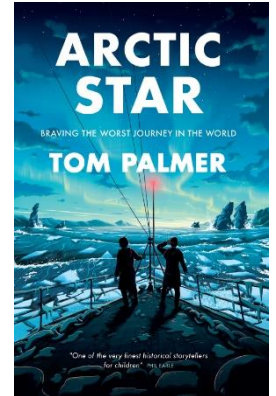


# Arctic Star by Tom Palmer

## Christmas Blackout Poem Challenge

### 1 Introduction:

Poets have developed ideas about rearranging words since the 1920s in the Dadaist and Surrealist movements. The poet Tristan Tzara set off a riot at a surrealist rally when he proposed to create new poems by pulling words randomly out of a hat. The Beat writers and poets of the 1950s (e.g. William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin) pushed this idea further by using scissors to cut up existing texts, like newspaper articles. In 2010, author, illustrator and web-designer Austin Kleon invented Blackout poetry itself, overcoming his severe case of writer's block. Blackout poetry uses a technique of crossing out words to create a different meaning or highlight a mood in the words left behind. Kleon recommends finding one or two "anchor words" -- or a combination of phrases -- in the text that you are using. This will then reveal a message hidden inside the original text which you have unlocked.



### 2 How to do it?

- You can choose to read the whole text beforehand or just jump right in. Sometimes it is best not to read it too closely. Try not to be too influenced by the original text and focus on create your own unique effect.
- Think what mood you are trying to create beforehand and develop this as you go along.
- Use a permanent marker to remove or eliminate unnecessary or irrelevant words and leave behind words that for whatever reason, really strike you.
- Choose between creating a punchy poem made of impactful big words like nouns, verbs, and adjectives or a more narrative style adding in little words like "is," "of," and "the" to move the story along more coherently.
- You can completely eliminate all the white paper and just leave your words or draw bubbles around words or phrase you want to particularly highlight.
- You might like to draw lines to lead readers from one phrase to another, or focus the eye on a particularly striking image.
- You can decorate the sheet with lettering, pictures and doodles to further develop your mood.
- The rules are only as limited as your poetic imagination, there are no right or wrong answers here.

**3 Extract from *Arctic Star* by Tom Palmer to experiment with.** We've suggested three optional edited extracts where young naval recruit Frank, serving on HMS Belfast, celebrates Christmas with his crew in 1943 listening to the King's speech and singing carols as they risk their lives to complete their mission to deliver crucial supplies to the Soviet allies. Or feel free to choose another extract.

**4 Finished examples using either of these extracts to show layouts and decoration ideas.**

**5 *Arctic Star* Blackout Poem Challenge certificate.**

**More resources here [www.tompalmer.co.uk/arctic-star](http://www.tompalmer.co.uk/arctic-star)**

## NINETEEN

*Barents Sea, Christmas Day, 1943*

And then it was Christmas Day. The first one Frank would spend without his mum.

It didn't feel great and he knew she'd be missing him too, on her own at home. But he tried to comfort himself with the thought that surely the war would be over by next Christmas – if they did what they had to do. Surely next year he and his mum would be together again to celebrate. You had to think like that during wartime.

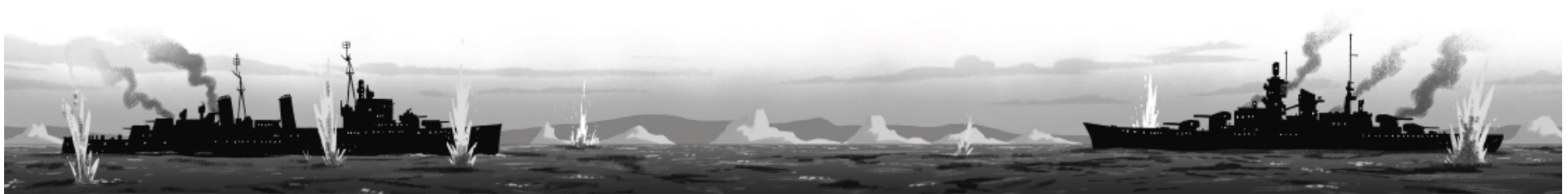
Christmas dinner on the Arctic Ocean was a bully-beef sandwich and some dried biscuits. Conditions were too rough for a proper feed. But they'd been promised a real Christmas dinner once the seas were quiet. And – although he fancied some turkey – Frank was always happier when the seas were wild.

HMS *Belfast* and its two sister cruisers were heading south now, having seen one convoy safely into Murmansk but not docking themselves as they had to meet up with and shield the next convoy that was on its way north.

But not yet. For now they needed to rest. And be ready for that something. Christmas Day or not. An hour to go until the late afternoon watch began, there was a crackle on the tubes and the captain's voice sounded.

The captain began by wishing them a Merry Christmas, then he asked them to join him in listening to the King's Christmas message that he was going to relay to them live from home by radio.

As the national anthem crackled over the ship's broadcast system, Frank stood, as he had always been told to. Several men joined in, singing in low voices, looking at their feet or hands.



Then, after the music faded, the King's Christmas 1943 message began, his voice faltering, hesitating before going on:

*And once again, from our home in England, the Queen and I send our Christmas greetings and good wishes to each one of you all the world over.*

*Some of you may hear me on board your ships, in your aircraft, or as you wait for battle in the jungles of the Pacific Islands, along the Italian Peaks ...*

*To many of you, my words will come as you sit in the quiet of your homes. But, wherever you may be, today of all days in the year, your thoughts will be in distant places and your hearts with those you love.*

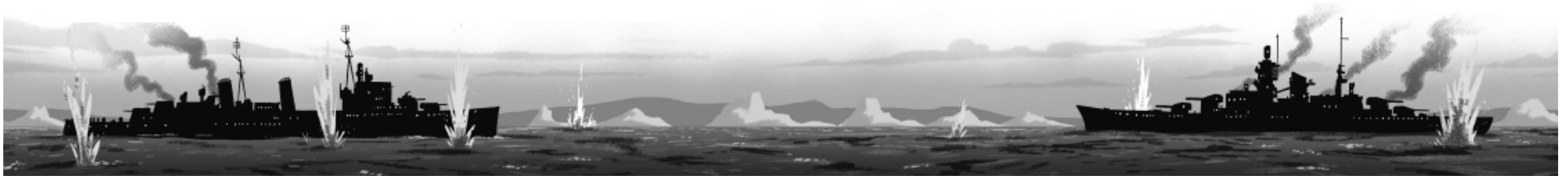
*I hope that my words spoken to them and to you may be the bond that joins us all in one company for a few moments on this Christmas Day ...*

After the speech, men turned to each other and shook hands. But none spoke.

Frank felt shattered but energised too. He was thinking about his mum. At home. Alone. Listening to the speech on the wireless. He knew she would be thinking of him listening to the speech too.

In the quiet below decks, from one, two, then several places on the ship, they heard singing floating up corridors and down ladders.

*Hark! The herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the new-born king!  
Peace on earth and mercy mild  
God and sinners reconciled."*



And then it was Christmas Day. The first one Frank would spend without his mum.

It didn't feel great and he knew she'd be missing him too, on her own at home. But he tried to comfort himself with the thought that surely the war would be over by next Christmas – if they did what they had to do. Surely next year he and his mum would be together again to celebrate. You had to think like that during wartime.

Christmas dinner on the Arctic Ocean was a bully-beef sandwich and some dried biscuits. An hour to go until the late afternoon watch began, there was a crackle on the tubes and the captain's voice sounded.

The captain began by wishing them a Merry Christmas, then he asked them to join him in listening to the King's Christmas message that he was going to relay to them live from home by radio.

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had to meet up with and shield the next convoy that was on its way north.

*And once again, from our home in England, the Queen and I send our Christmas greetings and good wishes to each one of you all the world over.*

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## MESSAGE

Belfast Sea, Christmas Day 1943

And then it was Christmas Day. The first one Frank would spend without his mum.

He didn't feel great and he knew she'd be missing him too, and he was at home. But he tried to comfort himself with the thought that surely the war would be over by next Christmas - or they'd win. They'd had to do. Surely now peace and the mum would be together again to celebrate. You find a Mum like that during war.

Christmas dinner on the Arctic Ocean was a badly beef sandwich and some dried biscuits.

Conditions were too rough for a proper feed, but they'd been promised a real Christmas dinner once the seas were quiet. And although he fancied some turkey, Frank was always happier when the seas were wild.

HMS Belfast and its two sister cruisers were

loading south now, having seen one enemy solely into Leningrad but not docking themselves as they had to meet up with and shield the next convoy that was on its way north.

But not yet, for now they needed to rest. And be ready for that something Christmas Day or not. An hour to go until the late afternoon watch began, there was a crackle on the tubes and the captain's voice sounded.

The captain began by wishing them a Merry Christmas, then he asked them to join him in listening to the king's Christmas message that he was going to relay to them live from home by radio. As the national anthem croaked over the ship's broadcast system, Frank stood, as he had always been told to. Several men joined in, singing in low voices, looking at their feet or hands.

Then, after the music faded, the king's Christmas 1943 message began, his voice faltering, hesitating before going on:

And once again, from our home in England, the Queen and I send our Christmas greetings and good wishes to each one of you all the world over.

Some of you may hear me on board your ships in your aircraft, or as you wait for battle in the jungles of the Pacific Islands, along the Indian Peaks...

To many of you, my words will come as you sit in the quiet of your homes. But, wherever you may be, today of all days in the year, your thoughts will be in distant places and your hearts with those you love.

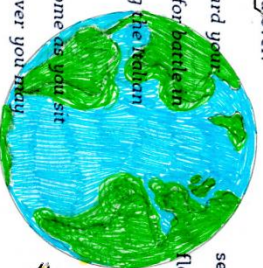
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Hark! The herald angels sing,  
Glory to the newborn king!  
Peace on earth and mercy mild  
God and sinners reconciled."







# Certificate of achievement for the Christmas Blackout Poem Challenge

Awarded to

Signed

*Tom Palmer* ★

Date

December 2021



[www.tompalmer.co.uk/arctic-star](http://www.tompalmer.co.uk/arctic-star)

