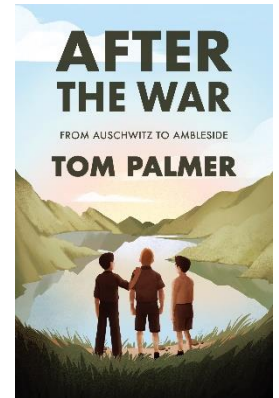


After the War by Tom Palmer

Blackout Poem Challenge

Thursday 8 May 2025 is the 80th anniversary of VE Day. Mark this significant anniversary **using a VE day extract from *After the War* by Tom Palmer to create your own unique blackout poem.** Child refugees Yossi, Leo & Mordecai have survived the horrific Nazi concentration camps and are beginning their hopeful recovery in the Lake District.



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 creating 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 *After the War* by Tom Palmer to experiment with... Child refugees Yossi, Leo & Mordecai have survived the horrific Nazi concentration camps and are beginning their hopeful recovery in the Lake District.

4 Finished examples from pupils at Greenbank School using *Armistice Runner*.

5 VE VJ Day 80th Anniversary Blackout Poem Challenge commemorative certificate.



Yossi noticed tomato plants growing on the insides of the windows. The sharp smell of the plants shook him. His mother used to grow tomatoes. He'd not smelled them for years. And on the table was a large wooden radio with a white and red dial at the centre.

He'd had one of those at home too. He hadn't thought about it for six years. The memory shocked him.

"Ah ... you've found Dad's bicycle," the woman said, joined by a second woman who was alongside her now. "And Spot," she said, naming the dog.

"Where's he been all morning?"

Mordecai translated for Yossi and Leo.

"Sorry, bicycles," Leo said quickly. In English.

The woman smiled. Mordecai patted his friend on the back, impressed that Leo had picked up so much English in just one week.

"We are Mordecai, Yossi and Leo," he told her.

"I'm Dorothy," the woman said. "Hello again.

And welcome. This is Joan, my sister. And your new friend, my daughter, is Joyce," she added, ruffling the girl's hair. Leo put his hand into his bag, causing the dog to sit obediently and stare into his eyes. Leo took out his jar of jam and gave it to Dorothy.

Yossi noticed her frown, confused at first. She would know this jam was from the estate kitchen.

"Jam?" She stifled a laugh.

"Jam," Leo said seriously.

Then she spoke to Mordecai. "How do I say thank you?" she asked. "In your language?"

"Dziekuje," Mordecai told her.

"Dziekuje," Dorothy said to Leo.

Leo bowed, then looked in through the door.

"That smells good," he said in Polish.

Mordecai reluctantly translated – he knew what his friend was up to.

"Would you like some?" Dorothy asked. "It's scouse. Like stew. Just vegetables, no meat. With bread?"

Mordecai explained what she had said and all three boys nodded, stepping forward at once.

They sat at a heavy wooden table, large brown bowls in front of them steaming with vegetable stew.

There was a photograph of a very young man on the mantelpiece above the fire. His face looked a bit like Dorothy's. Yossi wondered if he was her son, and whether he was dead or alive. He decided not to ask.

Seeing Dorothy watching him, Yossi pointed at the radio, wanting to change the subject.

"Radio?" he asked.

Dorothy smiled kindly. And then Joyce was talking excitedly.

"Yes. It is. It's new. We used it to listen to Mr Churchill on VE Day."

"VE Day?" Mordecai asked.

"Victory in Europe Day. When the Germans surrendered," Joyce chattered on, looking at her mum for approval. "Then we had a party. There was tea and cakes. We had long tables outside and Mummy made bunting."

"What is bunting?" Mordecai asked.

"Little flags. Red, white and blue," Joyce enthused.

"And Mr Churchill said: 'In all our long history, we have never seen a greater day than this.' And everyone was laughing, then crying, then laughing again."

"Do you remember that day, boys?" Dorothy asked, putting her hand on Joyce's head.

"Yes," Mordecai said. "This is the day we were free."



never never anywhere.
 scrambled I ran think to give up, I
 I got there. bunker.
 No
 screaming like an animal
 dropped in the collapsed trench,
 saw a man, I
 There was blood
 everywhere
 save him.
 there,
 in the bunker
 But I had to pass on the message
 my duty That was,



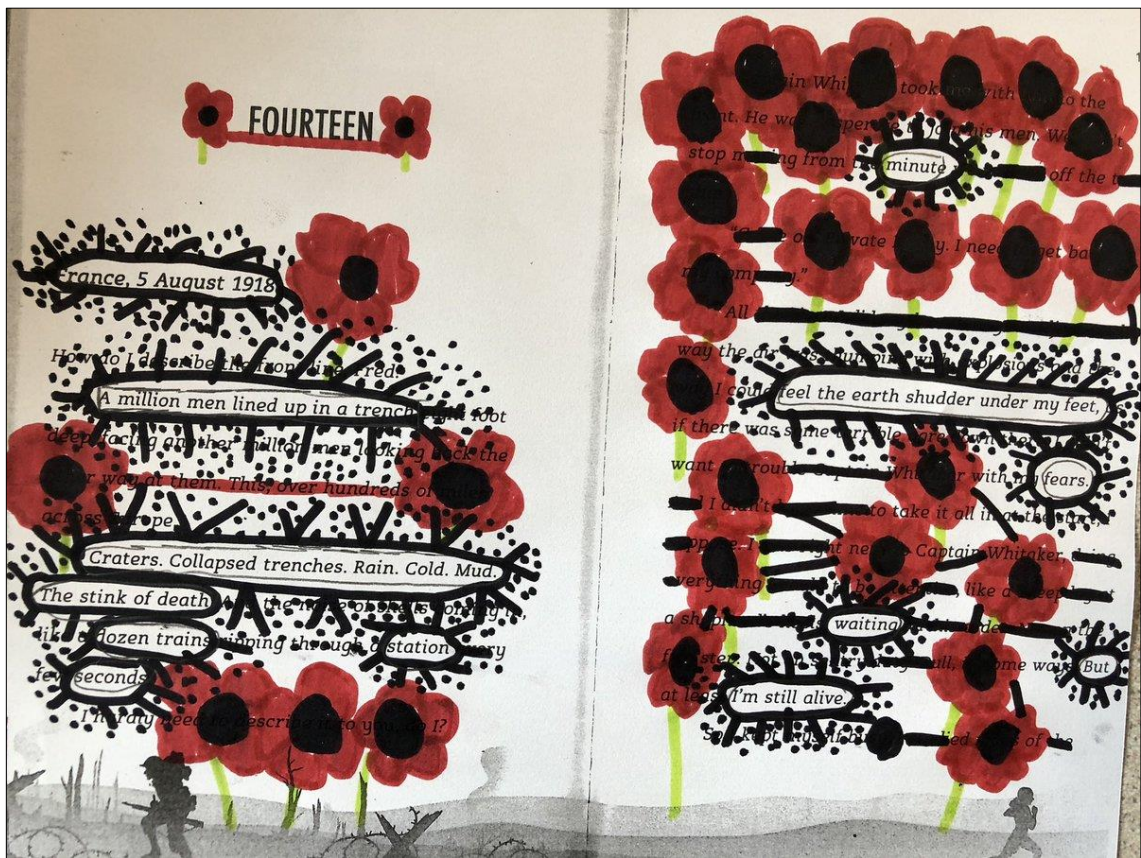
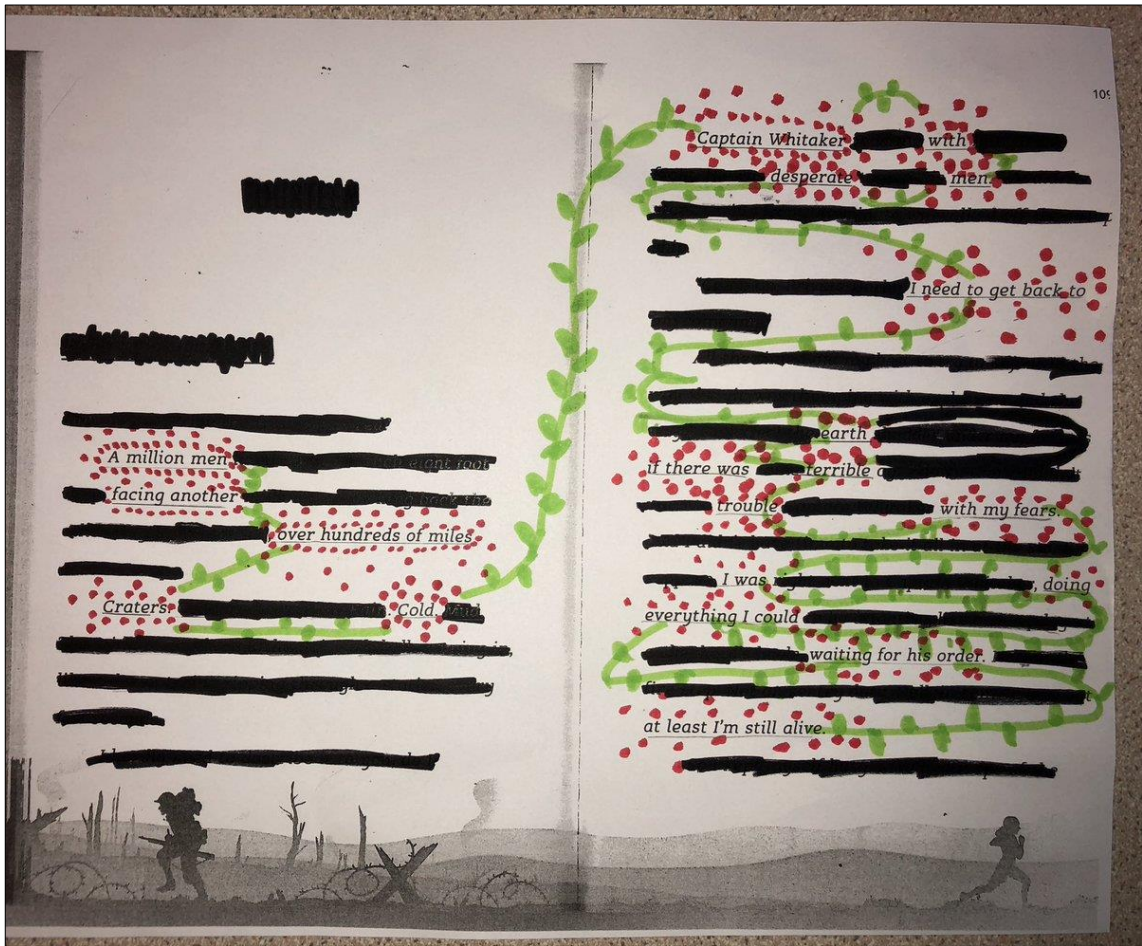
FOURTEEN

France, 5 August 1918

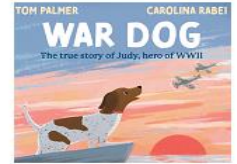
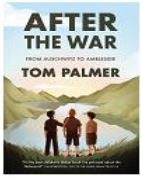
How do I describe the front line, Fred?
 A million men lined up in a trench eight foot
 deep, facing another million men looking back the
 other way at them. This, over hundreds of miles
 across Europe.
 Craters. Collapsed trenches. Rain. Cold. Mud.
 The stink of death. And the noise of shells coming in,
 like a dozen trains ripping through a station every
 few seconds.

I hardly need to describe it to you, do I?



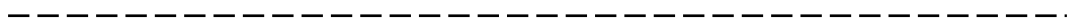


VE & VJ DAY



**80TH ANNIVERSARY
8 MAY & 15 AUGUST 2025**

Certificate of achievement
awarded to



for creating a unique
Blackout Poem

in commemoration of the
80th Anniversary of VE & VJ Day

Signed

Tom Palmer

Date

Thursday 8 May 2025

