

Activity

FOUND POETRY

Pick out words and phrases from a non-fiction text and work your writer's magic to create a poem... or several!

What should I do?

Choose a text: find your words

Go to your favourite website or use a search engine to find information on something that interests you, or hunt for random pieces of text in your house – this may work better and be more satisfying and surprising if you choose something that has nothing in particular to do with poems or stories or writing in general! Non-fiction is good: try instructions, a recipe, an information text, grocery list, horoscope, news report, scribbled notes or phone messages you might find lying around your house, advertisements, junk mail, etc.

Get a highlighter pen and a dark marker pen. With the highlighter, mark words or very short phrases that you particularly like or are intrigued by: these might be strange words or everyday words, poetic words or words that do a really useful job, names of objects, more interesting verbs, etc. Then, with the dark pen, blot out all the other words in the text so that only your highlighted choices show. (You might want to take a picture of the result to share with someone or remind you of what you've done.)



(image taken from Wessex Water flyer!
<https://www.wessexwater.co.uk/>)

Now you should have a good collection of found words to explore and play about with!

We chose...

aware boundary break call care carry chance changes colour cooled crosses
cut detached doubt find flooding footprint form future high homes inside
interruptions join keep kind land life minute missing need old only pouring
prey promises protect quality receive responsible rivers saving strange
struggling taste think through told touch under value view vulnerable water

Craft a poem

Traditionally, a found poem uses only words from the source text, usually keeping to the same order as they appear there, but you can mess about with yours as much as you like to achieve the best poem possible. You could try these activities to help you generate ideas and craft your poem(s):

- Write each found word separately on a scrap of paper and then play with putting them in a different order. What combinations are surprising, with one word unexpectedly adding to the meaning of another?

- Choose a mood that you want to evoke for your reader; make a note of it. Combine found words, add extra words to some, or look up synonyms for others and swap so that you emphasise the mood you intend.
- Can you arrange the found words to make a poem without using any additional words at all? If you do add some of your own, what is the fewest you can manage to use? (Every single word in a poem tends to be important and very carefully selected by the writer, included for a specific reason; you don't often find extra 'waffle'!)

Read your poem aloud, checking for ways it can be improved further. Look at...

- Line endings: do you end each line of your poem on a word that you want readers to linger on, or one to make them quickly move to the next line? What difference does it make if you end a line at the beginning, middle or end of a sentence?
- Line length: how does it change the pace and mood of your poem if you make your lines shorter? What about longer?
- Punctuation: choose from the punctuation you know about to make it obvious to your reader how they should read your poem. What might you use to make them pause? What do you need to include to ensure your ideas are clear and make sense? How can you emphasise particular words?

Share your work

How will you share your work with your friends and your teacher(s)? Can you film yourself reading, or take photographs of your creation, then email or upload to a shared area? Could you create a duplicate copy of your work to post? **IMPORTANT: Just remember everything you have been taught about staying safe online, and do talk to the person who looks after you about this before making a decision.**

Things that could help me

You can read about found poetry here: <https://www.creative-writing-now.com/found-poetry.html>. The site might also give you some other ideas for poems.

Randomly generate a poem from having input just a few words – some will be truly terrible, but others may be wonderful! <https://www.poem-generator.org.uk/>

Change it up! ...Go further!

A) Choose a text and find your words as before but, this time, give your words to a friend without telling them where they came from. You could explain to your friend how to find their own words so they can pass those onto you to play with. Write a found poem using your friend's words. What difference does it make not knowing the original text?

Notes for parents and teachers

Your young poet will probably find the most challenging element of this activity is coming up with a topic to write their poem about. Ask them to share a few of their favourite 'found' words with you, have a think, and then describe to them what these make you imagine: what scene do you picture? What mood? What message? Is there a theme? For example, with 'river(s)', 'view', 'footprint', 'told' and 'promises', you might imagine a traveller on a journey – someone moving through a landscape and encountering different perspectives. This could lead to a simple idea for a poem that describes a river winding through a valley, or could be more symbolic: you could be thinking about the 'life lessons' the traveller is learning along the way. 'Promises' may sound optimistic, as though the person is travelling towards a bright future... All this could lead to a poem about somebody encountering a hard time in life but seeing something great on the horizon and looking forward to reaching it, knowing they will.

Kenn Nesbitt is a former Children's Poet Laureate for the United States (2013-2015). His site, Poetry4kids (<https://www.poetry4kids.com/>), gives more information and advice for creating found poetry: <https://www.poetry4kids.com/news/how-to-make-a-found-poem/>.

You might like to explore more of his ideas and funny poems with your child.