writing that they might want to challenge.
- You could take a look at poet Austin Kleon's video How to Make a Newspaper Blackout Poem. Kleon used newspapers to make daily blackout poems, which he turned into an online project, Newspaper Blackout.
- Share your chosen texts with each other and explain why you were drawn to them. Is it a piece of writing the student knows well? What do they know about the author and their motivations?
- Make multiple copies of these texts so that students can experiment with them and reflect on how their new blackout poems compare to the original text.
- Using your own text, invite suggestions as to how you might transform it into a blackout poem. Is there a hidden meaning or new narrative in the text that you would like to reveal? Is there a part of your selected text that you would like to focus on? In what ways would you like to transform the original source's context?
- Scan the text for words and phrases that spark interesting ideas, then use a pencil to draw around them, reading them aloud and checking for how they make meaning together.
- Make any necessary refinements before taking a black marker pen and erasing or blacking out the rest of the text.
- Now read the poem aloud, inviting feedback from response partners and discussing the impact of their choices. How does the poem compare to or transform the original text? What new meanings are created for the reader?
- Reflect on the impact of blacking out words. Explore the way that this approach forces the reader to pay attention only to the selected fragments and not the original passage.
- Encourage students to experiment with different ideas and make changes. What if different words were retained or erased? What difference would it make? Which version do you prefer and why?
- Allow plenty of time for students to create their own polished poems. Then display the poems or present them in an anthology.

Once you have experimented with making blackout poems using markers, you might want to extend this exercise. Try adding more creativity, play and artistic exploration while still focusing on text, meaning and design. Here are some follow-on activities and variations you can try, using the materials that you have available.

a) Painted erasure

Use watercolor washes, tempera paint or correction fluid to block out sections of a text. You might want to experiment with opacity by making some words barely visible and erasing others entirely. Layering colours can create moods that reinforce the tone of the poem.

b) Collage erasure

Cut pieces from magazines, coloured paper and tissue paper and glue the cut-outs over words/lines in the text, leaving your chosen words visible. This technique can extend into visual metaphor (e.g. using flowers to cover words you want to soften or using bold graphics to create tension).

c) Cut-out and layering

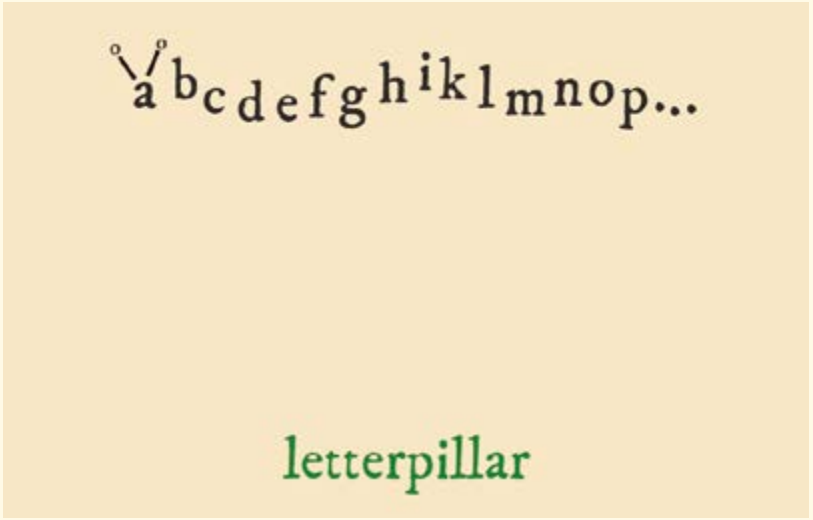
Cut away portions of a page with scissors, so that only your selected words remain visible. Place the page over coloured backing paper to highlight your chosen text. In this way you can create a tactile, layered blackout poem.

Activity 4: Inventing language

Visual poetry gives us room to play with language – twisting it, reshaping it and seeing what new meanings emerge. When ordinary words fall short, it is possible for poets to invent new ones, borrow from other tongues or twist familiar sounds into new shapes. This language play has the potential to open up new ways of thinking about and experiencing poetry.

Letterpillar by Astra Papachristodoulou 2025

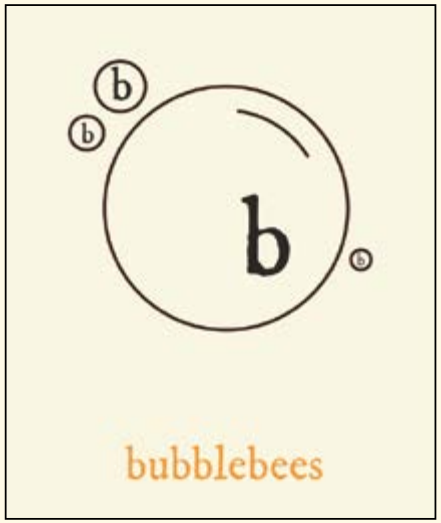
This playful concrete poem transforms the alphabet into the shape of a caterpillar, blending typography and imagery. The poem merges the words 'letters' and 'caterpillar' to create a new imaginary animal, the letterpillar. Both words at the core of this poem share the same number of syllables and consonants (Ls and Ts), which results in musicality. Letter spacing, font and colour are key elements of this poem and its play on words and meaning.



Responding to poetry

- Begin by inviting immediate impressions and responses from your students. What comes to mind when you read this poem? What does it make you think about?
- Reflect on the poem's wordplay and the similarities between a 'letterpillar' and a 'caterpillar'. How has the poet conveyed what is special or unique about a caterpillar? Why do you think she has chosen the alphabet to represent the caterpillar visually? What connections can you make between letters and the life of a caterpillar?
- Evaluate the poem, reading it with the eye and the ear. Is there anything that you particularly enjoy about this poem – the way it looks on the page or sounds when read aloud? What might change if the alphabet letters were capitalised instead of lowercase?

Further examples from this poet



Creating poetry

- A compound word is a word that is made up of two or more other words. For example, the word ‘buttermilk’ is made up of two words, ‘butter’ and ‘milk’.
- Reflect on the examples of word play in these three poems and how they draw on meanings that can be created and re-imagined through invented compound words: caterpillar > letterpillar, igloo > giggleoo and bumblebees > bubblebees.
- Revisit and re-read the invented words, exploring the way they relate to the sound, musicality and look of the original word.
- In your poetry journal, make a list of compound words and divide them into two separate lists written alongside each other (see the example list below).

Draw a line from the word in the first column to a word in the second column to make a compound word.

Egg ·	· Train
Honey ·	· Tail
Cave ·	· Marathon
Flower ·	· Tiramisu
Bark ·	· Light
Triumph ·	· Storm
Block ·	· Worm
Star ·	· Dream
Sky ·	· Line

- Now, draw a line from a word in the first column to a word in the second column to make new compound words.
- Select the new word from your list that you find most interesting. Perhaps it evokes strong imagery or it is particularly humorous.
- The more interesting and unusual your selected words, the more unexpected the result is going to be. Model how you can pair words that create interesting effects of consonance and assonance (the repetition of one or more consonants or vowels).
- Share your choice with a partner and talk about how this new word might look as a visual poem. What kind of response would you like from your reader? What are the possibilities?
- Place your invented word on the page and give it shape and/or colour to create the response you want from your reader.
- Be adventurous with your use of typography – blocky fonts are best suited to one-word concrete poems as they stand out more on the page.
- Experiment with different ideas before choosing the one that you can polish through to publication, either digitally or on paper, for a wider audience to enjoy.
- You might create a class anthology.

More ideas for wordplay:

- You may want to jot down a few suffixes, such as -ment, -ness, and -tion, and try adding these to words that wouldn’t usually include them to create unexpected new words. For example, the word ’chocolate’ and the suffix ’-tion’ would make up the new word ‘chocolation’.

Imagining the future through poetry

Reflect on all the poems that have been read so far.

- How would you describe the different poems? What were the different poems about?
- Could you categorise the poems into different topics or themes? How do these relate to the theme of '**Imagine the future**'?
- What ideas do the poems give you about what poetry is and what it could be? What ideas do you have for poems of your own?

Consider the ideas that you have been noting in your poetry journal.

- Which ones do you feel strongly enough about to take through to writing?
- How can you take your initial notes forward into crafting a poem?

You might find it helpful to work collaboratively at first. Choose a theme or topic of shared interest. This might be related to a particular aspect of modern life or a vision for the future such as human rights, the natural environment, scientific discovery or health and wellbeing.

Think about the form the poem will take. Consider which poetic devices might allow you to best express your chosen themes and feelings. You might have encountered them in the poems that you have read and explored. The devices you use might include rhyme, repetition, imagery, alliteration and assonance. You may be more comfortable writing in free verse and might find it easier to express your thoughts and feelings in this way.

Start to think about how the poem could be presented on the page to enhance the reader's understanding. Reflect on the poems you have explored – how they looked on the page and the impact this had on you as readers. Don't forget to include the typographical elements associated with concrete poetry and how these contributed to the creation of meaning. Use this knowledge to make notes on your draft.

Continue to select and reject ideas until you are ready to present a polished poem for publication. You might decide to present it on the page or in performance for an audience.

You could bind your poems together into a class anthology or display them, categorised into different themes. You might carefully choose and use technology, art materials and techniques, such as printmaking, or the use of musical instruments, to enhance the presentation of your poetry.

Get involved at the National Poetry Library

The National Poetry Library is free to visit. It's also free to become a member. Membership is available for adults, children and schools. We also offer an online membership that you can use to borrow ebooks and audiobooks.

Our children's collection was established in 1988 when we moved to the Southbank Centre with the donation of the Signal poetry collection (Signal was a magazine that reviewed poetry books for children). We now aim to collect all the children's collections and anthologies published by UK poetry publishers, as well as a selection from the USA, and a selection of picture books and board books that make use of rhyme and other poetic techniques. We also have a Young Adult collection aimed at children aged 12 and above.

The holdings of the National Poetry Library can be viewed in the National Poetry Library Catalogue.

If you'd like to limit your search to children's books, use the 'select collections' option and tick 'child anthology' and 'child collection'.

The National Poetry Library online ebook and audiobook collection is available here: https://poetrylibrary.overdrive.com/

Titles for children and young people can be viewed here: https://poetrylibrary.overdrive.com/collection/1058675

Our opening hours are:

Tue, 12 noon – 6pm
Wed – Sun, 12 noon – 8pm
Closed Mondays

Workshop visits for schools:

On Tuesday and Wednesday mornings in term-time the National Poetry Library offer workshops for schools. These take place between 10am and 1pm and last for two hours. Our workshops are for groups of up to 30 pupils.

The National Poetry Library offers two programmes aimed at Key Stage 2 primary school children.

Poetry Explorers

In this workshop children explore visual poetry, spoken poetry and poems about animals. They learn how to use an index in a book and find items in a library. Plus, they get the chance to explore our buildings by the River Thames on a quest to find words and experiment with creative writing.

Letters Home

This workshop looks at poems written during the First World War. It introduces students to visual poetry, sound poetry and typography. Students also write their own poems and take part in poetry-themed activities.

Key Stage 3

The Poetry Box workshop makes connections between poetry and science. Students experiment with writing their own poetry inspired by an interactive box where they view microscopic slides.

Cost: Poetry Explorers is free to Lambeth and Southwark schools (Years 4 and 5) and The Poetry Box is free to Lambeth and Southwark schools (Years 7 and 8). There is a charge for fee-paying schools and for state schools outside Lambeth and Southwark.

Teacher-led sessions are available for Key Stages 4 & 5. Teachers are welcome to use the library as a resource when leading their own sessions. We can help by preparing books on a given theme or featuring a type of poetry.

These sessions are free and available from Tuesday to Friday. Please contact the library in advance to book a slot and discuss any requests.

To make an enquiry and book one of our workshops:

southbankcentre.co.uk/venues/national-poetry-library/contact-us
Email: info@poetrylibrary.org.uk

Poetry credits

1. Rosa Parks, Kate Wakeling (from Shaping the World: 40 Historical Heroes in Verse, chosen by Liz Brownlee)
2. Fleming's Petri Dish, Laura Mucha (from Shaping the World 40 Historical Heroes in Verse, chosen by Liz Brownlee)
3. Inflamed Birds by James Wilkes first published in Litmus Magazine No.2
4. The Lark by James Wilkes first published in Litmus Magazine No.2
5. you me us part of Experiments in Typography, 1966, Bridget Bond. Tate, presented by Tate Members 2013. © reserved. Photo: Tate
6. Square Poem, Bob Cobbing, (Bloodaxe) 1989
7. Water Wheels in Whirl, attributed to Ann Stevenson under the tutelage of Ken Cox, based on an original by Ian Hamilton Finley, Openings Press
8. The erasure/blackout poem by Tania Hershman is from It's time: a Chronomemoir published by Guillemot Press in 2025. Thanks to Luke Thompson and the author.
9. Letterpillar, Giggloo, Bubblebees, Astra Papachristodoulou, 2025.

Further reading

Perloff Nancy (ed) *2021 Concrete Poetry: A 21st-Century Anthology*. London: Reaktion Books.

McCabe Chris (ed) *2015 The New Concrete: Visual Poetry in the 21st Century*. London: Hayward Publishing.

Smith Tracy K. 2018 *Wade in the Water*. New York: Penguin.

About the Southbank Centre

The Southbank Centre is the UK's largest centre for the arts and one of the nation's top five visitor attractions, showcasing the world's most exciting artists at our venues in the heart of London. As a charity, we bring millions of people together by opening up the unique art spaces that we care for.

The Southbank Centre is made up of the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, Hayward Gallery, National Poetry Library and Arts Council Collection. We're one of London's favourite meeting spots, with lots of free events and places to relax, eat and shop next to the Thames.

CLPE
CENTRE FOR LITERACY IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

About CLPE

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education is a UK-based children's literacy charity and Primary English Association. Our work raises the attainment of children's reading and writing by helping schools to teach literacy creatively and effectively, putting quality children's books at the heart of all learning. We provide well-evidenced and creative literacy training and support for primary school teachers and others who work in primary schools.

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