

#writeout

Creating Found Poetry from Public Signs

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Whether a city, National Park, small town, neighborhood playground, or suburb, the stories of place are communicated through signs. These signs may be about traffic, wildlife, weather, warnings and rules, directions, or information. This Write Out invitation serves as a chance to take a walk and take notes or pictures of signs that surround you and then use them to create found poetry!

Found poetry is poetry created with words you find. You can find these words anywhere (e.g. newspapers, magazines, blog spaces, menus, junk mail. In this case, we are finding words and phrases in signs.

Materials Needed

- Paper
- Pen or pencil
- Phone camera (not required)

Invitation:

Step 1: Go for a walk in your neighborhood or in a park. This can be done day to day or traveling adventures. Bring paper and something to write with. Or, a digital device (e.g. phone, Ipad, tablet). Look for public signs. These can be historical, traffic related, directional, weather related, rule related...any subject matter.

Step 2: If you have a camera, take pictures of the signs. If not, as you walk and observe, write the words you see on the signs. As you walk and notice, what words stand out to you? Are there expressions or sounds that catch your attention? Is there a sign that you are surprised by? Is there a sign that seems outdated? Is there a sign that you are drawn to? Or one, you really don't like? Capture these! As you notice signs and the language that stands out to you, create a word bank on your paper.

Step 3: Once you have a collection of words you are happy with or you are done with your walk, sit down and create a found poem using these words. This poem can be a list, a paragraph, a stanza, a circle, a run-on sentence, a song, or whatever you choose. It does not have to be a

formal poem and it does not have to rhyme. This is an unrestricted and open approach to writing poetry and the idea is to play and rearrange language to make it your own.

Example (as seen in video):

Word Bank:

Steps

Mapping

Corn

Butterflies

Footprint

Stop

Challenge

**How many steps does a ladybug take
As he roams through the sunflower field?
Will he map out his quest
(Should he go east or west?)
Or will he brave the unknown with a polkadot shield?**

**How many butterflies will fly high above
As the ladybug climbs through the corn?
Will they say hi! hello!
Or say stop! look for crows!
Or are they silent, delicate and forlorn.**

**How many challenges does the ladybug face,
As he explores grassy lands near and far?
But with all of its hardships,
Bug life sure is wondrous,
And who knows how important tiny footprints really are.**

3 Key Takeaways:

1. Creating found poetry using public signs can allow people to take part in a **close reading** of public spaces. What stories, messages, lessons, or information do signs share about a place?
2. Found poetry allows us to create our own meaning from other people's ideas and/or perspectives. How might found poetry allow you to **tell your own story** of a national park or community space? **changed over time?**
3. Looking at public signs, documenting them, and creating found poems requires **interpretation** and **inspiration**. What is the message the sign is sharing? What has been communicated and how? What do you want to communicate differently? What do you want to inspire?

Applying this Invitation to our Classrooms or Extensions

1. Invite students to create found poems from signs on the school campus. Or, go on a field trip, walk around the school neighborhood or block and do this activity.
2. Create new signs using text and images from old signs.

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