

Story FACTORY Ar+ Write Ligh+

Story Factory - Erasure Art Workshop

Duration: 2 hours

Target Audience: secondary (Stages 4 and 5)

In this workshop students learn about the history and concept of erasure poetry and use this knowledge to create three new and different erasure texts out of source material written by students from Western Sydney. This material will then contribute to a light installation and publication event to be held at Story Factory Parramatta in Term 4 of 2019.

Workshop Outcomes:

In this workshop you will:

- think creatively and critically
- write poetry in ways that are purposeful, challenging and descriptive
- learn about the concept of erasure art and experiment with the form of visual poetry
- draft, edit and create poetry that plays with publication conventions
- become published writers

Publication Outcomes:

- a blackout erasure poem
- a visual or collage erasure poem
- a covering erasure poem
- a proposal for how to erase a text

Introduction:

Art Write Light gives students in Western Sydney the opportunity to engage with contemporary Australian artists.

In 2019 Story Factory has collaborated with Bangarra Dance Theatre, Australia's professional indigenous dance company.

Students at Granville South Creative and Performing Arts High School and Chifley College Dunheved worked with indigenous dancer, choreographer and educator Kaine Sultan Babij

As part of *Art Write Light* Kaine has been commissioned to choreograph and perform two new dance works.

In Term Two students from two Western Sydney schools created writing that was inspired by Kaine's life story, his art practice and the ideas in his dance works.

In today's workshop you will use the writing produced by high school students in Term 2 in order to create new poems.

You will learn about and use erasure techniques to create new poems from this student writing.

What is Art Write Light?

Art: art practice of dancer, choreographer and educator Kaine Sultan Babij

Write: students from Western Sydney writing in response to either Kaine's life, art works and art practice or the writing of other students

Light: light based installation at Story Factory Parramatta in Term 4, 2019

Students view footage of Kaine's commissioned dance piece and his interview.

Short Bio:

Kaine is a dancer, choreographer, actor and educator based in Adelaide. He is of Arrernte, Afghan and Croatian heritage.

Kaine grew up in South Australia and is a graduate of the Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts.

He was a Principal Dancer with Bangarra Dance Theatre and has performed with the company throughout Australia and overseas.

In 2017 Kaine choreographed and performed in *Place*, a new work that was part of Bangarra's triple bill *One's Place: the Spine of Our Stories*.

About the Video:

Reborn is a short dance piece (approximately 4 minutes) that was choreographed and performed by dancer, choreographer and educator Kaine Sultan Babij as a commission for *Art Write Light*.

It was premiered to students at Granville South Creative and Performing Arts High School and Chifley College Dunheved.

In the dance piece Kaine explores the caterpillar Dreaming that is part of his Arrernte heritage.

- Kaine speaks about himself, the project and about his commissioned dance piece in his introduction to camera (1 minute 27 seconds).
- *Reborn*: first commissioned dance work for 2019 (4 minutes 20 seconds).

What is erasure?

When you hear the word erasure what probably comes to mind is the image of an eraser you might use to rub out pencil lines on paper.

What an eraser does is make pencil writing disappear.

Today we are going to experiment with the way we can make writing by making things disappear.

An erasure is the creation of a new text by disappearing the old text that surrounds it.

There are lots of different names for erasure texts.

Sometimes they are called blackouts, cross outs or ellisions.

They are even known as creative defacements.

A writer might erase or disappear the writing in a source text with a pen, paint, scissors, a blade or even objects.

The main idea is that the poet takes an existing source text and plays with language to find a new text within it.

The history of erasure poetry

During this workshop you will be making three different types of erasure poems from texts written by students in Western Sydney schools during Term 2 of 2019.

To develop your understanding of the possibilities of erasure poetry we are first going to look at four inspiring examples of writers and artists who have used erasure techniques to create new texts from other sources.

Some students here will already have experiences at school of making Blackout Poetry, a form of erasure poetry made popular in 2010 by US creativity expert, writer and author Austin Kleon.

Ask students to put up their hand if they have ever seen or written Blackout Poetry in the past.

Instead of starting with a blank page Austin Kleon grabs a newspaper and a permanent marker (he prefers to use a Sharpie and a newspaper called *The New York Times*) and eliminates or covers up the words he doesn't need to create a new poem.

A key message from his style of blackout poetry is that you can play with language to make a new poem.

Creativity is subtraction.

A poem is discovered in play.

When Austin Kleon makes a blackout poem he does not start with a blank page. He starts with a whole page of writing from a newspaper.

We call the piece of writing that is used to make an erasure poem our **source text**.

We are going to spend time today playing and making to create erasure poems but we can also treat this process as an important and serious way of making art.

Let's look at some example of how writers and artists have made erasure poetry.

In 1977 US poet Ronald Thompson found an old copy of John Milton's long poem *Paradise Lost* and blacked it out using an ink pen to create a new work he called *Radio s*.

The title of the work is created using letters from the two words that make up the title.

When asked about what was original about his erasure poetry he answered, "*I created the holes.*"

Tiny White Shadows is an erasure project created by US poet Mary Ruefle in 2006.

She took an old copy of a second hand book called *A Tiny White Shadow* and erased some of the text with liquid paper or White-Out to create and reveal new poems.

In 1966 English artist and poet Tom Philips began an erasure project that continues to the present day.

He set himself the challenge to buy a copy of a novel in a second hand shop for three pence or thruppence and transform it to tell a new story.

(A threepence is worth about fifteen cents in today's Australian money.)

The novel he found was the 1876 novel *A Human Document* by Havelock Ellis.

The new erased text he has created also takes its name from the original title.

A Human Document has become *A Humument*: the title being a partial deletion of the original title.

Philips decided to alter every page by painting, collage and cut-up techniques to create an entirely new version of the book

The first version of *A Humument* was printed in 1973, and Phillips has continued to transform it, revise it and develop it ever since.

Tom Philips has transformed each page into an original art work.

Each new piece of writing become a new page in a long story told in a non-linear way.

While his new version of the novel includes the original characters of Irma and Grenville he added an entirely new character, the mysterious Bill Toge, whose name only appears when the words "together" or "altogether" occur in the source text.

One idea for your own erasure poetry you can steal from Tom Philips is to make new words out of the letters from existing words in the source text.

Whereas Mary Ruefle has used erasure techniques to create individual poems Tom Philips has used erasure to create a new long form story out of an existing novel.

All the written text he stripped away has been replaced by visual images.

He has even released a digital version in 2010 known as *A Humument App for iPad*.

The "white snake lines" that guide the reader through his treated pages have been adopted by other makers of erasure poetry.

Jen Bervin is a US based poet and artist who has employed a variety of erasure techniques in her practice.

She has used cross stitch, a form of embroidery, to erase text.

Jen Bervin uses a needle and thread to sew over words she wishes to conceal from her reader.

Her project *Nets* is made by what Bervin calls harvesting language from Shakespeare's sonnets.

So her poems are mined or sourced from existing poems.

In this erasure poetry the source text is not covered up, as with Mary Ruefle and Tom Philip's work.

The source text remains visible to the reader so that they can consider the relationship between the new poem and the text that is used to create it.

This kind of artwork or text in which both the source text and the later text are both visible is sometimes called a **palimpsest**.

A palimpsest is a something reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form.

In the Middle Ages the pages of books were made of vellum, which is treated animal skin. Each page of a book was made from the skin of an animal such as a sheep.

This meant making a book was very expensive and so vellum was often recycled.

A book maker would attempt to wash or scrape off the original text so that new text could be written over the top.

A palimpsest exists when the reader can still see the original writing beneath the new text.

Tree of Codes is an artwork, in the form of a book, created by Jonathan Safran Foer, and published in 2010.

To create the book, Foer took Bruno Schulz's book *The Street of Crocodiles* and cut out the majority of the words in order to tell a new story.

He used a scalpel or very sharp blade to cut out the words he did not want to make a new story.

The publisher, Visual Editions, describes it as a "sculptural object."

Foer himself explains the writing process as follows: "I took my favourite book, Bruno Schulz's *Street of Crocodiles*, and by removing words carved out a new story".

Type of Erasure Poetry

There are seven types of erasure poetry we are going to expose students to today.

The first type we will explore is blackout poetry.

- 1) Blackout or Cross out Poetry
- 2) Grey Out
- 3) Computer
- 4) Cutout
- 5) Retyped
- 6) Visual/ Collage
- 7) Covering

Publication One

The first type of erasure poetry you are going to create today will take the form of a cross out or blackout poem.

We looked at this type of poem when I showed you the erasure poems by Austin Kleon that were made out of a copy of a newspaper.

Your first erasure poem will be made using the text of **just one paragraph** written by students who participated in *Art Write Light* in Term 2.

This first erasure poem will be very short.

It will only be one-line long.

Writing an erasure poem is a bit like a treasure hunt or archaeological dig.

We don't find the whole poem or all the treasure at once. We tend to find it a bit at a time.

One thing to dig for as you begin to create your erasure poem is an **anchor word**.

Before we begin let's go over a few strategies or tips for making a blackout poem.

- this is a **one-line** poem erased from a single paragraph.
- start by scanning the whole text before you read it.
- use a pencil rather than a pen to circle words and letters you might use in your poem.
- look for an **anchor word** to help you decide a topic or theme for your line of poetry.
- you can make new words out of the letters in one or more words
- the words you use in your line do not have to be in the same order as they are in your source text.
- try not to circle more than three words in a row.

- don't blackout until you have finalised your line of poetry!

Please make sure you write your name on top of your blackout poem.

Tips for Tutors to Help Students with Cross out / Blackout Poetry

- There is **no right or wrong approach** to erasure poetry. Encourage students to **have fun and play with language**.
- **Start with a pencil!** It is really easy to cross out a word or letter you might later realise you need if you begin with a pen or texta.
- **Scan** the page quickly **before you read** it closely.
- Ask students to begin by scanning through the written text looking for an **anchor word**. An **anchor word** is a word that has meaning, possibility or significance. It could just be a word that stands out or that you like.

Starting with an anchor word or two helps you to build a line or to work out what might be the topic, subject matter or idea of your erasure poem. Once you have an anchor word you can find other words that connect to this word to build your lines of poetry.

- Write down your **anchor word** and all the words you have circled at the bottom of the page. Play with their order. Once you have drafted out a line you can go back and circle all the words you have used in the source text. Note that not all students will need to do this step.
- **Read the written text one line at a time**. Revealing each line gradually by running a piece of blank paper, pencil or ruler down the page is a good way to locate words or letters you might not have noticed the first time you read through.
- Scan the written text starting from the **left hand side** margin. In English we read from **right to left**. Switching this up means you are more likely to see word patterns and word orders in a different way to usual.
- Start scanning the written text from the **bottom of the page rather than from the top**. This may cause words to appear that you had not noticed.
- Provide the reader with a **reading path, map** or **guideline** to help them read your lines of poetry. These might be the white snake like lines we saw in Tom Philip's *A Humument* or they might be arrows. They could be straight lines or curved lines. You could even **number** the order in which you wish your reader to read the words you have left visible. There is no one way to do this!
- Aim to circle **no more than three words in a row** from the source text. Erasure poems that do this tend to be too similar to the source text or turn into a summary of it.

- Remember you can make new words using the letters within or across a number of words. So you might carve out “so” from “**s**omething” or “rotten” from a few words **written** in a row.
- Writing any type of poem takes practice. Many of you are making erasure poems for the first time today. If you find you have circled too many words or that the draft of the poem isn’t working out then **feel free to start again** on a new and fresh copy of the source text. There will be plenty more copies at the front of the workshop space.
- Remember to **write your name** on your drafts of your erasure poem!

Poems Two and Three: Visual or Collage Poetry and Covering Poetry

The next two poems you will make in this workshop will be a visual or collage poem and a covering poem.

The source text for both these poems will be pieces of writing produced by students in two Western Sydney schools in Term 2 of 2019.

These next two poems will be longer than the one-line poem you made at the start of the workshop. It might be anywhere from three to ten lines. The choice is up to you.

Every student will get to make both of these poems but we will split into two groups and take turns to do this.

Half of the class will work on the visual or collage poem while the other half works on their covering poem.

I will explain how to make both of these poems before we begin our next poem.

If you have a V on your name tag you will in the first group to make a visual or collage poem.

If you have a C on your name tag you will first be in the first group to make a covering poem.

For both of these poems you will first use the techniques of blackout or cross out poetry you used your first short one-line poem.

Once you completed one of these poems you will have the opportunity to work on the second form.

As we explained at the start of the workshop all of you will become published poets.

We will include your blackout poem, visual or collage poem and a photograph of your covering poem in your class publication.

Before we make our Visual or Collage Poem and our Covering Poem we are going to look at a few more ways that writers and artists can make erasure poems.

These are:

- 1) Grey Out
- 2) Computer
- 3) Cutout
- 4) Retyped

- 5) Visual/ Collage
- 6) Covering

Storyteller shows students some examples of different ways of making erasure poetry and emphasises that we today we are only going to make two of them: a visual or collage poem and a covering poem.

Poem 3/ Group 1- Visual or Collage Poem:

Let's look at how one erasure artist has approached using visual elements to create a visual or collage poem.

Miriam Paternoster is another erasure artist who discovers poems in old books.

<https://arteascuola.com/2012/12/discover-the-hidden-poems/>

A great way to show students the possibility of erasure poetry is to screen this clip showcasing the work of Miriam Paternoster.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zf6k8aW2Toc>

The clip is 3 minutes 26 seconds in full.

You don't need to watch the whole clip but the students will probably want to do so. It is pretty mesmerising!

To erase the written text for this poem you will first use a pencil to the words you want to leave visible for the reader, just as you did for your first cross out or black out poem.

Once you have pencil version of this poem you can take a second copy and begin your visual poem.

Whereas your first blackout poem was only one line in length this visual poem can be a number of lines- perhaps 3-10.

You can choose to draw your own visual elements or you can incorporate collage elements and pieces of cut out paper.

It's worth asking students if they know the term collage.

definition:

collage: a piece of art made by sticking various different materials such as photographs and pieces of paper or fabric on to a backing such as a piece of paper.

At the front of the room are some paper cut outs you can use to create your own collage elements.

Look how simple it is to create objects from basic shapes such as circles, square, rectangles and triangles.

The trees in one of the collage poems are simply triangles cut out of green paper.

Some of these paper cut outs are stills from Kaine's dance performance of *Reborn*.

You might also choose to trace your hand onto the page and then colour this in after you have made your visual or erasure collage poem.

We also have some shapes cut out of paper card that you can trace or paste into your visual or collage poem.

Poem 3/ Group 2- Covering Poem

Covering Poetry

In this type of erasure poetry the poet covers the written text with another material such as sand, sticks or leaves- or whatever material they choose.

Artist and writer Sandra Johanson created a series of erasure poems that use materials from plants such as seeds, leaves, petals and slice of vegetables.

She uses plants in her erasure poetry as a way of celebrating and mourning the state of the environment in a time of global warming.

Johanson chose plants that were available during the month of October and looked for a range of colours and textures.

<http://nightjarreview.com/sonja-johanson.html>

To create the covering poem you will again first choose the words to be left uncovered by circling them with a pencil.

The blackout poem you made earlier was only one line whereas your covering poem might be 3-10 lines in length.

What is important is that you erase your poem by circling words and letters with a pencil BEFORE you start to play with the covering materials in the plastic containers.

Draft your poem on paper before you begin covering. You might find that your poem changes a bit once you start using the covering materials.

Be careful not to spill the materials onto the floor. We do not want anyone to trip or slip and be injured!

We have some iPads available in the room and we would like to film your hands as you cover up the written text you choose to conceal to create your poem.

We will not film your face as we make a record of your process of making a covering poem.

We have some tutors who will help you with this process.

We also want to photograph your covering poem once it has been assembled.

These are very fragile and often temporary poems so it is important that we record each once as it is completed.

We will take photographs of both your visual or collage poem and your covering poem to include in your school publication.

Reading:

Students have the opportunity to read the written text of their erasure poems.

You might get students to explain to the class the processes by which they erased their poems.

They may read for their peers or have the Storyteller or tutors read for them.

NAME:

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Proposal for an Erasure Poem

a) Written Explanation

There are many techniques that poets can use to erase a source text to make a new poem.

Write a short explanation for your own invented strategy for making an erasure poem.

There are no right or wrong answers.

I propose that poets could make an erasure poem by:

b) Illustration

Draw a quick sketch of what your erasure poem might look like.

You could include labels in this sketch or images of the materials or equipment needed.



NAME:

**Story Factory
Art Write Light Term 3 Workshop**

Miranda July's Forgetting Napkin

Writer and artist Miranda July created this poster for an art project by first painting a message on to a napkin.

She was interested in the way the act of covering could be a form of erasure and be used to create an art work with a purpose.

Miranda July offered the following explanation of her artwork.

"This napkin is to be used to cover a photograph and so thereby mend a broken heart."

"Forgetting Napkin," an artwork to be "hung over a photograph of someone who has broken your heart.... It is a gentle first step, a shroud," not "to be used in the later stages [of grief], because it will actually have the reverse effect, acting as more of a monument."



Write your own message about covering onto a piece of paper and paste it on to your choice of a piece of coloured paper.

Before you begin:

Make a list of other flat white objects that might be used to cover something.

1.	2.	3.	4.
5.	6.	7.	FINAL CHOICE:

Make a list of things you think might need to be covered or concealed.

1.	2.	3.	4.
5.	6.	7.	FINAL CHOICE:

Miranda July's art work uses covering to help heal a broken heart. What might your act of covering hope to achieve?

Draft One:

Title of Artwork: _____

This _____ is covering a _____
