

Poetry Prompts & Assignments for Teachers

Compiled, edited, or otherwise stolen by Taylor Mali

Listening to Poems While Reading Along

What you'll need: Audio speakers

Minimum time required for this exercise: 30 minutes

Directions: Hand out the text of one of my poems. Have the students read it quietly to themselves. Talk about it on a general level:

- What's it about on a literal level?
- Does it have any figurative meanings?
- Any interesting line breaks?

Ask a student to read it out loud. Then play the recording of me reading it. Ask if there was anything that they understood in a different way.

A lot of these recordings come from times either long before or long after the poem was published so pay particular attention to where the performance strays from the text. Is that a bad thing? Which version do you like better?

"One of the criticisms most often leveled against spoken word poets who publish books is that their poems don't really work when read on the page. The specific complaint is that they don't know which word to end every line with. Mali has said he likes to break lines in such a way that a sentence says one thing when read horizontally (line by line) but another when read vertically (as a sentence)." Are there any examples in this poem of where this might be true? Discuss the extent to which the line break can be considered a form of punctuation.