ABSTRACT

Teaching suggestions and questions on which to build a class discussion are presented regarding concrete poetry. An example of a poem about a bird's feather in which the words are arranged in the shape of a feather is included and is intended as a student handout. In addition to suggestions for student assignments, five sources of concrete poetry conclude this brief article. (JH)
Creating and Understanding Concrete Poetry

Begin by writing on the chalkboard the following poem, in stanza form as shown below. Read it aloud or ask a student to do so. If you think your students might have difficulty with “sea of green” or with the word hue, clear up those two problems now.

In a sea of green, a patch of blue;
A color of such a brilliant hue,
That I stopped to wonder at the thing;
A feather lost by a bird on the wing.

Now, distribute copies of the poem as shown on the handout and as it was actually composed—in the shape of a feather—by Mary Waddell, a high school student. Here are some questions on which to build a discussion of her poem and of concrete poetry more generally.

1. Which version of the poem is more effective? Why? (You might want to keep in mind that a fairly convincing argument can be made in favor of the traditional stanza form.)

2. The poet seemed to make some definite choices about the size and shape of words and their placement on the page. Can you think of a reason why the word wing is placed as it is? The word brilliant? What meaning do you assign to the changes in size? Why is it appropriate to the meaning and the mood of the poem that the words after the last semicolon grow smaller and smaller?

3. If you were to add colors and a pictorial background to this poem, what colors and pictures would you use? Why?

If your students have not studied concrete poetry, explain that in such poetry the placement of the words on the page is related to their meaning in the poem. Ask them to create one-word concrete poems using the words rainbow, dropout, waterfall, variety, crescendo, and other words that lend themselves to such treatment. Emphasize that they can change the size and, to some extent, the shapes of letters and arrange the words on the page in unusual ways.

The Feather

Mary Waddel

In a sea of green
of such a brilliant hue, that
I stopped to wonder at
the thing,
a feather
lost by a bird on the wing.

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