



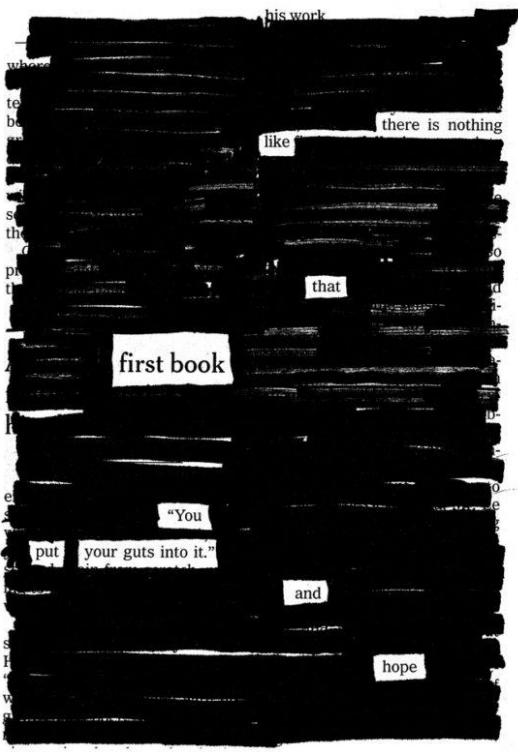
Adapting History Activity: Blackout Poetry

In Adapting History, Dahlak uses other people’s experiences, words, and musical styles to inspire his own works of art.

One way to do this yourself is through **blackout poetry**. You can do this with an old book (that you don’t mind writing in), or old newspapers, or something you find online and print out so you have a physical copy.

Read through the page to find words and phrases that speak to you that you would like to use in your created poem, and underline or draw boxes around them. Maybe they form a new sentence by themselves.

Then, color in all the *other* words with a black pen or marker. Eventually all that will remain is your poem.



The end result might look something like what you see on the left.

On the right, you will see an excerpt from an interview with young poet Amanda Gorman, who read her poem “The Hill We Climb” at the 2021 presidential inauguration. (You can read the full interview on Time.com.) Grab a marker and create your own blackout poem using her words as inspiration!

Interviewer: Poetry sometimes gets a bad rap—people think it’s all stuffy. How do you think we can make poetry accessible and cool, especially for a young audience?

Gorman: Poetry is already cool. Where we run into trouble is often we are looking through such a tight pinhole of what poems can be. Specifically we’re looking at dead white men. Those are the poems that are taught in school and referred to as classics. We really need to break out of the pathology that poetry is only owned by certain elites. Where we can start is highlighting and celebrating poets who reflect humanity in all of its diverse colors and breadth.

Interviewer: Tell me about the poets who came before you. Where do you draw inspiration—and do you draw inspiration from artists working in other forms?

Gorman: I love Black poets. I love that as a Black girl, I get to participate in that legacy. So that’s Yusef Komunyakaa, Sonia Sanchez, Tracy K. Smith, Phillis Wheatley. And then I look to artists who aren’t just poets. While I was writing the Inaugural poem, I was reading a lot of Frederick Douglass, a lot of Winston Churchill, a lot of Abraham Lincoln. I was also listening to the composers who I feel are great storytellers, but they don’t use words so I try to fill in that rhetoric myself. A lot of Hans Zimmer, Dario Marianelli, Michael Giacchino.

Interviewer: You have a mantra you recite to yourself before performing—can you share it here, and tell me how you came to choose these words?

Gorman: This mantra I’m about to say is actually in part inspired by Lin-Manuel Miranda’s lyrics in Moana in the song, “Song of the Ancestors.” Whenever I listen to songs, I rewrite them in my head. That song goes: “I’m the daughter of the village chief. We’re descended from voyagers who made the way across the world.” Something like that. Sorry Lin. I really wanted something that I could repeat because I get so terrified whenever I perform. So my mantra is: “I’m the daughter of Black writers who are descended from Freedom Fighters who broke their chains and changed the world. They call me.” I say that to remind myself of ancestors that are all around me whenever I’m performing.