

# Viral Imaginations: COVID-19

## Poetry in a Time of Pandemic

Michele Mekel, JD, MHA, MBA  
Assistant Director, Bioethics Program  
The Pennsylvania State University  
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**Level:** Grades 7-12

### Lesson Objectives:

- Students will utilize their research, reading, and creative-writing skills.
- Students will practice proper citation formatting.
- Students will produce their poetry, based on their pandemic experiences.
- Students will reflect how creative writing can be a tool for stress management and processing experiences.
- Students will participate in presenting their writing and thoughts to others through reading their poetry aloud to the class and engaging in class discussion.
- Students will be exposed to concepts of empathy and community through listening to others' poetry and exploring both the creative process and their pandemic experiences during class discussion.

### Materials Needed:

- Access to an Internet-connected computer, and Internet-based search sites and news sources
- Access to document-creation and sharing tools, such as Google documents

### Summary of Tasks/Actions:

- **TEACHER PREPARATION:** The teacher reviews (and modifies) the assignment (below).
- **INTRODUCTION:**
  1. The teacher will introduce students to poetry.
  2. The teacher will introduce students to one or more citation formats.
- **PROCESS:** Ask students to:
  1. Select a recent news article on the COVID-19 pandemic. The article may be from a news source, a magazine, or an academic journal in any field.
  2. Read and re-read the article, and then reflect on it using the following prompts:
    - What didn't you know before reading the article that you know now?
    - How does that information impact your thinking about the pandemic?
    - What new questions do you have?
  3. Select Option A or B below.

**Option A:**

    - Students will pick a short line (i.e., a sentence, a phrase, or even the headline) from the article that catches their attention for whatever reason and reflect on the following prompts:
      - What about that excerpt is interesting to you?

- Why did you select it?
- Students should create a new document in whatever program or platform has been selected. They should title the new document: A Pandemic Poem with a Line from “[INSERT ARTICLE TITLE]” by [INSERT AUTHOR’S NAME] in [INSERT PUBLICATION NAME] on [INSERT DATE OF ARTICLE PUBLICATION], and insert their byline. They should then paste the text they selected from the article into the document, and write a poem that includes the selected line. Students should cite the originating article using proper citation format.

**Option B:**

- Students should create a new document in whatever program or platform has been selected. They should then copy the article (or a page of it) and paste it into the new document. Students should title the document: Blackout/Erasure/Found Pandemic Poem Drawn from “[INSERT ARTICLE TITLE]” by [INSERT AUTHOR’S NAME] in [INSERT PUBLICATION NAME] on [INSERT DATE OF ARTICLE PUBLICATION], and insert their byline. Students should then scan the article/article excerpt for a word or a phrase that catches their attention and highlight that word or phrase in an obvious manner that makes it stand out from the rest of the text and continue doing this throughout the copied text. In the process of “collecting” or even “creating” new words in the excerpted text, students should develop contextual connections that communicate something about the COVID-19 pandemic experience. Students may choose to black out or strike through the rest of the words in the article/excerpted text, and they might even choose to illustrate on the text in some way. Students should cite the originating article using proper citation format.
4. Write a paragraph on the next page of the same document that reflects on this creative process using the following prompts:
    - Did it make you think about things in a different way?
    - How did you feel before the exercise and after it?
    - Did what you communicated through your poem surprise you, and, if so, how?
  5. Submit the document, which includes the poem and reflection, pursuant to the teacher’s instructions.
  6. Have the document with the poem and reflection accessible during class for the Pandemic Poetry Slam, during which students will have the opportunity to read their poem to the class and discuss this exercise.
- **CLASS ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION:** After the poetry and reflections have been turned in, the following class period will be dedicated to a Pandemic Poetry Slam and discussion. For the poetry slam, students will read their poem aloud to the class (either on a mandatory or voluntary basis, as determined by the teacher). After the readings conclude, the teacher will lead a class discussion of the themes that emerged from the poetry shared and about the experience of writing poetry and hearing others’ poems. Questions to guide discussion include:
    1. Why did you select the article you selected as the basis of your poem?
    2. What did you learn from the article about the coronavirus pandemic that you did not know before?
    3. What new questions does that raise?
    4. How did you feel before creating your poem? Did that change after creating the poem? If so, how?
    5. What themes did you notice in the poetry shared?
    6. How did hearing the poetic works of others alter your thinking about living in pandemic times?

- **OPTIONAL STEP:** Encourage students to upload, with parental permission, their final poetry to the *Viral Imaginations* website at <https://viralimagination.psu.edu/submit/>

## **ASSIGNMENT**

### **Introduction**

Some may not *think* they are creative. That’s ok. Others may not particularly enjoy creating because ... [insert your reasons]. That’s ok, too. And yet others may not feel that they have time to engage in creative activities. And that also is ok.

That said, this assignment is a creative exercise. But, before the eye rolling, sighing, or head shaking, give this a chance. (Seriously.) Why? Many reasons related to the present, as well as to the future.

Even in times that are not pandemics, we experience stress. Over time, such stress can accumulate and impact us negatively in terms of our mental and physical wellbeing, which then impacts every aspect of our lives. As a result, we must develop a set of skills and tools to process and cope with stress in a *healthy* way. One powerful tool is creating through writing, visual art, music—or any medium.

To that end, here’s an assignment that can assist you with working with the stress of the pandemic through creative writing. As a bonus, this assignment will also: (1) aid you in learning something new that, perhaps, you did not already know about the pandemic and its impact, and (2) allow you to practice your citation skills.

### **Assignment**

7. Select a recent news article on the COVID-19 pandemic. The article may be from a news source, a magazine, or an academic journal in any field.
8. Read the article. Re-read the article. Reflect on it:
  - What didn’t you know before reading the article that you know now?
  - How does that information impact your thinking about the pandemic?
  - What new questions do you have?
9. Select Option A or B below.

#### ***Option A:***

- Pick a short line (a sentence, a phrase, or even the headline) from the article that catches your attention for whatever reason.
  - What about that excerpt is interesting to you?
  - Why did you select it?
- Copy that line.
- Start a new document.
- Title the document: A Pandemic Poem with a Line from “[INSERT ARTICLE TITLE]” by [INSERT AUTHOR’S NAME] in [INSERT PUBLICATION NAME] on [INSERT DATE OF ARTICLE PUBLICATION]
- Insert your byline in the next line.
- On a new line, paste the text you selected from the article.

- Write a poem—in any form of your choosing—that includes the line you selected from the article. (Be sure to put the line in quotes.) The line can appear anywhere in the body of your poem that makes sense to you.
- Cite the originating article using proper citation format.

**Option B:**

- Copy the article (or a page of it).
  - Start a new document.
  - Title the document: Blackout/Erasure/Found Pandemic Poem Drawn from “[INSERT ARTICLE TITLE]” by INSERT AUTHOR’S NAME] in [INSERT PUBLICATION NAME] on [INSERT DATE OF ARTICLE PUBLICATION]
  - Insert your byline in the next line.
  - Starting on a new line in the document, paste the text (or text excerpt) from your chosen article.
  - Scan the article/article excerpt for a word or a phrase that catches your attention for whatever reason.
  - Highlight that word or phrase in some obvious manner that makes it stand out from the rest of the text.
  - Continue doing this throughout the copied text. In the process of “collecting” or even “creating” new words in the excerpted text, develop contextual connections that communicate something about the COVID-19 pandemic experience.
  - You may choose to black out or strike through the rest of the words in the article/excerpted text. You might even choose to illustrate on the text in some way.
  - Cite the originating article using proper citation format.
10. Write a paragraph on the next page of the same document that reflects on this creative process.
- Did it make you think about things in a different way?
  - How did you feel before the exercise and after it?
  - Did what you communicated through your poem surprise you, and, if so, how?
11. Submit your document, which includes your poem and your reflection, \_\_\_\_\_.
12. Have the document with your poem and reflection accessible during class on \_\_\_\_\_, when we will be doing a Pandemic Poetry Slam. During the poetry slam, students will have the opportunity to read their poem to the class and discuss this exercise.