

CORNERSTONE 2021 RESOURCE

Erasure Poetry: Making the Mundane Beautiful

Elective

AUTHOR(S):	Lauren Cohen Fisher; Erica Goldman
TOPIC (S)	Story telling, writing
SUMMARY	Sometimes the most beautiful things are found in the most unexpected places.
GOALS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity with erasure poetry as a new and accessible art form • Inspire fellows to look for beauty and programming ideas in unexpected places • To spark reflection and offer opportunity to process feelings, experiences, and perspectives
AUDIENCE:	8th grade +, group size <25
TIMING:	Elective- 75 minutes
APPENDICES:	Text of Genesis (Mah Norah)
MATERIALS NEEDED:	Trash source (see note at end for details -- 2x as many sources as participants), pens, sharpies/black markers, clip boards
SET-UP DETAILS:	Anywhere -- if not near desks/tables, be sure to have clip boards included in your materials.

SESSION TIMELINE

- 00:00 - 00:10 - Introductions, setting group norms
- 00:10 - 00:20 - Introduction to Erasure Poetry
- 00:20 - 00:30 - Erasure Poetry with Personal Source
- 00:30 - 00:40 - Coffee House Poetry Slam 1
- 00:40 - 00:50 - Erasure Poetry with Shared Source
- 00:50 - 1:00 - Poetry Slam 2
- 1:00 - 1:15 - Debrief: Where Do We Find Beautiful Things in Unexpected Places

SESSION OUTLINE:

Virtual Curated Space:

- Video share of carving away from trees
- Google slide/share → “Get yourself set up by clearing off the area around your screen, grabbing a sharpie, and having [junk mail]...”

Spark Question: When you were digging around for a [trash?] what is the weirdest or grossest item you pushed aside/sifted through/etc?

Transition: Introduce the topic by returning to the opening video. Ask: what’s up with that?

[Show of hands: how many of you have done erasure poetry before?]

Introduction: Erasure poetry became popular when Austin Kleon published a book of poems in 2007 that he had curated by selectively highlighting certain words from newspaper articles. He blacked out all of the other words, and what was left was a poem. Today, we’ll take a dip into his art form...

Facilitator’s note: You can find examples to show people [here](#). There are differences between found, erasure, and blackout poetry.

Screen share with this [short video](#) of erasure poetry. If in person at camp, you can print some examples of erasure poetry from the link above and then skip to the instructions below.

But how do we do it?!

1. Read through your article with a pen in hand -- leave your sharpie to the side for now!
2. As you’re reading, circle any words that jump out to you as important or resonant. These are your “anchor words”.
3. Once you’ve finished, read back through and circle any words that connect your anchor words. These can be conjunctions, verbs, a combination of words, etc.
4. Take your sharpie and highlight all the words you want to **exclude** from your poem
5. Voila! You have your poem!

[Possible use:]



Erasure Poetry: Give 5 min for those who need to find junk mail/recycling/trash around this home/camp/etc. Fellows complete erasure poetry using items found in their home / camp / etc. They will have 10 min to complete this. While they're doing it, [play this music as background](#).

Poetry Slam 1: Invite 3 people to share their poem

- Note: If on Zoom, have the poet “pinned” with a Zoom filter of a “poet’s beret” or “artsy sunglasses” while they read. If in person, have both of these items on hand to “spotlight” your poet!
- Coffee House Grounds Rules: you’re invited to react with kindness to your peers; art requires bravery, so thank you to those who are bravely sharing theirs!
- After each poet, ask all to “unmute” if on Zoom and “snap” as we transition

Transition: Move to a shared source that everyone will use for next round. In this case: Cornerstone Theme text [Mah Nora](#). Explain that to do this activity on Google Docs, highlight the words you want to *keep* in yellow and all other words in black (*hint: if you highlight one word in black, you can highlight the subsequent words by selecting them and pressing “Ctrl + Y”*). If at camp, print out these sources ahead of time.

Facilitator’s note: Above link is set to “copy” mode. Original/editable source text is [here](#).

Erasure Poetry 2: Give fellows 10 min to complete their second erasure poem. While they're doing it, [play this music as background](#)

Poetry Slam 2: Invite 3 people to share their poem

- Note: If on Zoom, have the poet “pinned” with a Zoom filter of a “poet’s beret” or “artsy sunglasses” while they read. If in person, have both of these items on hand to “spotlight” your poet!
- Coffee House Grounds Rules: you’re invited to react with kindness to your peers; art requires bravery, so thank you to those who are bravely sharing theirs!
- After each poet, ask all to “unmute” if on Zoom and “snap” as we transition

Debrief: Where Do We Find Beautiful Things in Unexpected Places

- What did you notice in these poems? Were there any common themes?
- How did you feel about erasing pieces of the original text?
- How might we think about this in relation to our experiences at camp?

Closing: What is one way you can try to find beauty in the mundane this week? [If on Zoom, can answer as a “waterfall” in the chat].

BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP & SHIFTING TO IN PERSON:

- Have printed examples on hand to show and inspire.
- Have diverse kinds of printed material on hand to use, like newspapers, junk mail, magazines of different kinds (serious and entertainment), pages from a novel (that you don’t mind destroying), printouts of Jewish texts, maybe something camp-related like the daily bulletin or a camp newsletter if your camp has those things.
- Consider having participants hang their finished poems on the walls or a certain place in camp
- You might decide to use a shared source as a way to surface conversations about communication and perspective; alternatively, you could ask each person to pick their own source to focus more on the art of finding beauty in the discard -- educator’s choice!
- This could be done without a specific theme in mind, as written above, or it could be related to a time, activity, or other theme of camp. For example, ask participants to create erasure poetry about Shabbat, about the parsha, about their bunk, etc.