

## The Prose Poem

Age Group: undergraduate, graduate, community audience

Materials: “The Many Deaths of Inocencio Rodriguez” Iliana Rocha, 1 poem draft of student work

Time: 45 - 60 minutes

Medium: in person or virtual

Lesson Objective: Through thought, discussions and the crafting of poetry, have the opportunity to learn the history, purpose and craft of the prose poem.

## The Lesson

Lecture:

### Prose

*Defintation:* traditionally thought of as fiction and nonfiction in the literary sphere. Composed of sentences, readers traditionally view prose as a narrative featuring a series of characters.

Examples: “The Great Gatsby”, “To Kill A Mockingbird”, and “A Brief History on Time”,

### Prose Poem

*Definition:* A prose composition that, while not broken into verse lines, demonstrates other traits such as symbols, metaphors, and other figures of speech common to poetry. - Courtesy of The Poetry Foundation

*History:* Dates back to the 1700’s with Wordsworth, later popularized by poets such as William Carlos Williams and Gertrude Stein. The form is thriving and expansions into new possibilities today with collections such as “Citizen” by Claudia Rankine. - Courtesy of The Academy of American Poets.

Examples: [“You are Jeff”, Richard Siken](#), Selections from [“The Year of Blue Water”](#) Yanyi, and [“The Jaguar and the Mango”](#) Jose Hernandez Diaz.

Discussion

As a group discuss the following questions

- What are your expectations from prose?
  - How can we leverage readers expectations of narrative and character into the prose poem?
- What are the genre expectations of prose?
- What are your expectations from poetry?
- Why do we read poetry?

Read and Discuss

“PHX Elegy” 53 pg. “The Jump” 5pg. and “Bury Them”

- How do these poems fit our expectations of the prose poem?
- Where do the genre expectations of poetry/prose get blurred?
- Do these poems complicate our definition of the prose poem?
  - How so?
  - How would you redefine the prose poem with these poems in mind?

Read and Discuss

Read aloud “True Crime Addict” 68 pg. and consider the following:

Richard Siken says “Poetry is the tension between the line and the sentence” meaning, the line break is what separates poetry from prose. Note that the lines in this poem extend well beyond the length of a line in a “traditional” poetry collection, with the physical book itself being almost twice as wide as we would normally see. All this means that the use of the line (within the prose poems) in this book is not simply dictated by the word processor, rather it is a crafted choice by the poet.

Activity

Take the following poems “True Crime Addict” 68 pg. and “White Mexican Girl” 69 pg. and reshape them on the page to make each line a single sentence.

The first line of 68pg. should read:

*He tells me to write something about a pig rolling in the mud to cool itself off*

The first line of 69 pg should read:

*This world was an accident.*

Once done, considering the following

- What is lost when removing the poet's control over the line?
  - Are there any moments of image or lyric that are less striking now?
- How is the pacing changed, especially in the poem on 69 pg.
- What are the advantages of the prose form?
  - What are moments in the poem that are highlighted by the form?
  - Consider elements such as pacing, narrative/lyric balance etc.

### Writing/Activity

Using the poem draft you brought to class, create the following new versions and consider what is being gained/lost in each.

*Version 1:* shape the poem so each line is the beginning of a new sentence.

*Version 2:* break the line at every third word of the poem.

*Version 3:* Using your working definition of a prose poem, recraft the poem into a prose poem.