

## Brown Bag Poetry

The real message that should come out of the Brown Bag Poetry activity is that poetry—well, any kind of creative writing—is accessible to all of us. Brown Bag Poems are literally “re-built” by participants in any way, shape or form that they so choose: there are no “right” answers, even though the poems are actual works written by someone else. Provided the poems or stories go together in ways that make sense to their “builders,” then the activity, regardless of how closely the poem resembles its original has been a success.

Brown bag poems can be of any style or length. Select poems that are funny, descriptive, or that have things in common with the participants. When choosing poems to “brown bag” for this activity, look for ones that offer interesting phrases, different words, or wonderful images that participants can relate to. Long poems, or poems that introduce unfamiliar words or subjects, can be frustrating for new players, so be sure to think about the poem choices in terms of how easy they can be understood by others who won’t see them in their original form.

Photocopy or transcribe the poems and print them (the cool thing about typing the poems out is that you can then play with font or colour or any other such stylistic tools as you choose). Cut up the poems, not line by line, but in a mix of lines, phrases and words. Leave the title intact, and include the author’s name alongside it, if you like.

Allow the groups to play and explore for as long as desired. Dump all of the pieces out of the brown bag on a surface, flip the written side up, and go to it! Players can move words and phrases around, read sections aloud, and discuss amongst themselves where or how they believe the poem fits together. Then, encourage other groups to explore how all of the poems have been rebuilt (do a tour of the room) before providing each group with an actual printed version of their original poem.

This is an adaptation of an idea by Betsy Struthers, outlined in “Poems as Pictures; Poems in Pieces” found on pages 24-30 in the League of Canadian Poets *Poetry in the Classroom*, edited by Betsy Struthers and Sarah Klassen, published by Pembroke Publishers in 1995.