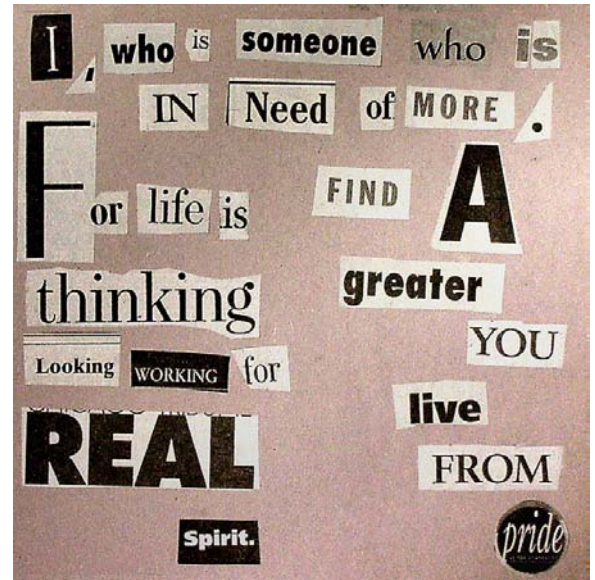




HEADLINE POETRY

The Headline Poetry project was developed by Olivia Gude, Jason Bozonelos, and Lacy Foy in the Express Yourself! group of the 2001 Spiral Workshop at the University of Illinois at Chicago.



Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century, artists have eschewed traditional boundaries between media. They've invented a myriad of new, hybrid forms that combine word and image, sound and word, concept and performance—yet most contemporary visual arts classes in elementary and secondary schools are still planned according to traditional art academy subject matter—drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture, crafts, and photography.

Unfortunately, when teachers encourage students to use words in their artmaking, the results are often uninteresting and predictable—a literal match between images and words. The Headline Poetry project introduces students to the use of words in their artmaking in a way that encourages spontaneity and exploration. Because students don't actually type or write words—instead, they gather and select words from newspaper and magazine headlines—they compose effortlessly without complaints about having to write in art class.

Headline Poetry is a good way to get students thinking about using words in artistic and unexpected ways. An interesting aspect of this project is that it asks students to create a personal stream of consciousness poem out of randomly found words of everyday culture.

INTRODUCTION TO RECYCLED WORDS & IMAGES

Introduce students to the work of Dada artists and poets. Discuss why artists in the beginning of the 20th century began appropriating words and images from printed sources. Ask

whether students consider this a valid way to make art. Have students suggest and collect examples of popular culture—music, TV shows, or rock videos that make use of appropriated, re-contextualized images and words.



For an introduction to pure chance poetry, try Tristan Tzara's recipe for writing Dada poetry. (See the Context Chapter.) However, this utterly random method may irritate students too much and thus may be unwise as an introductory activity.

GATHER WORDS

Divide students into groups—three or four students at each table or grouping of desks.

Ask students to randomly cut out words from the headlines. Tell them not to be consciously selective. Allow their minds and hands to freely wander. Have students stand on the same side of the table so that as they select words and lay them down on the table they will all be facing the same direction.

Begin by asking each student to gather 20 or 30 words. This will take only 5 or 6 minutes. After students cut out the requisite number of words, survey the words and then ask them to cut another 20 or 30 words. You may want to repeat this procedure several times. You could, of course, ask the students to cut out 50 to 75 words at once, but if you do this many students will complain this is too difficult. It's actually not that time-consuming or difficult—most students start to enjoy the process and cut more words than required.

It's a good idea to suggest that students use different sections of the newspaper in order to get a range of vocabulary. Also, suggest that each student spend one "cutting session" cutting words from the headlines of magazines. It can be interesting to discuss how the vocabulary drawn from various newspaper sections or magazines creates a different vocabulary to describe experience.

CHOOSE PAPER

Each student selects a piece of colored construction paper. Deep colors will have a tendency to emphasize the rectangular

structure of each word rectangle. Words on white paper may look lost unless the space on the paper around each word is closely cropped and the words are then closely spaced.

Pre-cut the paper for the class. When cutting the paper, consider the relationship of the scale of the paper to the scale of the words. In the first version of this project, we used 9-inch-square paper. This allowed space for enough words to make an interesting poem, but the regularity of the square did not seem to encourage experimentation with the layout and composition. In a later version, we used long, narrow sheets and this tended to produce more visually dynamic pieces.

MAKE POETRY

Students begin writing poems by selecting words and laying them out on their papers. Do not stop now to glue the words down. This inhibits the unconscious flow of meaningmaking and prevents spontaneous re-arranging of the words as the composition of the poem continues.

CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS

Explain to students that there can be no failures in this project. All that the project requires is surrender to the process. If the student artists "go with the flow," the projects will be an automatic success because the intent of the project is to introduce students to historical (and still valid) methods for tapping the creative imagination.

Explain to students that when they are in the initial stages of a poem or artwork, they can use Dada and Surrealistic techniques to mine the wealth of the unconscious, rather than sitting and fretting about not having any ideas today. When artists don't have a clear direction in mind, they engage in creative play.

GLUE DOWN THE POEM

After the poem is complete, suggest that students may wish to fine-tune the arrangement of the words as they glue them down.



PERFORM THE POEM

Each student reads his or her poem to the class. It's a good idea to have students "stand and deliver" with style and conviction. Tell students about Dada cabarets and their provocative performances. Connect this to contemporary "poetry slams." Encourage students to read in strange or experimental styles. Many teens will draw on knowledge of rap and hip-hop styling.

If this project is taught early in the year, it can set a climate for un-self-conscious experimentation. Students learn strategies for engaging in idea-generating activities. The project teaches students to immerse themselves in a process—to step back, consider, fine tune, and only then judge their results.

Organizing a classroom poetry slam helps students understand that they are members of a creative community. Each student's

role in the artroom is to share his or her art and ideas as well as to respond to the work of other students.

PUBLISH POETRY?

- * Consider submitting some of the poems to the school's literary magazine or newspaper.

- * Consider creating a Dada performance for a school assembly or talent show.

- * Consider creating small poetry posters and posting them in unexpected places around the school and community.

- * Consider reproducing the poems as transparencies using a Xerox machine or scanner and printer. Using an overhead project, create a changing poetry installation on the school hallways or cafeteria walls.

MATERIALS

for Headline Poetry

Newspapers and magazines

Glue or glue sticks

Scissors

Construction paper—deep or vivid colors usually work best