



snow city arts  
virtual  
learning

# VIRTUAL INSTRUCTION **VIDEO TRANSCRIPT**

Workshop:

## **Erasure Poetry (Analog)**

Learn about erasure poetry and the different techniques that can be used to create an erasure poem. You will also learn about poets who use these techniques in their art, and will draw inspiration from them to create your own erasure poetry.

Teaching Artist:  
Eric Elshtain

Workshop duration: 25 - 45 minutes



# Transcript

Hello! My name is Eric. My pronouns are he/him/his, and I am a poet that teaches with Snow City Arts. Thank you for inviting Snow City Arts into your room. Today, we will work together to compose a short poem. You will be able to do it even if you have never written a poem before.

Today I want to show you a technique called **erasure poetry**. Erasure poetry, also known as **blackout poetry**, is a form of found poetry wherein a poet takes an existing text and erases, blacks out, or otherwise obscures a large portion of the text, creating a wholly new work from what remains. Erasure poetry may be used as a means of collaboration, creating a new text from an old one; and therefore starting a dialog between the two, or as a means of confrontation- a challenge to a pre-existing text.

So this means that you're creating a poem, but you're not actually writing anything yourself—which might be a strange way to think about poetry. But, I want you to imagine walking into a classroom and finding a paragraph—a paragraph that you did not write—written on the chalkboard. You see some interesting words and some interesting phrases. You take an eraser, and you erase everything but those interesting words and phrases. They may end up creating complete sentences, or just be fragments and phrases. Either way, what you've done is created your own original poem.

Erasure can take many different forms, and can work on many different scales. Some erasure poems are just a single page, taken from a book, a newspaper, or a magazine. Some poets have taken short books, old books that they've found in used bookstores. And they've covered over each page to create a whole new collection of poems. Some have taken large novels that they've found, and have painted over every page with intricate illustrations and drawings, and creating their own story from the story that existed, or exists, within that source text. Today, we're gonna look at a few analog forms and a few digital forms of erasure poetry.

Okay, let's get started.

The simplest form of erasure poetry is blackout poetry, where you use a black marker to block out the text that you don't want people to be able to read. In this short erasure poem, I used a ruler to mark out the words that I wanted people to be able to read with nice straight lines. You can use a Sharpie. You can use a thicker black marker. And I like to begin with a pencil to make my

# Transcript Continued

initial choices, just in case I want to change my mind.

Here is a longer paragraph from the same book that I used to create the first poem I showed you. I'm not gonna use the ruler this time. I'm going to make my initial choices. This is an out-of-copyright book, which means that it's nobody's property. So, I can use it without worrying about any owner showing up saying "you can't use that, I own it."

I like some of the images and colors in this paragraph. I'm gonna use my erasure to highlight those aspects of this paragraph. So, once I've made my choices and I'm happy with my choices, I'm going to outline the words with the marker that I want to remain visible. These passages are from a book titled *The Song of the Lark* by the great American author Willa Cather.

## **[music]**

So now I'll just start crossing out the sections that I don't want visible in my erasure. You can play around with darker and lighter crossing out. The lighter crossing out means that people might be able to make out some of the background words, and that might create an interesting effect. And we'll explore that effect in different ways to create erasure later on in this video.

So, there's my finished piece:

*The red plant lived under the blaze of golden plums and sand.*

## **[If you want to try blackout erasure poetry, pause the video now.]**

Some poets will use illustrations to cover over portions of their source texts. Here is an example by a 17-year-old student that I worked with. Christine took the famous "to be or not to be" speech from Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* and did a colored pencil drawing of a young woman staring up at the sun to accompany her erasure poem.

The poet and artist Tom Phillips uses pencil drawings, pen drawings, paints, even collage, to cover over his source texts for his erasure poems. I want to show you a very simple technique using a source text and a source image that you can use to create an erasure poem.

# Transcript Continued

**[If you want to try the draw- or paint-over technique, pause the video now.]**

The technique that I'd like to show you now involves physically placing an image over a piece of text. You use the image to cover the words that you don't want people to see, and cut out windows from the image to reveal the words that you want people to be able to read.

Here is the little poem that I created using this process. It goes:

*Freedom. Upheaval. Again and again of the rising masses.*

I used an image of what looks like a small group of Indigenous Americans on a boat going down a river, perhaps returning to their homes. What I like about this is that I took a paragraph from a book titled *Principles of Geology*, published in 1830 by Lyell, and took a paragraph about a geological force and created it into a poem about the force of freedom.

Now, like I said, I used scissors to cut out these windows. Maybe you don't have any scissors available to you, so I want to show you this process using the same paragraph but a different image in a way where you don't need to use any cutting implements. You will need a soft surface to work on. This is just a small pile of white lined paper. This is an image I printed out from the Internet that's free to use. I'm going to choose a portion of the image, take a pencil, and trace a line. And I'm gonna use folds and creases to tear the paper. You want a nice crease. Use your fingernail. And once you've done that, it should tear pretty easily.

**[music]**

Don't worry about rough edges. Perfect. So you notice that I had two copies printed out. What I'm going to do, using a pencil, just make my choices. I'm gonna keep this short. So:

*Portions of movement may be falling of masses.*

So, now that I know the text that I want to use, I'll put the image underneath. And it's better to take a ballpoint pen and very heavily—a lot of pressure—box off the words that you want to use. And you may have guessed why I'm putting so much pressure as I'm outlining. What I want to try to do is create outlines on the image below. And you notice I didn't put enough pressure. And you may

# Transcript Continued

start to tear through your paper, and that's okay. Now I'm getting the outline here. There's actually a little dent, so I can use that to trace.

**[music]**

You can feel it. Even better, I started to mark through paper. And I can see it much easier that way. And then you're gonna continue this process, pressing down with your pen, until you start to work through the image. And then you should be able to just poke through to create your windows. You may want to use a pen that you don't care too much about to make this process work.

Here's the finished erasure using the ballpoint pen tear technique. You can glue or tape the image over the text once you've aligned it.

Thank you for taking the time to explore erasure poetry with me today. I hope you found it interesting—the idea that you can create a poem without writing anything yourself. Now, a question may have arisen from you while you watched this video or created your erasure: “Isn't this plagiarism?”

Well, it isn't plagiarism. And it is not for a couple of reasons. One being that many of the texts used by the erasure poets are so old that they're out of copyright. And it's legal to use any portion of that text. Also, when you create an erasure, you're using so little of the source text that you are creating a wholly original piece of art, that bears very little relationship to the source text. And so, it has no legal reproductions.

Thanks again for taking the time, and see you at the next poem!

Thank you for working with me today. I hope you will choose to work with Snow City Arts again soon.

**If you are interested in receiving school credit**

for the work you have completed in this workshop, or if you would like to have your work **displayed in a Snow City Arts exhibition space or virtual gallery:**

Visit <https://snowcityarts.org/consent-releases/> to learn more.

**Contact us at [programs@snowcityarts.org](mailto:programs@snowcityarts.org)** if you have questions, would like to offer feedback, or would like to continue working with us virtually.



snow city arts

**Snow City Arts inspires and educates children and youth in hospitals through the arts.**

**[snowcityarts.org](https://snowcityarts.org)**