Blackout Poetry Examples

# Example 1: “I Ain’t Got No Home”

I ain't got no home, I'm just a -roamin' 'round,

Just a wandrin' worker , I go from town to town.

And the police make it hard wherever I may go

And I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

My brothers and my sisters are stranded on this road,

A hot and dusty road that a million feet have trod;

Rich man took my home and drove me from my door

And I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

Was a-farmin' on the shares, and always I was poor;

My crops I lay into the banker's store.

My wife took down and died upon the cabin floor,

And I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

 I mined in your mines and I gathered in your corn

I been working, mister, since the day I was born

Now I worry all the time like I never did before

'Cause I ain't got no home in this world anymore

Now as I look around, it's mighty plain to see

This world is such a great and a funny place to be;

Oh, the gamblin' man is rich an' the workin' man is poor,

And I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

## Poem Explanation

In this poem, the narrator, despite working hard their whole life, has no home. “Home” could be interpreted literally, as a physical house that they cannot afford, or figuratively, as a space in American society. The narrator has no home or space in society because American society values the wealthy and powerful and its capitalist economic system functions in a way that those with wealth benefit at the expense of the poor, creating significant economic inequality. Now that the narrator “sees” or realizes this truth, they are overcome with worry about their future. This poem reflects Woody Guthrie’s political and social commentary because Guthrie used his music to speak out against this type of capitalist economy that rewarded the rich at the expense of the poor. Guthrie’s music also supported people in their efforts to form unions to combat the excessive power of corporations and to protect the rights and dignity of workers.

# Example 2: “Talking Centralia”

I'm just a miner in a mining town

I dig like a mole in a hole in the ground

When the sun comes up til the sun goes down

I don't see much sun when I'm down in the ground

Soft coal and hard coal and lead and zinc and all other kinds of hard stuff

It's a hard living.

Got up this morning in the same old way

Dropped my hot coffee to start off my day

My wife give me breakfast in her stocking feet

And I kissed the kids in bed and then I walked down the street

Just walking along watching the sun come up, I was just thinking and wondering

Wondering and thinking.

Centralia here is a pretty little town

You can see Illinois for miles around

Can't see too good with my eyes full of sleep, though

I'm gonna quit mining someday and I'm gonna sleep 'bout a week

Just solid sleep

Hard down, hard up

Good old warm sleep

Dream myself up a lot of pretty dreams

About pretty mine holes and pretty mine bosses

And pretty mine owners and pretty women all over the place

Most men don't talk what's eatin' on their minds

About different ways of dying down here in the mines

But every morning we walk along and joke

About the mines caving in, the dust and the smoke

And one little wild spark of fire

Blowing us sky high and crooked

One little spark blowing us cross-eyed and crazy

Up to shake hands with all the Lord's little angels

Well, I knock at the gate and stand and laugh

And the elevator man drops us down his shaft

We scatter and kneel and crawl different places

With fumes in our eyes and dust on our faces

Gas on our stomach and water on our kneecap,

Aches and pains and rheumatism, all kinds of crazy pictures flying through our heads

Well, a spark did hit us in the number five

I don't know if anybody ever did come out alive

I got carried out with a busted head

The lady said there's a hundred and eleven was dead

Well, this ain't my first explosion

I come through two cave-ins and two more fires before this one

Twenty-two dead down in Ohio and thirty-six I seen in Kentucky laid up

And a hundred and eleven here in Centralia

Well, it seems like the very best men go down

And don't come back in these mining towns

Keep on a-wondering how things would be

If a cave-in had come to the senator's seat

Or a big explosion of some kind was to go off up there in them Congress walls

Wonder what sort of words and messages that they'd write on their slates

Wonder if they'd hire anybody to come down to them Senate chambers and put in some safety devices,

Nine hundred dollars worth

Think there's just about enough loose gas around that Capitol dome up there, though

To make a mighty big blow if a spark ever hits it just right

## Poem Explanation

In this poem, the narrator imagines how the world *could* be and acknowledges the power that a “spark”—one person or a small group of people—has to create an “explosion,” or a change in our society. The narrator concludes with the idea that if the power of the people can be harnessed, the creation of a better world is possible. This idea reflects Woody Guthrie’s political and social commentary because he believed in the capacity of people to organize and challenge those in power to create a more equitable society.