

Writing a found  
poem is an  
art-making process  
that does not start  
with a blank  
canvas or a big  
lump of clay.  
Found poetry  
starts with  
something already  
in existence.

## **earthquakes + tsunamis** (a poetic diptych)

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What follows is pair of *found poems* created by the practice of mining the writings of other authors to form a new work, a piece of *language art*. This process shares similarities with postmodern artistic practices including collage, appropriation, sampling, remixing, and repurposing. Source materials for found poems can include other poems, novels, newspaper articles, magazine stories, obituaries, letters—almost anything.

For these particular poems, the source materials are academic educational research articles about geological fault zones and earthquakes. The majority of the text in these poems is taken verbatim from their original articles and used in the order of appearance, with a few additions and alterations.

*Keywords: faults, fault lines, earthquakes, tsunamis, found poetry, verbal collage, arts-based research, appropriation, language art*

## earthquakes + tsunamis

This pair of poems falls into the category of *found poems*, the practice of mining the writings of other authors as material to create a new work. This process shares similarities with other postmodern artistic practices including collage, appropriation, sampling, and remixing. Source materials for found poems can include almost any written texts: other poems, novels, newspaper articles, magazine stories, obituaries, letters—almost anything.

The process of writing poetry involves the concentration of meaning and its expression through an economy of words, often using the literary tool of imagery as a powerful conduit. The process of creating found poetry can be understood as a kind of *ekphrasis*—the aesthetic translation of meaning from one (art) form into another (Mitchell, 1994; Rhoades, 2017; Welsh, 2007).

For these particular *ekphrastic* poems, instead of artwork or experiences, the raw source materials are academic educational research articles about geological fault zones and earthquakes. This use stretches the original understanding of *ekphrasis* as the aesthetic linguistic translation/representation of a source object or experience, though there are no clear boundaries or limitations on its definition or use (Welsh, 2007, para. 5). Hence, the *ekphrastic* translation here is not technically from one art form into another, it is in the process of taking academic scientific language and translating it into language art, art created using texts or language as a primary medium/subject. The majority of the text in these poems is taken verbatim from the original articles and used in the order of appearance, with a few minor additions and alterations such as adding an article or changing tense.

In doing this exercise, I considered the fault lines of art education and our potential energy for change. There is so much pent up frustration in education in general around standardized testing (Clark, 2004; Dodge, 2009; Kohn, 2000; Ravitch, 2010); corporate-driven curriculum (Bacon, 2000; Clark, 2004; Gluckman, 2002); externally-deter-

mined teacher evaluations (Baker, Oluwole, & Green, 2013; Ravitch, 2010); uneven technology adoption and use (Barrett, Moore, & Slate, 2014; Chapman, Masters, & Pedulla, 2010); defunding of arts classes and programs (Benigni, Kosienki, & Cyr, 2018; Schneider & Townsend, 2013); and the loss of extracurricular activities (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008; Kronholz, 2012); just to name a few. There is so much inequity. There is so much pressure building. Unmitigated potential energy can only accumulate so long along a fault before change becomes inevitable, before movement becomes a necessity. Faults can rip apart, or the sides thrust up, down, or sideways. The resulting quakes are tectonic or volcanic, they can shift, erupt, collapse, or explode (Toivonen, n.d.).

*Fault* can also mean bad or negative traits or outcomes. What are our faults as individuals, as a collective, or as a field? In these poems, instead of being specific, the faults are metaphors and allegory. Their representation remains vague and open-ended. This allows readers to insert their own concerns, potential frustrations, and fault/s line/s: What do we need to confront and change?

To create these poems in particular, I started with the journal's theme of faults and fault lines and searched for academic education articles about them. I quickly added earthquakes—the physical environmental embodiment of the potential energy for change and destruction and reformation that fault lines harbor and signify. From the articles I gathered, two stood out as particularly interesting. The first I chose because of its stated intention to redefine earthquakes and its use and analysis of an “earthquake machine” (Hubenthal, Braile, & Taber, 2008, p. 33). While the earthquake machine of the article is a physical model that demonstrates the behavior of a typical slip fault, it inadvertently conjures images of a machine that might control earthquakes that might cause or prevent the movement of plates and the subsequent slipping along faults. I selected the second article due to its captivating title: “The Ghost Forests of Cascadia: How Valuing Geological Inquiry Puts Practice into Place” (Ault,

2014), with its highly imagistic reference to the importance of inquiry and of place. How might we shape our educational system to recognize the value of place, to understand and respect local literacies and knowledge, and to modify our practices accordingly?

As I read these articles, I searched for words and phrases that struck me as poetic, underlining them along the way. Then, I excerpted the words and phrases into a new document, maintaining their original order. After, I read through the excerpts several times, again underlining key words and images, deleting anything that seemed superfluous or expendable, revealing and concentrating the meaning in the process. I re-read the poem drafts multiple times, each time making deletions and minor adjustments. Once the poem seemed finished, I played with the arrangement of words on the page—the use of placement and punctuation to emphasize, complicate, and enhance meaning (Barrs, 2016). As Eisner (1981) notes about arts-based research, it “acknowledges what already exists and instead of presenting a façade of objectivity, exploits the potential of selectivity and emphasis to say what needs saying as the [artist/researcher] sees it” (p. 8; see also Barrs, 2016).

Hence, writing a found poem is an art-making process that does not start with a blank canvas or a big lump of clay. Found poetry starts with an existing piece of text. For Monica Prendergast (2006), found poetry is an “imaginative appropriation and reconstruction of already existing texts” (p. 3), using an original text as the source material for extracting words and phrases and creating a poem that re-presents “the meaning of the original text anew” (Burdick, 2011, p. 3)

The process of selection is one of individual aesthetic taste and choices. The poet, or language artist, then engages in re-reading and deleting, trying to trim anything unessential in an effort to compress, to distill meaning (Cahnmann, 2003). In some cases, the resulting excerpts are verbatim and in the same order as in the original text; in others, the original text is reordered or

contains additions and alterations. There are no set methodological rules for creating found poetry, just a flexible process for mining and making new meanings from extant texts.

In this way, students engage in the postmodern practices of sampling, appropriation, and remixing (Duncum, 2013, 2014, 2015; Knochel & Patton, 2015). To go further, students might then write short poems about their new artworks to accompany them, bringing the process full-circle in a constructivist cycle” that includes teacher and student collaboration (Hill, Stremmel, & Fu, 2005; Leonard & Gleason, 2014; see also Broderick & Hong, 2011; Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001). Students can then reflect individually and collectively on the artworks, the process, and their learning (Broderick & Hong, 2011). As Slavich and Zimbardo (2012) note, “[p]reflection and reflection are critical for translating educational activities and exercises into meaningful, sustainable change in students’ lives,” (p. 594) into meaningful learning and knowledge (see also Vygotsky, 1962, 1978).

We know teaching is an intimate interpersonal interaction that occurs bounded in a specific time and place; it is not the delivery of standardized curricular information far removed from students’ lives, frames of reference, and needs. How do we catalyze and capitalize on potential seismic educational shifts? How can we make meaningful educational and social change? One answer is that we start with where we are, with the materials and methods available. We take chances and keep what works, reshaping it, adapting it to our particular needs—in our schools and for our students. The theme of faults and fault lines sent me to search other educational fields and their scholarly literature for what we might learn from them, from their words. This research for resources and the process of concentrating or distilling meaning from scholarly publications led to this particular foray into creating found poetry. Students in classrooms can start with different textual source materials: short stories, novels, newspaper articles, magazines, Twitter feeds, text messages, response threads, etc. We can encourage them to

find their voices through manipulating materials, to become artists and poets, to be creators and to create, despite our faults and theirs, to be earthquakes, to cause tsunamis of change.

These poems speak of geographical forces and historical events that are unpredictable, sudden, and destructive. They also honor the positive aspects of this earthly power: the beauty and seduction of certain places, our desire to inhabit them. Sometimes we can see the records, and sometimes the warnings, of Earth's violent

movements; we often disregard them, at our own peril. Other times, movement and maybe disaster, strike unexpectedly, the result of something far away, beyond our knowledge and control. We have to figure out how to recognize the fault lines in (art) education, how to address them, how to adapt and survive in the midst of ongoing cycles of disaster, crisis, and change. We have to learn from our faults. We have to endure our earthquakes and survive our tsunamis.

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### earthquakes + tsunamis (a poetic diptych)

#### **our faults** (*a found poem*)

the nature of earthquakes  
makes it difficult

a series of questions—

broken—

in-to-small-hier-arch-ic-al-seg-ments

the inputs and outputs of a system

an active fault

the

downward

pull

of a

subducting

slab

.....continuously adding tension to the system.....

t h e e l a s t i c p r o p e r t i e s

{the potential energy}

the//frictional//forces

OVERCOME

release seismic waves

—the slip of the block—

enhanced by motion  
strips of light slowly accumulate  
in rock  
surrounding a locked  
fault

—a sudden slip—

copies of reality  
rather than representations  
the calculated rigidity, a constant for every event  
varies  
in the displacement

—or slip—of our faults—

a direct correlation  
the moment, a magnitude  
the ground beginning to tremble  
mysterious  
uncontrollable

—these forces can destroy everything we believe permanent—

the movement of tectonic plates appear almost accurate  
at the surface (of) our shallow understandings, our insights  
the unpredictable mechanics of earthquakes  
—their slips—

—and the infinite measure of our faults—

Found from:

Hubenthal, M., Braile, L., & Taber, J. (2008). Redefining earthquakes and the earthquake machine. *The Science Teacher*, 75(1), 32-36.

**in the event of a tsunami** (*a found poem*)

*On January 26, 1700, an earthquake in the Pacific Northwestern U.S. created a tsunami in Japan.*

people dwell in a place  
a city, a landform in the wild,  
    they attach  
    to each other, social histories, collective identities

in time, any people may come to feel native to their place  
preserving sacred sites  
giving gratitude  
    just as the moss gives thanks for the rain.

the risk is palpable  
the majesty of the surroundings—  
mountain peaks, rocky headlands, coastal dunes  
the risk and the majesty, cobbled together through time's vastness;

the knowing of a fact:  
nature's artistry  
often has a price tag

the timing of distant events accounts  
for circular stands  
of dead cedar trees  
on Washington's coast

strata of rubble and sand  
evidence of tsunamis that swept up the estuary  
at intervals of centuries

slipping faults  
the ancient edges of earth thrust over the seafloor  
set a tsunami in motion  
beneath the cedars  
    these ghostly sentinels still stand  
    witnesses to catastrophe,  
    harbingers

in Japan  
dutiful magistrates recorded the arrival of a series of tsunami waves  
their particular times and places  
they mapped the destruction with temporal precision

from port to port  
detailed the damage in each harbor  
to warehouses, homes, rice paddies  
specified wave direction, duration, propagation speed, cresting height  
the havoc chronicled by samurai bureaucrats  
to them, an orphan tsunami,  
the unexpected retribution, an interpretation of geology

seismic hazards cohere in a particular landscape  
an ocean away  
ghost forests harbor a stunning message:  
prepare!

the symbiosis of thinking and doing,  
the processes that sculpt Earth,  
the sequences, the salient features,  
the records lie scattered about  
in haphazard patterns

the river's remainder, minerals found;  
the water simply faded away  
beneath the riverbed,  
emerged in desert springs  
to evaporate,  
the hollowed topography collapsing from below

traces of events—  
plausible causes, modern analogues—  
converge on past catastrophes, future risks

earthquakes dot the millennia  
the sublime landscape speaks of beauty and terror  
an inviolate relationship,  
an intimate knowledge of place  
an informed understanding  
a curious case of dead cedars,  
their stories carried away,  
ghosts  
of a  
tsunami

Found from:

Ault, C. R., Jr. (2014). The ghost forests of Cascadia: How valuing geological inquiry puts practice into place. *Journal of Geoscience Education*, 62(2), 158-165.

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