

Blackout Poetry: Re-envisioning Writing

Poetry

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Grade Level	10th – 11th Grade	**Time Frame**	2-3 class period(s)
Subject	English/Language Arts	**Duration**	90–120 minutes

Essential Question

How can creative constraints, such as blackout poetry, help writers overcome writer's block and rethink what it means to write creatively?

Summary

This lesson allows students to reflect on and discuss their perceptions about writing. Shifting the focus from writing from scratch to using words already written as a starting place, students engage in reading and creating blackout poems from newspaper articles. Students also practice listening and speaking skills as they read and present their creations. Ultimately, students determine if and how their perceptions about what writing is changed as a result of this lesson.

Snapshot

Engage

Students watch a video about Austin Kleon, a blackout poet, and engage in a Magnetic Statements activity.

Explore

Using the I Think/We Think instructional strategy, students read and respond to poet Austin Kleon's blackout poems.

Explain

Students create an original blackout poem using a newspaper article as a mentor text.

Extend

Students read and present their blackout poem to their classmates.

Evaluate

Students complete a reflective free-write and both a self and peer evaluation.

Standards

ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - Reading (6-12)

WME301: Analyze how the choice of a specific word or phrase shapes meaning or tone in somewhat challenging passages when the effect is simple

Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 10)

10.7.R: Analyze and evaluate the techniques used in a variety of multimodal content and how they contribute to meaning.
10.8.W: Write independently using print, cursive, and/or typing for various lengths of time, intentionally selecting and combining modes and genres to suit their audiences and purposes.

Attachments

- I Think, We Think—Blackout Poetry.docx
- I Think, We Think—Blackout Poetry.pdf
- Lesson Slides—Blackout Poetry.pptx
- Magnetic Statements—Blackout Poetry.docx
- Magnetic Statements—Blackout Poetry.pdf

Materials

- Magnetic Statements (attached; for facilitator's use)
- I Think/We Think handout (attached; one per student)
- Example Blackout poems (online)
- Newspapers
- Sharpies or black markers
- Writing materials: pen, pencil, paper, etc.
- Computers/tablets
- Dry-erase pockets and markers (optional)

Preparation

Print and post the attached **Magnetic Statements** around your classroom before you begin this lesson.

20 minutes

Engage

Use the attached **Lesson Slides** to guide the lesson. Display **slides 3–4** to briefly introduce the essential question and learning objectives with students.

Display **slide 5** and show students the "Blackout Poet" YouTube video, an interview with Austin Kleon. Because many students might be unfamiliar with Blackout Poetry, this video will provide some helpful background information.

Embedded video

https://youtube.com/watch?v=XqB9kXzJ0UA

As students watch, ask them to think about their own personal feelings and conceptions about writing; students should also consider a specific time they struggled with writing.

Move to **slide 6** and review the Magnetic Statements instructional strategy. This will help uncover their ideas and attitudes about their own struggles with writing and/or a time they felt they had writer's block.

Teacher's Note: Magnetic Statements

Magnetic Statements are attached above. Feel free to edit these, use only the ones you want, or add your own as you see fit.

Direct students' attention to the statements posted in your classroom. Allow a few minutes for them to walk around and read each statement.

Then, ask students to move next to the statement that most repels them. Have them discuss with the other students around their chosen poster. Then, invite one person from each group to share common ideas.

Repeat this process by asking students to move next to the statement that most attracts them, or that they align with the most. Then have students discuss and share out.

Teacher's Note

Be sure to address student beliefs/attitudes during this activity. Ask probing questions such as *"What specific reasons caused you to be attracted to/repelled by this statement?"*

Explain to students that Kleon's solution to his writing dilemma was to create blackout poetry out of newspaper articles. Students will be doing just that for this lesson.

Teacher's Note

Transition into the Explore stage of the lesson by encouraging students to keep their beliefs and attitudes in mind as they work through the following activities. Let students know they will be revisiting these statements at the end of the lesson.

25 minutes

Explore

Place students into small groups of three. Instruct groups to research Austin Kleon's blackout poems located on his website. Ask groups to choose two poems they want to focus on.

Teacher's Note: Additional Blackout Poetry Examples

Consider asking students to review the blackout poetry examples found at this website as well.

Move to **slide 7** and review the I Think/We Think instructional strategy with students. Pass out the attached **I Think, We Think** handout to each student. Explain that students will first individually respond to the three poems their groups chose in the "I Think" column. Then, they will come together with their assigned group and share their responses, and fill out the "We Think" column. This is a front and back handout.

Teacher's Note

Be sure to check out the I Think/We Think instructional strategy card (linked above) beforehand. Students will need writing materials for this activity.

Encourage students to focus on anchor words, themes, and central ideas portrayed in each poem as they complete their handout.

Once students have read, responded to, and discussed two blackout poems, ask for each group to share out with the whole class.

Teacher's Note

For sharing out for a whole class, ask each group to choose one poem they found particularly interesting, had very similar (or different) ideas about, liked, etc. It's not necessary that each group discuss each poem aloud with the whole class, especially if time is a factor.

25 minutes

Explain

Display **slide 8** and pass out the attached **Poetic Elements** handout to each student. Working in the same groups as before, have students review their chosen poems and use their handout to identify examples of two of the four following elements found in their poems:

- Tone
- Mood
- Imagery
- Figurative language

> **Teacher's Note: Reviewing Poetic Elements**
>
> Consider reviewing these poetic elements with students to refresh their memory and help them identify correct examples.

Once groups have completed their handouts, move to **slide 9** and facilitate a whole-class discussion, asking students to respond to the following prompt:

- "How does the tone, mood, and inclusion of specific figurative language contribute to the overall themes of these poems?"

Transition to **slide 10** and review the Blackout Poetry instructional strategy with students. Tell students that they will be moving from reading example blackout poems to creating their own poetry. Allow time for students to peruse newspaper articles and choose one to use as a mentor text for their own blackout poems.

Once students have chosen their mentor text, pass out a black marker to each student and ask them to take out a piece of paper and follow the steps below:

1. Write down any words or phrases that relate to a specific topic or theme you want to focus on.
2. Scan the text and circle any anchor words (words that are relevant to your theme or topic).
3. List your anchor words on your paper and plan out your poem.
4. Use your marker to black out the text, line by line, except the words and phrases you have chosen to use in your poem.

30 minutes

Extend

As an extension, give students sufficient time to read and present their newly created blackout poem to the class. Have them first read their poem aloud and then show their classmates how it looks visually on the paper.

15 minutes

Evaluate

Display **slide 11** and review the Quick Write instructional strategy. Play the five-minute timer and ask students to take out a piece of paper and respond to the following prompt for their quick write:

- "Revisit your responses to the magnetic statements activity. Did your creative process change the meaning of what it is to be a poet or writer?"

Allow students time to complete their quick write.

Resources

- K20 Center. (n.d.). Blackout poetry. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/84
- K20 Center. (n.d.). I think/We think. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/141
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- K20 Center. (n.d.). Quick write. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/1127
- Kleon, A. (2016). Austin Kleon. https://austinkleon.com/category/newspaper-blackout-poems/
- Kleon, A. (2016). More of Austin Kleon's newspaper blackout poems and a way for students to share their own: Newspaper blackout. http://newspaperblackout.com/
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