



Message Creative Writing Ideas

The following prompts are designed to encourage creative writing [and thinking] rather than the production of 'conventional' poems, and most of the stimulus guides students to write **List Poems**. This is a form that is straightforward in providing structure whilst also encouraging creative ideas in continuous runs of lines.

Each idea is linked to familiar ways in which *Messages* are thought about today and/or conveyed.

All of the ideas are described in detail here as teacher's notes, and there are accompanying student resource sheets that can be used to help further prompt the students, especially providing ideas for preparations to be made before their actual writing. All too often students attempt to simply write a 'poem' from scratch, and this rarely works! List Poems are in essence straightforward to write, but the student preparation and the leap they need to make to being 'poetic' will need the teachers' explanations and encouragement.

1. Text Message List Poem

This idea uses text message abbreviations [an exaggeration of these rather than necessarily in common usage] to prompt students in writing creative interpretations instead of literal meanings of the selected abbreviations.

As with most of these suggestions, the purpose is to provide frameworks in which students are thinking metaphorically and/or obtusely rather than factually and expectedly. In many

ways, this is a mental work-out on the theme of *Messages* to move away from the transactional to the poetic.

Working individually or as pairs/small groups, students will simply need a resource sheet with abbreviations, easily found on the internet. These should be scrutinised and edited to suit school use and/or age range. An example can be found here:

<http://www.mob1le.com/sms.html>

Students should begin each line of their poem with a texting abbreviation, using/explaining it with an original or unexpected interpretation.

The following sample/model may help to get students started:

Text Message List Poem

IMHO this is the best poem you will ever read
SWALK is harder on A4 envelopes
U4E as long as it lasts
OTOH I have five fingers too
ATM I am thinking of the next line.....

2. Message in a Bottle Poems

This is the obvious one!

There are a number of possibilities for this, and here are a few suggestions, with examples as starters/prompts for students.

The actual use of a bottle will be an optional part of each [we are generally being metaphoric, after all]. Indeed, the temptation would naturally be to treat this as realistically as we can, especially for those whose schools are near the coast [!], but it might be an important contextual point to refer to the pollution of the world's oceans and seas, especially with plastic, and the use of plastic bottles would be the immediate and convenient consideration as a receptacle. For those students who want to debate using original glass ones instead.....

For this first idea, however, students *can* use a bottle and a means to seal this as it is a genuine message to themselves in the future –

Message to Myself Poem

There is a popular writing workshop task of composing letters to oneself, usually as adults reflecting back on and advising themselves when younger. Indeed, a very contemporary example would be Victoria Beckham writing a letter to herself as presented in *Vogue* magazine [details here <http://www.vogue.co.uk/article/victoria-beckham-october-vogue-cover-star>]. There are many other examples that can be found on the internet as an extra resource.

Taking this approach, students can write messages to themselves in the future, hoping for and anticipating achievements and experiences. It is difficult to define what the tone should be and many would naturally, and perhaps most productively, want to treat this seriously, focusing on their ambitions. This will be for the teacher to decide – and individual students, obviously – but prompts to the lighter and the experimental will likely appeal to most.

The following example continues the preference for students being creative/imaginary, and the model again is provided and suggested to provide a framework: a structure that can be copied by students. This uses a repeated line *I hope you have* with four following details, this becoming itself a repeated pattern. There can be many ‘ordinary’ suggestions, but these should be contrasted with the outlandish and therefore poetic!

Message to Myself

I hope you have

been happy
scored a thousand goals
returned from that trip to Mars
passed all your exams, especially English

I hope you have

always washed your hands
invented tasty food without calories
written the book *Homework Made a Doddle* for your own children
fell deeply in love

I hope you have

made up for that big mistake [you know the one]
run your fastest time
stopped changing your hair colour
or
continued changing your hair colour

.....and so on

Rescue Me Message List Poem

This takes the most obvious ‘message in a bottle’ idea and presents in as a list poem with the repeated opener to each line *rescue me....*

And it may be sensible to also stick with the most stereotypical place from which to be rescued: the Desert Island [which is near the ocean for the bottle.....]. There could be other places, but these can quite quickly become sinister and oppressive – like a dungeon or even house where someone is kept captive – and it is best to keep with the conventional ruse, though even with this, Loneliness would be a common theme. As ever, teachers need to be sensitive to the mood and tone they want or feel they need to set.

This is also a poem where a model as prompt could close down the options for individual creativity as areas for focus are so obvious and nearly finite: sand, heat, food [absence of], shelter, loneliness, and so on.

Therefore, some opening class discussion might build up a collective map of these very details to consider when writing poems, either individually or in pairs/small groups. For example – in talking about what there would be to eat, the students will probably mention fruit, then perhaps fish and wild animals. Discuss what would be missed if fruit was the only thing you do ever manage to eat. In consideration of recent climate change moves away from meat and a vegetarian based diet, this might be seen as a positive...

However, if a model is still considered useful/desirable, here is another starter prompt:

Rescue Me Message List Poem

rescue me from the sand and sand and sand and sand
rescue me from the jungle's silence
rescue me from the jungle's night-time voices
rescue me from the fruit without choices
rescue me from the mirage of fast foods
rescue me from the sound of my own thoughts

.....and so on

More Messages in a Bottle Poems

Two of the more interesting facts about the history of messages in a bottle are:

1. The 'colourful' one is that Queen Elizabeth I was so concerned any such bottles washed up on English beaches might conceal the secret messages from British spies and/or fleets sailing the world's oceans, she appointed an *Uncorker of Ocean Bottles* and only this person was legally permitted to retrieve the messages from any found. It was also a crime, punishable by the death penalty, if anyone else did this.
2. The 'functional' one is that the most common use of messages in a bottle was for Drift Bottle Studies: bottles used for the scientific purposes of measuring the direction and pace of the flow of ocean currents. There are, apparently, many different ways in which bottles were weighted and so on to control the conditions for their drifting. Further study will provide specific examples of interesting results from this activity...

This next idea combines these two facts into a poetic reality. It is another List Poem similar to *Message to Myself*, but there is an assumption these aren't all being done with the same students!

This again provides the clear structure of repetition and prompt lines, and the imaginary details that are added to these should be just that: adventurous and metaphoric. It is worth stressing here too that as well as providing a framework for all students to write, but especially those who find it difficult to work in any detail [with significant detail therefore provided already in the repetitions] these are ideal for reading aloud – once more because of those repeated rhythms:

Uncorker of Current Flow Messages in a Bottle Poem

I uncorked the bottle and discovered

this drift current flows from a blue whale's travels
this drift current flows from plastic palpitations
this drift current flows from the Titanic's echo

I uncorked the bottle and discovered

this drift current flows from flowing
this drift current flows from sharks chewing
this drift current flows from an unbreakable code

.....and so on

Mixed Messages Poem

This is the most complex idea, and would be for older students and/or those who have a particular interest in writing creatively, being keen to experiment. It also requires access to tablets/PCs and will need careful research and preparation from the teacher. Accessing word-generator and randomiser sites will also require testing with school networks and ease/acceptability of access.

It could very sensibly be done as a singular, whole-class activity with the teacher using the white board and generating a randomised text for all individual students [or again as paired/small group work] to produce a Mixed Messages Poem. This will be clear from the following instructions.

This will also necessitate practise from the teacher [though all of the ideas collected should be attempted before taught]. Two word-generator sites can be found and used here:

<http://www.lazaruscorporation.co.uk/cutup/text-mixing-desk>

<http://www.languageisavirus.com/text-mixer.html#.V8vc461b9vp>

By feeding in a text – written by a student/or researched – that original is then randomly mixed to form a jumbled ‘new’ text. Students find new organisations of their original and re-present these as a fresh text, shaped poetically: narrow, minimal stanzas do seem to work best here. This is, of course, the very essence of Found Poetry, and these devices acting as electronic cut-up machines.

Students can feed in:

- any of the poems already written about Messages
- original writing that purposefully mixes content/detail/attitudes to a subject
- text about Messages in any context selected from search engine results [cut and paste into generator]
- research specific content about Messages in a Bottle [Wikipedia *Message in a Bottle*, *Historical examples* is excellent for suggesting other texts/details] and cut and paste in as immediate above

The following is a quick and simple example, though encouraging students to take that poetic leap of finding and then shaping a text that transforms itself from the original. As with all experimental writing, a useful maxim/motto would be: **it doesn’t need to make literal sense, but it must make grammatical sense.** Therefore, grammatical words can be added to make the writing ‘accurate’.

The following example used the Lazarus Corporation Text Mixing Desk and fed in the *Uncorker of Current Flow Messages in a Bottle Poem* from above. What follows is the newly generated text and a short poem written from this. One imagines that a longer poem/text would be fed in to generate more text and variety, but this still demonstrates the interesting possible outcome:

Mixed Text

This drift current flows from sharks blue whale’s travels this drift current this drift current flows from a chewing this drift current flows from this drift current flows from flowing flows from plastic palpitations this drift I uncorked the bottle and discovered current flows from the Titanic’s echo I uncorked the bottle and discovered. Bottle and discovered.

Crafted Poem from Mixed Text

Bottle and
discover
the Titanic’s
echo

chewing this drift.
This current

flows from
flowing's flow

uncorked.

Another Example

If useful, here is one more example. The resource for this was taken from information on this site http://www.theamericansurveyor.com/PDF/TheAmericanSurveyor_Perry-MessageInABottle_March2007.pdf and this contains interesting pictures of Drift Cards [really!] and other information about Messages in a Bottle.

Original text

This bottle was released at sea as part of a large-scale study of ocean currents. Information on the date and time of release is on file at the Coast and Geodetic Survey in Washington D.C. You can add to the knowledge of ocean currents by returning the addressed card with the requested information on the date and place where you found the bottle. You will receive by return mail information as to where the bottle was released. Your cooperation in giving accurate information will be of great assistance.

Text generated from Lazarus

On file at the Coast and where the bottle was released. Bottle was released. Your Geodetic Survey in Washington D. In Washington D. C. You card with the requested information on of ocean currents. Of ocean currents. Information on the as part of a large-scale study can add to the knowledge of found the bottle. Found the bottle. You will receive cooperation in giving accurate information will ocean currents by returning the addressed the date and place where you date and time of release is by return mail information as to This bottle was released at sea. Released at sea.

Poem

Released at sea
you will receive
the cooperation
of ocean currents.

By returning
you will receive
knowledge of the
ocean's release.

NB There is no student resource sheet for this idea. It will need careful introduction and illustration by the teacher if being used for individual student writing. Otherwise, as a whole-

class activity these teacher's notes will be most usefully shown on a white board [the examples, at least], edited if required.