

Blackout Poetry for Thematic Connections to News and Literature

Objective: Through the visual deconstruction and recreation of poetry, you will learn that words can inspire visual imagery, as well as demonstrate understanding and mastery of a literary skill.

Introduction: Creating visual art and poetry inspired by text

1. Look at the image below and write your responses to the questions below:

Question	Response
a. What do you see? (who, what, where)	
b. What feelings are expressed by the image below?	
c. What story do you think this image is trying to tell? Support your response by describing what parts of the image reflect the story you think the image is trying to communicate	



2. This image is an example of Blackout Poetry. You can create these poems by blacking out and drawing over found text. Look back at the image and notice the text underneath the image. Notice: **Which words did the artist hide, and which words did the artist highlight?**
3. Notice the words in boxes. If you read them in order from left to right, starting at the top of the page and moving your way down, you'll see a poem. After reading the poem, answer the questions below:
- 4.

Question	Response
a. What words or lines stand out to you from the poetry? List at least three.	
b. What feelings are expressed in the poem?	
c. What story and/or theme do you think the artist is trying to communicate in the poem? How do you know?	

5. The image above was composed by Katie T, a student at R.J. Reynolds High School in Winston-Salem, NC. As you read the following from Katie T, which describes the themes and stories she hoped to communicate, compare her response to your predictions above.

From Katie T: *"The theme I choose to explore within these offerings was that of identity, and the issues that arise when one is taken away or forced upon someone. The speaker in my poem has lost themselves. No direction, They live in complete oblivion. Not knowing who you are can be a strange and frustrating concept to wrap one's head around. People who once knew who they were, but no longer do, yearn and search for the being that they once were, and are desperate to find themselves, much like Junior attempts to find himself in ATD ["The Autobiography of a Part-Time Indian" by Sherman Alexie]. This also echoes the theme in Radiolab's "American Football", specifically the segment about the Carlisle Indian School. Identity was stripped from indigenous children, and they were forcibly assimilated.*

6. Katie created the image above after reviewing two texts: "American Football" from the radio show Radiolab, which explores a connection between modern day football and a government-mandated residential school program for Native American children, and the novel "The Autobiography of a Part-Time Indian" by Sherman Alexie, which explores the story of a Native American teenager navigating life at a new high school. Both texts examine stories of Native Americans and their experiences with the lasting impact of U.S. government policies.
7. Read pages 5-7 of the transcript from Radiolab's "American Football." After reading, respond to the questions below:

Question	Response
1. What did General Pratt say were his goals for creating the Carlisle school?	
2. What were some of the challenges that Native American children faced when attending Carlisle?	
3. What details from the reporting are reflected in Katie's drawing below?	
4. What details from the reporting are reflected in the poetry that Katie created by hiding and highlighting words from found text?	



Practice: Creating visual art and poetry inspired by reporting by journalist Daniella Zalcman

- The Carlise boarding school is one example from a system of government-mandated residential schools for Native American children that ran in the United States for over a century. Over 50 still exist today. For decades, indigenous families from many countries were mandated by their governments to send children to residential schools. Learn more about the system by reading the description of the project “Signs of Your Identity” from journalist Daniella Zalcman. After reading, reply to the questions below:

Question	Response
a. According to Zalcman’s description, what was the goal of the residential school system for Indigenous children?	
b. What challenges did children face as a result of going to these schools?	
c. What are some of the ways that people who attended residential schools as children, and their families, continue to be affected by their experiences of attending the schools?	

- Zalcman reported from several countries to explore the lasting impacts of government-mandated residential schools for Indigenous children. Pick one of the articles below, and make notes on a separate sheet of paper about the following: **What words and/or images stand out? What themes stand out from the story?**
 - [“For More Than 100 Years, the U.S. Forced Navajo Students Into Western Schools” by Daniella Zalcman for Smithsonian Magazine](#)
 - [“Carlise and the Indian Boarding School Legacy in America” by Daniella Zalcman for Pulitzer Center](#)
 - [“Pictured With Their Past, Survivors of Canada’s ‘Cultural Genocide’ Speak Out” by Daniella Zalcman for National Geographic](#)
- Using a pen, pencil, marker and/or colored pencils, create a blackout poem using one-page of text from the article you chose. Use the following techniques to create a blackout poem that reflects themes from the article that stood out to you:
 - Box, or draw around, words that are part of the poem you have created using words from the text.
 - Draw over words you want to hide from the viewer. Compose a drawing that also reflects themes from the text.
- Write a short paragraph that helps communicate the themes you are exploring in your blackout poem
- Share your poem and paragraph by emailing them to education@pulitzercenter.org

Extension: Creating visual art and poetry inspired by texts that interest you

Option 1: Read various non fiction offerings from indigenous writers and examine documents and photography provided via Pulitzer Center. Pick one text, and use that text to compose a blackout poem that visualizes the themes from the text. Here are two examples that you can start with:

- a. “In California, Salinan Indians Are Trying to Reclaim Their Culture and Land” by Allison Herrera for *NPR*
- b. “Seeds of Resistance: How Some Indigenous Brazilians are Trying to Save their Land” by Pablo Albarenga for *The Washington Post*

Option 2: Create a blackout poem using a page of text that you choose

- a. Look through books, newspapers, magazines and other print documents in your home/school/community. Identify one text that you think is important, and that more people should see.
- b. Create a blackout poem that reflects the key themes from the text you selected.
- c. Share your finished poem by emailing it to education@pulitzercenter.org