



Living History: Editing text to create 'Found' poetry

Now that you have gathered your recording together, you have to decide what to do with it. Try the poetry exercise below. You will take on the role of both writer and editor.

Being an editor puts you in a very powerful position as you can literally change history should you want to. There are many examples of how history has been edited unfairly. Bear in mind that however you record oral history in writing you will lose something of the original communication with the person or people involved. The effect of editing is greater the more editing that you do. Selecting material to leave in or out changes the effect of what is said. You have a very great responsibility to be as fair an editor as possible and to represent the individual and their experiences fairly.

Found poetry

Found poetry is poetry written by selecting and ordering other people's words which have been recorded or documented as texts. In some ways found poetry is similar to a visual collage, pulling together different phrases and words from an oral history interview or recording. Bear in mind that the poetry you create in this way is an edited text.

1. Listen to the person speaking. Try to get an idea of who they are and what they are saying.
2. Select the phrases you are going to use in your poem.
3. Decide on an order for the phrases or a structure for your poem.
4. Write your poem.
5. Review what you have written. Does it create the picture you want?

This is an example of a short 'found' poem.

*Poetry today
It's like praying
You get into it
And it starts going and going*

Or so they tell me

This poem attempts to use the person's own voice and a specific part of what they have said as a way of giving a picture of the way the person talks. Try to do the same with yours.

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