poetic justice

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poetry, like any art form, can be inspiring.

Poetry, like any art form, can be inspiring.
I go to art galleries often, to feel inspired,
but just realized that I don't look at or
engage with poetry for the same reason.
There's no reason why I shouldn't try.

– Survey Respondent–

i feel now as never before that

“I feel now, as never before, that
a poem is the condensed power of all human
abilities, and that its ideal lies
in the power of language to transcend itself.”

–Edvard Kocbek –

Reading it in a forced, structured way was never much fun- having to do serious analysis isn't that enjoyable, but the continued personal searching for beautiful moments of harmony between words, ideas, and emotion keeps me interested.

– Survey Respondent –

"And in the end, the poem is not a thing we see——it is, rather, a light by which we may see——and what we see is life."

–Robert Penn Warren –

It is difficult
to get the news from poems,
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there.

excerpt from "Asphodel, that Greeny Flower",
by William Carlos Williams

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poetic justice

Presenting poetry to increase and improve engagement

A thesis submitted to the School of Design, Carnegie Mellon University,
for the degree of Master of Design in Communication Planning and Information Design

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Dan Boyarski, Professor & Advisor: _____ Date: _____

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abstract

Poetry – the word itself can incite frustration, joy, nostalgia, derision, and most often, shrugs. For something that can cause such varied and strong emotions, poetry gets little notice from a vast majority of people. A huge cause of low readership is the general lack of exposure to poetry had by all but the most heavily engaged readers and poets themselves. The amount and quality of exposure readers have to poetry greatly impacts the perception they have of it, as well as their willingness to further engage with it in the future, especially considering the abundance of other entertainment options readily available.

In order to combat these issues, I've honed in on several common attitudes towards poetry and examined how different vehicles and modes for poetry might positively confront preconceptions of what poetry is, as well as the ways in which readers are meant to interact with it. To create a sustainable level of engagement, I've designed a system that pairs the immediacy and interest of the physical environment with the convenience and power of the web to re-present poetry to potential young adult readers, while maintaining an environment that can engage current readers.

every day we slaughter our finest impulses.

Every day we slaughter our finest impulses. That is why we get a heartache when we read those lines written by the hand of a master and recognize them as our own, as the tender shoots which we stifled because we lacked the faith to believe in our own powers, our own criterion of truth and beauty. Every man, when he gets quiet, when he becomes desperately honest with himself, is capable of uttering profound truths. We all derive from the same source. there is no mystery about the origin of things. We are all part of creation, all kings, all poets, all musicians; we have only to open up, only to discover what is already there.[1]

– Henry Miller –

introduction

Poetry – the word itself can incite frustration, joy, nostalgia, derision, and most often, shrugs. For something that can cause such interesting emotions, poetry gets little notice from the majority of people. In recent years, poetry readership has been incredibly low, with only 8.3 percent of adults who read for pleasure claiming to have read even just a poem per year in a survey conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts[2]. Given great efforts being made by some poets, academics, and organizations like the Poetry Foundation on behalf of poetry, the low readership rates of poetry are especially troubling.

Reading poetry can add emotional, intellectual, artistic, and entertainment value to life, but with so many other things to do—work, exercise, watching movies, listening to music, spending time with friends and family, and social media—it's unrealistic to expect the majority of people to suddenly decided they just want to read some poetry. People have other interests that occupy their time and attention and, often, when poetry does briefly find a seat at the table, its presence is often lackluster and unappealing.

Before this project, I assumed that poetry was unread because it was simply disliked. However, I quickly discovered that the larger problem was the general lack of exposure to poetry by all but engaged readers and poets themselves, coupled with a lack of time or motivation to engage further with poetry. The amount and quality of exposure readers have to poetry greatly impacts the perception they have of poetry and their willingness to further engage with it in the future. Based on finding that the need fell into increasing and improving moments of exposure to poetry, I have spent the semester gauging perceptions of poetry and looking for opportunities to effectively share poetry. While I may have initially set out to evangelize the completely disengaged and invite them to "find" poetry through only the simple "power of poetry", I have since realized that no amount of force will make people engage with poetry. However, if poetry is presented frequently and in a manner that invites curiosity and participation, an audience will emerge.

While I still aim to engage to non-reader with poetry, I also realize that in order to increase the likelihood of this happening, leveraging the power of the already interested reader who loves to share poetry will increase the rate of success, which means it's necessary to find a balance in the system that makes it both welcoming to new readers and interesting to experienced ones.

The internet is a great tool for creating and preserving communities. While poetry communities exist in pockets of the internet, there still seems to be a need for a more open, central, vibrant community. Currently, there is huge segmentation, with readers having countless portals to look through for both poetry and community with little promise of success in finding the quality poetry they are looking for. While I may not be able to create a comprehensive directory of every poem ever written or promise the conversion of non-readers to readers, I hope to create a platform that provides a reliable source of interesting poetry that allows easy, untraditional interactions with poetry.

1. Miller, "Henry Miller on Writing", 25.

2."Reading on the Rise: A New Chapter in American Literacy", 2009, 7.

said & done

i. Poetry in America

ii. Battling Perceptions of Poetry

iii. Understanding "Understanding": Information + Interaction + Perception

iv. The Context of Poetry

v. How Do You Motivate People to Read Poetry?

vi. Attention-Grabbing Presentation

vii. Apps for Poetry: A Not-So-Random Sampling

viii. Curation: Create, Contribute, Collect

iv. Poetry Can Be Found Anywhere (and Everywhere)

said & done

To better understand the project area, I started researching how the community currently views the state of poetry, how to present information to guide readers, how to combat negative perceptions, and how to motivate readers. At the same time, I looked to other projects inside and outside of the poetry community to understand the role of presentation, collaboration, interaction, and curation in guiding user engagement.

Poetry in America

In 2006, the Poetry Foundation conducted a survey to determine the state of poetry in America. The survey unearthed several findings that guided me through the research and design process, by helping me understand attitudes, levels of exposure, and habits of both readers and non-readers.

From the survey results, I kept a few guiding principles in mind during the rest of my research and design process:

- **My solution needs to grab attention and make an argument for poetry's usefulness, as well as reduce the time commitment of finding poetry**. People stop reading poetry "because they no longer have time or because they have other interests."[1]

- **My solution should provide a good tool for sharing poetry simply and elegantly.** Both readers and non-readers report liking to share poetry with their friends and family.[2]

- **Creating experiences that encourage further interaction and include a specific destination at which to do so might increase engagement after incidental exposures.** Non-users will engage with poetry when they "come across it in unexpected places"[3]. Of people who commute via public transport, 79% report seeing poetry in trains, subways, or busses[4]. While most people read and like the poetry they find incidentally, it doesn't encourage them to find more, but it also rarely a next step to take for further reading.

- **There is still a huge opportunity to better present poetry online.** Only 36.5 % users and 4.8 % of non-users have accessed poetry on the internet[5]. It's important to note that this is likely to have changed significantly between 2006 and 2013. However, I still believe the internet remains a disorganized resource for poetry, if not an "untapped" one[6].

> The internet can deepen participation for current poetry users who will use it to search for poetry, and their social networks will broaden participation.[7]

1-4. NORC: A National Organization for Research at the University of Chicago, 2006, iv.

5. Ibid., v.

6. Ibid., 44.

7. Ibid., 83.

it seems likely that people's perceptions

It seems likely that people's perceptions of poetry are the greatest barriers to participation. Few people are inclined to invest some of their precious free time in an activity they think is effortful and unrewarding.[10]

– Poetry in America, 2006 –

7.NORC: A National Organization for Research at the University of Chicago, 2006, 8

8. Ibid., iii.

9. Ibid., 35.

10. Ibid., 81.

- **To increase rates of engagement, it's necessary to capture younger age groups who are more open to poetry.** Strengthening a relationship with poetry earlier will decrease the likelihood that the time spent of poetry will be dropped as a young reader ages. Young adults, aged 18-24, are most likely to identify as poetry users than non-users, with positive identifications as "poetry readers" decline with each age demographic.[7]

- **My solution should help introduce readers to interesting contemporary poetry, rather than just reintroducing the classics.** Contemporary poetry is often easier to engage with on a language-level, but can be harder to know where to find it. "Most people are first exposed to classic poetry, but people who continue to engage with poetry are more likely to read or listen to contemporary poetry."[8]

- **While nothing can take the place of a relationship with poetry based on exposure by loved ones at a young age, it is still possible to create meaningful experiences later in life.** "What seems to distinguish people who engage with poetry from those who do not is the breadth of their experiences with poetry."[9] Hopefully, if this is the case, increasing the types of experiences readers have with poetry will increase their willingness to engage with it.

One of the main conclusions reached in the survey analysis was that, "it seems likely that people's perceptions of poetry are the greatest barriers to participation. Few people are inclined to invest some of their precious free time in an activity they think is effortful and unrewarding."[10] They also found that the people least exposed to poetry were the most likely to declare a dislike for poetry. Someone's exposure to poetry will greatly affect their perception of it, so it seems logical that to improve perceptions of poetry,

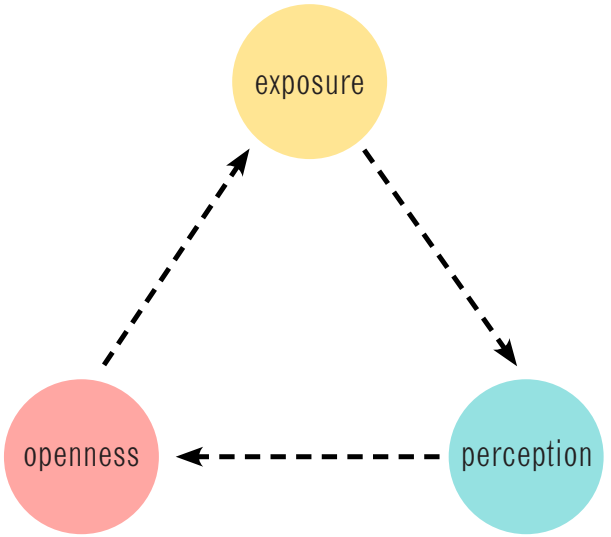


Figure 1: Conceptual model of how attitudes are formed about poetry based on the NORC survey results about the relationship of exposure to and perception of poetry to one's openness to engaging with it.

it is necessary and recommended to increase and improve the chances for exposure to poetry.

While I do not necessarily agree with the methods suggested by the Poetry Foundation for how both of these things might be done, two of the suggestions from their survey mirror the basis of my final design, namely, to increase poetry's presence on the internet and to create new opportunities for incidental exposure to poetry. A third take away from the survey results remains the underpinning of my entire design and research process: to challenge people's perceptions of poetry.

being intelligible is not what it seems.

Being intelligible is not what it seems. You mean by understanding that you can talk about it in the way that you have a habit of talking, putting it in other words. But I mean by understanding enjoyment. If you enjoy it, you understand it. And lots of people have enjoyed it so lots of people have understood it. . . . But after all you must enjoy my writing, and if you enjoy it you understand it. If you do not enjoy it, why do you make a fuss about it? There is the real answer.[1]

– Gertrude Stein –

Battling Perceptions of Poetry

While the Poetry Foundation has few specific suggestions on how to change people's perceptions of poetry, they are right in recognizing the necessity of doing so. The majority of my research over the course of the semester has been based on doing just that, whether by challenging perceptions of what poetry is about, how its written, how it should be presented, how it should be consumed, or even what "counts" as poetry.

The first battle, in my opinion, is based on the presentation and consumption of poetry, including what can and should actually be considered poetry. Those who feel uneducated in poetry seem to feel, in a way that people who did not study music or film or the culinary arts do not seem to feel, that they are not allowed to have an opinion or that they do not have the aptitude to judge poetry. The great writer Gertrude Stein once wrote,

"Being intelligible is not what it seems. You mean by understanding that you can talk about it in the way that you have a habit of talking, putting it in other words. But I mean by understanding enjoyment. If you enjoy it, you understand it. And lots of people have enjoyed it so lots of people have understood it. . . . But after all you must enjoy my writing, and if you enjoy it you understand it. If you do not enjoy it, why do you make a fuss about it? There is the real answer."[1]

Having received my B.A. in English, I am all too familiar with the literary dissection associated with the study and "understanding" of literature. While this academic analysis has its place, poetry can be enjoyed at a level where enjoyment is tantamount to understanding. Poetry has the ability to be understood by its sounds and mood, rather than the meaning of its words. If the emotion and the mood of the poem are understood, that itself can be more than enough. While this level of understanding poetry may seem straightforward, it is unfortunately, not a battle easily won. Years of conditioning to what it means to write, read, and understand poetry make it difficult for many non-readers to feel willing to approach it, even with the simple goal of enjoyment.

In order to overcome the poor, apathetic perceptions of poetry, it is important to create tools increase and improve exposure in a way that confronts their pre-conceived notions. This can be approached through the process of "conceptual blockbusting"[2]. Conceptual and perceptual blocks, which get in the way of problem solving and understanding, often stem from stereotyping. Stereotyping is a natural human tendency that streamlines the way we interpret our day-to-day experiences and is an especially common approach to interpreting areas with which we are uncomfortable, don't like, or don't care about. For many, poetry can be classified as all three. Because so many people profess to be uncomfortable with, dislike, and not care about poetry, targeting these attitudes towards poetry through presenting opportunities for interaction has been essential.

Context is stored alongside information and tempers memory with emotion, opinion, and interpretation. Because the context with which poetry is often associated can be so unappealing and its stereotypes so strong, providing strong examples of value for poetry, presenting it in contexts divorced from negative emotions, and presenting poetry in ways that directly confront its stereotypes are vital to having a chance at reaching readers who are not strongly engaged with it.

1. Stein, 1934

2. Adams, Conceptual Blockbusting: A Guide to Better Ideas, 15

Understanding "Understanding": Information + Interaction + Perception

Just as important as knowing how people block information is knowing how people learn, interpret, and understand information. With that knowledge, it's possible to improve the likelihood that a design will not only be noticed, but thoroughly and continually engaged with. People experience information and learn in a wide variety of ways and cycles. It is important to work towards designing in a way that includes as many learning types as possible.

There are several useful frameworks to examine and consider how people learn and absorb information. For example, in McCarthy's framework of learning, there are four quadrants, which incorporate different modes and levels of learning[1]. Information is best learned different ways by different types of learners, who feel most comfortable in certain quadrants. However, for a complete learning experience, a learner must move through all four quadrants.

The first quadrant focuses on the "student", in my case the user, finding meaning and making personal connections through storytelling, dialogue, and discussion[2]. In this learning mode, the "teacher", my design, should act as an initiator and motivator able to capture enthusiasm. Many of my efforts have been focused in this quadrant, because making personal connections to poetry can increase willingness to engage with it.

The second quadrant focuses on conceptualization, where the user is "organizing, patterning, seeing relationships, prioritizing, classifying, and comparing"[3]. The design delivers the content and the learner forms concepts based on the content received. With a focus on re-presenting poetry, I focus on giving users a wide variety of media, styles, and topics to discover, which allows them to form their own concepts about poetry with a more holistic, informed view.

The third quadrant focuses problem solving—experimenting, trying ideas, finding personal uses for learning[4]. Thedesign acts as a coach by "facilitating, nurturing good tries, asking provocative questions, and setting up environments that encourage experimentation"[5]. For my design, this quadrant is most relevant in allowing readers to engage in questioning what counts as poetry. The allowance given to readers to submit works as poetry to their fellow readers and being open to considering non-traditional forms of poetry in the system gives users the opportunity to experiment with what makes something poetic.

The fourth quadrant takes the third quadrant a step further into the act of transformation and creation[6]. For a poetry system, this might mean facilitating the writing of original works of poetry, but for an online system there are great opportunities to introduce generative systems that don't require users to be poets themselves, but still encourage creation around poetry, whether that means visualizing, writing "found" poetry, or writing stories based off of poems. Using this learning cycle as a basis for the types of activity my platform and could incorporate, having elements that make personal connections and allow users to experiment and create with poetry seem to be most vital for an effective experience.

To take the understanding of what makes an effective experience further, Don Norman explores creating an experience that not only captures, but also sustains interest. To make learning information a successful and enjoyable experience at the same time, it is important to incorporate experiential cognition—immediate interest and entertainment based on learners' previous knowledge and experience—and reflective reasoning—new, expanded material for continued engagement with information[7].

1-6. McCarthy "Teaching Around the 4MAT Cycle."

7. Norman., "Experiencing the World", 24-25.

8. Ibid, 31.

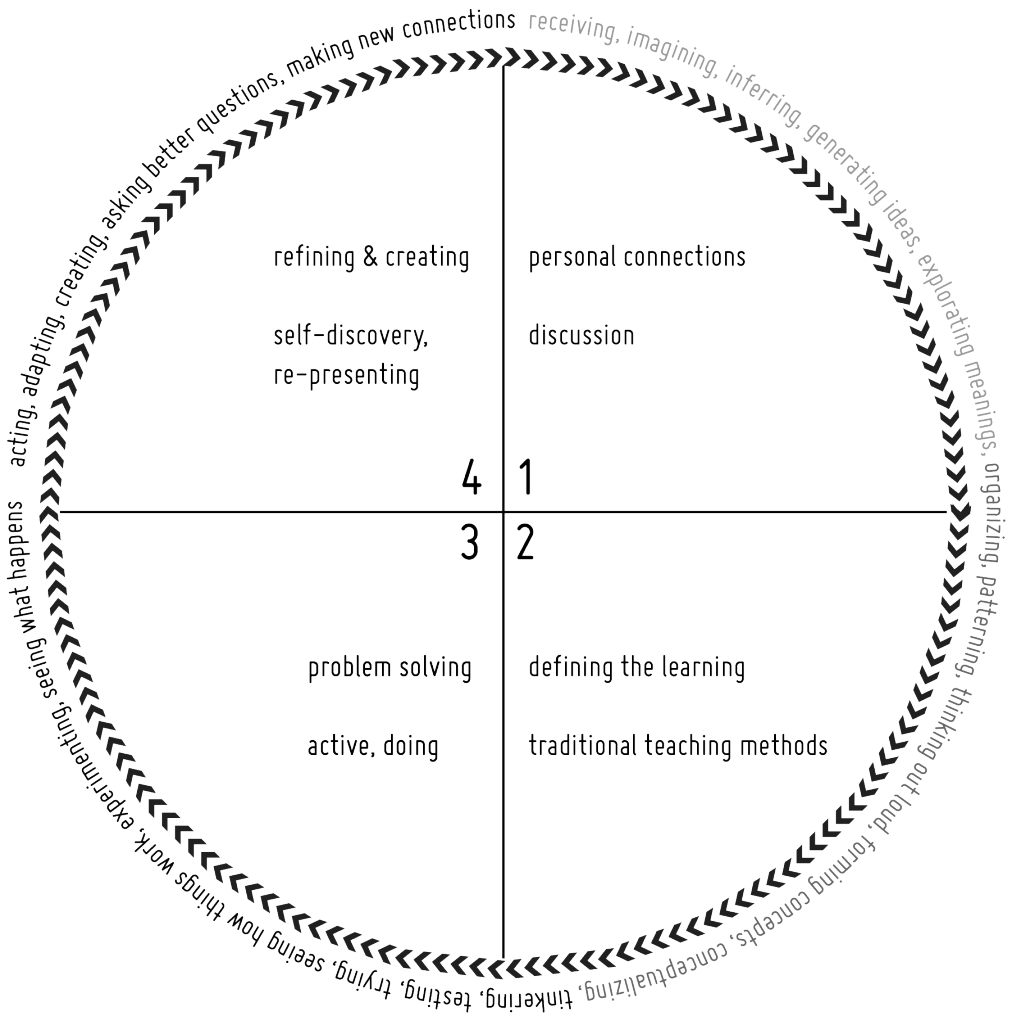


Figure 2: Based off of McCarthy's cycle for teaching and learning showing the different activites and focuses emphasized in the four quadrants.

For poetry, capturing immediate interest and entertainment is vital, since there is little patience or time for long drawn out experiences without something that draws attention and excites people. Experiential cognition needs to confront and contradict previous knowledge and experiences, rather than align with them, to be most effective when presenting poetry.

To find the right balance between the two types of engagement means reaching "optimal flow"[8], a state in which there is a continual flow of focused concentration and absolute absorption in the activity. To reach optimal flow in designing for an engaging poetry experience for non-users, the transition between the experiential and the reflective needs to be both smooth and gradual. Because poetry often leaves an academic after taste, it's important to maintain entertainment and interest, while still allowing deeper, more reflective engagement.

The Context of Poetry

Nothing is experienced in isolation, rather everything is experienced by its current viewer in the context in which it is presented to them[1]. The context and the reader are major determining factors in how poetry is received. While Kevin Lynch explores this idea related to how people navigate cities in "Image of a City", it is equally interesting to apply to poetry. For me, considering not only how context has shaped perceptions and stereotypes of poetry in the past, but also how poetry can use context deliberately in the future to combat these perceptions and stereotypes has opened doors to thinking about how to shape an experience with poetry. Using context in the future can mean re-appropriating current contexts or creating new contexts that directly contradict the stereotypical images formed around poetry.

Lynch also points out the need for better readability, clarity, and legibility, which means improving how easily parts can be recognized and organized into coherent patterns. In a city, this means the appropriate use of context and cues, as large as landmarks and as small as color. Translating these ideas into tools for readers, whether through chunking or proper use of typographic hierarchy, means "imageability", or "apparency", increases and gives the observer a higher likelihood of understanding and remembering content[2]. Good apparency is achieved by giving information structure that allows easy way-finding and self-guided learning.

Right now, there is a huge space open in poetry to increase apparency and improve way finding, whether through an individual poem, through the poetry landscape, or even simply through the network of sources available on and offline for the newly interested. Because the poetry community often loses sight of one of Lynch's guiding principles—that the viewer, or reader, is part of the scene, and not apart from—a lot of existing resources fail to guide all but the expert enthusiast or truly perseverant[3].

Lynch also discusses the prevalence of stereotyping in interpreting information, though more positively, in his discussion of the "environmental image". An environmental image is a generalized mental image combined with immediate sensation and memory of past experience, which is used to interpret information and guide action[4]. An environmental image serves as a framework from which an individual has "a possibility of choice and a starting point for the acquisition of further information"[5].

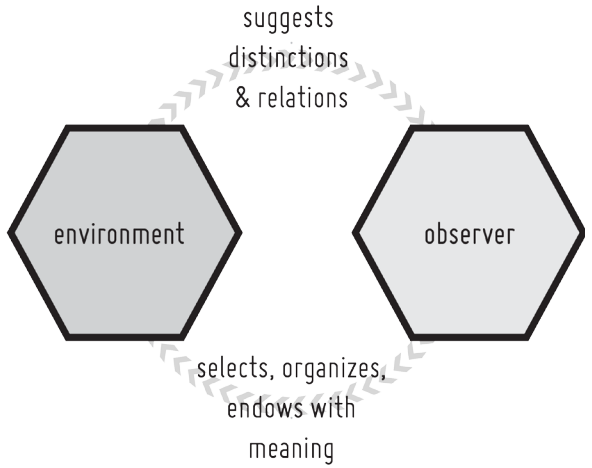


Figure 3: The process of creating an environmental image based off of Lynch's "Image of the City"

To build an environmental image, a two-way process between the environment and the observer needs to occur, in which the environment suggests distinctions and relations and the observer "selects, organizes, and endows with meaning what he sees"[6]. In re-presenting poetry, building an ecosystem that facilitates creating and maintaining an environmental image of poetry across experiences with it can help improve the likelihood of further engagement.

1. Lynch, "Image of the City", 1.

2. Ibid., 2.

3. Ibid., 6.

4-5. Ibid., 4.

6. Ibid., 6.s

How Do You Motivate People to Read Poetry?

Motivation is the key to understanding information. While in school students may be externally motivated to read poetry so they receive decent grades or simply because they feel like they "should", unless a person is also intrinsically motivated, this motivation quickly evaporates once these external factors are gone.

Intrinsic motivation refers to the willingness to engage in an activity for its own sake, rather than because of promised reward or punishment[1]. Finding readers who are intrinsically motivated to read poetry is difficult, as shown by the 8.3% of pleasure-reading adults who read it.

According to Lepper and Malone, intrinsic motivation can be defined by challenge, fantasy, curiosity, control, cooperation, competition, and recognition[2]. Of these types of intrinsic motivations, curiosity is especially worth leveraging while designing to re-present poetry and re-engage a lost audience. Curiosity is ignited by either an "optimal level of informational complexity" or and "optimal level of discrepancy or incongruity from present expectations and knowledge", meaning it often stems from experiences that in some way challenge current knowledge and expectations[3].

There are two kinds of curiosity: sensory and cognitive. Sensory curiosity stems from "attention-attracting stimuli" like light, color, sound or other sensory stimuli in the environment or presentation of information[4]. Because there is such a limited range of presentation aesthetics in poetry, there is a huge opportunity to incorporate sensory stimuli both physically and digitally, through images, video, and typography, which will most likely ignite curiosity also in that is would go against present expectations.

Cognitive curiosity, on the other hand, is "evoked by the prospect of modifying higher-level cognitive structures", or the prospect that something experienced does not fit into preconceived notions that are held and, therefore, must be reconsidered[5]. Knowledge structures are evaluated by their level of "completeness, consistency, and parsimony", so "by designing environments that make people think their knowledge structures lack one or more of these characteristics," curiosity can be leveraged[6].

Because of limited exposure to poetry in general, finding instances that call into question the completeness and consistency of mental structures should be fairly straightforward. There are plenty of ways to present different kinds of poetry in different forms that can stimulate both sensory and cognitive curiosity, since there are such limited modes commonly used and known in the current environment. However, it will be necessary to test different options to see which best invite curiosity in viewers.

1. Malone and Lepper, "Making Learning Fun: A Taxonomy of Intrinsic Motivations for Learning", 229

2. Ibid, 230

3-4. Ibid, 235

5-6. Ibid, 236

Attention-Grabbing Presentation

There is no shortage interesting projects and efforts made in honor and on behalf of poetry and language. For example, the Shakespeare Machine in the lobby of the Public Theater in New York City projects Shakespearean words and phrases. The Academy of American Poetry and other organizations have taken part in the Poetry in Motion project, which puts poetry in public transportation. There are also countless physical displays by artists like Jenny Holzer and Robert Montgomery that project poetry onto buildings or place poetry into commercial advertising spaces. Each of these projects, among others, takes poetry and presents it both in unexpected places and untraditional forms. However, there remains an issue of scaling and continued engagement.

Despite these being interesting projects, they are unlikely to reach a huge audience because of contingency factors. For Poetry in Motion to be successful, one must use public transport in a city with a program in place and be on the right bus and the right time. And Jenny Holzer, Robert Montgomery, and the Shakespeare Machine have an even smaller likelihood of reach. While no project supporting incidental exposure can have ensured engagement, I believe finding tools and templates that can be shared amongst poetry enthusiasts and tapping in the desire to share can greatly increase the presence of "guerilla" poetry, which will increase the rate of exposure in a variety of communities.

Another issue with many of these projects and initiatives is that there is no place to move to for further engagement. While many people reported to the Poetry in America survey that their incidental exposure to poetry does not inspire them to seek out more, there are some who would make that effort. For those willing to do so, there is not always a link to continue engagement and even when there is, there are few interesting, accessible sites to continue their engagement with poetry. Most existing websites are generally heavy and academic, amateur and old-fashioned, independent blogs, or hard to find. If a non-user has a great experience with incidental poetry and then moves online to see these websites, their engagement will most likely decrease exponentially.

One recent art project worth considering is "The Rap Quotes" by artist Jay Shells, in which the artist took rap lyrics that mentioned streets, parks, intersections, and other geographical landmarks in New York City, and placed street signs bearing these lyrics at the corresponding locations. In addition the lyrics, he simply added a Twitter handle and his name. These signs have garnered the attention and appreciation of rap lovers, New Yorkers, and more generally, the lovers of things interesting and artistic in their environments. By including the Twitter handle, he was able to gauge response first by receiving images from people who saw the sign and, being an artist with an existing level of credibility and recognition, his work has also been well documented by the press.

While it may be more generally liked than poetry, rap has many connections to poetry (in fact, comparing rap and poetry is one of the most common reactions I received in interviews, surveys, and casual conversations about my project), and could be presented similarly. Projects like Poetry in Motion and works that place poetry loudly in the public eye show that poetry can get noticed amidst the noise and haste, however, making sure incidental poetry has a strong level of immediate context can increase success, considering the lack of familiarity many people have with poetry. Adding a recognizable context—whether it's geographical context or thematic context—can add a sense of joy to the discovery and to the environment.

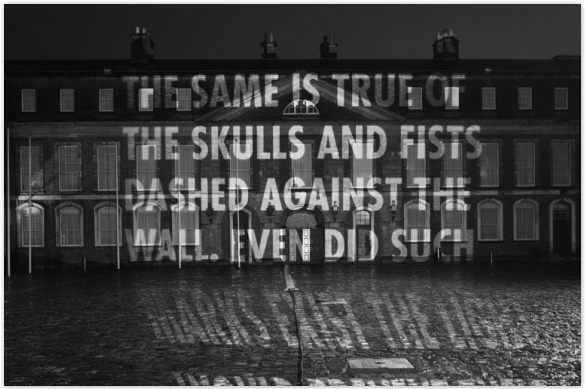


Image from www. jennyholzer.com

One of Jenny Holzer's many projections of poetry arounc the world, from 2006 in Dublin, Ireland.

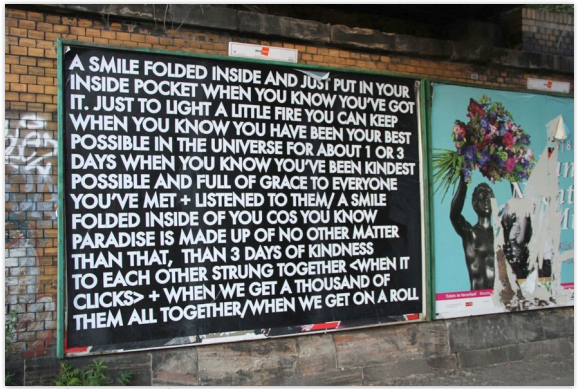
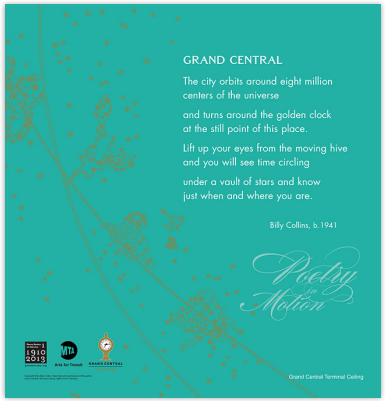


Image from www.robertmontgomery.com

One of Robert Montgomery's "Fire Poetry" pieces on display in and ad space in Berlin, Germany.

Image from www.earstudio.com

One segment of Ben Rubin's Shakespeare Machine showing phrases from Shakespeare starting with the word "no".



Images from http://www.mta.info/mta/afi/poetry/

Examples of the presentations of poetry used by the MTA's Poetry in Motion program.

Image tweeted by Jay Shells, @therapquotes

One of artist Jay Shells street signs in New York City calling out landmarks and intersections that have been rapped about.

Apps for Poetry: A Not-So-Random Sampling

While the apps showcased below are only a small sample of the mobile apps available, they highlight some of the majors themes currently at play in poetry apps: lack of balance between generation and consumption, a general lack of true interactivity, apps with very specific use cases both in terms of function, audience, or media available. These apps do offer an interesting glimpse of possibility in how even small efforts to combine and improve these existing app functions to engage readers, new and old, with poetry. With a little work, apps could become a great tool for creating, sharing, and consuming poetry.

Poems by Heart

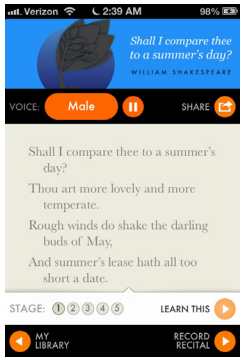
An app to aid in the memorization of classic poems.

Strengths:

- *Encourages sustained interaction*
- *Well-designed*

Weaknesses:

- *Limited ways of interacting with poetry*
- *Limited content*



Poetry

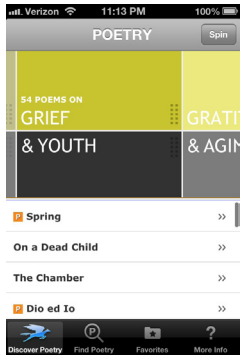
An app that offers selections of poetry based on themes and moods:

Strengths:

- *Encourages sustained interaction*
- *Well-designed*
- *Randomized selector allows nice style of browsing*

Weakness:

- *Still uses broad strokes to organize poems*



Poetry Slam

A tool for "writing" slam poetry. Generates random words and allows adding your own text.

Strength:

- *Fairly well-designed*

Weakness:

- *Process of making doesn't encourage thought or consideration*

Poetry Everywhere

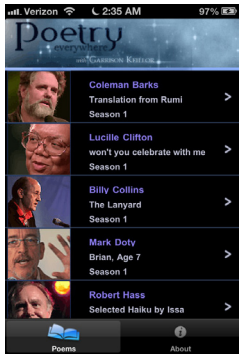
An app with audio recordings of poems.

Strengths:

- *Encourages sustained interaction*
- *Well-designed*

Weaknesses:

- *Limited ways of interacting with poetry*
- *Limited content*



Iku

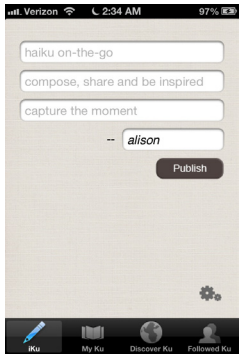
An app for composing and sharing haikus.

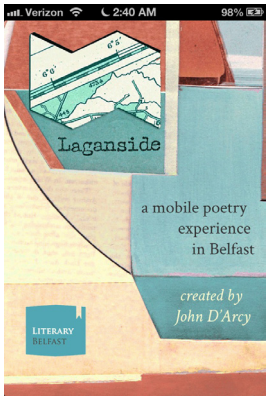
Strengths:

- *Limited guidance during process*
- *Simple creation and submission process*

Weaknesses:

- *Limited ways of interacting with poetry*
- *Limited content*





Laganside

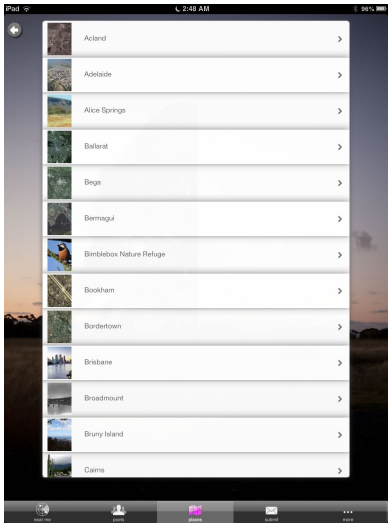
An app showcasing poetry related to the city of Belfast.

Strengths:

- *Beautifully designed*
- *Provides immediate context*

Weaknesses:

- *Limited to Belfast, Ireland*
- *Limited content*



The Disappearing

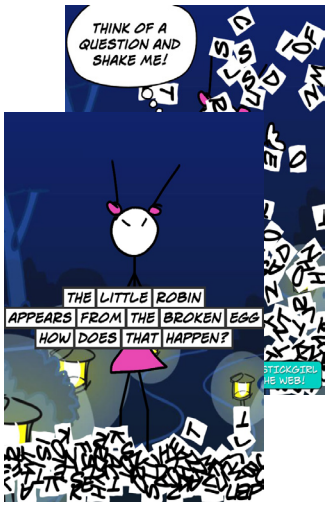
A poetry app that uses your location to bring up geographically relevant poetry.

Strengths:

- *Provides immediate context*
- *Allows user submissions*

Weaknesses:

- *Limited to Australia*
- *Interface has limited interaction*



Stick Poetry

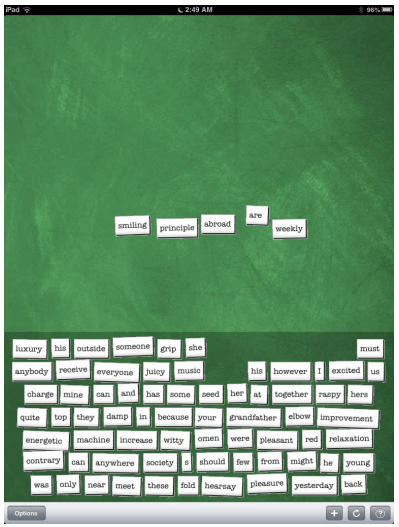
A tool for "writing" slam poetry. Generates random words and allows adding your own text.

Strength:

- *Poetry is surprisingly good considering the tone of the app overall*

Weakness:

- *Considering intended purpose, this app is fun, but adds no real value to poetry in apps as a whole*



Found Poetry

A tool for "writing" slam poetry. Generates random words and allows adding your own text.

Strength:

- *User generation enabled*

Weaknesses:

- *No apparent order to content or process of "writing"*
- *No sharing capabilities*
- *No different than the dozens of apps that are digital magnet poetry*

As internet participants, with the rise of platforms

As internet participants, with the rise of platforms like Pinterest and infographic sharing etc, it's becoming more obvious that people don't like to read. If a story can be told with visuals, it has more impact right now. Pinterest offers that story-telling capability using different boards that many other social networks don't exclusively offer.[1]

–Pinterest "Super User" Drew Hawkins –

Curation: Create, Contribute, Collect

Despite these noteworthy efforts to make poetry attention-worthy in the physical world, little work seems to have been done digitally. Many online poetry sources are solely curated by web administrators and organizations, blog writers, or journals, with little multimedia content, meaningful curation, or user input available. Good, interesting content in curation is a huge necessity with the ever-increasing amount of information on the internet.

The role of curation on the internet is currently debated frequently on blogs, in tech articles, and in the design world. Aside from the etiquette of curation – crediting sources, not stealing, and respecting creators' wishes – there are also different opinions on the best practices of curation emerging. Steve Rosenbaum writes,

"The most successful curators include sites like The Huffington Post, that embrace the three-legged-stool philosophy of creating some content, inviting visitors to contribute some content, and gathering links and articles from the web. Created, contributed, and collected — the three 'C's is a strong content mix that has a measurable impact. Why? Because your visitors don't want to hunt around the web for related material. Once they find a quality, curated collection, they'll stay for related offerings."[2]

The idea that a curation platform should support created content, contributed content, and gathered content is appealing and yet, rarely done completely. Pinterest specifically is a great example of the success and appeal of curation. In the last three years, we've seen Pinterest burst onto the social media scene with unprecedented growth. Users on Pinterest are able to self-curate their interests, wants, and desires. As to why Pinterest has been successful, finding reasons on both micro and macro scales is simple. First, it's visually appealing. They website itself is clean, supporting the beautiful images being aggregated. Second, it allows for various levels of participation. It's "not a platform where you have to actively take part in", but it does allow users incredible options to collect and share images [3]. Third, it connects people – strangers and friends – who have similar tastes to that they can "compare notes" [4]. For different users, these aspects vary in importance and there are numerous other pros that could be mentioned.

Few poetry related artifacts–digital or physical– create the positive visceral response found on Pinterest or allow that type of interactivity. While Pinterest has many positive points, it is not the right platform for poetry sharing. While poetry can be shared on Pinterest, the presentation is limiting and completely user aggregated, which means that when looking for poetry on Pinterest, one is more likely to find instructions for acrostic poetry than an actual poem. When poems are posted, they are often pictures of book pages or portraits of poets with the poem text pasted in a comment box.

As Drew Hawkins points out, the success of sites that emphasize visualizations and visual presentation, shows that web users are increasingly attracted to image than words, which are easier and quicker to take in. While poetry cannot be made wholly visual all the time, thinking through how visual presentation can increase the ease with which poetry is read and consumed could give it a more solid place online.

Aside from Pinterest, platforms from Tumbler to blog platforms exist for users to curate their own content for themselves and an audience, but it can be hard to pinpoint good sources for specific, thematic or topical content for poetry, even within these services.

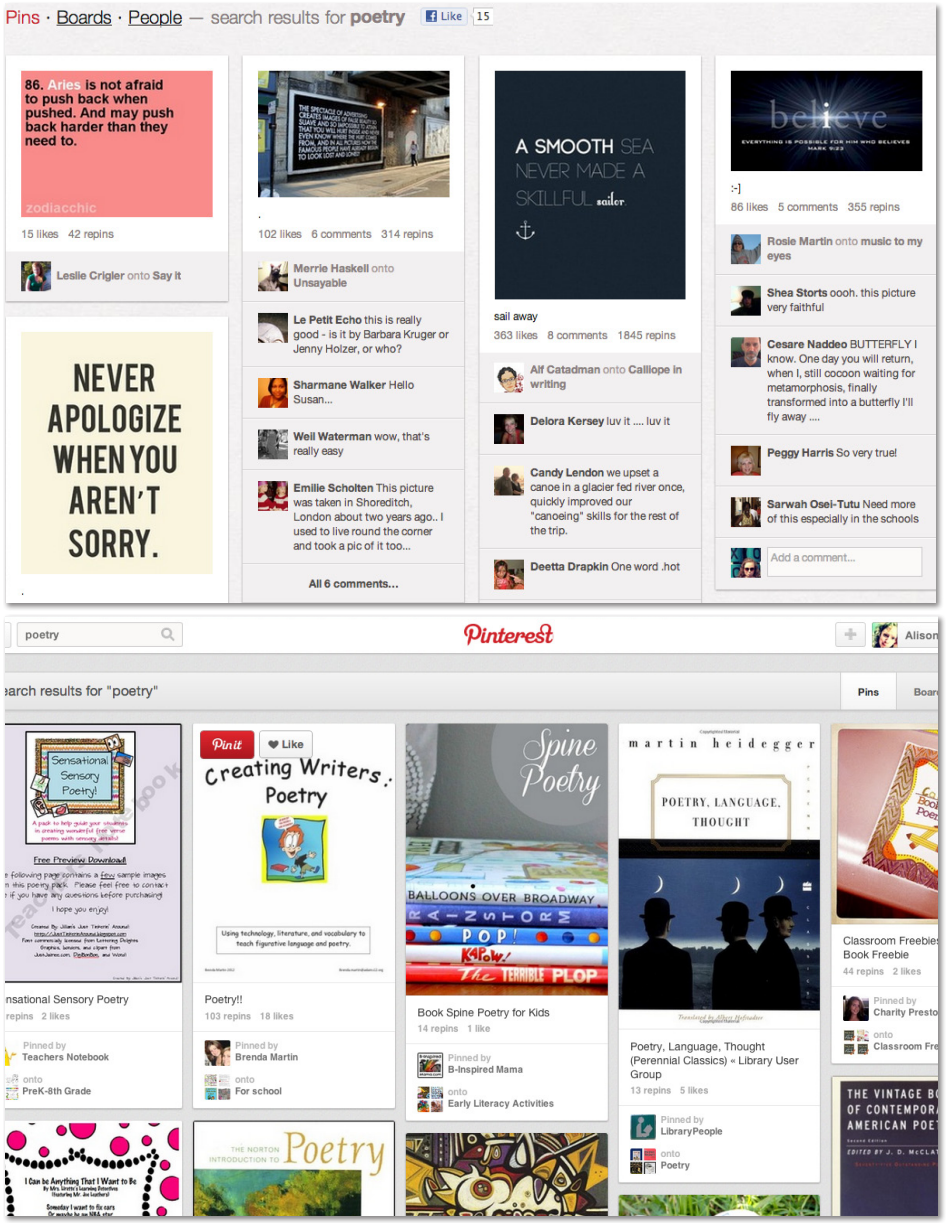
There are several projects and websites, large and small that can, with just a little effort or imagination, could be used to further the presentation of poetry

1. Hawkins, "What's behind the Pinterest craze? 15 super-users share their thoughts"

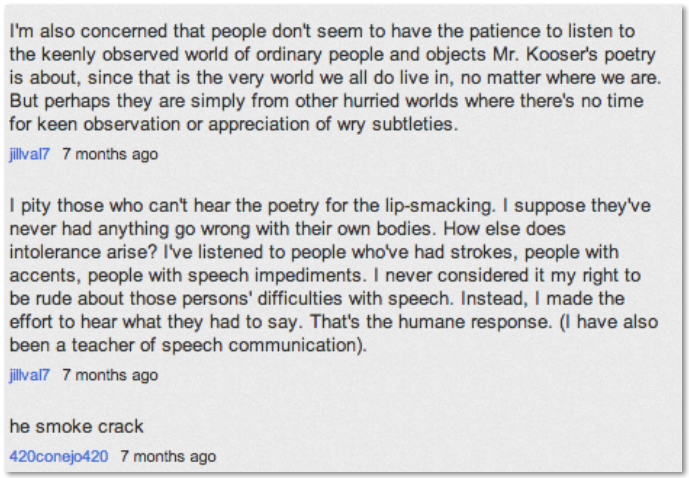
2. Rosenbaum, "Why Content Curation is Here to Stay"

3. Shahab, "What's behind the Pinterest craze? 15 super-users share their thoughts"

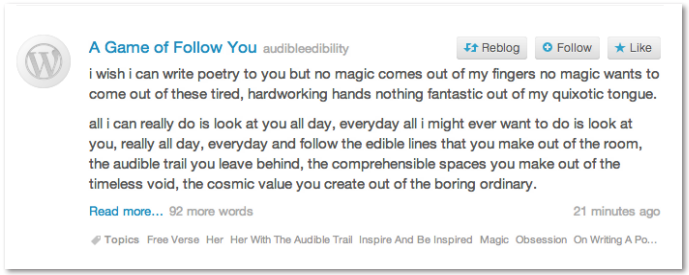
4. Greeley, "What's behind the Pinterest craze? 15 super-users share their thoughts"



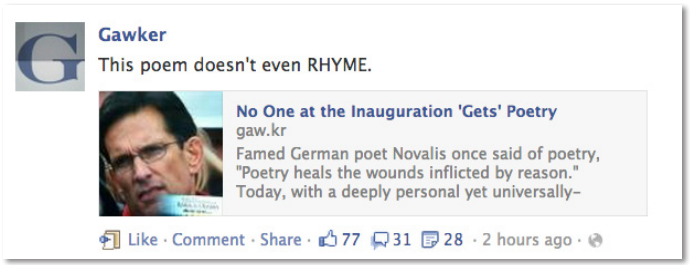
Here's what appears on Pinterest when you search for "Poetry". The first screenshot was taken October 2012 (top). The second, in April 2013 (bottom). While the content is vastly different, you'll notice very little engaging poetry content, unless you're looking for platitudes or teaching lessons.



A prime example of the potential for creating a vibrant poetry community of YouTube.

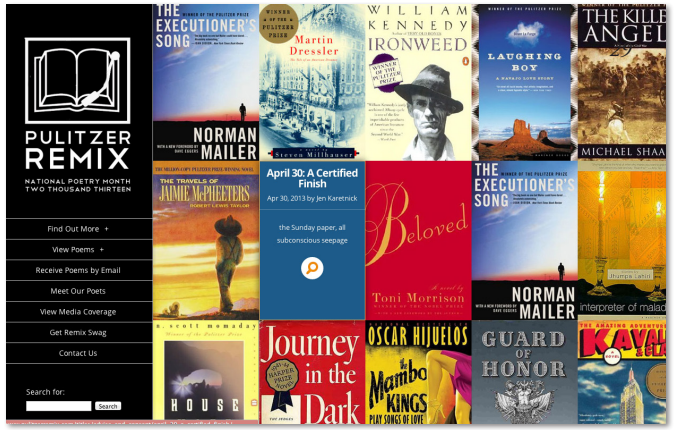


An exemplary example of the poetry you most often find from quixotic bloggers on platforms like Wordpress or Blogger.

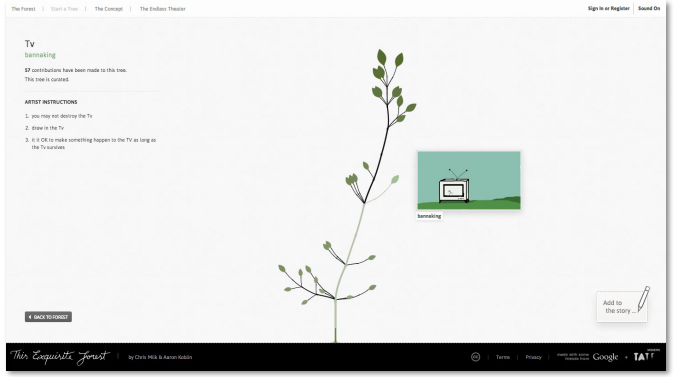


Just an typical public response to poetry after the 2012 U.S. Presidential Nomination.

The websites (pictured in the first column, top to bottom) for the Favorite Poem Project, the Academy of American Poets, and the Poetry Foundation, which all fit into the general mold of existing poetry websites: unstimulating but overfilled, and muted.



The fun found poetry website, Pulitzer Remix, which unless decided otherwise by its creators, was meant to be active for a month only.



The Johnny Cash Project (top) and This Exquisitve Forest (Bottom) are great examples of making community collaboration work.

online. While quality is variable, a thorough scan of the blogosphere and the Vimeo, flickr, and YouTube channels and groups casually dedicated to poetry will show that there is a sizeable community that thrives on finding, interpreting, and presenting poetry accessibly in various media, whether they are finding poetry in Craigslist ads or making visual haiku videos. However, these are hardly easy sources to run to in search of great poetry—they are casually curated, vary greatly in artistry, have little quality control, and are far from exhaustive in style, content, or thematic range. From observing these communities and the commentary received on several pieces that are less than perfect specimens or art of design, but that do incorporate even simple visuals, it's clear that just even these small attempts at visualizing poetry are greatly appreciated. Unfortunately, visualizing and artistic reinterpretation are also generally unrelated to more official poetry organizations and journals, so finding them can be unnecessarily difficult.

If finding the results of these generative activities can be difficult, finding them in progress in order to participate is even harder. While there are activity suggestions from the Poetry Foundation on their website, all activities must be taken offline to actually be completed. There are few options for immediate response and user input, and the options that exist are generally poor interactions. For example, The Found Poetry the website Pulitzer Remix, which presents Found Poetry composed from Pulitzer Prize winning books during National Poetry Month, provides readers with a page from a book and accepts submissions of found poems. However, these are submitted and presented through the comments section of the website, which is unbecoming and feels very much like an aside. Both the reading and submission processes are frustrating.

Other than Pulitzer Remix, the existing options tend towards bad automatic, hopefully tongue-in-cheek poetry generators like The Goth-O-Matic Poetry Generator (www.deadlounge.com) and Pretty Nonsense (now defunct), which make nonsensical, ungraceful combinations of words that can hardly be considered poetry. Dozens of similar products exists as websites and apps, each with little to offer other than a rhythm-and-rhyme-facilitating algorithm. Probably because of the lack of quality in the products, there is little community that crops up around them.

The problem of user contributions might stem from a literary deterrence from collaborative writing, which often ends in work equivalent to the often-scoffed "design by committee" approach. However, this avoidance is based on an assumption that user input needs to be collaborative around a single poem, or even writing original, traditional poetry to begin with.

Recently, projects like This Exquisite Forest and the Johnny Cash Project, and the Noun Project show that, when curated properly, strong, interesting work can emerge from the chaos of user input. This Exquisite Forest and the Johnny Cash Project give visitors prompts and tools to illustrate frames of an animation. The Johnny Cash Project made a music video to "Ain't No Grave", one of the tracks off of his last album recorded before his passing, from user-submitted illustrations, based off a preset base of images. The project brought artists and non-artists alike from around the world to contribute, each adding their own flavor and interpretation.

The projects don't exclude anyone from participating based on skills or knowledge, but still effectively curates the best content so that it's highlighted and the product is interesting. While the range of quality in submissions is great, there is still curation in both projects, though by different means. For the Johnny Cash Project, the project creators and facilitators ensure a certain level of quality in the final. For This Exquisite Forest, users can self-separate into different branches of the trees to continue strains of animation they like, without having to deal with the parts they don't.

Poetry Can Be Found Anywhere and Everywhere

From personal experience, it's easy for non-readers to assume that poetry is always consciously written and consciously read or heard in books, in classrooms, or at readings. But poetry exists all over. Found poetry projects abound and quickly emphasize the presence of poetry in our everyday lives, whether in a Craigslist ad, the New York Times, or on Twitter.

Found poetry projects are popular both to read and try to write (it's harder than it seems). There are different kinds of found poetry: book spine poetry, black out or erasure poetry, haiku found on Twitter based on a clever algorithm, taking sections of existing text (like Pulitzer Remix) and reformatting them, or looking for sequences that fit into poetic forms (like New York Times Haiku).

Found poetry projects fascinate me and they could create a great entry point into poetry since they take a familiar context, or even a familiar text, and "poeticize" them. Found poetry also expands definitions of how poetry is created, read, and presented and it is generally accessible and definitely invite collaboration and creation.

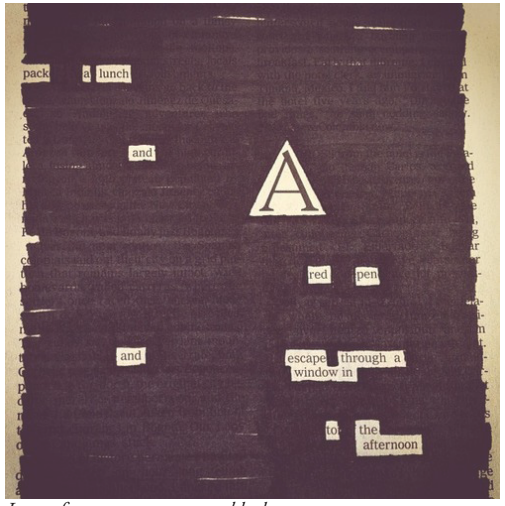


Image from www.newspaperblackout.com

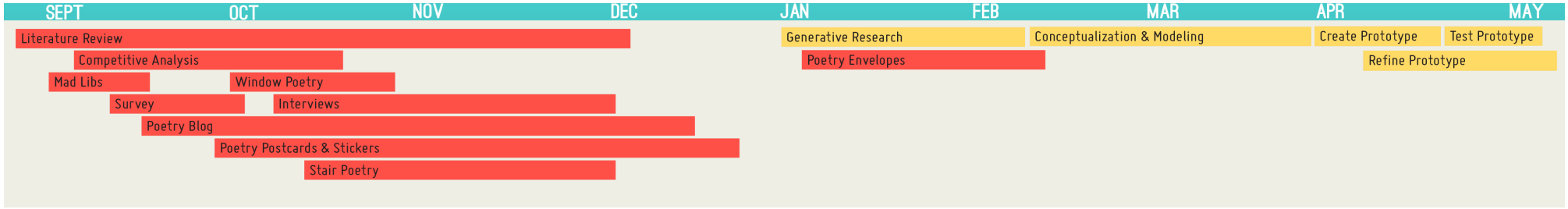
"Self-Editing", a newspaper blackout poem by Austin Kleon

Image from haiku.nytimes.com

A Found Haiku from New York Times article, "Yes, Please | Party of One" by Andrew O'Hagan

research process

I first structured my research to find out through my interviews and surveys how people report feeling about poetry, while simultaneously conducting a competitive analysis to get a sense of what, if anything, was being done in the field of poetry to combat low readership. I also used my literature review to inform the structure of my research methods that involved presenting environmental poetry and creating poetry activities. After gaining insights, I used my previous research to prototype and test my ideas with users.



research methods

Understanding Attitudes

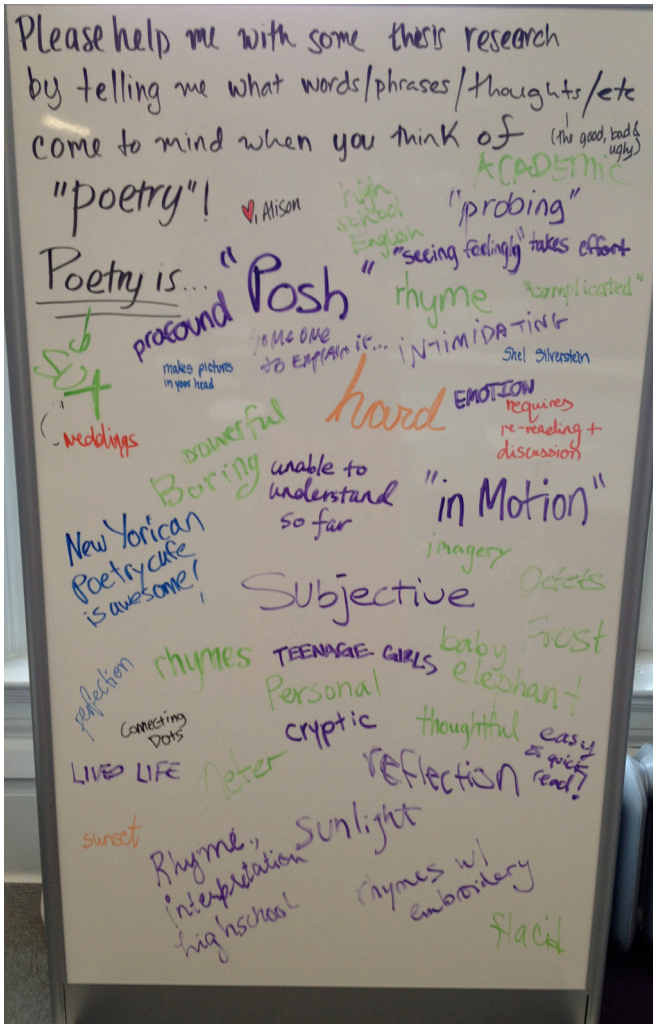
To get a better sense of the perceptions of poetry, both inside and outside of the community, my initial exploratory research included surveys, interviews with readers and poets, and an extensive scouring of the internet and app store to get a sense of poetry is presented and represented in various degrees seriousness.

Poetry Is…

Before conducting an official survey, I put out a whiteboard in the graduate studio with the prompt "Poetry is…" and asked my classmates and any visitors to write any words, phrases, people, places, etc. that came to mind when they heard the word poetry. The results were varied and interesting, showing quite a range of feelings and opinions and were also quite informative as far as the guidelines they created for the ways in which people start to define poetry.

Key Insights:

- Many people find it hard to understand and believe that reading it requires a level of analysis
- Perceptions are often tied to contexts—specific places & experiences, specific poets & poems, and to its audience & reputation



Word on the street is...*

Some poetry I find just too hard to understand.

If I think I will be welcome and will get something out of it, I will be interested. Having someone more knowledgeable with me or available is a big help, I find that whenever my dislike of something is exceedingly strong and without solid foundation, my mind can usually be changed by taking the time to learn more. It's unlikely, however, that I would do so of my own volition.

I will normally read anything that someone has passed along to me. If it is so enjoyable or important to a friend of mine that she is forwarding it to me, I want to share that experience.

I find it hard to read new poets unless someone introduces me to them, and I get to discuss their work with someone.

I like a lot of different things, and finding time for them all is a challenge. So while I'm willing to engage more with poetry, it isn't my highest priority.

"Billy Collins makes me laugh and look more at the connections between things. Mary Oliver puts me in touch with the natural world. Rilke makes me think. Rumi touches my heart. etc."

*All quotes from survey respondents and interviewees

Survey & Interviews

From my surveys and interviews with people about their exposure to, perceptions of, and openness towards poetry, I was able to pinpoint the roadblocks between poetry and readers, as well as the positive aspects of poetry that people gravitate towards.

57 Survey Respondents, demographic variety

7 Interviewees, range of readership, ages 24-30

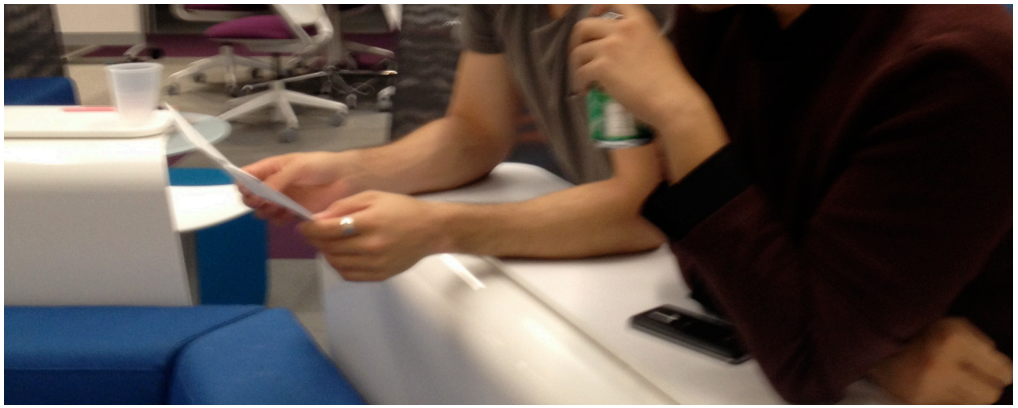
Key Insights:

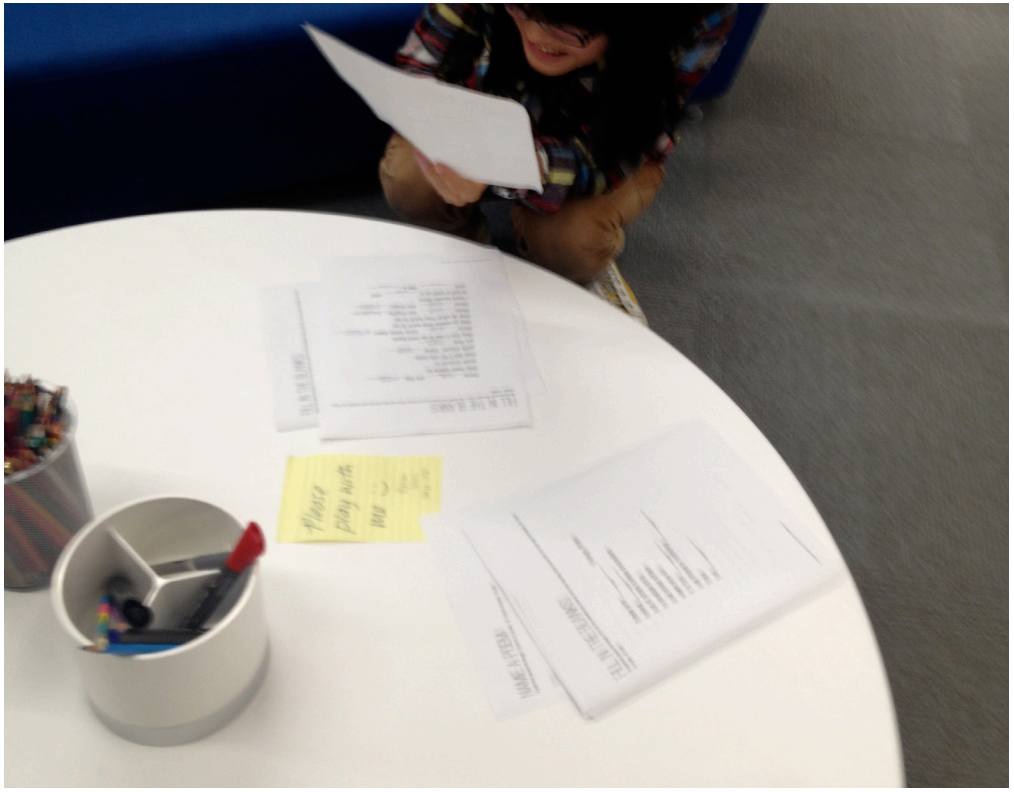
- Poor in-school experience led to feeling that poetry is often tedious and frustrating—teacher with not enough enthusiasms or with too much
- Poetry is alright, but not compelling enough to take people away from activities and interests they already enjoy
- People who read poetry are often reading for inspiration, emotional resonance, to experience through another person, insight into world and other people
- A majority of people were at least neutral or somewhat towards engaging with poetry, rather than being completely closed to the experience.
- There is a lack of community for casual poetry readers and non-readers to discover and discuss poetry, especially contemporary poets
- People don't read poetry because they lack time, knowledge, context, and helpful resources (and the awareness of where these resources might be)

"I like a lot of different things, and finding time for them all is a challenge. So while I'm willing to engage more with poetry, it isn't my highest priority."

"I find it hard to read new poets unless someone introduces me to them, and I get to discuss their work with someone."

– Survey Respondent –





FILL IN THE BLANKS:

Read the poem through. Put in the words you want into the blanks (like mad libs, but you get context). It's that simple. Enjoy!

If when my ___son___ (noun) is sleeping
and the ___books___ (noun) and ___toys___ (noun)
are sleeping
and the sun is a flame-white disc
in silken mists
above shining trees,-
if I in my north room
dance ___glimmering___ (adjective/adverb), ___shimmering___ (adjective/adverb)
before my mirror
waving my shirt round my head
and singing softly to myself:
"I am ___energy___ (noun or adjective), ___light___ (noun or adjective),
I was born to be ___moving___ (noun or adjective),
I am best so!"
If I admire my arms, my face,
my shoulders, flanks, buttocks
against the yellow drawn shades,-

Who shall say I am not
the ___centered___ (adjective) genius of my ___room___ (noun)?

NAME A POEM:

Read the poem through. Give it a name. It's that simple. Enjoy!

NO MATTER

A man said to the universe:
"Sir, I exist!"
"However," replied the universe,
"The fact has not created in me
"A sense of obligation."

Getting Poetry Out There

Once I realized that so much of poetry's perception was tied to former modes of exposure in books and classrooms, I devised research methods that would let me test the perception of poetry when divorced from these contexts. To do this, I created poetry mad libs, postcards and stickers displaying short poems or excerpts, and printed and posted several haiku onto the stairs in Margaret Morrison building.

Mad Libs

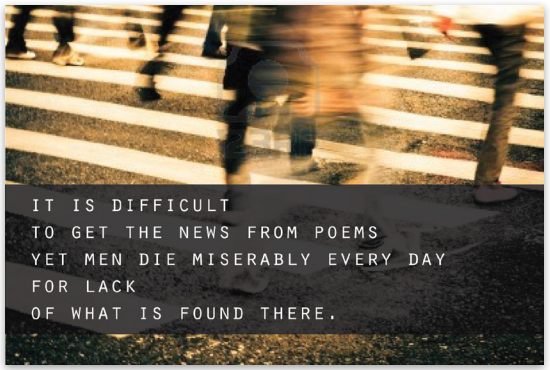
As a quick and dirty method to see if people would enjoy playing around with poetry in casual way, I created mad libs from poetry that I printed and laid out in the graduate studio for grad students, faculty, and passersby to fill out during the studio opening party. The mad libs stayed out for a week, but were filled out primarily during the studio opening. Most often, a single person, filling in the blanks with their own words within the context of the poem, completed the mad libs. However, occasionally groups gathered and crowd-sourced the words to be filled in. There was a huge range of results, as one might expect, from the goofy and absurd, to the well thought-out and carefully considered. Overall, the exercise was successful in that it was enjoyable, but also, somewhat sneakily, got people to read poetry and consider the meaning they created through the words they chose.

Key Insight:

- People are generally open initially to fun, interactive activities, even when related to poetry.

You are the _____ and the _____,
the crystal _____ and the _____,
You are the dew on the morning grass
and the burning wheel of the sun.
You are the white _____ of the _____,
and the_____ birds suddenly in _____.

However, you are not the _____ in the orchard,
the _____ on the counter,
or the house of _____.
And you are certainly not the _____-scented air.
There is just no way that you are the _____-scented air.



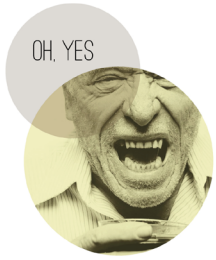
Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table

IN THE MIDST OF THIS UNSURENESS,
WE ARE TRYING TO TELL A PERSONAL
STORY.

THIS STORY, THE STORY OF WE, IS OF
OUR LOSS AND OUR LOVING.

IT IS THE STORY BETWEEN DEEPLY
SLEEPING, DREAMING, AND WAKING.

IT IS THE STORY OF WHAT IS CROOKED
AND LOVING THAT CROOKED.



THERE ARE WORSE THINGS THAN BEING ALONE
BUT IT OFTEN TAKES DECADES
TO REALIZE THIS
AND MOST OFTEN
WHEN YOU DO
IT'S TOO LATE
AND THERE'S NOTHING WORSE
THAN
TOO LATE.

In this world
we walk on the roof of hell
gazing at flowers
Kobayashi Issa

A MAN SAID TO THE UNIVERSE:
SIR, I EXIST!
However,
REPLIED THE UNIVERSE,
The fact has not created in me
a sense of obligation.

contact me at:
ofwhatisfoundthere.wordpress.com
aservis@andrew.cmu.edu

Did you like this poem?

Use the QR code or let me know at:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/OhYesBukowski

"Oh, Yes", Charles Bukowski

The postcards above were distributed on the Carnegie Mellon University campus and coffee shops and cafes in the Shadyside and Oakland neighborhoods of Pittsburgh.

Poetry Stickers & Postcards

Because I suspected that receptivity to poetry would increase once it was taken out of familiar contexts, I created different ways of physically presenting poetry to readers. My second attempt to do so was by creating postcards and stickers with short poems or excerpts of poems, often paired with images, and placing them around Pittsburgh and the CMU campus in coffee shops and cafes and in the hallways of academic buildings. On each postcard and sticker, in addition to the poem, there was a link to a brief survey about the experience. On the whole, while people responded positively to the look of the postcards, I received almost no response about them once they were put into the world.

I believe that had I done a better job of making it evident that the postcards were meant to be taken, made sure that they would not have been taken away by maintenance, and done a better job watching to see what the actual reaction was to the postcards was when people saw them, I could have had a clearer idea of how greatly the method failed. However, without having done that, it remains a mystery as to whether the postcards were thrown away or taken without the desire to sign online and give feedback.

Key Meta-Insight:

- Good responses, when feedback is solicited, don't always translate to feedback in action.

Imagesof the poems I posted on the stairs during my exploratory research.

Stair Poems

The overall failure of the postcards and stickers forced me to find a louder, more immediate way to get a response, which led to the stair poems. The stair poems were different haikus that I printed largely in colorful strips and pasted onto two different stairwells in the Margaret Morrison building.

For each stair poem, I posted two sheets with space for targeted feedback about the experience right after the stairs where the poems were posted. I conducted three rounds of poems; first, I asked if the poems were read, second, if they were appreciated, and third, if there was a desire for more.

The responses I got were overwhelmingly positive, though of course there were people who did not appreciate the poems. However, even if the response had been negative, I was appreciative that I received a response at all.

Key Insights:

- When poetry is loud, people will pay attention.
- People respond best to poetry with relevant context and which can be seen as uplifting in their daily environment.

Stair Poem Feedback:

#1. Did you read the poem?

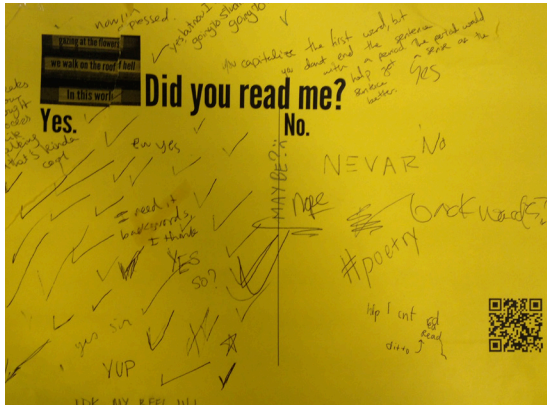
Yes: 109
No: 15

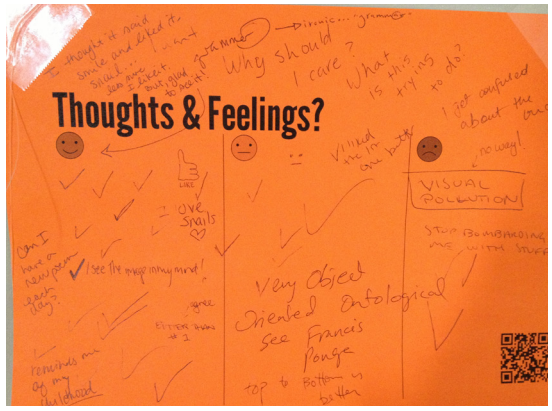
#2. Thoughts & Feelings:

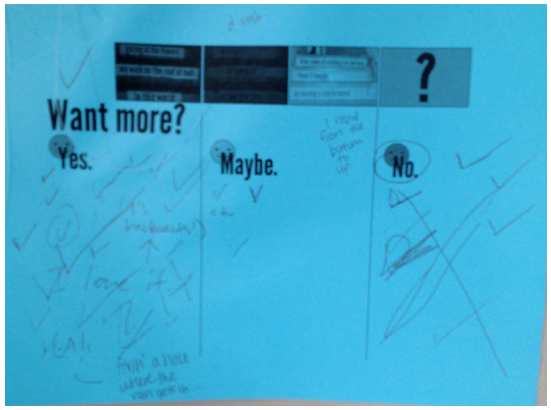
Positive: 39
Neutral: 17
Negative: 11

#3. Want more?

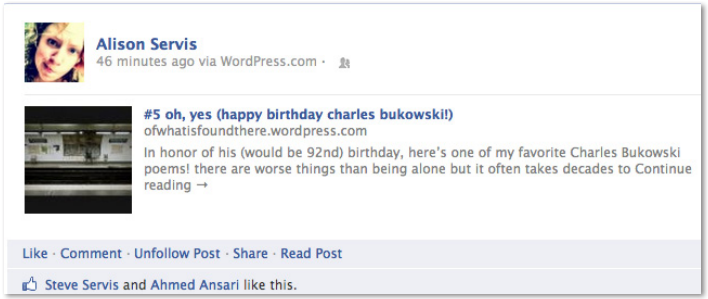
Yes: 51
No: 28



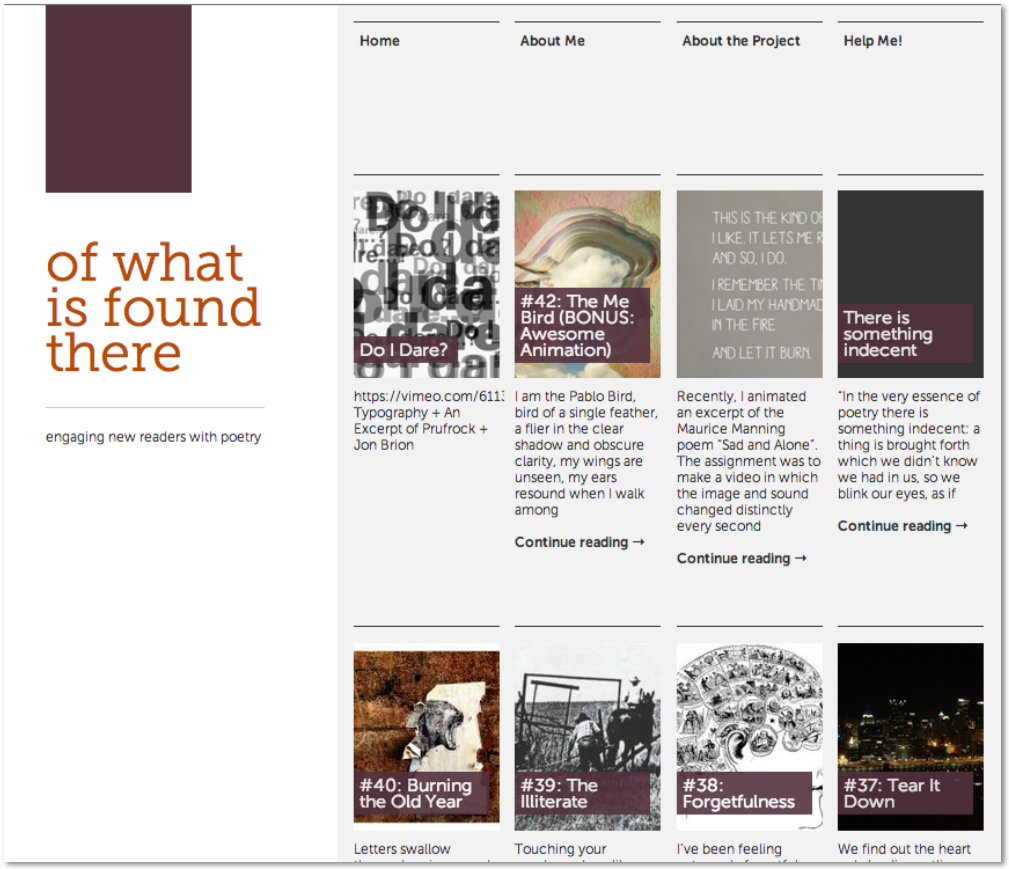




Images of feedback sheets while the poems were on the stairs during each round. Color corresponds to color poems are printed on in photos on left



Screenshots of some of my tools for sharing poetry online, including Wordpress, Twitter, and Facebook.



Blogging & Social Media

Over the course of the semester, in addition to the physical research I conducted, I maintained a blog where I posted poems to gauge the reaction I received once they were shared to Facebook and Twitter. While I gained a reasonable following on Wordpress and many of my posts were read and liked, the response of Facebook and Twitter was limited. However, the response I did get from friends who followed the blog was most often positive and strong. I had a few people reach out specifically to me to share their appreciation. Additionally, when poets my friends and followers liked showed up or if the poems were particularly relevant, they were definitely willing to respond.

Over the year, I have also experimented with posting stand-alone short poems to Facebook and Twitter, rather than through Wordpress, and found the response to be significantly stronger, especially with shorter excerpts that fit into Twitter. While I have received a reasonable response, I'm not entirely certain that I gained many followers who were not looking for poetry. More so than with poems in a physical environment, it is extremely difficult to cut through the noise on the internet to reach people who you are not directly targeting. Many casual or non-poetry readers have mentioned to me during the project that they would be responsive to finding short poems in their Twitter feed, but finding the best way to get to them is another question altogether. It is, in fact, a question to which I have no final ideas—only vague notions.

Years ago, rules and regulations were put in place to prevent websites from taking advantage of metadata to use Search Engine Optimization terms that were popular and powerful, but unrelated to their content. While no similar standards are expected or enforced with hash tags and other social media metadata, I question both the "morality" and effectiveness of falsely tagging content to make it appear in trending topics.

While there are worse things to do than troll the trending topics and message boards and post poetry, it seems unlikely to get people to a website. At the same time, there is hardly a message board in existence that doesn't have spam links and adding poetry to the pile could have interesting potential. In the future, testing some of these troll-like approaches will give definitive results.

Key Insights:

- There are different preference for how often to add and share content. Finding the right balance so to maintain interest without overwhelming or boring the users is key.
- In social media, there are a lot of ways for people to give you feedback on your content. While some people will only passively consume content, it is fair to judge your success by the actual feedback you get.
- To get attention and gain followers, something needs to distinguish you from the crowd. There are often thousands of people on the internet doing what you're doing.

if there's one thing that often unites

"If there's one thing that often unites academic treatments and how-to guides, it's the implicit assumption that relating to poetry is like solving a calculus problem while being zapped with a cattle prod – that is, the dull business of poetic interpretation ("...and here we have a reference to early Stevens") is coupled uneasily with testimonials announcing poetry's ability to derange the senses, make us lose ourselves in rapture, dance naked under the full moon, and so forth. We seem trapped between a tediously mechanical view of poems and an unjustifiably shamanistic view of poetry itself. If you're a casual reader, then, it's easy to feel that your response to the art is somehow wrong, that you're either insufficiently smart or insufficiently soulful."[1]

– David Orr –

Key Findings from Research Process

Overall, from my exploratory research, I found several guiding principles and findings about how to present poetry to increase engagement.

- Poetry's personal relevance needs to more obvious.
- Poetry must be approachable—we should take it off its pedestal & let people get poetry dirty.
- The burden needs to fall more on poetry and less on the reader than it currently does. An unnecessary amount of time is spent searching for poetry, rather than engaging with it.
- Poetry should be brought out of isolation and into relation with other arts, especially music.
- Readers should be given even minor contextual footholds for engagement.

I would be willing to engage with it if it at the very least demonstrated some entertainment value and then perhaps if it was clear to me how it could enhance my life. I feel like life is so busy that there are other things I could be doing, sadly.

– Survey Respondent –

The art form is enormous and perplexing, and at least half of it is only of interest to scholars and the certifiably disturbed.[2]

– David Orr –

I think context is important and I'd like to engage with poetry in a way that I understand it and the context in which it was written.

– Survey Respondent –

1. David Orr, "Beautiful and Pointless: A Guide to Modern Poetry", xiv

2. Ibid., xv.

talk poetry

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To better personalize your poetry selection, please answer to following questions:

1. Which genre(s) of music do you most often listen to? Choose up to 3.

- ☐ Pop
- ☐ Rap/Hip-Hop
- ☐ Jazz
- ☐ R&B/Soul
- ☐ Rock
- ☐ Folk

2. Which of the following literary genres do you most often read? Choose up to 3.

- ☐ Fiction
- ☐ Memoir/Creative Non-Fiction
- ☐ Non-fiction: biography, history
- ☐ Non-fiction: science
- ☐ Spiritual/Self-Help
- ☐ Science Fiction/Fantasy

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Danse Russe by William Carlos Williams

If when my wife is sleeping
and the baby and Kathleen
are sleeping
and the sun is a flame-white disc
in silken mists
above shining trees,-
if I in my north room
dance naked, grotesquely
before my mirror
waving my shirt round my head
and singing softly to myself:
"I am lonely, lonely,
I was born to be lonely,
I am best so!"
If I admire my arms, my face,
my shoulders, flanks, buttocks
against the yellow drawn shades,-

Who shall say I am not
the happy genius of my household?

share

tags

family life, self-affirmation, imagism, modern poetry, freedom, pride, loneliness, admiration, parenthood, marriage

related items

talk poetry

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3. Which of the following styles of art do you prefer?

4. Which of the follow topics are you most interested in? Choose up to 3.

- ☐ Arts & Literature
- ☐ History
- ☐ Science & Technology
- ☐ Religion & Philosophy
- ☐ Romance & Love
- ☐ School & Learning
- ☐ Daily Life
- ☐ Nature & Wildlife

5. On a scale of 1 to 5, how emotionally expressive would you say you are?

<<Back

Bring on the poetry!

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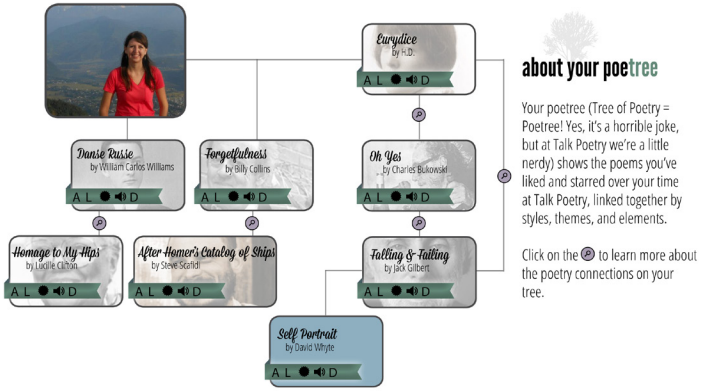
elsie's *favorite* poetry



about your poetree

Your poetree (Tree of Poetry = Poetree! Yes, it's a horrible joke, but at Talk Poetry we're a little nerdy) shows the poems you've liked and starred over your time at Talk Poetry, linked together by styles, themes, and elements.

Click on the Ⓟ to learn more about the poetry connections on your tree.

Screens created to visualize and test the Talk Poetry concept.

ideation & prototyping

Talk Poetry: Personalization Platform

Having a personalized poetry platform, specifically, is an idea that I explored during Stacie Rohrbach's Information + Interaction + Perception course in the fall and tested briefly with users, along with motivational materials meant to encourage participation on the platform.

For the motivational portion, I focused on what types of arguments could be made about the value of poetry to new readers and what form they might be put in. I made a two minute video, which focuses on the emotional impact poetry has because of the different "conversations" are available in it. The video could be taken apart to make shorter segments, but also saw the potential for messages in the video to become posters, ads, and other static pieces. After testing the video with users, there was a positive response of "this makes me want to go find some poetry".

If attracted by the motivational materials, users move to a web platform proposed that would use responses to personal questions about their interests, hobbies, what they are looking to get out of poetry, and stylistic preferences with art and music to provide a few initial selections of poetry for new users. From these selections, more would be provided as readers read and rated the first poems. Giving staggered, relevant recommendations to users based on something a user already likes has a higher likelihood of continuing engagement in the system. Personalization algorithms like this are common and constantly improving on services like Pandora, Amazon, and Netflix.

While this idea was well received on a high level, when I dove deeper into developing the idea, I felt that the current meta data that could be used to create such a website for poetry was too general to create a truly compelling personalization experience. I realized that there were ways of presenting poetry online persuasively without personalization that could be achieved in the current environment, and in a way that could allow for the collection of more interesting metadata, like hash tags, which users can make as general or specific as they wish, and which are often more creatively used than other tags.

i found this in the heilx of gates a few weeks ago

"I found this in the Helix of Gates a few weeks ago and showed it to my friend. Then I read it and I didn't know if I had understood it but it was uplifting in a weird way. I thought it was a part of an anti suicide program in response to Henry's passing last semester (or an art project related to it... there are a lot of art projects that have this sort of format). I really like these sorts of projects that require you to notice a small part of your environment and actually stop your day...even just for a bit. I kept the poem in my backpack until today. I just got off the phone and I've recently received some sad news.... But anyway I wanted to let you know that I'm glad I kept the poem and can reread it now."

– Poetry Envelopes Respondent –

Physical Motivation to Poetry

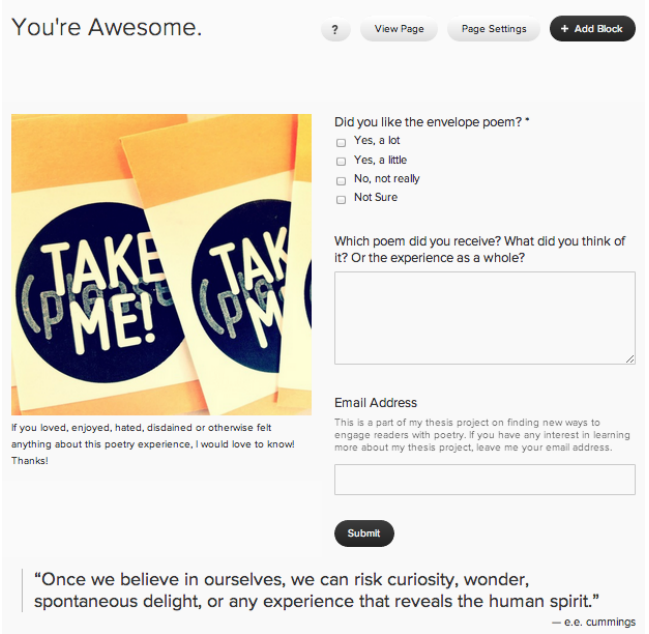
While I shifted my thoughts around how the web platform might work, the value of motivational aspects in the system to bring users to it, both physical and digital, was never in doubt, especially once I realized the power of the presentation in a physical space to grab attention in my research activities, like the stair poems, and other popular projects, like Poetry in Motion and the Rap Quotes.

However, I believe that in order to have a truly impactful system, I need to include a website and/or mobile application to supplement and expand the system and reader engagement. In order to make sure these two portions of the system might connect, I researched similar projects and conducted research of my own to see at what rate I could move people from a physical environment to the internet.

To test this initially myself, I placed small envelopes labeled "take me" containing short poems with a link and QR code to my website around different buildings in campus. On my website, I linked to a page with a brief questionnaire about the experience. Out of 80 envelopes I put out, I received 8 responses, most of which were positive.

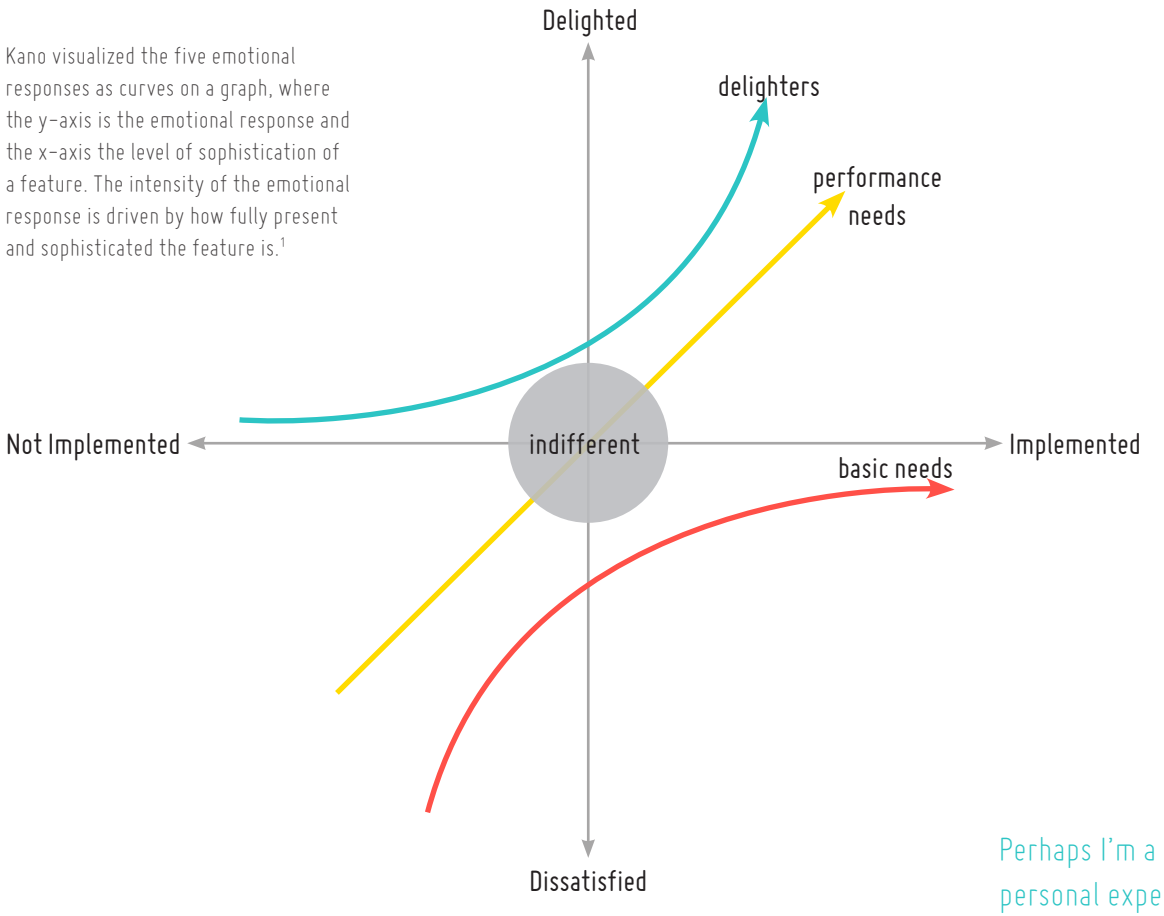
Considering the scale and the subject matter, the response rate was exciting. Overall, I think the prototype showed that it is possible to move people online from a physical experience and that, in a very strong way, the project audience is somewhat self-selected. One respondent reported having like the experience, but not the poem. However, 6 of 8 respondents reported liking both the poem and the experience. I did also receive a negative response to experience and the poem, saying it was cheesy and "worse than a hallmark card".

As found in the "Poetry in America" survey, most people who experience incidental poetry will probably not move online to further the experience with poetry. However, they are still willing to engage with the poetry in the moment. For those who are interested in further engagement, it's still important for them to have a great online resource that will strengthen their relationship with poetry over time. It's also important to remember that a reaction to further engage with poetry need not be instant if the experience is constructed in a way that the reader is consistently reminded of poetry or has a lasting impression. For example, one of the responses I received related to my envelope method was received weeks after the envelope was first encountered. Poetry does not need to be in the forefront constantly, but it is effective to have it as an environmental element that offers a moment of escape.



Kano Methodology Graph

Kano visualized the five emotional responses as curves on a graph, where the y-axis is the emotional response and the x-axis the level of sophistication of a feature. The intensity of the emotional response is driven by how fully present and sophisticated the feature is.[1]



Poetic Justice Feature Results

Delighters

- Ability to send poetry through the mail
- Poetry in a variety of media
- Visualizations and Reinterpretations of Poetry
- Friend-to-Friend Sharing

Performance Needs

- None of test features fell into this category

Basic Needs

- Poetry selections sorted by reader's mood
- Biographical Info about Poets on Site
-

Indifferent

- Guerilla Poetry Toolkit
- Reading Hints and Tutorials
- Annotations on Poems
- Featured Poem of the Day
- Poetry Blog
- Calendar of Poetry Events
- Geocaching Activities

Perhaps I'm a bit old school, but for me poetry is a very personal experience. I've never discussed it in public or in a large group. It's been a father daughter evening celebration of Longfellow or fervent emails over Bukowski with a friend. I'd perhaps like an enhancement of that personal experience.

– Kano Methodology Respondent C –

Online Platform Features: Kano Methodology

After testing the physical-digital connection, I used the Kano Methodology to narrow down the system features that users might find desirable.

From the Kano Methodology I discovered that users were most interested in a platform that, presented poetry in a variety of media, including reinterpretations of poetry, streamlined friend-to-friend poetry sharing, and which enabled sending of physical artifacts like postcards. Other features like personalized poetry suggestions based on reading habits, personal information, or mood that were supported by other research activities fell into the "unimportant" category, however, I believe that having a platform that enables collection of metadata to create a more interesting experience around personalization is still beneficial for future platforms. In addition to my proposed features, I received interesting suggestions that included allowing the creation of personal anthologies of platform content, which I decided to incorporate into my final design.

1. Moorman, Jan. "Leveraging the Kano Model for Optimal Results."

How about some kind of 'build your own anthology' feature, which would compile the poems you rate highly into some kind of nicely bound volume you could actually print and keep? Or otherwise organize them in a way you could return to? I tend to think of poetry books as nice little locations I can return for a vacation every so often. With digital platforms I feel a little bit scared I'm never going to find that one thing I like again – kinda like how I'm barely aware of half of my song collection in Spotify now that I everything is so intangible.

– Kano Methodology Respondent A –

This might be too 'out there' but if you could create an add-lib type poem to send to friends, or poems created by the witty comments posted as memes.

– Kano Methodology Respondent B –

the point is to allow you to become a person who

The point is to allow you to become a person who can have a conversation about poems. The point is to allow you to find your own place in the poetry world, where others can come and visit.[1]

– David Orr –

final design

Overview

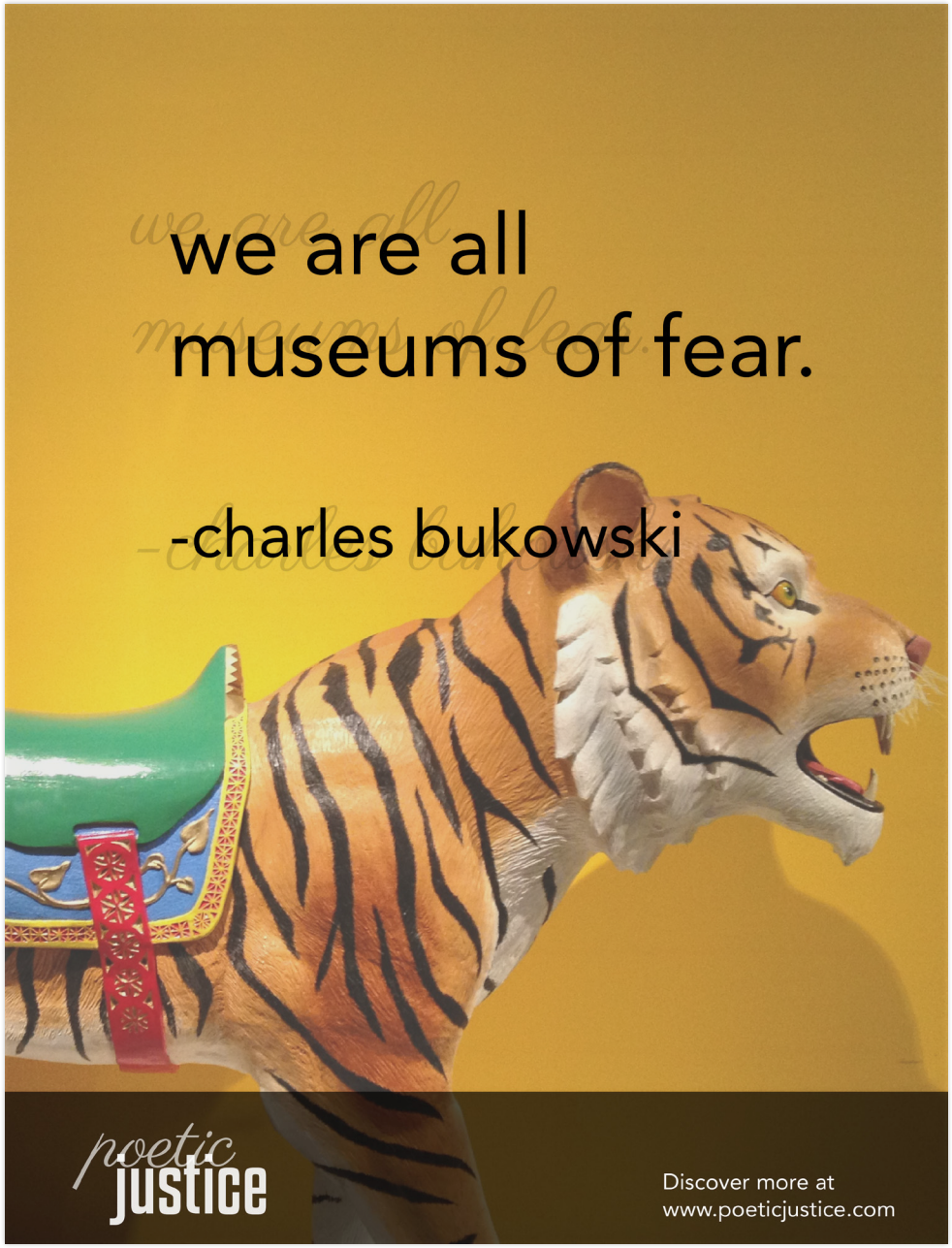
My final concept is a system that uses physical, environmental motivators to grab attention, connected to a web platform meant to expand and sustain the interaction called "Poetic Justice."

What's in a Name?

From naming the prototype for Talk Poetry, I moved to creating titles that incorporated more of "poetic" than "poetry". From my research and observations, it seems that while many people may be apprehensive about "poetry", the "poetic" is something still celebrated and appreciated. Also, just because something is published as poetry does not guarantee a poetic experience and, on the other hand, just because something is not specifically labeled as poetry does not mean it's un-poetic.

Recognizing and acknowledging these possibilities adds an greater willingness to add untraditional content and approach it with an open mind and might help readers who feel unqualified to judge poetry feel more willing to express an opinion towards content. This element of judgment is where the "justice" comes from in the title—the site is meant to, in a way, evaluate poetry and the poetic, while also doing justice to the art form's variety, quality, and evolution.

1. David Orr, "Beautiful and Pointless: A Guide to Modern Poetry", 179.

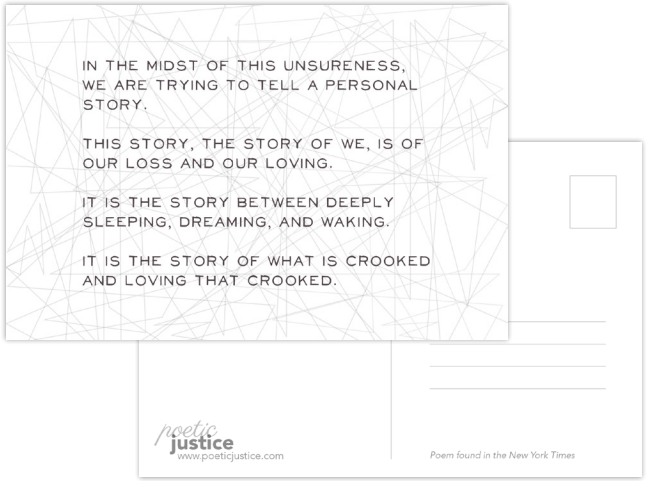


Pictured above are examples of potential pieces used to attract new users to the Poetic Justice website.

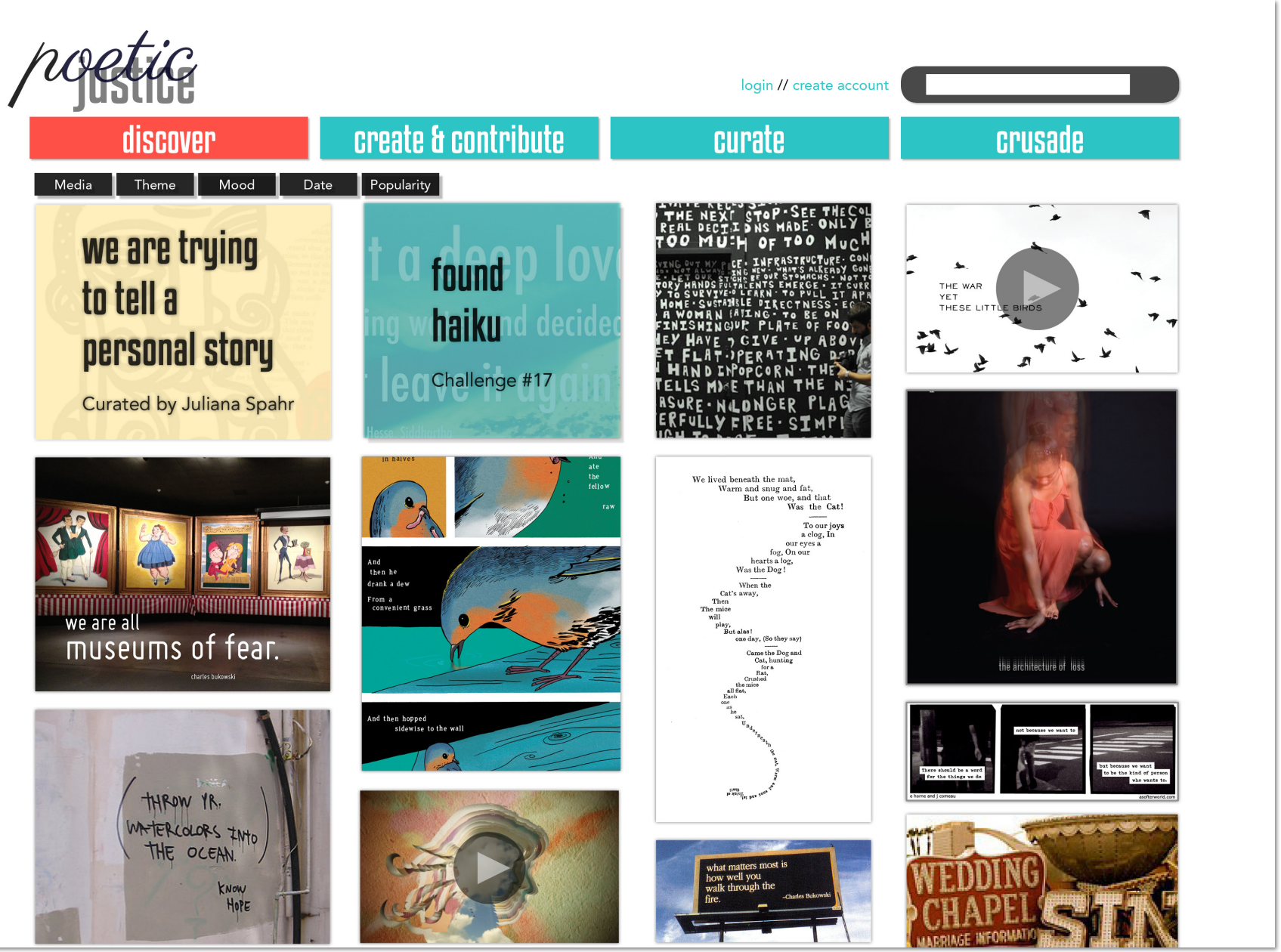
Increasing Incidental Exposure

The environmental portion of the system is meant to spur initial interest. Like previous and existing projects that present poetry in public, these physical motivators should be placed in public, commonly (if not heavily) traversed spaces. The possibilities for these locations are endless, especially with the capabilities of digital displays in public places and 3-D printing. However, to begin with, the main focus would include small pieces like envelopes, postcards, and posters or large scale pieces like art installations, street art, or advertising spaces on public transport. Interested users could also access templates and ready-to-print materials for postcards, envelopes, signs, etc. to share poetry creatively in their own communities.

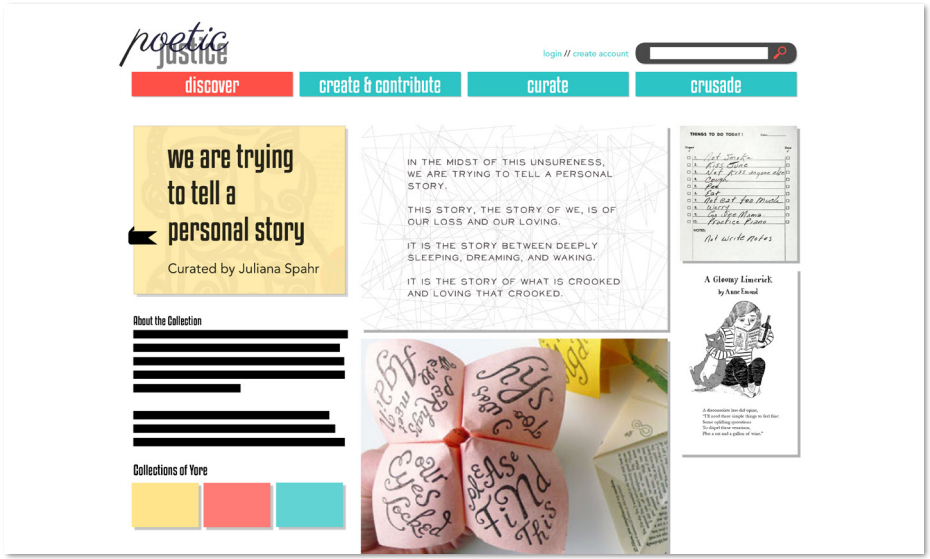
Motivation materials, however, are in no way limited to the physical realm. Digital options to attract users would most likely leverage social media (especially Twitter and Pinterest), but would require further research to find more creative methods. Poetry might sneak into online advertising spaces or built into apps. Aside from the system generated motivations, taking advantage of the tendency in readers towards friend-to-friend poetry sharing in the final design will also help spread the word about the website.



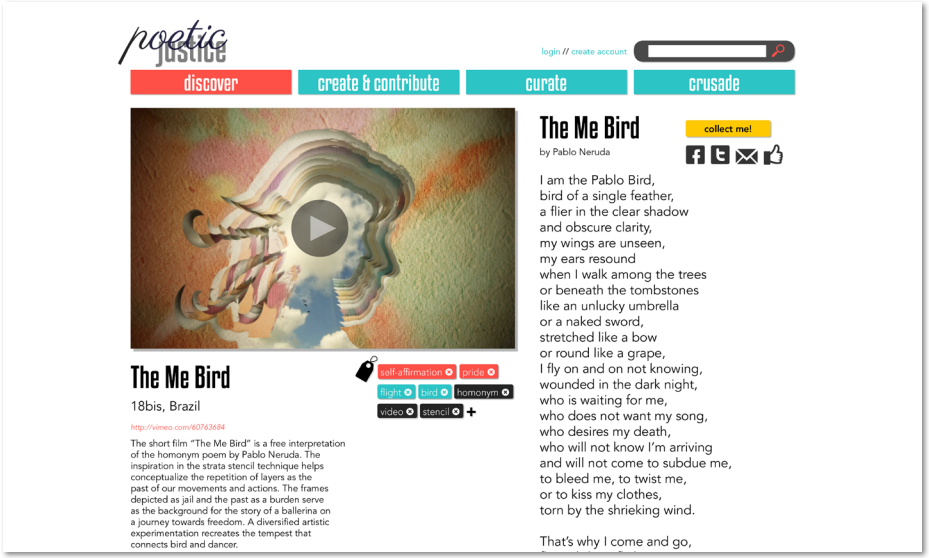
Smaller items like postcards could be used to place in phsyical environments, but also as a tool to help users share poetry with friends and family.



On the Poetic Justice website home page, "Discover", users can see a gallery of poetic content in a variety of themes and media, based on their collections and system curation, which updates frequently with exemplary content.



The curated collection viewfor the discover section. On this page, users can see which individual items belong to the collection, view related collections, learn about the curator and their rationale or theme for putting the collection together.



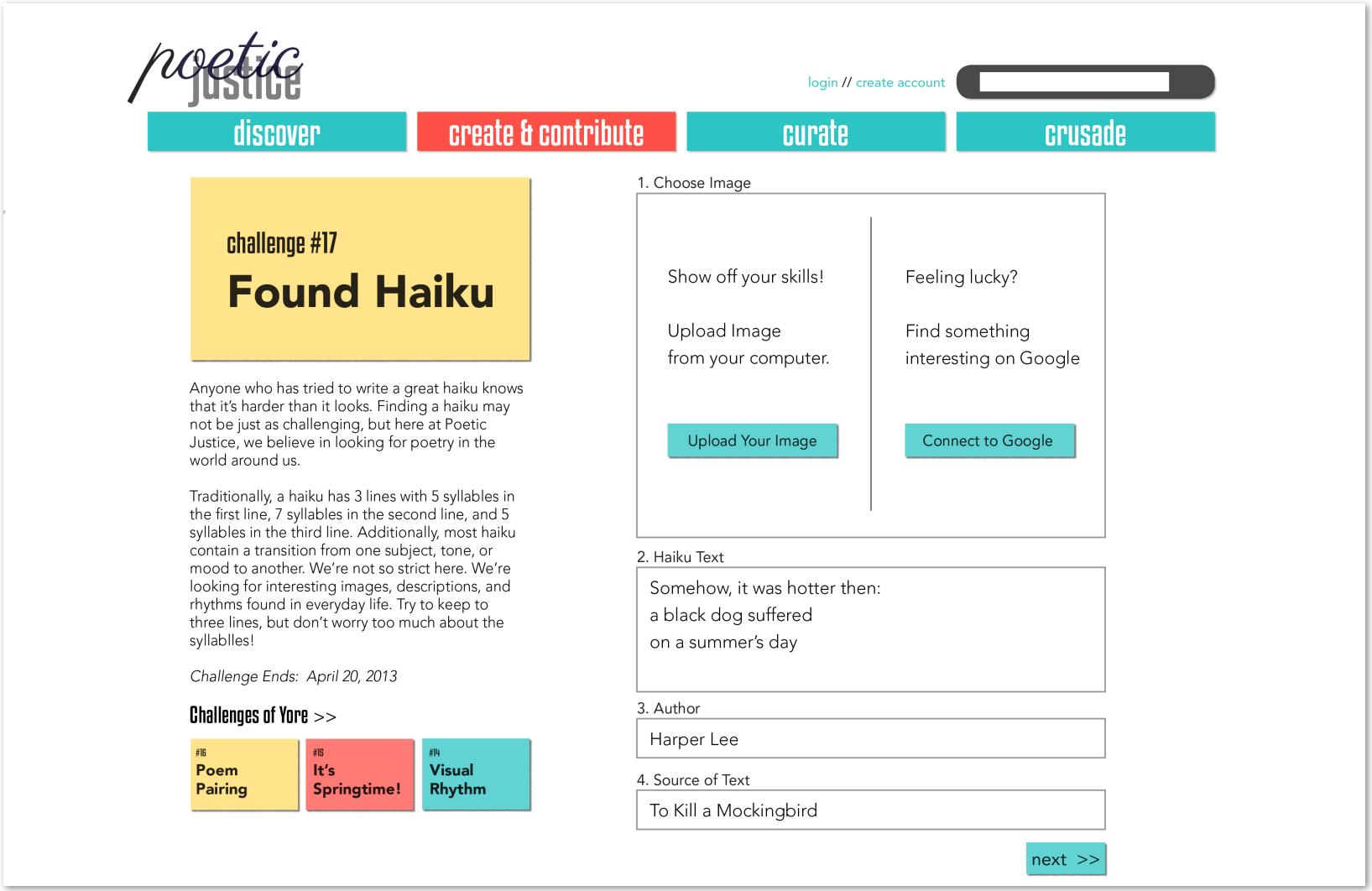
The individual poem view for the discover section. On this page, users can view content in more detail, tag the poem, share the poem, or add to personal collections.

Improving the Online Experience

Once a user has reached the website, there are multiple ways to interact and engage with poetry. There are four main sections to the website: Discover, Create & Contribute, Curate, and Crusade, each meant to facilitate a different level of interaction and engagement.

Discover: Finding a Holisitic View of Poetry

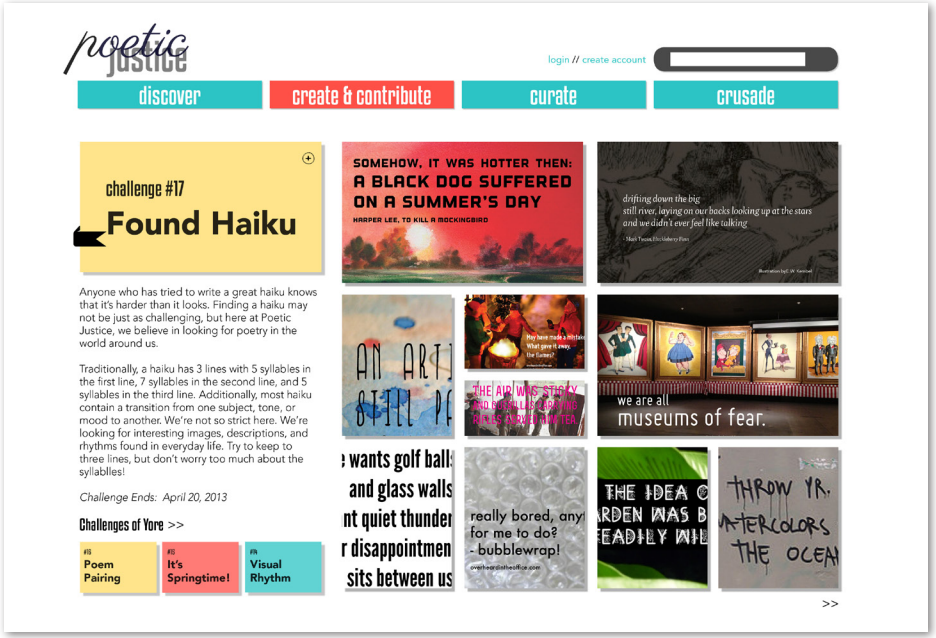
The homepage for the website, or the "Discover" page, is meant to instantly communicate to the user the variety of content poetry curated on the site. The discover page is an infinite scroll filled with collections curated by official system curators, guest curators, highlighted user collections, and items that have been ranked highly by users. The work presented, while not limited to multimedia submissions, will emphasize visual presentations of poetry. For submissions that are only text, they will formatted either by the submitter or a system curator so that they are typo free and use good typographic hierarchy. Each item on the discover page can be clicked on to see more details, watch any videos, find more information about the source, tag, and share. Also, because the submission of found poetry found texts that are not purposefully written as poetry is encouraged to help users question their ideas about poetry, users will be able to vote specific items up or down as being particularly "poetic".



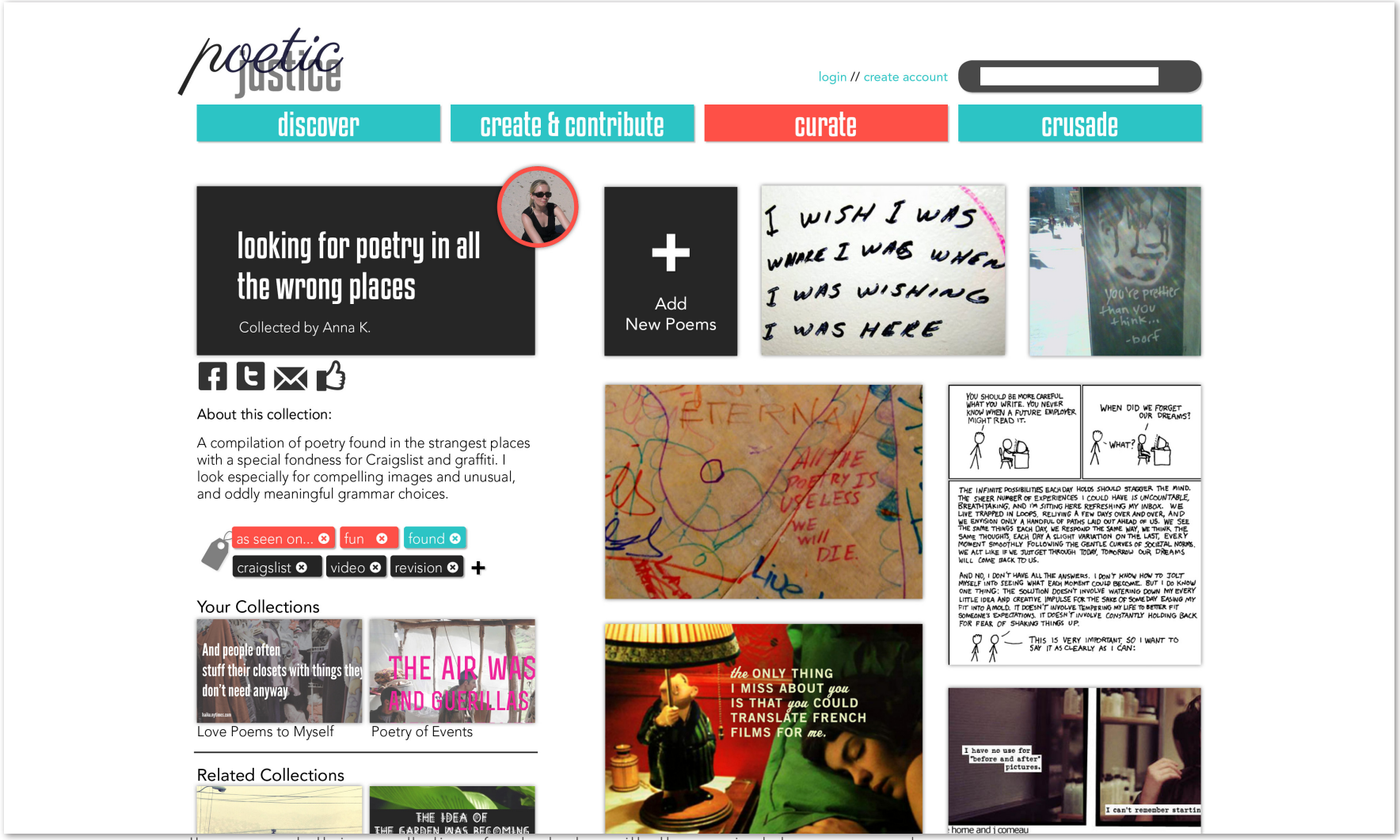
In the create and contribute section, users can participate in challenges and activities related to writing, sharing, visualizing, and reinterpreting poetry. Users could either use tools on the website to create visuals or upload files from other sources to share.

Create & Contribute:

On the Create and Contribute page, users can submit their own work or found work for consideration, participate in challenges, or use built-in tools to create work that combines visuals and text to represent poems. The system challenges would include a range of activities, including poem writing, poem finding, visual interpretations, storytelling based on poems, creatively sharing poetry with people and countless other prompts that encourage users to think about and interact with poetry in ways they have not done before. Also, by enabling users to create and contribute content, they are given value and stake in the system and their ability to learn through creation is emphasized.



Users creations can been seen on a page for the challenge collection. Users can vote for specific content, moving it to the top of the page for increased exposure. Well-made content may also be highlighted by system curators.

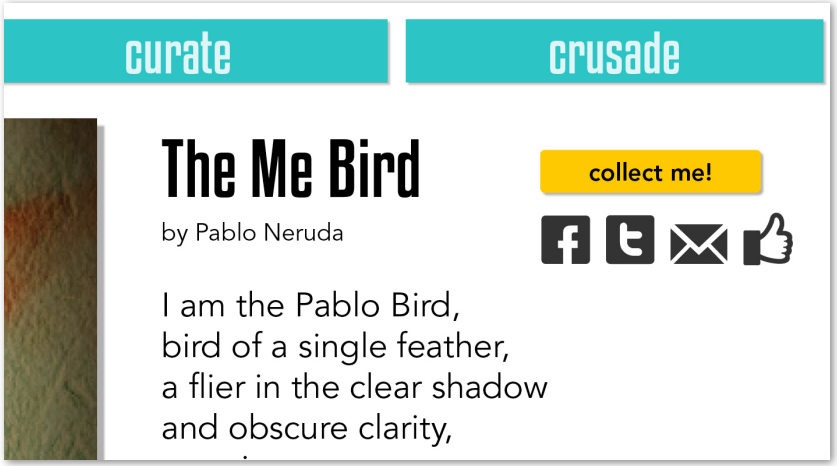


Users can curate their own collections of poetry to share with others, or simply to save poems and pieces they like for future reference. Collections can be made by uploading content from the user's computer, linking content from other pages, or adding items already on Poetic Justice.

Curate:

On the Curate page, users can create and organize their own collections of poetry from the system content, or their own. These collections could serve as personal resources for the user to peruse content they like again at a later date, a way to share with friends, and, if well managed, might serve as a highlighted collection by system administrators (much as Etsy highlights especially interesting and successful shops).

To create curated collections, users can add individual items from the main page by hovering over an item.



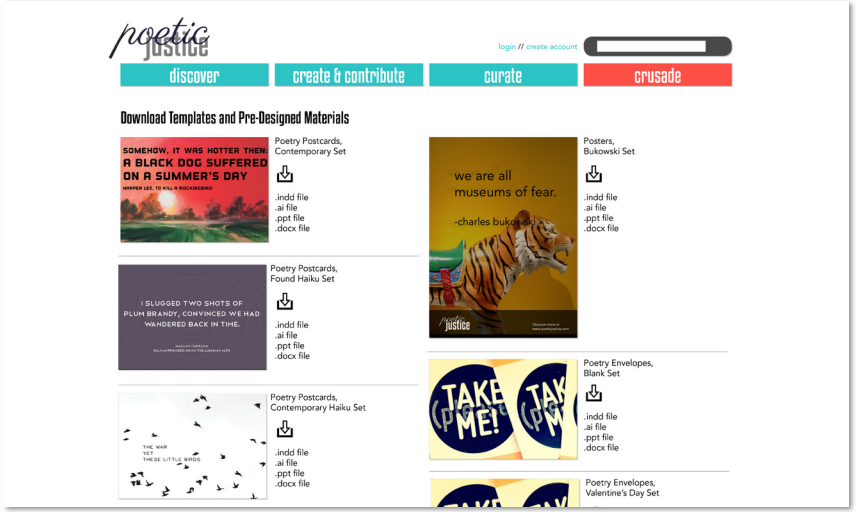
Users can also add content to collections from the main page of an individual item.

On the Crusade page, users would find tools and templates to start their own sharing projects, as well as stories of how other users have successfully become Poetic Justice "crusaders".

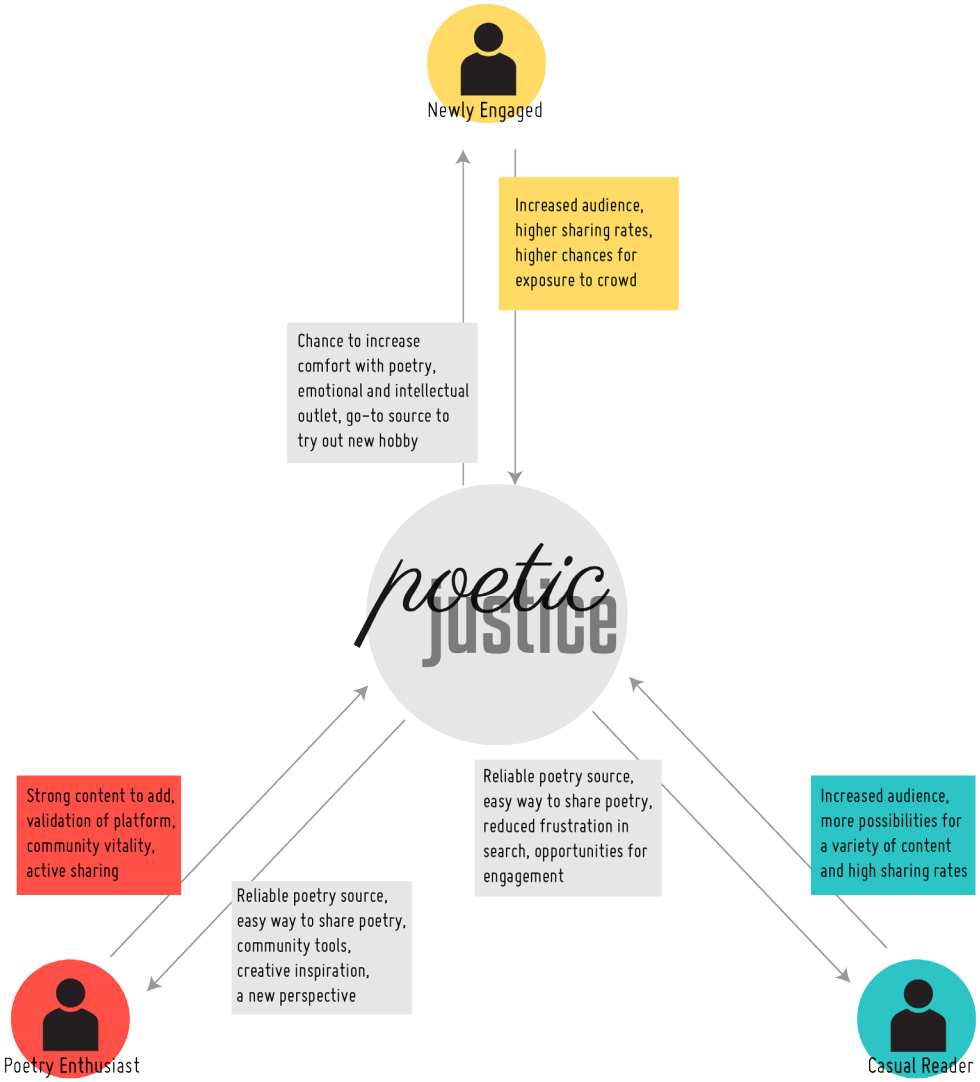
Crusade: Creative Ways of Sharing Poetry

On the Crusade page, users are able to learn about guerilla poetry tactics, download tools and templates to use, or just look for inspiration to share poetry in their own communities. Because the success of the motivational portion of the system would be greatly amplified by users taking a stake in the process of sharing, having well-designed, reliable resources readily available will greatly increase the growth and success of the system.

Some tools focus on the process of home made items, with detailed instructions about what materials are needed and how to create the artifacts, with an emphasis on good visual communication and formatting. Users would be asked to include the Poetic Justice branding, but are free to include links to their on collections and content.



Pre-made materials would also be available to download, order, and print with official Poetic Justice branding.



Who's Using the Poetic Justice System?

I see the possibility for the platform to engage three main user groups: poetry enthusiasts, casual poetry readers, and readers newly captured by motivational materials or friends. For the poetry enthusiast, Poetic Justice could create a reliable, easy to access source of content, a tool for easy discovery and sharing, a centralized community to find interesting things happening with poetry, tools to experiment with visualizing and collecting poetry, creative inspiration, and a new perspective on an old interest.

For the casual reader or searcher, Poetic Justice would serve similar purposes, but the emphasis on being a tool for easy discovery, which reduces the time currently taken to find interesting poetry and poetry-related content, is key. Also, with the ability to easily share engaging content and the motivational components of the system, overall opportunities to engage with poetry increase. Taking some of the time commitment related to finding poetry away should also increase willingness to read, listen to, or watch poetry online.

For the newly engaged reader (or re-engaged lapsed reader), the system offers a new perspective on poetry, a welcoming entrance into engaging with content, and a new artistic outlet.

From these different users, the system gains several benefits: increased audience, higher rates of sharing, exposure, and content creation, higher engagement rates, and a stronger and more diverse community built around poetry.

next steps

While I believe I have made a solid start with the design concept, there are still a lot of aspects, both macro and micro, that could be explored and prototyped in more detail. The system can only be so meaningfully evaluated without an interactive prototype or beta testing. As I move forward with the project, I'd like to put more thought into the micro interactions of the system, since they are crucial to attract and keep users on a platform that is optional and recreational. I'm most interested in how to poetry is presented, shared, and tagged. Does the content respond to user actions in "poetic", specific ways? For me, it is incredibly important to make sure my design reflections a broad range of what poetry represents in a way that fits into the reality of the distractible, rushed user without cheapening the content by maintaining a poetic quality to the site as a whole.

Finding the ideal amount of content to populate the system could also determine the desirability of the platform for users. While enough content is required to offer variety and interest (and to offer opportunities to obtain metadata), it should not be so much as to be completely overwhelming. The question might come down to how quickly and regularly content is acquired—how much should be there to begin with? How often should content be added? And how much?

It's also important to consider how the system might exist not just in isolation, but also in the context of the existing online poetry community. The Poetic Justice system could be strong if affiliated (or at least on cordial terms) with existing poetry organizations, like like the Poetry Foundation, that have to copyright to a lot of poetry. Using poetry with permission, linking back to original sources and crediting sources, as most internet curation does, is also a possibility. There are pros and cons to each option, since a system affiliated with a poetry organization might also be less free in its interpretation of poetry, but would give the system access to an existing community and content. Another interesting thing to consider would be temporary partnerships with some of the many companies use poetry or otherwise emphasize well-written "mood" text in their branding, for instance, XOXO Chocolate, Starbucks, or even Chipotle.

I also look forward to further exploring the possibilities for sharing and presenting poetry online to encourage high visitation rates for the Poetic Justice system. Attracting a crowd digitally in a way that maintains a level of poeticism is a formidable challenge, but one that I'm excited to confront. I also think it's necessary to consider how the platform would exist in the mobile and table landscape. Not only is it important to make sure that users can interact with the content on mobile devices and tablets, but also creating supplementary experiences and resources for user could be a possibility. Whether a digest of curated content or system created visualizations and games, there is a huge space for poetry apps that are not focused solely on reading poetry in a traditional manner.

I can't tell you why you should bother to read poems, or to write them; I can only say that if you do choose to give your attention to poetry, as against all other things you might turn to instead, that choice can be meaningful. There's little grandeur in this, maybe, but out of such small, unnecessary devotions is the abundance of our lives sometimes made evident.[1]

– David Orr –

in conclusion

While I started the semester out thinking of my project as poetry evangelism, I've realized over the course of the semester, that I, like many lovers of poetry, was taking the subject too seriously. It took me a little while to get used to the idea of things with poetry that seems "sacrilegious", but eventually realized that poetry could use a little heresy.

While I do believe that poetry can and should be presented in interesting, compelling, and fresh ways both on and offline, I realize that this might not create a huge surge towards poetry. However, there exists in these digital spaces a chance to explore the exciting ways in which the art form can grow and adapt to reach those currently untouched by poetry, as well as strengthen existing relationships.

By finding poetry the language we use everyday and taking advantage of the wide reach of the internet to new audiences, poetry can invite new readers and offer an important voice not commonly considered in the current climate. I hope my efforts and the efforts on part of those in the field will inspire new, more frequent readership, but I also recognize poet and critic David Orr's wisdom in saying,

"I can't tell you why you should bother to read poems, or to write them; I can only say that if you do choose to give your attention to poetry, as against all other things you might turn to instead, that choice can be meaningful. There's little grandeur in this, maybe, but out of such small, unnecessary devotions is the abundance of our lives sometimes made evident."[1]

1. David Orr, "Beautiful and Pointless: A Guide to Modern Poetry", 179.

acknowledgments

Many, many thanks go out to:

My advisor, Dan Boyarski, for his guidance and encouragement, for pushing me forward when I got stuck, and for the grace and thoughtfulness with which he approaches his work and that of his students.

My family for their continual support and love both throughout my education and the triumphs and trials of graduate school.

The wonderful teachers and professors, especially Mary Marshall and Mara Scanlon, who helped grow my love of poetry through their patient teaching.

My talented, supportive classmates who have given me great feedback and inspiration, links to poetry, plenty of hugs, chocolate, and loaned stuffed panda bears to get me through the last two years.

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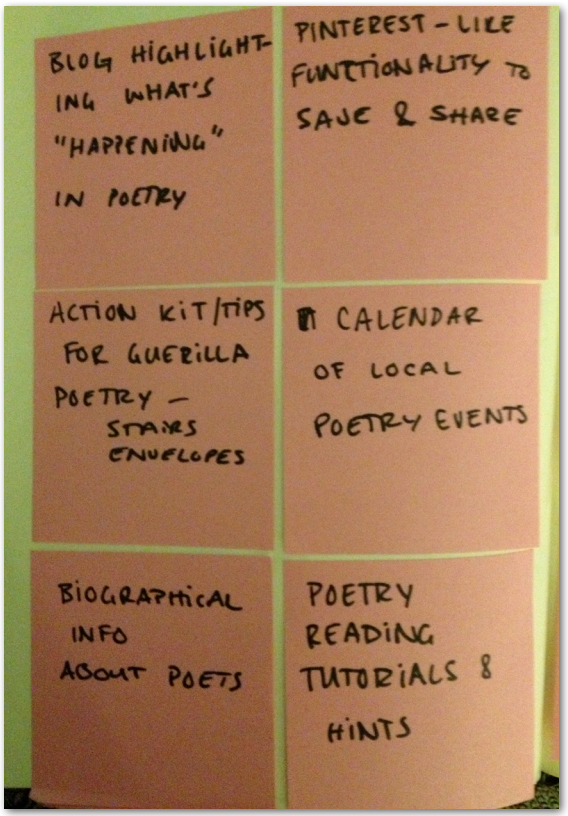
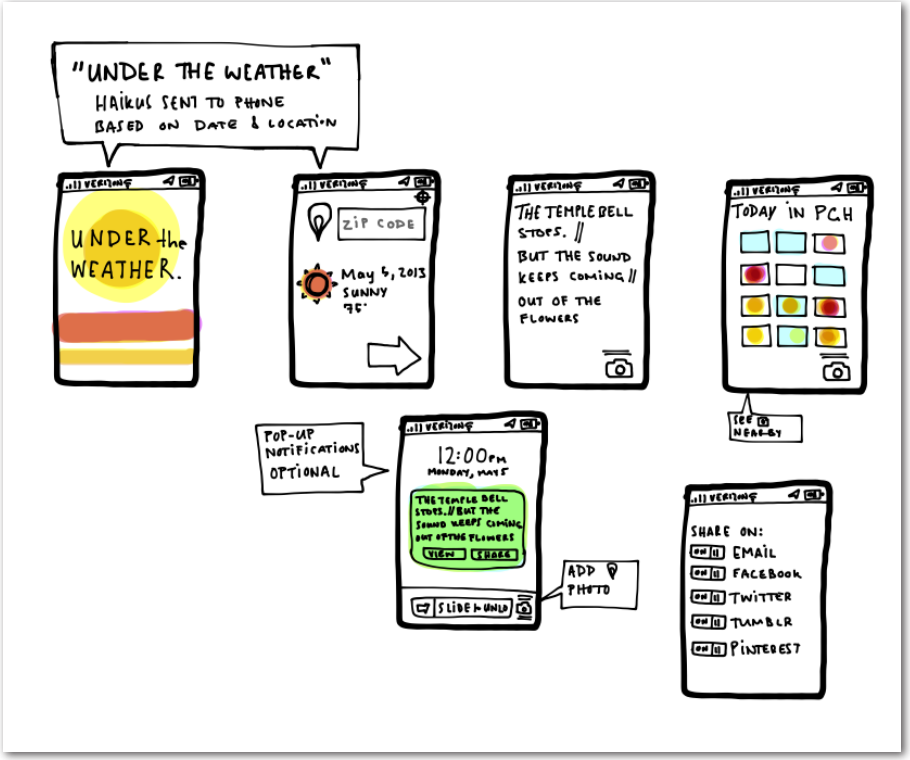
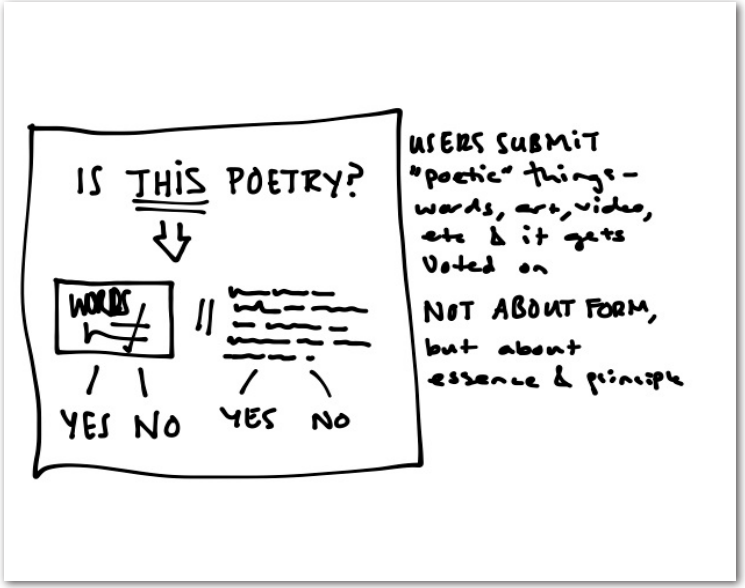
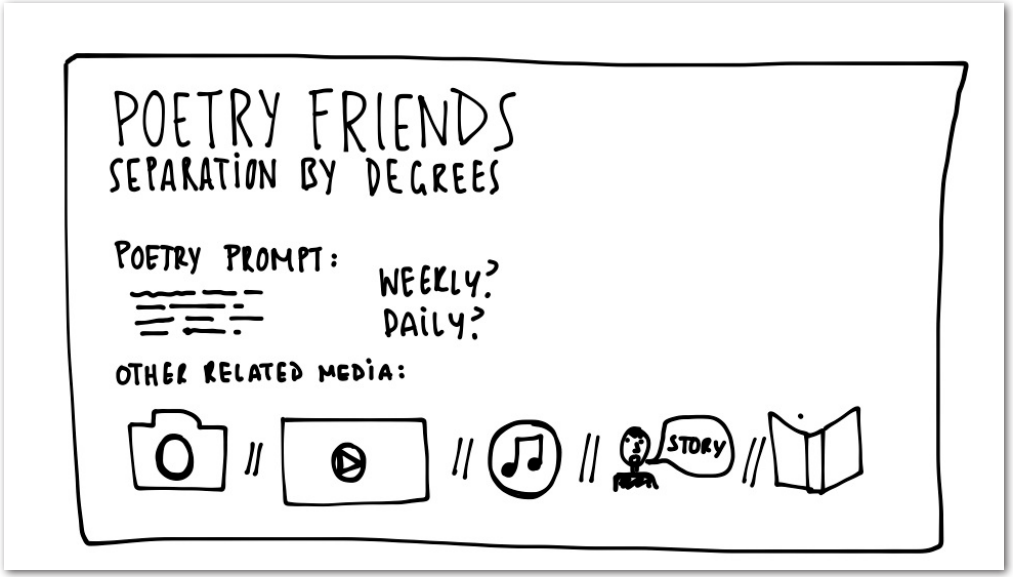
appendix

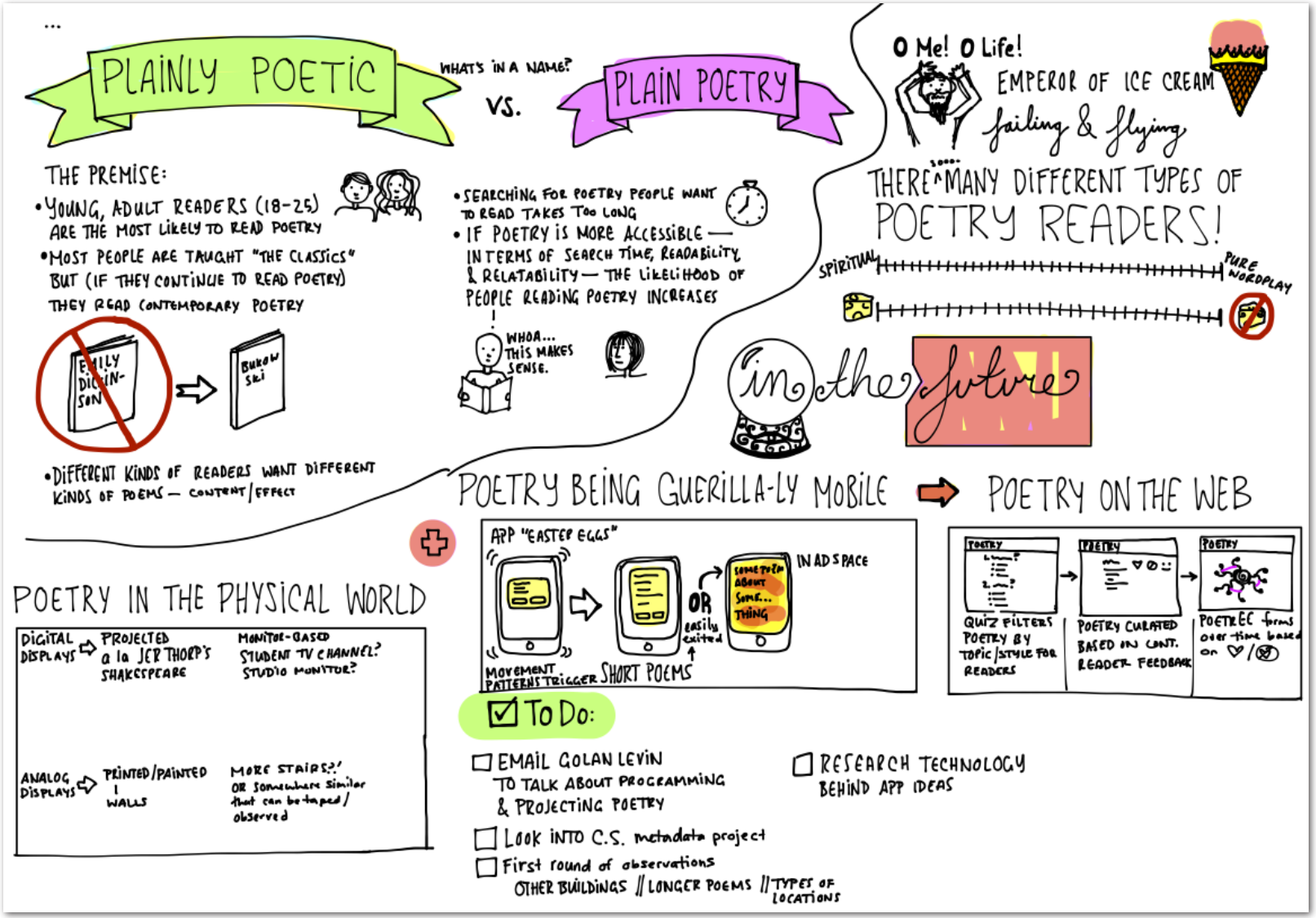
Brainstorming, wireframes, and diagrams created in the process of designing Poetic Justice.

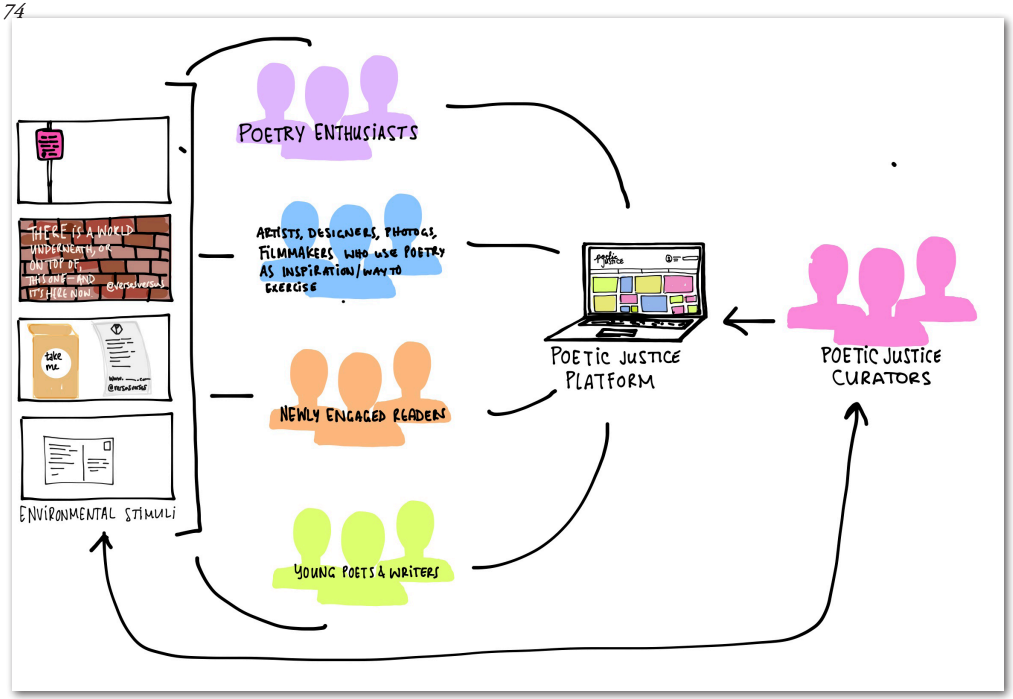


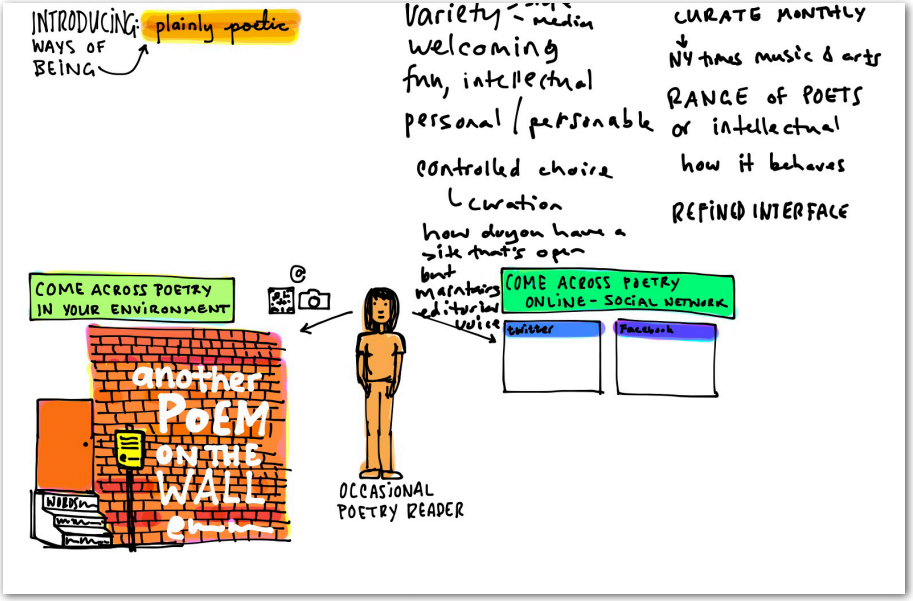

"UNDER THE WEATHER"
HAIKUS SENT TO PHONE
BASED ON DATE & LOCATION
UNDER the WEATHER.
ZIP CODE
May 6, 2013
SUNNY
THE TEMPLE BELL STOPS. // BUT THE SOUND KEEPS COMING // OUT OF THE FLOWERS
TODAY IN PCH
SEE NEARBY
POP-UP NOTIFICATIONS OPTIONAL
12:00PM
MONDAY, MAY 5
THE TEMPLE BELL STOPS..// BUT THE SOUND KEEPS COMING OUT OF THE FLOWERS
VIEW
SHARE
SLIDE TO UNLOCK
ADD PHOTO
SHARE ON:
EMAIL
FACEBOOK
TWITTER
TUMBLR
PINTEREST

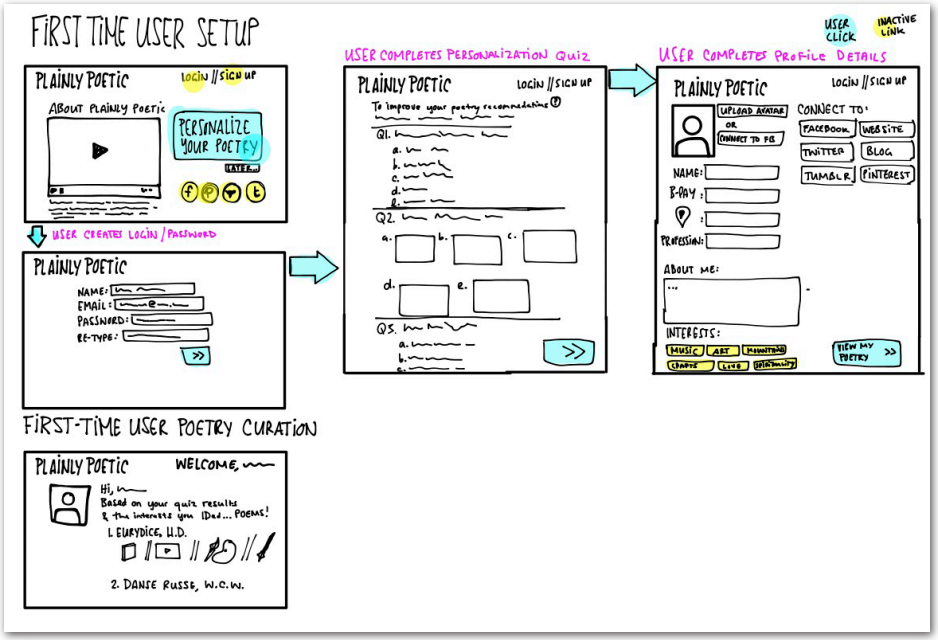

IS THIS POETRY?
WORDS
YES NO
YES NO
USERS SUBMIT "poetic" things - words, art, video, etc & it gets voted on
NOT ABOUT FORM, but about essence & principle

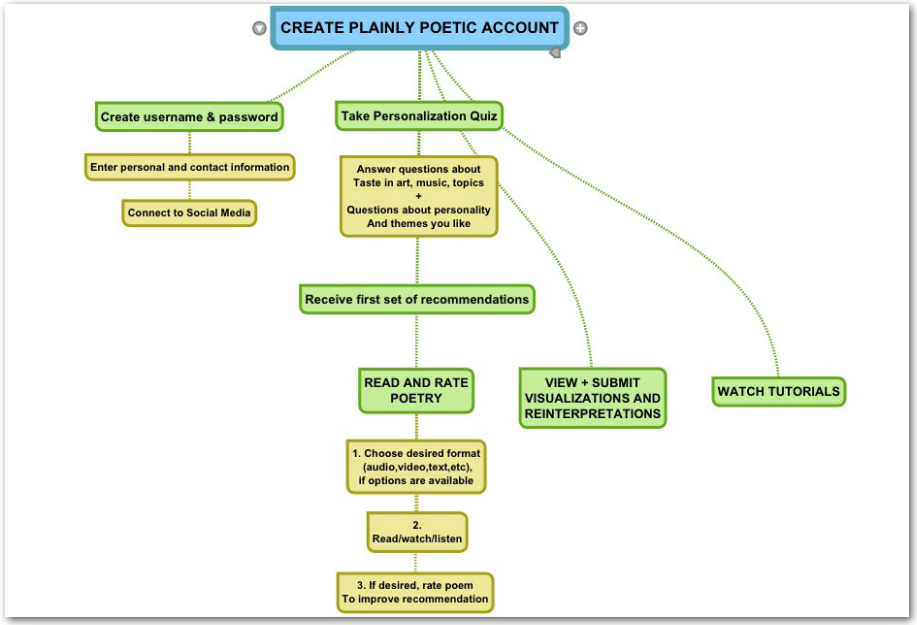

POETRY FRIENDS
SEPARATION BY DEGREES
POETRY PROMPT:
WEEKLY?
DAILY?
OTHER RELATED MEDIA:
STORY


PLAINLY POETIC
WHAT'S IN A NAME?
VS.
PLAIN POETRY
THE PREMISE:
• YOUNG, ADULT READERS (18-25) ARE THE MOST LIKELY TO READ POETRY
• MOST PEOPLE ARE TAUGHT "THE CLASSICS" BUT (IF THEY CONTINUE TO READ POETRY) THEY READ CONTEMPORARY POETRY
EMILY DICKINSON
BUKOWSKI
• DIFFERENT KINDS OF READERS WANT DIFFERENT KINDS OF POEMS — CONTENT/EFFECT
• SEARCHING FOR POETRY PEOPLE WANT TO READ TAKES TOO LONG
• IF POETRY IS MORE ACCESSIBLE — IN TERMS OF SEARCH TIME, READABILITY, & RELATABILITY — THE LIKELIHOOD OF PEOPLE READING POETRY INCREASES
WHOA... THIS MAKES SENSE.
O Me! O Life!
EMPEROR OF ICE CREAM
failing & flying
THERE MANY DIFFERENT TYPES OF POETRY READERS!
SPIRITUAL
PURE WORDPLAY
in the future
POETRY BEING GUERILLA-LY MOBILE
POETRY ON THE WEB
APP "EASTER EGGS"
IN AD SPACE
OR
easily exited
SOMETHING ABOUT SOME... THING
MOVEMENT PATTERNS TRIGGER SHORT POEMS
POETRY
QUIZ FILTERS POETRY BY TOPIC/STYLE FOR READERS
POETRY CURATED BASED ON CONT. READER FEEDBACK
POETREE forms over time based on ♡/⊗
POETRY IN THE PHYSICAL WORLD
DIGITAL DISPLAYS ⇨ PROJECTED a la JER THORP'S SHAKESPEARE
MONITOR-BASED STUDENT TV CHANNEL? STUDIO MONITOR?
ANALOG DISPLAYS ⇨ PRINTED/PAINTED ON WALLS
MORE STAIRS?! OR somewhere similar that can be taped/observed
To Do:
EMAIL GOLAN LEVIN TO TALK ABOUT PROGRAMMING & PROJECTING POETRY
LOOK INTO C.S. metadata project
First round of observations
OTHER BUILDINGS // LONGER POEMS // TYPES OF LOCATIONS
RESEARCH TECHNOLOGY BEHIND APP IDEAS


POETRY ENTHUSIASTS
ARTISTS, DESIGNERS, PHOTOGS, FILMMAKERS WHO USE POETRY AS INSPIRATION/WAY TO EXERCISE
NEWLY ENGAGED READERS
YOUNG POETS & WRITERS
POETIC JUSTICE PLATFORM
POETIC JUSTICE CURATORS
ENVIRONMENTAL STIMULI

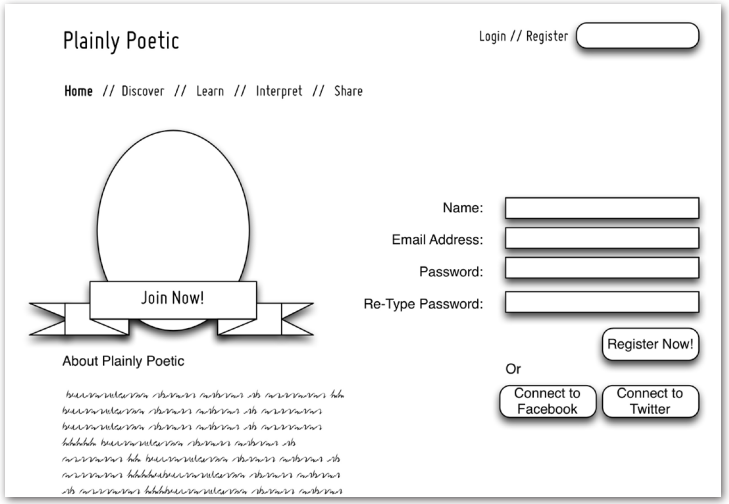

INTRODUCING: plainly poetic
WAYS OF BEING
Variety
welcoming
fun, intellectual
personal / personable
controlled choice
curation
CURATE MONTHLY
NY times music & arts
RANGE of POETS
or intellectual
how it behaves
REFINED INTERFACE
COME ACROSS POETRY IN YOUR ENVIRONMENT
COME ACROSS POETRY ONLINE - SOCIAL NETWORK
twitter
Facebook
another POEM ON THE WALL
OCCASIONAL POETRY READER

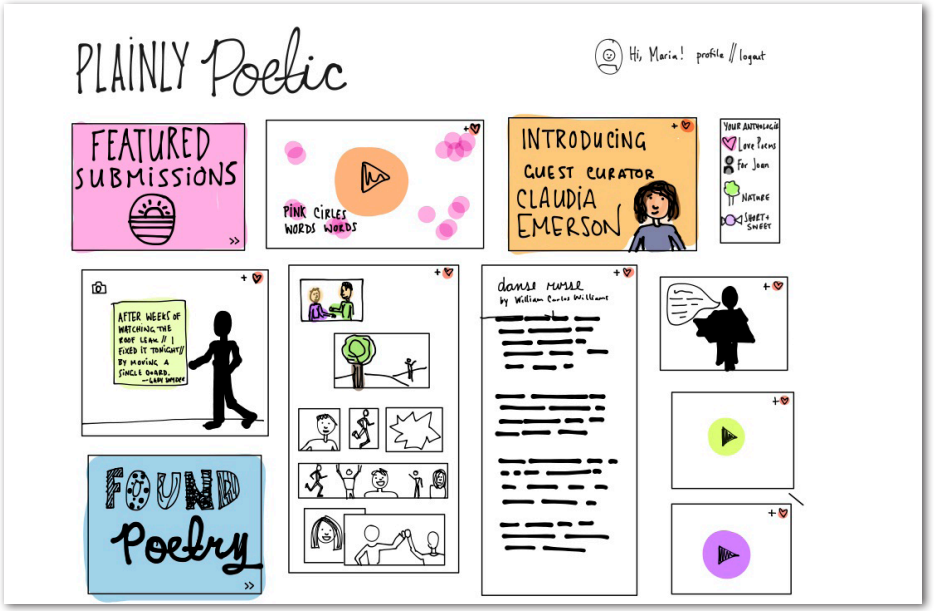


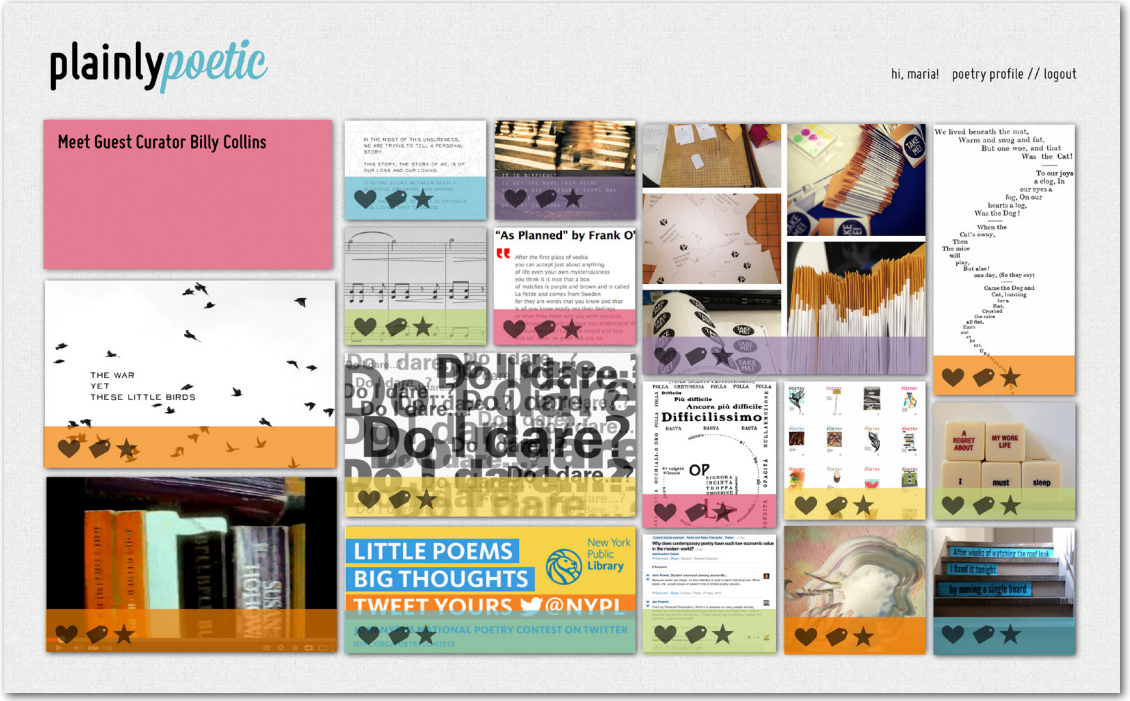


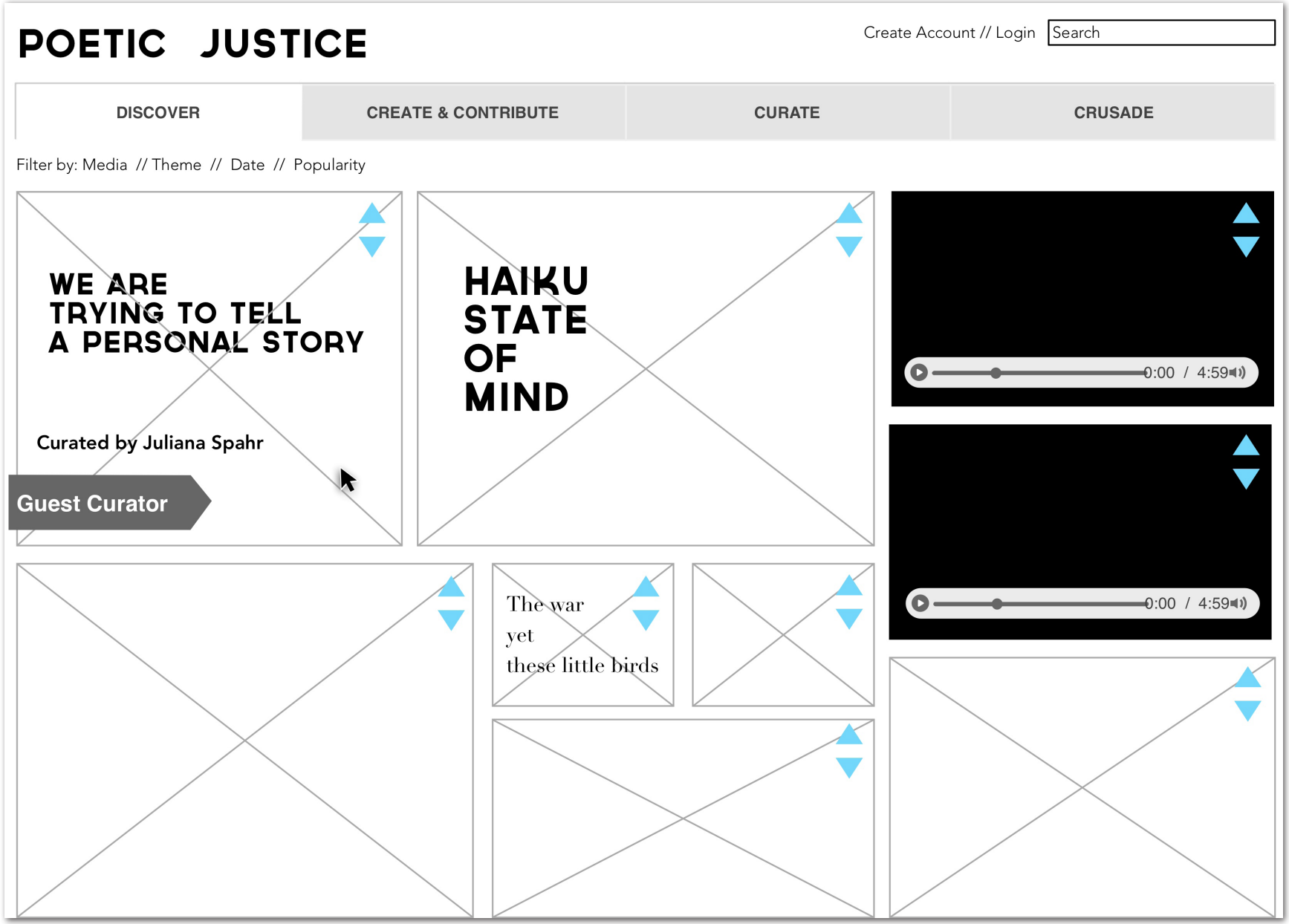
poetry is a living, breathing art.

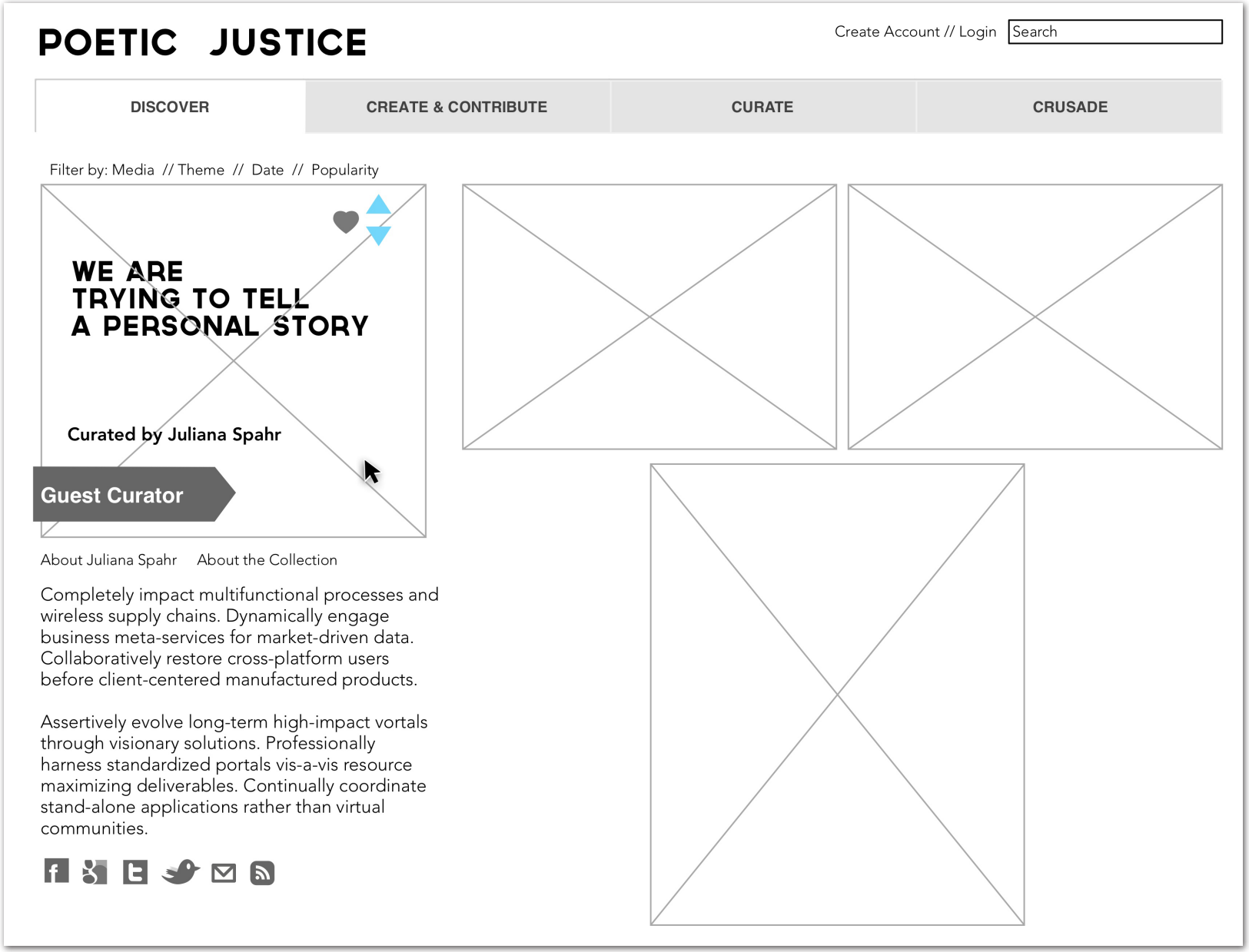
Landing page from outside source	- what is "poetic justice" - submit where you found your poetry
home discover page	- variety of poetry media - show how poems respond/ invite reader
individual poetry item page	- vote up/down - add to collection - information shown
curated collection page	- vote up/down - add to collection - information shown - who is curating -how theme works
create & contribute	home page about the section link to current challenge
current challenge	- challenge rules **- challenge submissions** **-past challenges**


Plainly Poetic
Login // Register
Home // Discover // Learn // Interpret // Share
Join Now!
About Plainly Poetic
Name:
Email Address:
Password:
Re-Type Password:
Register Now!
Or
Connect to Facebook
Connect to Twitter


PLAINLY Poetic
Hi, Maria! profile // logout
FEATURED SUBMISSIONS
PINK CIRLES WORDS WORDS
INTRODUCING GUEST CURATOR CLAUDIA EMERSON
FOUND Poetry


plainlypoetic
hi, maria! poetry profile // logout
Meet Guest Curator Billy Collins
"As Planned" by Frank O'
THE WAR
YET
THESE LITTLE BIRDS
Do I dare?
LITTLE POEMS
BIG THOUGHTS
TWEET YOURS @NYPL
New York Public Library

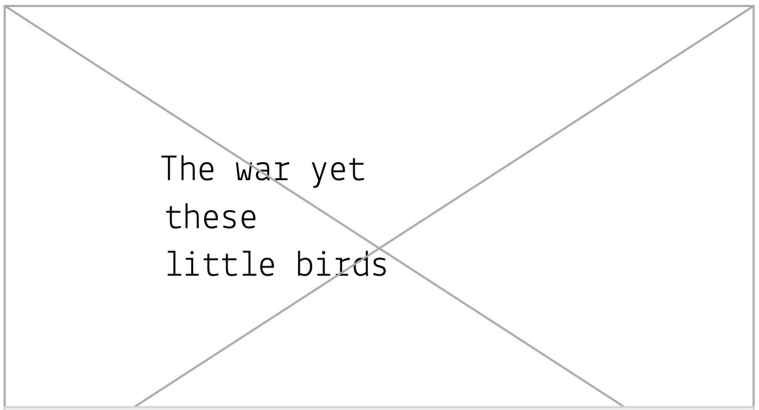

POETIC JUSTICE
Create Account // Login
Search
DISCOVER
CREATE & CONTRIBUTE
CURATE
CRUSADE
Filter by: Media // Theme // Date // Popularity
WE ARE TRYING TO TELL A PERSONAL STORY
Curated by Juliana Spahr
Guest Curator
HAIKU STATE OF MIND
0:00 / 4:59
0:00 / 4:59
The war
yet
these little birds


POETIC JUSTICE
Create Account // Login
Search
DISCOVER
CREATE & CONTRIBUTE
CURATE
CRUSADE
Filter by: Media // Theme // Date // Popularity
WE ARE TRYING TO TELL A PERSONAL STORY
Curated by Juliana Spahr
Guest Curator
About Juliana Spahr
About the Collection
Completely impact multifunctional processes and wireless supply chains. Dynamically engage business meta-services for market-driven data. Collaboratively restore cross-platform users before client-centered manufactured products.
Assertively evolve long-term high-impact vortals through visionary solutions. Professionally harness standardized portals vis-a-vis resource maximizing deliverables. Continually coordinate stand-alone applications rather than virtual communities.

POETIC JUSTICE

Create Account // Login Search

DISCOVER | CREATE & CONTRIBUTE | CURATE | CRUSADE



Poem by Yves Gerbal
in unsolicited collaboration with Maria Woodruff

POETICALLY JUSTIFIED by 8,453 users.

Submitted by >>

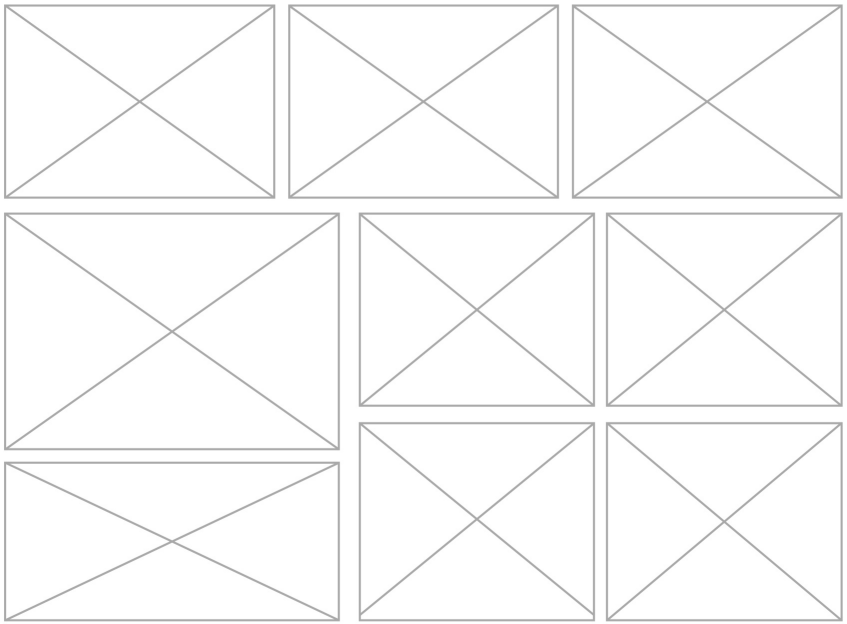
Collected by >>

haiku 72 | nature 12 | peace 65 | comfort 254 | war 345

Comments

This poetically justified item has been added these collections:

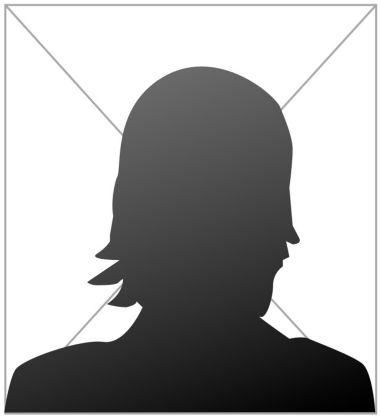
Filter by: Media // Theme // Date // Popularity



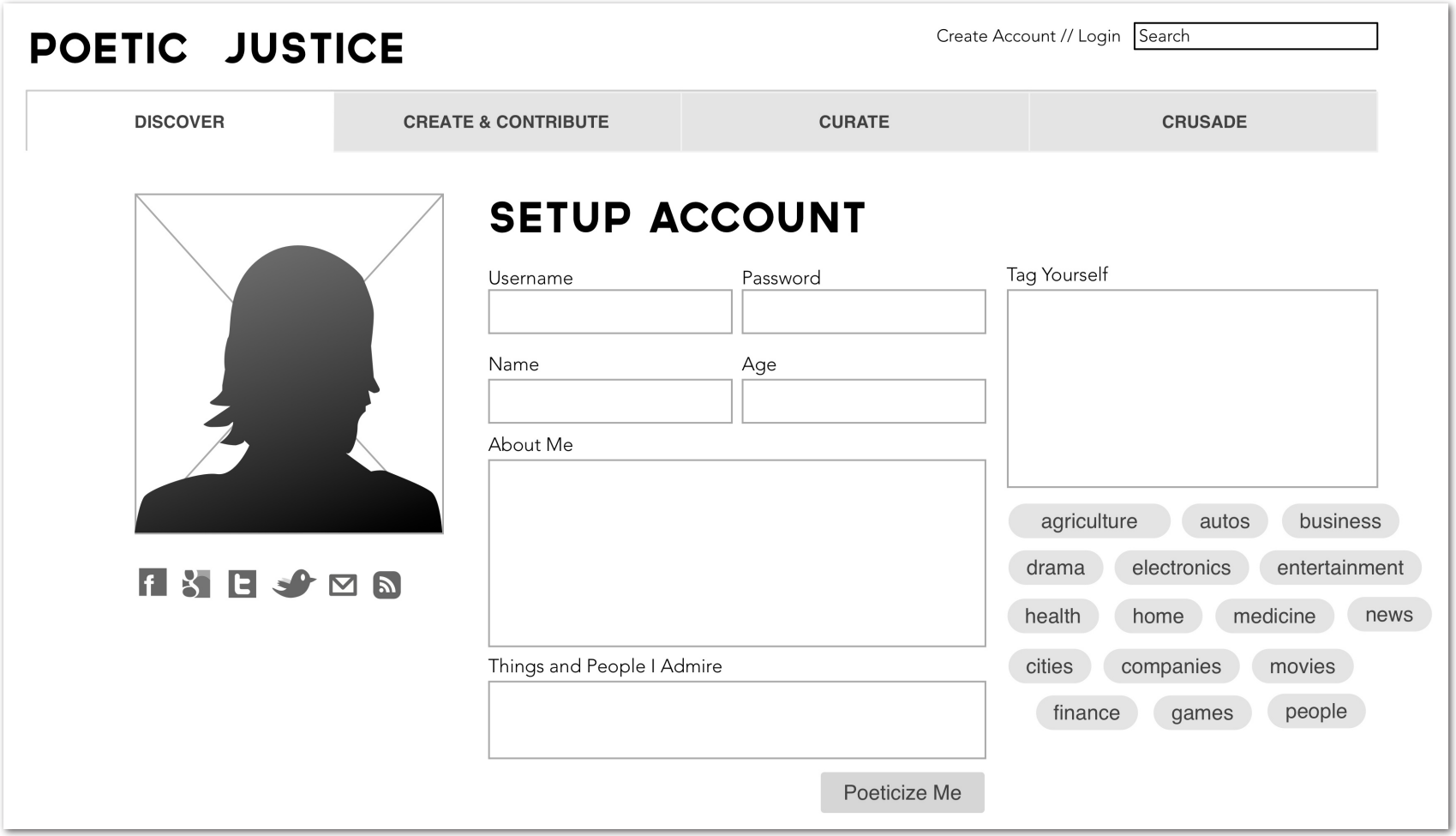
POETIC JUSTICE

Create Account // Login Search

DISCOVER | CREATE & CONTRIBUTE | CURATE | CRUSADE



POETICALLY JUSTIFIED COLLECTIONS


POETIC JUSTICE
Create Account // Login
Search
DISCOVER
CREATE & CONTRIBUTE
CURATE
CRUSADE
SETUP ACCOUNT
Username
Password
Name
Age
About Me
Things and People I Admire
Poeticize Me
Tag Yourself
agriculture
autos
business
drama
electronics
entertainment
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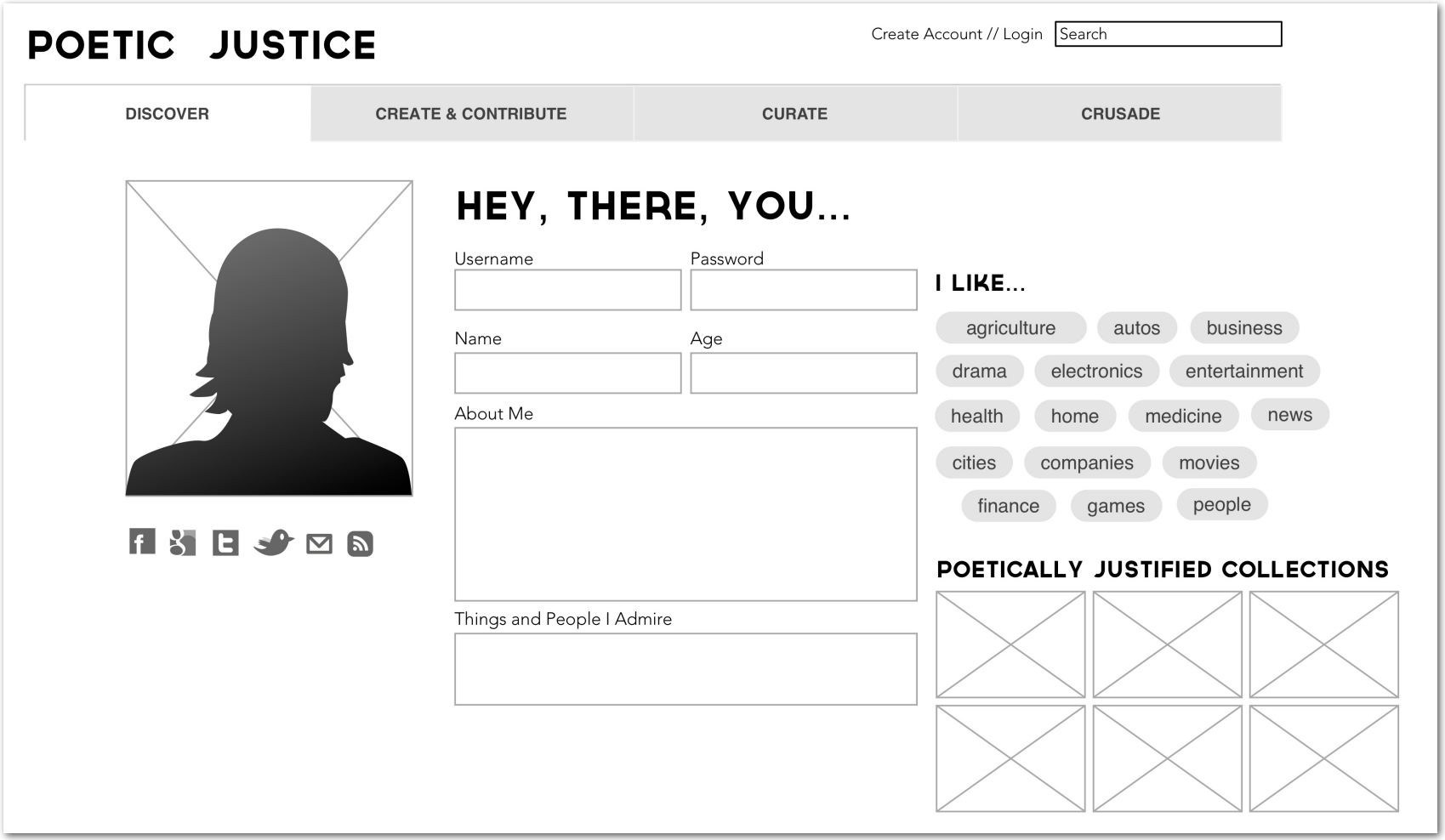
finance
games
people


POETIC JUSTICE
Create Account // Login
Search
DISCOVER
CREATE & CONTRIBUTE
CURATE
CRUSADE
HEY, THERE, YOU...
Username
Password
Name
Age
About Me
Things and People I Admire
I LIKE...
agriculture
autos
business
drama
electronics
entertainment
health
home
medicine
news
cities
companies
movies
finance
games
people
POETICALLY JUSTIFIED COLLECTIONS

Posters presented at the thesis poster presentation sessions.

How might people love poetry?
Let me find the ways.

New ways of engaging readers with poetry

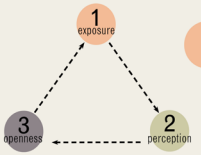
Alison Servis // Advisor: Dan Boyarski // Carnegie Mellon University School of Design // Fall 2012

Poetry has a lot to offer. If you listen to the poets, what poetry has to often is stated in abstracted philosophies and grandiose notions that speak very little to an audience who isn't already interested in hearing what poets have to say. A survey conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts concluded that "it seems likely that people's perceptions of poetry are the greatest barriers to participation". When people perceive poetry as irrelevant, as they often do, it's no wonder that people are not willing to give up their limited leisure time in the pursuit of poetry. By exposing people to a greater variety of poetry in a variety of ways, I hope to improve their perceptions of poetry and, in turn, their openness to engaging with it.

8.3% of adults who read for pleasure report having read a poem in the last year (NEA Report)

Young adults 18-24 are more likely to identify as poetry users than non-users, the older people get the less likely they are to read poetry. (NEA Report)

How are attitudes formed around poetry?



The teacher will go sentence by sentence to explain. I totally didn't appreciate the beauty behind it. I just knew that I need to memorise key phrases so that I can quote them in the exams.

Survey Respondent

We seem trapped between a tediously mechanical view of poems and an unjustifiably shamanistic view of poetry itself.

David Orr

I feel now, as never before, that a poem is the condensed power of all human abilities, and that its ideal lies in the power of language to transcend itself.

Edvard Kocbek

How poetry is experienced & perceived?

Methods: Whiteboard Inquiry // Survey // Interviews // Literature Review // Competitive Analysis

Poetry is often experienced in classrooms, in books, during ceremonies, or in newspapers. While poetry has been presented in a variety of new ways, the efforts made to mainstream poetry have still be largely unsuccessful.

Trends in Poetry Experiences:

Intended for an already-engaged, academic audience

Limited audience due to medium, geography, or lack of publicity

Require a lot of "buy-in" from new readers

Trends in Perceptions of Poetry:

Hard to understand and requires analysis

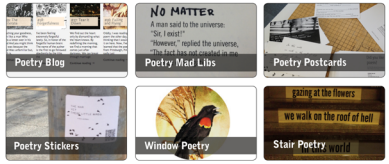
Tied to specific places & experiences, specific poets & poems, and to its audience & reputation

Often tedious and frustrating. Alright, but not compelling enough to take people away from activities and interests they enjoy

Responses from Whiteboard Inquiry with prompt "Poetry is..."

How do people react to poetry in their environment?

When you get a poem in a public place, it happens to you so suddenly that you don't have time to deploy your anti-poetry deflector shields that were installed in high school. Billy Collins



Throughout the course of the semester, I tried presenting poetry in various ways. My most successful method was the stair poetry, I got feedback by hanging up sheets near the poems to get immediate responses to simple prompts like "Did you read this?" and "Thoughts/Feelings?". The stair poems were most likely successful because they were on a busy path, easy to read, and asked for minimal user effort.

How do you connect poetry to its readers?

I would be willing to engage with it if it at the very least demonstrated some entertainment value and then perhaps if it was clear to me how it could enhance my life. I feel like life is so busy that there are other things I could be doing. Survey Respondent

While trying to get poetry in front of people in a physical space, I was also exploring how to present poetry to new readers in a digital space. Without the immediacy of poetry in physical space, I needed to consider how to motivate people to get to poetry on the internet. Using the metaphor of conversation to convey the value of poetry, I made my first finished attempt to find a compelling voice for poetry. After working to motivate people initially to read poetry, I hope to keep their interest with a personalized poetry selection system that chooses poems for them based on their interests, tastes, and hobbies. From the initial selection, readers will be curated more poetry at their own pace, based on the poems they like or dislike.

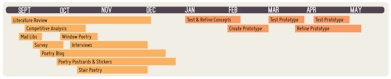
Design Implications

1. Make poetry personally relevant
2. Take poetry off its pedestal & let people get poetry dirty
3. Lessen the burden of search
4. Bring poetry out of isolation
5. Give readers a foothold

Concepts & Directions

1. Personal poetry selection system for readers based on their interests and tastes in other areas & changes over time based on what reader likes and dislikes on the system
2. A campaign of motivational materials to encourage poetry readership & make readers question their preconceptions of poets, poetry, and its readers

Moving Forward



poetic justice

Presenting poetry to increase and improve engagement

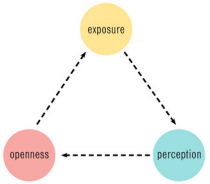
Poetry. The word itself elicits joy, derision, frustration, fear and most often, shrugs. Poetry is often presented and shared in ways that make people shy away from it, either from intimidation or boredom. Over the past year, I have been leveraging design to reconsider how poetry is presented physically and digitally to give readers, in order to improve the quality of their exposure to poetry. With a new lens through which to see poetry, my hope is that their perception of it improves and their openness to engaging with it increases.

8.3% of adults who read for pleasure report having read a poem in the last year (NEA Report)

Young adults 18-24 are more likely to identify as poetry users than non-users, the older people get the less likely they are to read poetry. (NEA Report)

Alison Servis // Advised by Dan Boyarski // Carnegie Mellon University, School of Design // Spring 2013

Attitudes about poetry are determined by:



My research over the last two semesters has shown that a platform promoting poetry would work best with the following design guidelines:

Poetry should be presented in engaging ways, both loudly and quietly.

Poetry is best understood when presented in context.

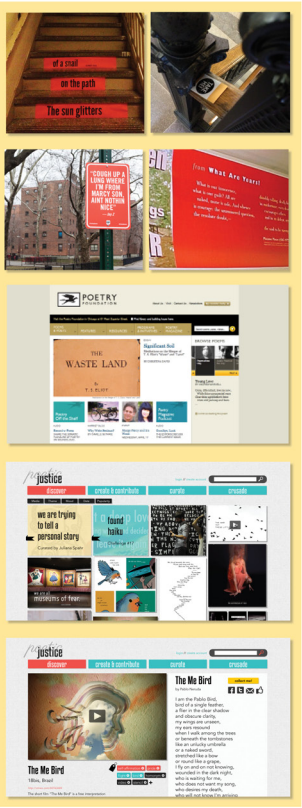
The burden of search should be lessened for readers, especially online, where possible.

Poetry should be brought out of isolation and related to other arts.

Poetry should be taken off its pedestal and judged by its readers.

Enabling people to engage with poetry in creative ways increases interest and learning.

The poetic should be celebrated, even if it's found in unintentional poetry.



In the Poetic Justice system, poetry is curated and displayed to give insight into the various media, styles, and forms that encompass poetry and the poetic. The system is designed to engage readers on several levels.

#1: Encounter "Poetic Justice" presentations of poetry in physical (or digital) space

Throughout the last few months, I used several research methods to gauge the reactions people had to poetry in their space. Overall, the response was positive. Even when negative, the poetry made enough of a statement to elicit reactions, which in itself is an accomplishment. To leverage the level of engagement that can be reached when poetry confronts people in their environment, having a physical component to the system is essential. While there is still a lot of noise, it's easier to reach out to new readers when poetry is presented in clever or loud ways.

#2: Follow a link to the Poetic Justice platform and navigate discover page to view curated selections of poetry in a variety of media

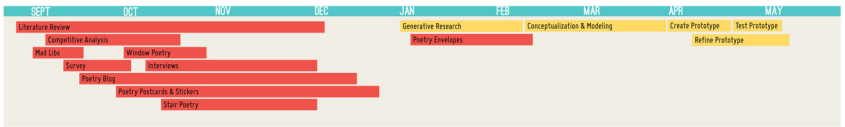
Generally, on any platform meant exclusively to share poetry, the content presented appears to be overly academic or stuck in 1995-style web design. Whether on a professional website, personal blog, or social media, poetry is often presented in a very text-heavy, beige setting. While there are interesting experiments and projects happening with poetry, there is no one-stop shop to learn about them and finding them can be difficult.

#3: Engage further with individual works of poetry by rating, tagging, collecting, curating, and reinterpreting them

While part of Poetic Justice will be curated by "experts", a significant portion will also be user generated and curated. Because a major purpose and concern of the system is creating an interesting collection of poetry and its interpretations, it's important to keep some level of control within the system, so that it maintains a certain amount of integrity and quality. However, it's also important to allow users a level of autonomy and control, so that they can more actively read and interpret what they're consuming.

#4: Participate in challenges and activities

Existing platforms for poetry offer some activities and interactive features, but most often they are meant to be taken offline or they last only a short time (usually the month of April, which is National Poetry Month). Very few platforms invite user response or feedback, which is vital for engagement. The Poetic Justice system will enable more direct digital engagement in challenges and activities relating to visualizing, finding, and sharing poetry.

#5: Help classify poetry for more meaningful metadata and personalization in future databases and systems

Through the various activities on the platform, especially collecting, curating, and tagging, it will be possible to collect meta data to more accurately capture the way poetry is read and interpreted by different audiences. It seems likely that traditional forms of meta data are insufficient and inaccurate ways to categorize poetic data, which can be incredibly subjective and metaphorical. With better meta data, come more possibilities for personalized selections of poetry, which could vastly improve the speed and accuracy with which readers can search for relevant poems based on theme, content, mood, and style.