

Accordion to Each of Us

This is very much like a written twist of “broken telephone,” where a phrase is passed around and repeated in whispers from one player to the next, often with hilarious results. An Accordion poem or story is one that is written, generally in sections of two lines, as a group activity. Groups of 6-8 writers make the activity manageable, fun, and extensive enough to result in a fairly decent piece of writing.

The last two lines (or whatever piece has been written by the previous writer) is the only piece available to be read by the current writer: the rest is folded, accordion style, and covered up from view. That means that the current writer only sees what the person before him/her wrote: however, themes, allusions, descriptions and more often carry through the writing well, as there is enough of a link to provide some unity and coherence to the piece.

If it is preferable to use a “starting line” for each group, share the starting line only with the beginning writer, and not with the whole group—that way, the whole group isn’t influenced by knowing what the first writer is “supposed” to write about. Remind writers, too, of their “place” in the group: for example, the first writer will be introducing an idea, but the last two writers will be readying to complete or wrap that idea up. Encourage writers to read the lines above theirs carefully, and to try their best to continue the theme, image or feeling that is described above.

When all group members have taken their turns, unfold the sheet and share the entire poem aloud. Twists (and a whole lot of laughs) can also be added to the activity by choosing a rhyme scheme for the piece, such as “a-b-a-b” (where every second line rhymes) or “a-a-b-b” (where the two lines that each person writes must rhyme).

This is an adaptation of an idea by Betsy Struthers outlined in “Poems as Pictures; Poems in Pieces” found on pages 24-30 in the League of Canadian Poets *Poetry in the Classroom*, edited by Betsy Struthers and Sarah Klassen, published by Pembroke Publishers in 1995.

Accordion to Each of Us....Suggested Starters

Here are some suggested starters for a round of Accordion writing: only the first writer should read/see the starter! It should then be folded over and kept from view, with only the writer’s work showing for the next participant.

1. The family was just sitting down to eat supper when the doorbell rang. Mom opened the door to see a policeman standing on the front step.
2. “So, what do you want to do today?” she asked. “I have the perfect idea,” I answered with grin. Let’s go....”
3. With one last loud clunk, the engine died. Everyone sat in silence. Finally, George spoke. “Someone’s gonna have to go and get help.”
4. “Ew, yuck! What’s that awful smell? Hey, what are you doing in there?”
5. This was it. The biggest, most exciting day of his life. Today, he was going to meet his hero....
6. Uh-oh. Late again. “What will I use for an excuse this time?” I wondered to myself.
7. If I was a superhero, I’d choose a name like The Spring. That would help explain my superpowers, which would include....
8. It all started when Sarah knocked over Mr. Couchie’s coffee, “by accident.”
9. It was the best birthday present ever.
10. They opened the door and then stopped in their tracks. There was water everywhere.