The Library as Incubator Project
Kit: The Great Poetry Hunt

Created by Line Assembly

“The Great Poetry Hunt” has three goals: 1. To generate poems (and illustrate how poems can be inspired by original sources). 2. To introduce participants to several types of poetry with which they may be unfamiliar. 3. To illustrate the usefulness, versatility, and breadth of your local public library.

The activity is essentially a scavenger hunt. Participants will be given a list of items to find - in this case, poems to write. Types of poems are paired with sections of the library’s collection - for example, exploring the Fine Art section leads to the creation of an ekphrastic poem. The length of the item list can be tailored to the number of participants, to level of experience with poetry, and in accordance with the library’s resources.

Additionally, many of the “items” can be taught as their own sessions, if multiple days/weeks of programming are desired. Where appropriate, “items” includes resources - links, introductory articles, and reading suggestions - for the type of poem associated with that section of the library. However, the activity is written so that it can be done without any formal knowledge of poetry. (If the “item” is being taught as its own session, participants can be told “Go write this type of poem” because they’ve learned exactly what it is. If the “items” are part of the scavenger hunt, and participants therefore haven’t learned the concept, they are written in such a way that they don’t use formal vocabulary until after the concept has been introduced and processed.)

An interest in poetry is essential, though.

Recommended readings and resources are appropriate for all ages!

AS A SCAVENGER HUNT

Number of Participants: Technically, any number, but 20 or fewer will allow time for sharing and reflection.

Materials:

• Item list
• Notebook and writing utensil for each participant
• Map of the library/run-down of the DD system

Time needed: 1.5 - 2 hours

1. Introduce the activity.
2. Hand each participant a copy of the item list.
3. Set a time limit: 1 - 1.5 hours should be enough.
4. Set the participants free!
5. When the time is up, bring everyone together. Encourage participants to share what they’ve written, as well as add a few words about how they approached the subject material, or how the scavenger hunt has changed their perception of the library and what it offers.

BONUS STEP:

• Display the poems in the sections that inspired them. Include a note that says “Curious about this person/painting/whatever?” with a citation and recommendations. This will be a
source of pride to participants in the activity, as well as being a unique way of drawing attention to the library’s offerings.

• Unlike the typical scavenger hunt, it isn’t a race, so there is no winner. However, you could still have prizes in various, non-judgemental, categories (Silliest, Craziest, Most Musical, etc.)
• To encourage collaboration, try pairing up participants before sending them on the hunt.

AS INDIVIDUAL SESSIONS
Number of participants: 20 or fewer is ideal to allow discussion and time for sharing and reflection.
Materials (variously):
• Internet access and a projector; or copies of resources/sample poems.
• Notebook and writing utensil for each participant.

Time needed: 1.5 hours.

• Warm-up, if desired.

1. Introduce the section of the library that corresponds with the “item.” Discuss what types of books it includes, where it’s located in the library, and why that type of book is important.
2. Introduce the poetic concept, using resources, if desired.
3. Read and discuss sample poems. (Time constraints will dictate how many poems can be discussed: at least two is ideal.) Ask a participant to read each poem out loud. Encourage participants to share their thoughts about the poem. First reactions are often valuable ones. If a participant really likes it, ask them to articulate why. If a participant doesn’t like it, ask them to articulate why. Try to come to an understanding. Encourage participants to connect each specific poem to the concept at hand: Why might a poet have made this particular choice? Why write in this voice/about this painting/in this form?
4. Following discussion, direct participants to the section that corresponds to the “item.” Give them about twenty minutes to locate some inspiration and draft a poem.
5. Bring everyone back together. Encourage participants to share their work, as well as talk about the process of looking through the library’s collection.

BONUS STEP:

• Display the poems in the sections that inspired them. Include a note that says “Curious about this person/painting/whatever?” with a citation and recommendations. This will be a source of pride to participants in the activity, as well as being a unique way of drawing attention to the library’s offerings.
• To encourage collaboration, try pairing up participants before sending them on the hunt.

Some Sample ITEMS

Get to know...BIOGRAPHY:

• Find the Biography section of your library.
• Find an interesting-looking biography. In this case, judging a book by its cover is just fine.
• Read the dust jacket. Skim a few pages. Skim until you have an idea of who this person is, what he or she did that merited a whole biography, etc.
• Write a short poem in this person’s voice, from inside his or her perspective. Become them. The poem’s “I” isn’t yours - it’s theirs. Introduce him or her to the world, describe what a day in his or her life is like, share a dream he or she had, or just let them talk.
• This is called a persona poem.
Resources for teaching persona poetry:


Reading suggestions:

- Julianna Baggott, *Lizzie Borden in Love: Poems in Women’s Voices*
- Jim Hall, “Maybe That's Yo Pwoblem Too”
- Tyehimba Jess, “mistress stella speaks”
- Patricia Smith, *Blood Dazzler*

Get to know...FINE ART:

- Find the Fine Art section of your library.
- Find a piece of art that really captivates you. It can be a photograph, a drawing, a painting, a sculpture, a collage, a digital image, an installation, a piece of architecture - any kind of visual art. Don’t overthink it. Trust your gut.
- Write a poem that responds to this piece of art in some way. Describe it, or enter it, or ask it questions. Consider what can’t be seen, or what the artist was thinking. Write about what makes it interesting or mysterious or confusing. Write about how it makes you feel, or just write about how thick the paint is or how weird the light is. Write about a memory or person or place it reminds you of. Just respond.
- This is called an *ekphrastic* poem.

Resources for teaching ekphrastic poetry:


Reading suggestions:
(If projection equipment is available, showing the painting along with each poem is a terrific way to understand how poets can look at art.)

- Veronica Chang, “Edward Hopper Study: Hotel Room”
- Sharon Dolin, *Serious Pink: Ekphrastic Poems*
- Matthea Harvey, “Self-Portraits” (based on the paintings of Max Beckmann)
- Lisel Mueller “Paul Delvaux: The Village of the Mermaids”
- William Carlos Williams, “Landscape With the Fall of Icarus”