

BLACKOUT POETRY

An Exercise to process Black Saturday



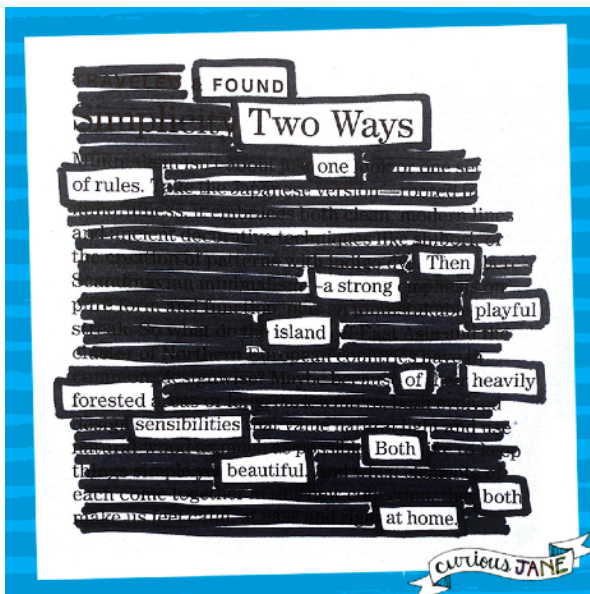
Using the technique of blackout poetry, learners will read through three timely pieces written in response to this moment to create their own poetic works. This resource is designed for lovers and skeptics of poetry.

Poetry holds a special place in Israeli society and has remained a vital center of Israeli literary culture. A typical Israeli bookstore, lures customers in by placing books of poetry in their window. And people in Israel lean on poetry in moments of calm as well as in moments of crisis.

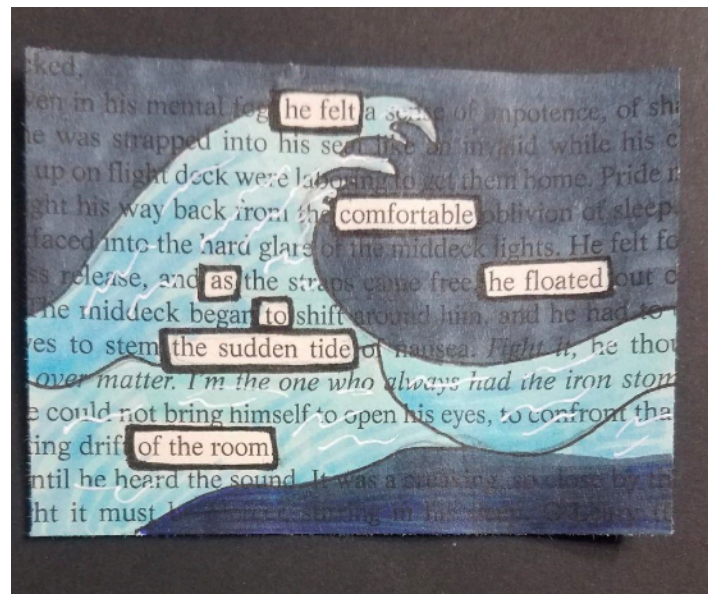
In the aftermath of the October 7 attack, poetry has and continues to play a critical role in helping people find the right words to express themselves. New poems and old poems have been circulating the internet, leaning on their abstract imaginary wordplay for comfort, solace and prayer.

At the same time, this quality of poetry can make it feel removed and hard to grasp, let alone create. Yet, looking within a text and elevating words and phrases that speak to you, can help connect you to particular emotions that you are experiencing in the moment.

Blackout poetry is a technique for reading and producing poetry that uses original text of any kind to allow an individual to update and enhance it to reveal new meanings and illuminate hidden emotions.



Source: <https://www.yayomg.com/blackout-poetry-diy/>



Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/263390278197543655/>



Read through the following three sources that relate to the period after the October 7 massacre to this moment. You can use one of them as your starting point to create your own poetry for this moment.

STEP 1: CREATE YOUR BLACKOUT POEM

Follow the steps below to create a blackout poem:

- ◆ Choose one source to focus on.
- ◆ Scan the page: Look for words that seem meaningful and significant. Start imagining possible themes and topics from your poem.
- ◆ Use a pencil to circle any words that resonate with you. Try to avoid circling more than three words in a row.
- ◆ Piece your selected words together to make a new narrative. If you are stuck, feel free to add or remove words, so that the words that appear fit with your new narrative.
- ◆ Once you have your words, take a Sharpie and black out the rest of the words.
- ◆ On the margins and in the other places, create an illustration or design that connects to the meaning of your poem. You can use markers, pencils or anything else to enhance your new poem.

STEP 2: REFLECT WITH THE GROUP

- ◆ Ask for 3 volunteers to read the original texts
- ◆ Invite learners to share their new poem.
- ◆ After they share, have them respond to the question: What story is your new poem telling? Which words did you intentionally cross out? What was this process like for you?

STEP 3: END WITH A BLESSING

May these poems join the new Jewish canon of literature that become artifacts for how we moved through this moment in time.



SOURCE 1: A CONVERSATION BETWEEN FRIENDS

In a conversation amongst a group of Israeli friends after the massacre on October 7th, they were sharing their feelings of this moment.

Amongst the pain of it,

Please read the excerpt below, October 20, 2023

Friend 1; I am in pain all over my body. It hurts me physically. And reading what they write on the news about this being the beginning, is making the pain even stronger.

Friend 2: Yesterday was the first night that I didn't have nightmares. I have been up everynight for two weeks unable to sleep, thinking about the babies that have been kidnapped and my entire body is ripped about. Ripped.

Friend 3: Yesterday there was a news show that showed how the terrorists gained control. Step by step. I can't stop crying. I can't stop. And after I cried at midnight, I opened my zoom and saw Avitar Banai play music and it was medicine for my heart.

אני עם כאבים בכל הגוף. פיזית כואב לי .
ורק קוראת מה שכותבים בחדשות שזו רק
ההתחלה ועוד יותר כואב לי.

אתמול פעם ראשונה שלא היו לי סיוטים
בלילה.
כבר שבועיים שאני ערה
ערה בלילות
לא יכולה לישון
חושבת על התינוקות שחטופים ואני מרגישה
את הגוף שלי נקרע
נקרע

אתמול היתה תוכנית בעובדה שמראה איך הם
השתלטו . צעד אחר צעד.
אי אפשר להפסיק לבכות
אי אפשר
ואז אחרי שבכיתי מלא
ב 12 בלילה פתחו זום של אביתר בנאי
וזה היה ריפוי ללב



Friend 1: Everyday I read a little and feel like I have to throw up. Anytime I am without the kids, I cry. It just flows from me. What is this reality? How can we raise our kids here?

Friend 2: It's the most cliché, but we have no place else to go. And it is my identity, my authentic identity that I can't have in any other place.

Friend 3: I feel like leaving this country is going back in history. Again antisemitism and again, a Holocaust.

No.

Not as a sheep to the slaughter.

No

This is our country.

We were given it.

We fought for it.

I want to raise my girls here.

I have no other country.

To change the script.

Friend 4: I'm already starting to imagine a village somewhere far out on the edge of the world.

Friend 3: It could happen, but what type of life will it be? Will you take all of your loved ones with you?

כל פעם שאני קוראת קצת אני מרגישה צורך להקיא. כל פעם שאני בלי הילדים אני פשוט בוכה. זה פשוט יוצא ממני. מה זאת המציאות הזאת? איך נגדל פה את הילדים שלנו?

הכי קלישה

אין לנו מקום אחר ללכת אליו אחיה בזהות שלי

האותנטית

בשום מקום אחר

אני מרגישה שלעזוב את הארץ זה פשוט לשחזר את ההיסטוריה. עוד פעם אנטישמיות ועוד פעם שואה.

לא.

לא כצאן לטבח.

לא.

זו המדינה שלנו.

קיבלנו אותה.

נלחמנו עליה.

כאן אני רוצה לגדל את בנותיי.

אין לנו ארץ אחרת.

לשנות את התסריט.

אני כבר מתחילה לחשוב על איזה כפר נידח בחור תחת של החיים

זה יכול לקרות

אבל איזה מין חיים אלה יהיו

תקחי לשם את כל אהוביך?



SOURCE 2: SHARON BROUS

Rabbi Sharon Brous:

On Yom Kippur, in the conversation with Dr. Murthy, the Surgeon General, I shared the midrash about *Adam haRishon*, the first person, on the sixth day of creation, at the end of his first day of his life. The sun begins to set, and Adam starts to panic. He wonders if maybe he did something wrong. As the sky blackens, he becomes increasingly fearful. Could it be that the world is ending?

Eve must be scared by Adam's tears and his anxiety. His vulnerability. But she doesn't retreat from him. Instead, she comes close. She sits down, right across from him (*k'negdo*). And they hold each other all night long, weeping and wailing until—to their astonishment—the world does not return to null and void. Instead, the first hint of a new dawn arises.

It is then that they realize: *this is the way of the world*.

This, I believe, is the great question of our lives: When the night comes, who will sit and weep by your side? Who shares your worry? Who will not be scared away by your grief, but will come closer? Who sees you? And who do you see?

As we walk into this unknown future, full of grief and uncertainty, I thank this community for stepping closer, in the depths of our heartache this week. Please, let us continue to find our way to each other with tenderness. We need one another now.

And I thank our friends and allies, who also came close, despite your own anguished hearts.

And I ask us to promise that this feeling of isolation and loneliness, the yearning for solidarity, will remind us of the sacred responsibility to step closer, rather than hide, equivocate and retreat ourselves when another people is suffering. We, who have been excluded by the narrow scope of others' moral concern, must not narrow the scope of our moral concern to exclude others. Do you understand what I'm saying? Just because others have lost their damn minds, we must not lose our damn minds.

Sadly, I know that the days ahead will give us many opportunities to be the kinds of allies and friends we wish we had been embraced by this week. It is precisely my unremitting desire for my own pain to be validated that will guide me in validating and crying out with other human beings in suffering, including Palestinian civilians in Gaza, for whom the situation is already unbearable and becoming increasingly desperate.

I close by amplifying the words of the mothers. Rachel Goldberg, a close friend and family to many in our community, is the mother of Hersh Goldberg-Polin, who was abducted from the Festival, and brought into Gaza. He lost his arm while protecting friends from Hamas bullets and grenades. He is badly wounded and has not been heard from for a week. These are Rachel's [words](#):



I want things to go back to how they were before Saturday morning. Before I saw Hersh's text messages that alerted me he was in grave danger: "I love you" and "I'm sorry." Before Hamas launched its attacks, which have claimed more than 1,200 innocent lives in Israel and resulted in about 150 innocent hostages being held in Gaza with no foreseeable way out. Before my son's phone was a black box with no answer.

But here we are, stuck in the awful present. Time is slowly ticking into the future, with these hostages approaching a week in captivity. If he is still alive, how much longer can he survive? His wounds are grievous. I hope someone somewhere is being kind to him, caring for him, attending to him.

Hersh is my whole world, and this evil is the flood that is destroying it. I really don't know if anything can save it. If anyone knows, please tell me. To save a life, our sages taught, is to save a world. Please help me save my son; it will save my world.

Every single person in Gaza has a mother, or had a mother at some point.

And I would say this, then, as mother to other mothers: If you see Hersh, please help him. I think about it a lot. I really think I would help your son, if he was in front of me, injured, near me.



SOURCE 3: MAYA TEVET DAYAN

Maya with a fringe in a black and white photo
One day everything that surrounds you now
won't be there anymore. Not the straw chairs
not the grass, not your mother's friend
who serves cold juice to the table,
not the juice, and not
your mother.

Scary things will happen: someone
will kidnap you in the playground
and you'll barely be released
from his suffocating grip.

Twice you'll almost drown at sea. Almost
all of your prayers for others will fail
You won't save any of your loved ones.

Years will pass until you find a friend.
Until you get used to the look of your face.
From your love stories you'll feel nothing
but the storms

Three times your heart will shatter
You won't eat a thing for weeks.
The three of them will return. With all three

you'll choose the longing
over another heartbreak.

You'll be scared to death: from poverty. From
failure.

From ending up alone.

And then you'll practice it with everything
you've got -

being incredibly poor, incredibly alone
and devoid of success.

Over and over life will prove to you
that everything works out when you love.
Until you figure this out, you'll be
older than your mother and her friend in the
photo.

You'll have long ago softened your heart.

You'll talk to the dead.

You'll forgive anyone who's ever left you. Forgive

yourself even, for the stories
you told to hide who you are.

It'll take many years.

You'll worry it might never come.

I write to you now so that you'd know:

all of this adds up in the end.

It will be worth it.

You'll make it through.

