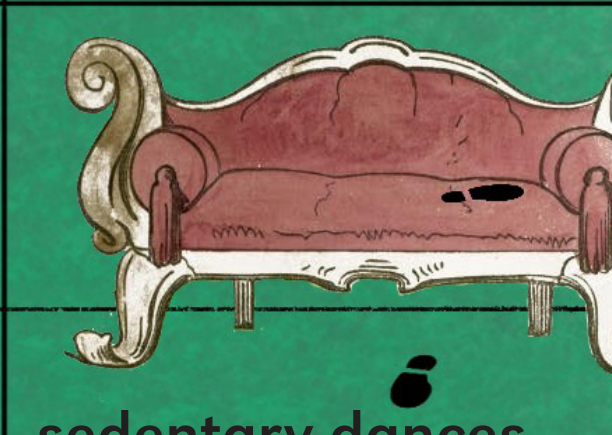
Fig. 1

Fig. 3



sedentary dances

a volume of poetry games

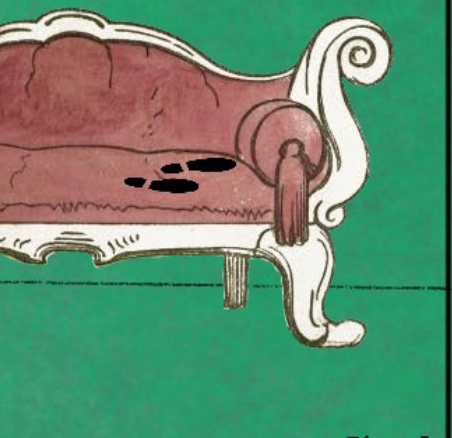
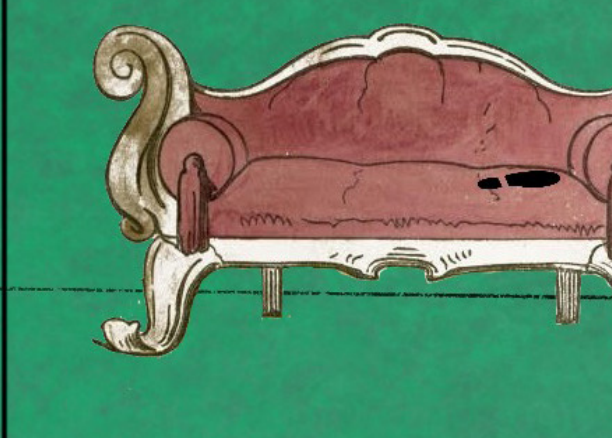


Fig. 5



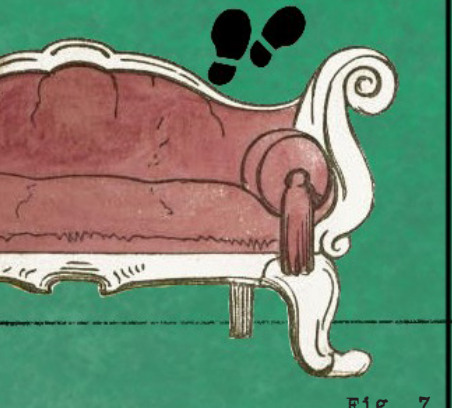
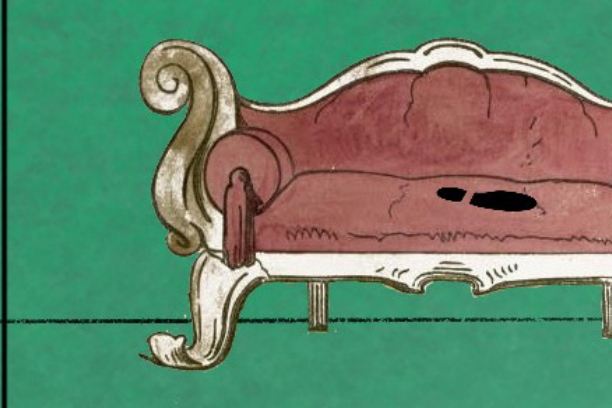


Fig. 7



Sedentary Dances is the (first?) volume of Poetry Games by the First Configuration of

RULE 42 ARTS COALITION

(That's just Jonathan Cook with valuable feedback from Ronald Russ and Tiffany Parrott)
Check out our other work at rule42.itch.io, Follow us on Twitter @Rule42Arts or e-mail rule42coop@gmail.com
Special Thanks to Faith Rader, Ronald Russ, Tiffany Parrott, James and Lois Cook, Elizabeth Delaere, and, especially, all of our generous backers on Kickstarter! Without all of you, this would not exist.

Our universe deals out trauma at least as easily as it does joy, and playing story games is a vulnerable and sometimes scary creative process. Even with friends, it can be emotionally fraught. Before playing any of these games, take some time to talk to each other, remind each other that the people playing matter more than the game does, and put some safety tools and techniques into place. It's pretty common to use Lines and Veils in combination with the X card, but there are many approaches. One set of tools that I really like is Script Change, by Brie Beau Sheldon, but googling "story game safety tools" is sure to bring up a bunch of techniques to try. Keep talking, keep caring, and figure out what works best for your group.

Credits: Most of the art is either by me or from the public domain. The piece on this page is by Jan Toorop.
On Poetry and Forms- art by Faith Rader and Galileo (as well as some uncredited public domain pieces).
What She Meant- art by Ruth Chaney for the WPA, inspired by Pale Fire by Nabokov.
Laughter or a Lit Flame- art by Claude Lorrain, Francis Seymour-Haden, and Matsumoto Hoji, poems by the three great masters of haiku, Basho, Buson, and Issa.
The Untimely Endings- obviously inspired by Edward Gorey, the art, however, is by John Tenniel.
The Misnaturalists of Zifyex- I did the half-assed Dr. Suess pastiche.
The Translation Game- inspired by and draws from the work of the Oulipo art movement.
Weird Al Doesn't Want To- inspiration is right in the title; it also shamelessly steals a mechanic from Jason Morningstar and Lizzie Stark's The Lesser Player's Tale.
the poets tell us- thanks to Ben Robbins for letting me include my little expansion for Microscope.
Never Metagame I Didn't Like- uncredited public domain clip art
Friends Forever- sloppy art? must be me.
Rectification- The back cover decoration is by Owen Jones.

Poetry (whatever we may say) is, was, and will always be a game. And as every child knows, all games have rules. So why do the grown-ups forget?

-Wislawa Szymborska
(my favorite poet)

I love poetry. Some people don't. If you're reading this, you're probably not one of them, but just in case, here's why I love poetry.

Poetry is an emergent property of language, a magic which derives from this: The way we say a thing generates meaning on its own.

Of course, what you say or write (or intend by what you say or write) generates meaning. My experiences and how I relate to what you've said as a reader or listener also generates meaning.

The surprising thing is that the language itself, the way words and sounds relate to each other, the way they look on the page, the synonyms avoided, the metaphors other people have used to express related ideas; all that stuff generates meaning independent of either of us. And it happens with or without our intention. The things we say, both at the level of the thing said, the thing heard, and even at the level of our thoughts are endlessly informed by the corpus of available words in our language and the ways that we've heard them used before. This gives us the power to mine associations, connotations, and juxtapositions for new kinds of truth that exist beyond the merely literal.

Poetry is how we recognize this astonishing property of language with intention, how we play with it, how we let it inform the meanings we want to share, and how we push the boundaries of the expressible.

Here are some of the defining features of poetry:

Poetry usually uses heightened language to address grander subjects, emotions, and desires than everyday prose. Not always, of course. Sometimes a poem is a passive-aggressive note about eating someone else's plums. But when we think of poetry, we're mostly imagining the moment when someone starts singing in a musical, when the emotions or ideas inside are so overwhelming that they can't be expressed any other way.

Poetry is also about compression, packing many different ideas and meanings into very few words. Many common rhetorical devices, like METAPHORS or PUNS, are about finding ways to squeeze multiple connotations from a single word.

And poetry also has rules, because it's a game. We often call poetical games "FORMS", which just means a set of rules for a poem.

Usually the first poetical rule kids learn about is RHYMING. One of the simplest poetical forms (or games) is a COUPLET, two lines of similar length where the words at the end of each line rhyme.

We can denote a RHYME SCHEME (basically a rule for which lines rhyme with each other) using letters, so that the first rhyming sound is A, the second is B, and so on. A LIMERICK has an AABBA rhyming scheme, for example. Sometimes ending words don't require a rhyme by the rules of the poem. "Roses are red/Violets are blue/Sugar is sweet/And so are you" has an ABCB rhyme scheme, for example, where A and C never rhyme.

Other rules might be about repeating words, as in a SESTINA. You can make up rules about length. SONNETS have a rule about the number of lines, CINQUAINS have rules about the number of words, and FIBONACCIS (or fibs) have rules about the number of syllables.

Poetry and music are very closely linked, so it's not surprising that many rules have to do with rhythm or METER. In English there are stressed and unstressed syllables, and poets often divide words up into "FEET" containing one stressed and one or more unstressed syllables. The most famous such "foot" is the IAMB, containing first one unstressed and one stressed syllable (da DUM; "deFINE" or "the SUN" are good examples). If you make a rule that you have to have five iambs in a line, you're writing in IAMBIC PENTAMETER, a poetic game that William Shakespeare often played.

Language is a toy box! Whether you're writing poems or inventing forms, you have so many toys available. Rhetorical Devices, Poetic Devices, Storytelling Techniques, Tropes, even the Rules of Grammar are all there for you to play around with. Here's a few more: oh dang, alphabetical order, i knew i forgot one

ANACOLUTHON *breaking the syntax of a sentence, "i completely agree with- wait, what?"*

ANADIPLOSIS *repetition of the last word in a phrase at the beginning of the next, "this is an example. an example that sucks."*

DYSPHEMISM *the opposite of euphemism, this is substituting an ordinary phrase with a less pleasant one, like calling a restroom a "poop depository"*

FABLE *and Rabbit said "oh, i see now, this is a type of story that usually features animal characters and ends with an explicit moral" and he remembered it to this very day*

IN MEDIA RES *starting a narrative in the middle of the action and gradually revealing the events leading up to this situation*

KENNING *naming something using a two word compound expression usually ending in -er, like calling french fries a "paunch creator"*

KISHONTENKETSU *an four-part structure for poetry and narrative that isn't built on conflict but on the development of a situation and a twist before resolution*

LITOTES *understatement phrased as the negative, "this isn't a completely useless technique"*

ONOMATOPEIA *a word for an object or action that sounds like the thing it's describing, like ka-pow or fragh (the sound a writer makes when they're trying to come up with examples)*

OXYMORON *a combination of contradictory words in a phrase, like "interesting examples"*

PARALELLISM *repeating grammatical structure or meter for emphasis, "this is the last of pages, this is the hardest of pages"*

PERSONIFICATION *granting human qualities to animals, plants, inanimate objects, or abstract concepts (this list noticed that last one and smiled)*

SYNECHDOCHE *when part of a thing to stands in for the whole or a category stands in for an individual, "i got wheels" for "i own roller skates."*

CONCRETE POETRY *a poem where the words are arranged on the page in a shape that is somehow relevant to the subject of the poem*

SIMILE *a simile is like a metaphor, but not as good*

METRICAL FEET *beyond the iamb: trochee is DUM dee, anapest is da da DUM, and dactyl is DUM do do. there's a bunch more*

NESTING *put a story inside a story, then put that in a story, then it's stories all the way down*

PERSPECTIVE *first person, second person, third person, free indirect, they all got their view of things*

PLEONASM *using more words than necessary to make sense, "i thought of this example myself"*

REPETITION *say it again for those in the back*

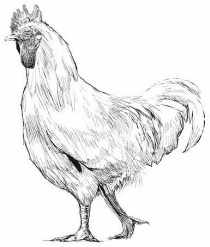
TMESIS *putting a word inside of another word or phrase, it's abso-bloomin-lutely an Eliza Doolittle thing*

ZEUGMA *using one word in two senses with two clauses, "i beat my drum and the devil in a drum-beating contest"*

GHAZAL

A ghazal is a form that originated in Arabic poetry that is very popular in South Asia and Turkey. In English, the rules are that

• a ghazal is composed of an odd number of couplets
• the first line of the first couplet and the second line of every couplet ends with the same rhyme leading to a one-to-three word refrain
• each couplet can stand alone but should be related in theme, and
• the last couplet should be more personal and make some reference to the poet's pen name.



that chicken across the road, it comes from dinosaurs
think of them clucking or strutting; humdrum dinosaurs

i imagine their dark and stupid eyes, simple fears and
flocking into cages for some seed, what dumb dinosaurs

can you see them brooding on their eggs out of mere hope
no way of knowing why or how we make income of dinosaurs

this is how we won: our ceaseless drive, our vicious smarts!
our lucky timing wasn't enough for us to overcome dinosaurs

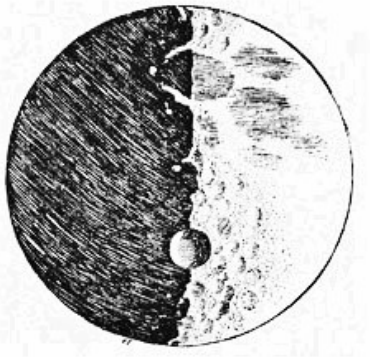
it's the oldest rule in the book. stay bright, stay tough, focused
don't notice the light changing in the sky or become dinosaurs.

OVELLIJO

The Ovellijo is an old Spanish form often associated with Cervantes, the author of the Quixote (not Menard). In English, the rules for an ovellijo are that

• it consists of ten lines- three couplets and a four line stanza
• each couplets consist of a question in 6-9 syllables, and a rhyming answer in 2 or 3 syllables
• the last line of the four line stanza contains all of the rhyming answers.
• the complete rhyme scheme is: AA BB CC CDDC

(example on the next page)



is leaving the only way to know?
here i go.

i'll be so lonely; am i a buffoon?
to the moon!

what if i still need them then?
back again.

looking back on my old home when
i've made it to the horizon
may give me clear eyes, and
here i go to the moon; back again.

TONGUE TWISTER

This form is less about specific rules and more about a specific kind of end result. The goal of this kind of poem is to create something that's hard to say out loud, but still memorable and fun to attempt. Generally, you'll use alliteration to clump together words that start with the same sound. Assonance and consonance can also work. Using rhymes or near rhymes and a catchy meter will make the result easier to remember. You're probably familiar with ones like Peter Piper, How much wood could a woodchuck chuck, or To Sit in Solemn Silence.

Here's a new example, anyway.

The tsar said the tchotchkes for his sisters
Should be transported in spite of all the twisters
Dissenters were dispatched to secret stations
But servants got spun up in those gyrations
The trinkets scattered to the wind
Subordinates saw a chance to ascend
Since Trotsky swore the twit was sinister.

Inventing and playing with forms is fun. Here are three new short forms, each with two examples.

WHAT, LORD?

This form produces inscrutable little poems in four lines, the fourth of which is always "Christ, what an asshole." The first three lines should each be between five and eight syllables, and the second and third lines must have an internal rhyme (that is, rhyming words that don't occur at the end of a line). Oh, and the poem must accurately describe a New Yorker cartoon.

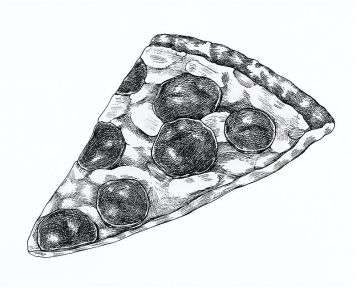
Walking beside a picket fence
Black and white dogs complain
Of cliches and of trite commands
Christ, what an asshole.

Long curly line implies a wife
Another makes a husband
Old news breaks, his pointed jokes
Christ, what an asshole.

TASTEFUL TALES OF TERROR

This is a form to accompany pictures of food on Instagram or wherever. It must describe the ongoing adventures of a hero, whose first and last name start with the same letter as the primary dish in the picture (and who must be named in the first line of the poem). The poem should describe a danger approaching the hero, and end on a cliffhanger of a question that is never resolved. The poem consists of four lines, with a rhyme scheme ABBA. The third line must contain a reference to an ingredient, flavor or other aspect of the dish. If you ever post a dish with the same first letter, use the same character and, above all, respect the continuity.

(examples on the next page)



Time is catching up to Pete Postlethwaite,
But his tired old bones keep on running
Crimson Jake's found the jewel with his cunning
Can Pete get it back before the machines activate?

Shakshouka

Shannon Shields creeps through the creature's cave
Not breathing the breeze that was rotten and cold
Where it fruitlessly nests and gets furiously old
Will she sing it to peace or cry out in her grave?

FROM ROSY MISTS, A SCHOLARLY CHANT

This one has a somewhat forgiving meter. There are two different musical keys that unlock this puzzling form and make it quite easy to write. The relevant details:

- eight lines.
- AABACCDA
- every line except the seventh should be five to seven syllables, three of which will be stressed syllables with at least one unstressed syllable between each stressed one.
- the seventh line is a repeat of the first three syllables of the first line, and must be repeated again as the start of the final line

i'm looking at the hole
you're filling out payroll
it's deeper now but you
still are in control
we used to live near the mines
remember deep sacred shrines
i'm looking
i'm looking in the coal

---

she gave me a feather
i never asked her whether
she took it from his cage
or found it in the heather
not that he would mind
there are no more of his kind
she gave me
she gave him us together

What She Meant

A Game for Two to Five Players

The player who is either most or least likely to believe in ghosts is **the Heir**. The rest of the players are **the Club**. The game is intended to be played over the course of a week or two by text, email, forum, social media, or by letter.

The Heir

Your mother was a beloved and popular poet (well, popular for a poet, at any rate). She died about five years ago. You still make a little money from occasional reprints of her work in anthologies and the like, but the main way you make extra cash is bilking her most devoted fans. They call themselves "The Club," and pool together cash in exchange for exclusive new poems you "discover" from her archives. In reality, you're just writing them yourself.

Your mother was: (choose one)

Gentle but lived a mostly interior life
Cruel but brilliant and funny
Kind but broken and disappointed
Fun but unpredictable and dangerous
Passionate but only for the spiritual or abstract
Absent

What was her name? What did you call her? What was the name of her most famous collection of poetry?

You need money for: (choose one)

An expensive hobby
A passion project
Gambling debts
Booze or drugs
Wooing someone
Health issues

Tell us a little more about the specifics. Why is getting the money more urgent now than it has been?

Share your answers with the other players as you see fit.

The Club

You are all great admirers of the poet, though each arrived at your admiration differently. You've banded together to fund the release of her unpublished poems exclusively to your club.

The first player will be referred to herein as A, the second as B and so on. Decide together who is who. When the instructions give you a turn order, ignore any letters that don't correspond to a player. There is a very loud amusement park in front of my current lodgings.

You are: (choose one and cross it off, in this order: A B C D)

A student of the poet's
A less famous colleague
A former best friend or lover
A critic who championed her work early on
A professor and acquaintance now writing her definitive biography
Her estranged sibling, in the club anonymously

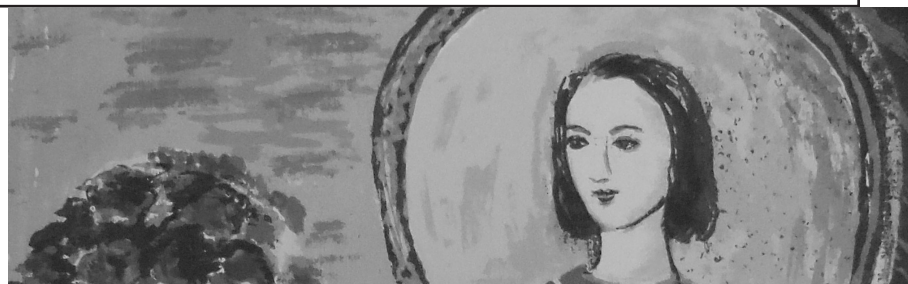
What is your name? What do you like best about the poet's work? What did you hate about it (or about her)?

You want to prove that this new piece is really:
(choose one and cross it off in this order: D C B A)

Part of a Map to a Mysterious Treasure
About how much she regretted harming you
About how she came to realize you were right all along
A confession of something that only you know about her
A warning or prophecy of a lurking danger
A disguised version of a story you told her or a conversation you had
Plagiarized, just like everything else she wrote

Why do you believe what you believe? What would it mean for you if it were true? What would it mean for the poet's heir?

Share your answers with the other players as you see fit.



FIRST TURN
Rules for the Heir:

You have been a literary forger for some years. The Club has paid handsomely for dozens of "recently discovered" lost poems. But this time, sitting down to write- something is different. You feel her coming out of your pen.

When was the last time you saw your mother? What was your relationship like at the time? What did she say? What do you wish you had said? Picture the scene very clearly in your mind and then start writing it down. Write it as quickly and as unthinkingly as you can. If you get to the end of the memory just keep writing, engaging your conscious mind as little as possible. Focus solely on maintaining the mechanics, the physical act of writing.

When the voice from outside takes over? That's your mom.

Keep writing for at least fifteen minutes. You can allow a little more time if your mother has more to say.

What you've written may not look like a poem yet, but you should edit it into one. Use the phrases that sound the least like you and the most like her, put line breaks wherever, cut and paste in any order that makes sense to you.

The poem should be at least 10 and no more than 30 lines. Send it off to the Club, even though you know it's not finished, that she IS coming back. Tell them- I don't know, tell them it's the first part of a major work you've found in scraps and pieces.

Rules for the Club:

In this order [CDAB], each of you annotate the poem with three footnotes. The first player should find the three lines that most clearly confirm their theory of the poem, and add footnotes showing how and why the poem means what it means (Notate them in the body of the poem as [C1], [C2], etc.). Point out the veiled reference to your shared experience, the poetic framing of a secret truth. Be bold and honest with your assertions; don't bother trying to hide your perspective or your biases. Or else let your lies be obvious ones.

Every player after the first should do two of their footnotes in the same way, but their third should directly challenge a previous player's footnote, showing how their interpretation is obviously flawed and providing your own correct interpretation of the line. (This can be either notated in the poem adjacent to the challenged footnote, or as a footnote inside a footnote.)

Everyone, including the heir, should see everyone else's annotations. Share after every turn.

SECOND TURN
Rules for the Heir:

Read all the annotations made by the critics. Ignore them.

Think instead of the best time you ever had with your mom, when things were easy or fun, perhaps a time she was obviously proud of you. Picture that memory completely and again, start writing, as quickly as you can. Let your mom take over the same way, and edit it into your next section.

Rules for the Club:

Same deal, in this order: BADC

THIRD TURN
Rules for the Heir:

Your mom's spirit, if that's what it was, has left you. If you try automatic writing again, all you get is the inside of your own head.

Instead, read all of the club's annotations. Pick the two theories that you like best, for whatever reason. Create two different versions of the last 5-10 lines of her poem. They should both complete the poem and also confirm, as indirectly or concretely as you please, those two theories respectively. Pick the one you think your mom would've found funniest and send it to the critics. Keep the other one for yourself.

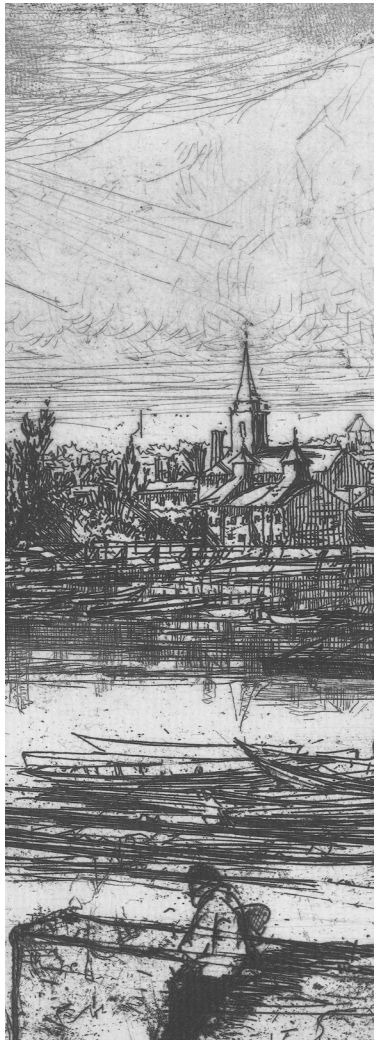
Rules for the Club:

This last section reminds you of what a great poet she really was, how much she defied categorization or analysis. Allow yourself to doubt what you believe; imagine that something else entirely might be true. Write one final annotation that shares your doubt. There is no order, take your time before sharing.

Laughter or a Lit Flame

This game is a hack of a very old poetry game from Japan called Renga. That game is the origin of the haiku, a form that has become very popular in many languages. (Just in case you aren't familiar, in English, the most common rules of a haiku are that it is a poem of three lines where the first line has five syllables, the second line has seven syllables, and the last line has five syllables again.)

Here is the game as it originally appeared (in the 200 word RPG contest). At the end I'll give you some advice on playing with more than three players, plus a few alternative rules and suggestions for making it your own.



Here I have a game:
Paper, pens, and three players.
It's simple to play.

First Player writes a haiku
That describes a character.

Inspire love or hate.
Make us laugh. Or nod, silent.
Good haiku delights.

Player Two writes a waki,
(Two lines, both of seven beats).

Describe there events
That befall the character.
Tragic? Exciting?

Hide the haiku from our sight.
Fold it back or cover it.

The third player's turn?
Haiku of a character,
Waki-affected.

Now hide the waki from view.
It's player one's turn again.

On each turn, you write.
First respond to what you see,
Then hide what you saw.

Alternate. Haiku. Waki.
Maintain silence as you write.

Or else, talk of things
Unrelated to the game
TV shows, your day.

Haikus invent the people:
Lives impacted by events.

Wakis are events
That change everything for
Our small poem-folk.

When you've written five times each,
Reveal all and read aloud.

Whoever read then
Sits in silence. And so
Must the other two.

The silence can be broken
By laughter- or a lit flame.

Notes:

• If you have more than three players, no problem! Everyone should take their turns simultaneously, and instead of just one poem, you end with as many poems as there are players. This version of the game can feel a little more intense, like speed chess, and results in a less conversational, breezy feel in playing, but can be a lot of fun. Everyone should write the number of players plus one times each.

• Don't worry too much about being "good." Haiku is best when it's plain-spoken. Metaphors and fanciness just don't fit in the space. But also: don't be afraid to imply there's something more you're not saying in the poem, and don't be too precious or subtle about those implications.

• If you choose to burn your poem, please do it safely! Outside, for starters.

• As in renga, the idea of this game is that every five line section (haiku + waki or vice versa) should make sense as an independent poem, but no eight or seven line section should. What this (hopefully) does is create a shifting feeling to the final poem, as the meaning of the stanza you just read changes when you read the next stanza. A good haiku will also have this shifting feeling in the final line, ideally creating a little leap that recontextualizes the first two lines or images.

• Other rules found in old-school renga included requiring a word or image that implied the season. Sometimes all the verses had to relate back to a single word theme chosen at the beginning. There were also rules based on who was the guest of honor, who was hosting the game, and rules for how they could write (i.e. the guest of honor's opening was supposed to be magnanimous about the host's home, the host's subsequent waki should be self-deprecating, etc.). Slyly referencing and reframing other poems through allusion were signs of sophistication. Think about how you might shift those rules to create interesting twists on the game. Maybe every verse should include a reference to food or all the characters must be animals. Maybe whoever starts must decide on a theme word that is shared with all the players. Perhaps the final player must try to write a verse that would fit both the stanza above it and the original stanza, so as to create a loop. Maybe every poem should hint at a relevant song lyric or movie title.

• You should definitely read some renga (and haiku and tanka, a related form)! It will help you play the game, plus it's just really fun. One place to start learning more is the book One Hundred Frogs by Hiroaki Sato.

no one travels
along this way but i,
this autumn evening.
-Basho

since it turns out i'm all by myself
i make friends with the harvest moon
-Buson

watching me
with a grumpy face
a frog
-Issa

Aa is for anything, i guess

The next two games are alphabet/acrostic games for 3 to 13 players. You'll need a bunch of paper and pens for everyone.

Both games begin the same way. If you have 9-13 players, take 26 sheets of paper and label them A-Z (up in the corners, not too big). If you have 8 or fewer players, collaboratively come up with two words that have the same number of letters as there are players, and label that many sheets with the letters that make up those words

Shuffle the papers and deal them out randomly to the players (if there's more than eight players, some players may get one more sheet than others, but don't stress about it, just allow a little extra time for them to finish).

The games end the same way, too. Put all the papers back into a pile and back into order, then take turns reading them aloud to each other. The results will be silly. Allow yourself to be delighted by your friends' creativity.

Now head to one of the two games on the following pages.

Hey Reader! Some of the games on the following pages will ask you to roll dice with notations like "roll a d4" or 2d6 or d20+1. The number after d tells you what size die to roll, so a d6 is a regular six sided die, and a d4 is a four sided die. If there's a number in front of the d, that tells you to roll that many and add up the result, so 2d6 is roll two six sided dice and add their results together. And if there is a + or - afterwords, that just means to add or subtract that value from your result. Hope that isn't too confusing!

Also a couple of the games have inspiration/challenge tables that are 6 columns by 6 rows. To use them, roll two six sided dice of different colors, the first result denotes a column and the second gives you the row.

The Untimely Endings

Per the instructions found on the previous page, you should all have at least two sheets with a letter of the alphabet written in the corner.

In this game, you are going use those letters to write 2 or more limericks about, let us say, unusual characters. Take the first sheet you were given and roll 2d6. Consult the chart below to see what it is about your character that begins with the letter on your sheet:

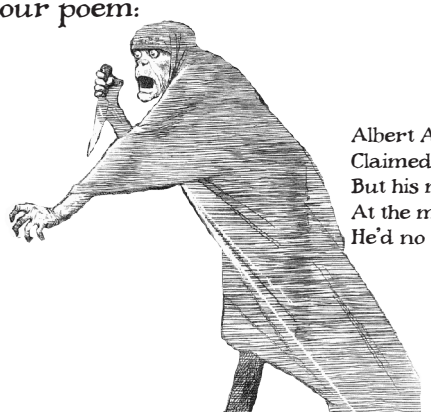
2-4	Your Character's Species
5-6	Their Name
7	Their Occupation
8-9	Their Location
10-12	A Personality Trait or Emotion that Defines Them

The first line of your limerick must include the trait starting with that letter.

Roll 1d6 to determine what your poem, in total, is describing about your character:

1	Their Untimely End
2	A Misdeed They Committed or Else Were the Victim of
3	A Peculiar Habit
4	A Mysterious Circumstance they Found Themselves In
5	An Encounter with the Supernatural
6	Their Very Untimely End

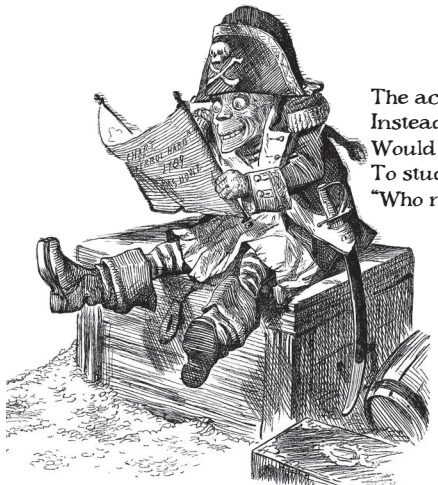
If you want some inspiration or an additional challenge, use the table on the next page to find something else that you are then required to include in your poem:



Albert Ames, a knife-wielding ghoul
Claimed to be viciously cruel
But his mouth went agape
At the most light-hearted jape
He'd no stomach to be ridiculed.

I once knew a Bear, name of Dwight,
Who loved all pets with a pure delight
Though he wanted to love
Every single kind of
Creature, most of them fled out of fright.

A sugar bowl	An uninvited guest	A mysterious doorway	A dock	An infernal noise	The last biscuit
A sloth	A lamp	A house of ill repute	A bicycle	A policeman	A bank
A cavern	A giraffe	A gardening tool	A fur coat	A small black doll	An ornate figurine
A telephone	A knife	A country manor	A parachute	A pair of tennis shoes	A deflated ball
An electric cord	A rooftop	An under-garment	A runaway mine cart	A menagerie	A crawlspace
An alderman	A science fair	A specialist	A whaling-boat	A deck of cards	A poet



The acclaimed pirate Captain onshore,
Instead of spending his riches galore,
Would always relapse
To studying maps
"Who needs enough when you could have more?

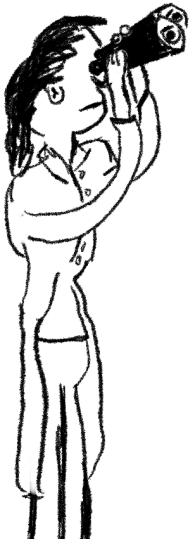
The Avigloops

The Misnaturalists of Zifyex

When they discovered the portal to Zifyex,
We couldn't believe what they'd found!
Each of you wanted specifics
Of the strange creatures seen on those grounds.
And as naturalists in your prime
Your discoveries, you share in rhyme.

This time, the letter on your paper is the first letter of a fantastical new creature's name. Roll a d6. That's how many syllables there are in the name. Make up the name of the creature (hint: the stress should probably either be on the last or second to last syllable to make it easy to rhyme).

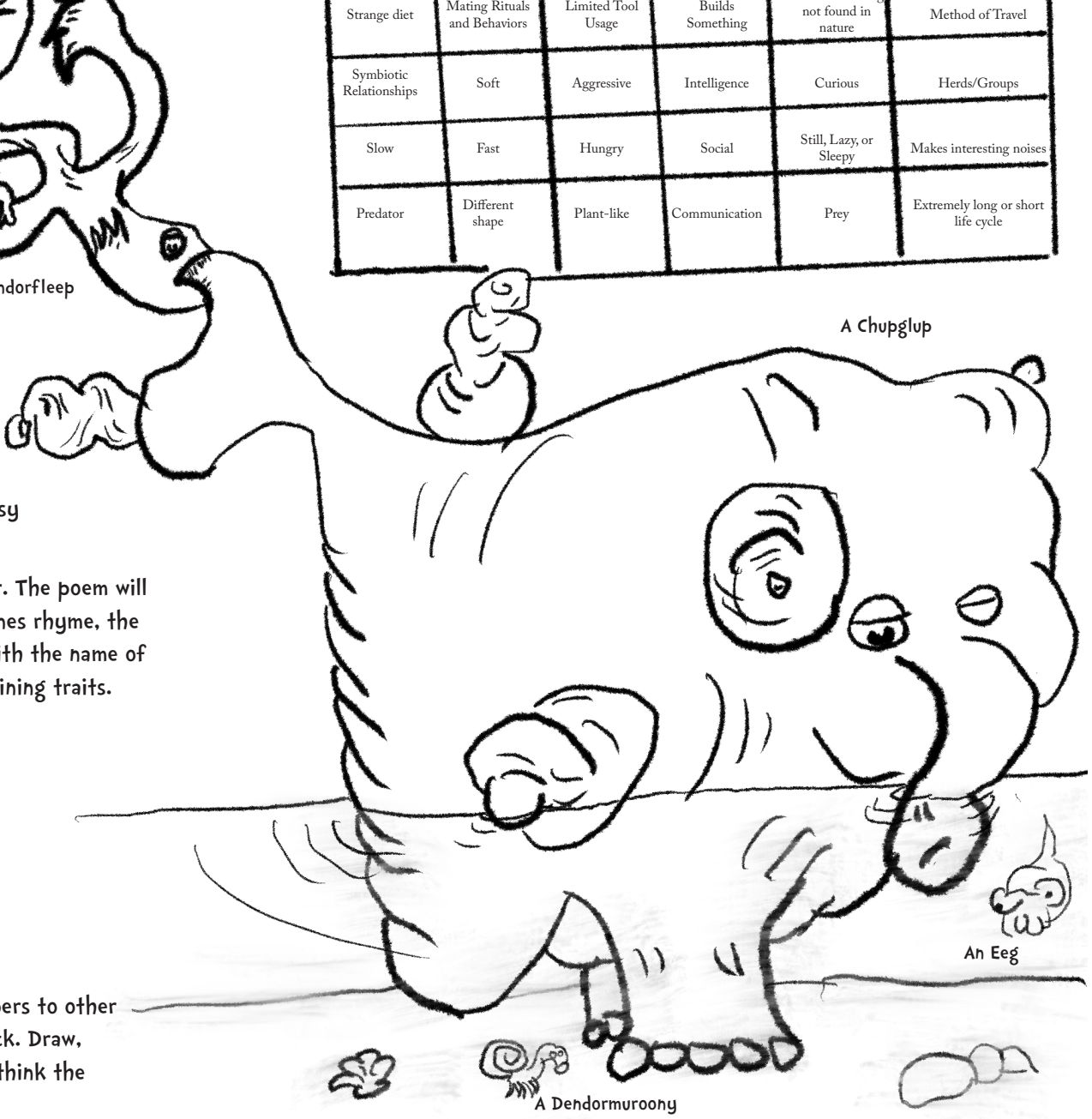
Describe the creature in poem form on the bottom half of your paper. The poem will be six lines long. The rhyme scheme is ABABCC (the first and third lines rhyme, the second and fourth, and the fifth and six). The first line should end with the name of your creature, and the rest of the poem should illustrate a couple defining traits.



Write about at least one of the following:

The creature's anatomy,
Its habitat,
Its strange diet,
Some curious behaviours,
Its role in an ecosystem,
A surprising danger or useful quality.

After you've written all your poems, pass your papers to other players, and receive an equal number of papers back. Draw, quickly and without worrying too much, what you think the creature described in this poem looks like.



A Burrgondorfleep

A Chupglup

An Eeg

A Dendormuroony

Plumage	n-fold Symmetries (like Starfish)	Teeth	Spirals	Scales and Armor	Parasites
Other Senses	Shared consciousness	Flying	Adapted to inhospitable environments	Scale (very big or small)	Limbs
Strange diet	Mating Rituals and Behaviors	Limited Tool Usage	Builds Something	Loves something not found in nature	Method of Travel
Symbiotic Relationships	Soft	Aggressive	Intelligence	Curious	Herds/Groups
Slow	Fast	Hungry	Social	Still, Lazy, or Sleepy	Makes interesting noises
Predator	Different shape	Plant-like	Communication	Prey	Extremely long or short life cycle

The Translation Game

This game is played over e-mail, text, or your preferred social media.

You and at least two friends are translators, working to bring works that you love written in an obscure [and imaginary] language into your native tongue.

To begin, each of you send a poem or excerpt of a poem between 10-25 lines in length to another translator. Choose a poem that you like or admire in some way. Every translator should send one poem and receive one poem.

Now it is your job to generate a literal, word for word translation by applying, in sequence, 2-4 of the rules on the following page. If you have more than three players, more than one of you can do this for each poem. If you want even more randomness, roll a d20 each time to pick what rule to follow.

When the poem is completely unrecognizable, pass it on to one of the other translators: not the person who sent you the original poem, and not anyone who has worked on the translation.

The poem you now receive is the literal translation of your absolute favorite poem. It can be very hard to see why or even make any sense out of this clumsy transliteration because the language its in is very different from your own. But you want other people to understand and see why you love it so much. You now must find a way to convey what you love about this poem to someone else.

You can do this either through exegesis (making annotations and footnotes or writing a short essay explaining the work), or through making a less literal translation that gets to the heart of what it means. You can write this as a different poem, in prose, or even in dramatic form if you think it's useful.

Share the results with your other translators. Let your love shine through.

Translation Rules:

Replace all nouns with the first verb they make you think of, or all verbs with the first noun

Replace every adjective and adverb with two other adjectives or adverbs

Use Google to translate it into another language and then back again

Replace every noun with a noun 1d6+5 spots away from it in the dictionary

Remove a specific letter from the entire poem by replacing every word that contains it with a word that doesn't

Imagine each individual line as an independent statement in a conversation and replace the line with an imagined response

Replace every [d6]th word with three that you associate with it

Replace every [d4+1] words with just one

Type every d6th word into Google and replace it with the rest of the first autocomplete suggestion

Replace every word that you can think of an opposite for with its opposite

Replace every [d6+2]th word with its dictionary definition

Replace every [d6+2]th word with a word that rhymes with it

Cut every line in half by number of words and recombine the halves in any order you like so long as every new line is different from before

Rearrange the words of the poem in alphabetical order

Rearrange the words of the poem in order by number of letters

Rearrange the lines of the poem in alphabetical order (then do +1 of the other rules)

Remove every [d6+2]th word and using the word's part of speech as a prompt, play Mad Libs with a non-translator friend to replace them

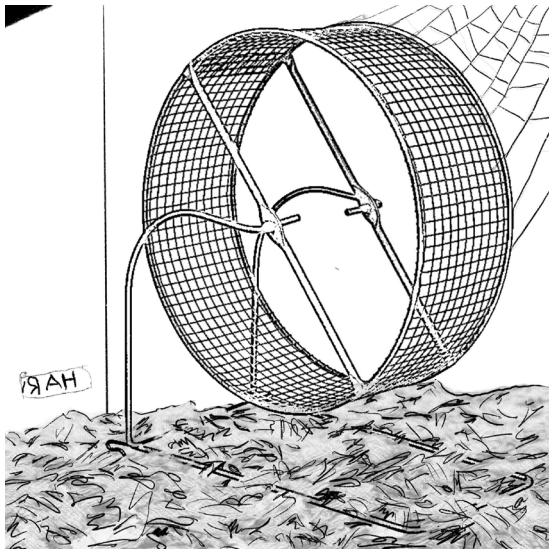
Cut off words so that the nth line only has n number of words, i.e. the first line has one word, the second has two and so on

Take only the first or last line. Use talktotransformer.com or repeated uses of autocomplete or a chatbot to generate enough words to create a poem of roughly the same length

Alter one of the above rules or just make up your own. It's best if it is an algorithm or process that can be applied without resorting too much to your own creativity (or at least, your natural editorial impulses), but anything that transforms without completely destroying the original text and makes a result that is strange, interesting, difficult to understand, or just weird is fine

"WEIRD AL"

doesn't want to



"Weird Al" Yankovic, beloved song parodist and international rock star has been hired to create a pitch for something truly remarkable and new: the world's first parody jukebox Broadway musical.

Only thing is, he doesn't feel like doing it.

That's where you come in.

This is a game for two to eight players plus one facilitator. It's ideal for friends or family who are soon to reunite after a significant time apart and who like being very silly together.

The players are all playing Weird Al's assistants. The facilitator is playing a Broadway Producer. If you're reading this, congratulations, that's you! The players don't need to and maybe shouldn't read the rest of this. There's a few passages they'll need to know about, but they're marked and you can pass them along. It's played in two phases. The first phase should take place over text or social media. It can be done asynchronously over a week or two. The second phase takes place when you all meet in person to make the pitch.

To begin with, send this to the assistants:

> "Hey chickie babies, listen: the producer wants to know what ideas Weird Al has for the story of the musical. Weird Al, despite this being a dream opportunity for him, is pretty depressed. He's been out of it for a while, if we're being honest. It's why he hired so many assistants, even tho none of you have many responsibilities or any musical experience. But Al is good to all of you. You each love him, in your own ways, and you don't want him to miss out on his dream just because it's a bad time.
>
> Each of you may suggest a story, which can be an existing work of fiction like a novel or a movie, a historical event, or even a real-life personal anecdote that all the players are familiar with. Get wild, you might even do an old RPG campaign or even an original story that can be told in one or two paragraphs. As a group, pick just one to pitch and send it back to, me, the producer.
>
> You're beautiful, don't ever change, you know what I mean."

You must now break that story down into a series of scenes. If there are 2-4 players, there should be twice as many scenes as players, if there are 5-8, exactly as many scenes as players.

Example: The 6 players decide to pitch The Princess Bride. The producer breaks it down as follows (spoilers, I guess?):

1. After Westley dies, Buttercup is kidnapped by Vizzini.
2. The Dread Pirate Roberts defeats Inigo, Fezzik and Vizzini.
3. The Trials of the Fire Swamp
4. Humperdinck tortures and kills Westley, again.
5. Fezzik and Inigo rescue Westley and storm the castle.
6. Westley rescues Buttercup and Inigo defeats the Six-fingered Man before they escape.

You might have noticed in the example that the scenes were fairly arbitrary. There are infinitely many more ways to divide any given story up. The only key element is that enough is happening in any given scene to justify a whole song.

Having broken up the scenes, you must also make a list of "the songs that we have the rights to." The criteria for this are:

- that a karaoke version of the song should be easily available (YouTube is a good free source)
- the songs shouldn't be too long, four minutes is a good max
- and (ideally) that most of the songs should be familiar to all the players

There should be one more song on the list than there are scenes.

Now send back your lists of scenes and songs to the assistants with the following instructions:

"In order from oldest to youngest, pick which scene you want to write up. (Small groups will each pick twice, snake draft style). Then in order from youngest to oldest, pick which song you will use for your scene.

You now have until you all are scheduled to meet up to write an original parody song that covers all or part of what you think is necessary or interesting about the scene. (You have to write two, if you're with a small group.) Write down the lyrics of your parody somewhere, but don't show it to anyone yet.

Dare to be stupid! The main thing about writing the parodies is not to try and be as good as Al or Demi Adejuwigbe or your favorite song parodist. It's to tell your little bit of the story. But there's no harm in having fun and making your songs better than they need to be. Here's a few hints:

Retain the structure and rhymes of the chorus if you can. The more links there are to the original the funnier the stuff you've come up with will be.

Sometimes it's useful to make a list of funny, unusual words that are relevant to the story you're telling and then make a list of rhymes for those words. When you're putting them into the lyrics, try to make the funny word come last and use whatever rhyme you have to set it up in the line before.

Write from a character's perspective instead of a dispassionate narrative. And make jokes at the narrator's expense. Self-deprecation is funny.

There's a lot more to say about lyrics and joke writing, but not enough space. Luckily there's lots of books and websites to learn about things like "the rule of threes" and why lists are funny in songs and why perfect rhymes sound cleverer than near rhymes and how to set-up expectations so you can surprise your audience by subverting them. Go, read, learn, and listen to Weird Al songs! It's fun!"

You should make note of what song didn't get picked and write your own parody. Instead of one of the scenes on your breakdown, imagine for yourself a post-credits sequence or set-up for a sequel and set your song there. Also, pick your favorite Weird Al song, just in case.

Soon enough, it will be time to meet up and make the pitch.

The day before, let the assistants know that Weird Al has told you they will be making the pitch for him. Randomly assign them the scenes to pitch and perform. Nobody should have a scene they actually wrote. Also send this:

"You didn't expect this, but you can't say anything without snitching on Al. Send what you wrote to whoever will be pitching your scene(s). Review the material written for the scene(s) you are pitching.

Assistants, remember you aren't performers. You aren't parody songwriters. You never signed up for this. But it's your job, and Al has always been kind to you, so go out and do your best. On a performance level, embrace awkwardness, embrace mistakes, embrace confusion, and most importantly don't give up. Power through it. You can talk or drag some of your friends in to roleplay the set-up for your song, then play the karaoke track (from Youtube or wherever) and sing and dance your heart out. Whenever you aren't pitching, jump in, forget the words, and sing along (or backup dance, or whatever). Laugh and applaud your friends all doing their best in an impossible situation."

When you all get together, you aren't actually playing the producer. You're the producer's assistant, who has been delegated with hearing this slam dunk of a pitch. You don't know what you're doing or how these decisions are made. And while you're trying to appear professional, you should also give hints of getting into it despite yourself. Strategy tip: If you want to perform your number, give more of these hints.

At the end, ask all the assistants to line up in front of the producer's assistant and close their eyes. Read this: "If you think you all got Al the job, give a thumbs up. If you think you didn't, give a thumbs down."

If the majority thinks they got the job, tell them to open their eyes and tell them how much you loved it, and if they don't mind taking one note to Al, you've had a brilliant idea for the ending you want to share. Get up and perform your song. If you can get the rest of them to sing along on the choruses, you win and the show will be a huge success.

If the majority thinks they didn't, have them open their eyes and tell them how much you loved it. In fact, you've had an even better idea, which is casting all of you as performers in a revue of Weird Al's classic hits! Turn on your favorite Al song and lead everyone in a big singalong finale!

the poets tell us

a modest, between-games expansion for microscope

Microscope is a brilliant timeline building game by Ben Robbins. In order to use this page, you'll need a copy of it. If you enjoy anything in this zine, you need a copy anyway. You can find it at www.lamemage.com/microscope

This is an add-on you play between (and during) sessions of a Microscope campaign.

At the end of your first game, choose one card on the timeline. Create a poet who lives then and there (if it's a scene that they couldn't have been a part of, maybe they live nearby and are writing a little before or after). Ask another player to choose a second card earlier in the timeline than yours; that is when the events your poet is writing about happened.

Before the next session, write an excerpt of your poet's epic about those times, or a folk song, or a poetic bit of drama, or whatever kind of poem you feel like. It should be between 4-20 lines. It doesn't need to be good, but it should reflect what your poet thinks of the times they live in, using the events of the time you're writing about to make their point.

Bring the poems to the next session and read them aloud when you get started, but don't discuss them too much. Place them next to or under the card when they were written. When picking the lenses for the second game, draw them in some way from one of the poems you didn't write.

After the second game, choose one of the poems you did not write and a card a little after when it was written on the timeline. Write an exegesis about the poem, about a half-page to one page long, from the perspective of a writer or academic living then. Feel free to misinterpret what the poet meant, to cast it through the lens of your writer's own ideas and hardships.

Anytime a scene is set where one of your poets or academics may have lived, feel free to play them as a character.

On subsequent games, you can either choose to write a new poem, following the rules from the first game, or an analysis, following the rules for the second game. You may write an exegesis of an exegesis, or poetic responses to either one.

Never Metagame I Didn't Like

When board game night ends, everyone gives one other player a word.

Before the next game night, you must create a poem that puns on that word. Here's how:

Think of any word that sounds pretty close to the word you were given. Homophones are great. If it's an online board game night, homographs are great too. Rhymes are also good, but you can even do non-rhyming words that share a primary vowel sound and maybe one or two consonants, especially if they are the initial consonants.

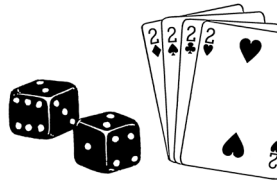
Now, think of a phrase that has that second word in it. Could be a common phrase, song lyrics, movie titles, a cliche, an in-joke, or a pop culture reference. Google can help, as can some rhyming dictionary and famous quotation sites. Try to link the idea of the original word to that phrase somehow. Extra points if you can replace a second word in the phrase with one related to your original word.

You can also do this in reverse, think of a common phrase with your initial word and find a meaningful way to work the sound-alike into it.

The poem is four lines with a rhyme scheme of ABCB. The second B should be the phrase you came up with. The first three lines should set up a payoff where both your original word and the new phrase have some relevance. Here are a couple examples (exactly as low effort as yours should be):

Cookie --» Wookie

When Leia's only hope for a snack
Means calling Threepio in,
She reminds him that R2 won't do
Always get the cookie tin.



Tractor --» Factor

When I tilled up the math teacher's stolen money
And buried SAT answer key (separate times)
I said "I just took a guess, it's the only way
To tractor up the product of two crimes.

At the start of the next board game night, everyone recites their poem. Whoever elicits the biggest reaction, either groans or laughter, gets to go first next game you play.

Friends Forever

This is a game for two friends.

First, make a mobius strip from a sheet of lined or plain white paper.

If you don't know how to make a mobius strip, the instructions are on the next page (one side of the paper is colored blue and the other pink to make it clearer.)

Next, agree that you will remain friends until the mobius strip is completely filled in. That means being kind to each other, helping and listening to each other, respecting each other's boundaries, and making a genuine effort to spend time together.

Choose one player to be the first active player.

Every time you hang out, the active player should bring the mobius strip, and, just before you part, must write down a line or so in commemoration: perhaps a phrase somebody said, or just some words that refer to something about the time you've shared. Feel free to connect it (thematically, narratively, structually, or rhetorically) to the line before, or to allow it to stand alone (non sequiturs are fine!). They then give the mobius strip to the other player, who becomes the active player.

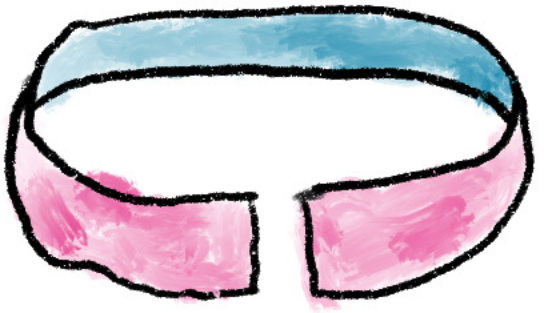
The strip may be flattened, folded, and tattered, but must never be torn.

The day comes when the last line will be filled, where the ending meets the beginning again. Once it is, read the whole thing aloud, starting somewhere in the middle.

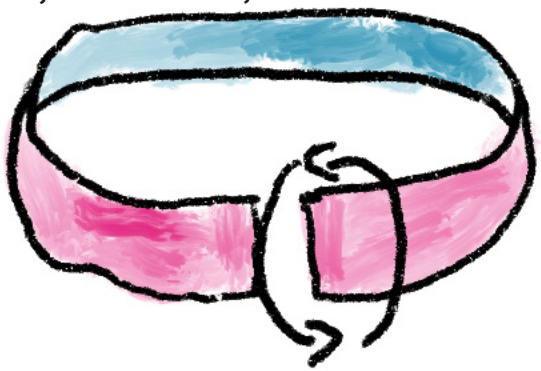
Decide if you still want to be friends.

First, cut a piece of paper long-wise, about three inches wide.

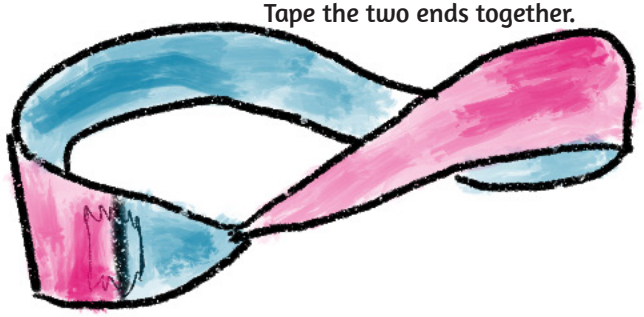
Next, bring the two ends together.



Give one side a half-twist.



Tape the two ends together.



Hold your place with one hand and run a finger on the other along the surface to ensure your paper only has one side. (Not strictly necessary, but you don't want to accidentally break reality. Mobius strips, like friendship, can be dangerous.)

Rectification

Read poetry as often as you can. That's not just a rule of the game, it's also good advice.

When you meet up to play this game, everyone must bring a poem they've read that made them sad. At least three of you should meet. Also, bring enough paper and pencils for everyone.

Pass your poem to the player to your right.

Read the poem that was just handed to you. If it makes you sad, think about why it does. If it doesn't, think about why it might make someone else sad.

Now, write a poem about a world where the sad thing in that poem is fixed, a world where that poem could not be written because it wouldn't make sense. Be as fantastical or as practical as you please.

Pass both poems to your right when everyone is finished. Read the poems you were just handed. Now think about how this new world your friend to your left has just created is different. Imagine who might be harmed by the switch to this new world, imagine who might be unhappy here. Write another poem set in that world demonstrating that melancholy perspective.

Repeat until the world is fixed.