



**The Oxbow School
FIRST OXBOW PROJECT**

Welcome to The Oxbow School!

The Oxbow faculty would like to introduce your first project! This project is due upon your arrival at Oxbow, and your presentation of this work will be the first time we get to hear you talk about your thinking and process.

Read the attached packet of poems. A collection of works from various poets, each poem was selected for its unique structure, content, style, or combination therein.

Choose something from one of these poems that grabs you: a character, a moment, a sentence, a word, a line of dialogue, a rhythm, a relationship, a scene, an image, a feeling—anything—and translate* it into a two- or three-dimensional (or time based) art piece.

*Note that we do not want you to illustrate, but to **translate**:
v. to express the sense of (words or text) in another language.

In addition to your artwork, we also ask that you prepare a text to accompany your piece. This text should not exceed 250 words and should be an examination of your process: What captivated you and how did you choose to express it visually? Why?

Please bring the project and statement with you upon your arrival, or send it in advance, if necessary, to The Oxbow School, Student Name, 440 Third Street, Napa, CA 94559. You will keep your project in your dorm and faculty will give you instructions when you arrive.

-The Oxbow Faculty

ASSIGNMENT REVIEW

- Read the attached packet of poems
- Create a two or three-dimensional (or time based) piece in response to an element of one of the stories
- Write an accompanying statement that discusses your thought process
- The artwork should not exceed 18 inches in any dimension and the statement should not exceed 250 words
- The project is due on your first day at Oxbow. Please bring it with you or send it in advance if necessary.

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I Go Among Trees

by Wendell Berry, from *A Timbered Choir*

I go among trees and sit still.
All my stirring becomes quiet
around me like circles on water.
My tasks lie in their places
where I left them, asleep like cattle.

Then what is afraid of me comes
and lives a while in my sight.
What it fears in me leaves me,
and the fear of me leaves it.
It sings, and I hear its song.

Then what I am afraid of comes.
I live for a while in its sight.
What I fear in it leaves it,
and the fear of it leaves me.
It sings, and I hear its song.

After days of labor,
mute in my consternations,
I hear my song at last,
and I sing it. As we sing,
the day turns, the trees move.

One Art

by Elizabeth Bishop

The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.

Ithaka

by C. P. Cavafy

As you set out for Ithaka
hope the voyage is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
angry Poseidon—don't be afraid of them:
you'll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
wild Poseidon—you won't encounter them
unless you bring them along inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

Hope the voyage is a long one.
May there be many a summer morning when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you come into harbors seen for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
to buy fine things,
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
sensual perfume of every kind—
as many sensual perfumes as you can;
and may you visit many Egyptian cities
to gather stores of knowledge from their scholars.

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you are destined for.
But do not hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so you are old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you have gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.

Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you would not have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you will have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.

In Time of Daffodils

by E. E. Cummings

in time of daffodils (who know
the goal of living is to grow)
forgetting why, remember how

in time of lilacs who proclaim
the aim of waking is to dream,
remember so (forgetting seem)

in time of roses (who amaze
our now and here with paradise)
forgetting if, remember yes

in time of all sweet things beyond
whatever mind may comprehend,
remember seek (forgetting find)

and in a mystery to be
(when time from time shall set us free)
forgetting me, remember me

Sunflower Sutra

by Allen Ginsberg, Berkeley, 1955

I walked on the banks of the tincan banana dock and
sat down under the huge shade of a Southern
Pacific locomotive to look at the sunset over the
box house hills and cry.

Jack Kerouac sat beside me on a busted rusty iron
pole, companion, we thought the same thoughts
of the soul, bleak and blue and sad-eyed, sur-
rounded by the gnarled steel roots of trees of
machinery.

The oily water on the river mirrored the red sky, sun
sank on top of final Frisco peaks, no fish in that
stream, no hermit in those mounts, just our-
selves rheumy-eyed and hungover like old bums
on the riverbank, tired and wily.

Look at the Sunflower, he said, there was a dead gray
shadow against the sky, big as a man, sitting
dry on top of a pile of ancient sawdust—

I rushed up enchanted—it was my first sunflower,
memories of Blake—my visions—Harlem
and Hells of the Eastern rivers, bridges clanking Joes
Greasy Sandwiches, dead baby carriages, black
treadless tires forgotten and unretreaded, the
poem of the riverbank, condoms & pots, steel
knives, nothing stainless, only the dank muck
and the razor-sharp artifacts passing into the
past—

and the gray Sunflower poised against the sunset,
crackly bleak and dusty with the smut and smog
and smoke of olden locomotives in its eye—
corolla of bleary spikes pushed down and broken like
a battered crown, seeds fallen out of its face,
soon-to-be-toothless mouth of sunny air, sun-
rays obliterated on its hairy head like a dried
wire spiderweb,

leaves stuck out like arms out of the stem, gestures
from the sawdust root, broke pieces of plaster
fallen out of the black twigs, a dead fly in its ear,
Unholy battered old thing you were, my sunflower O
my soul, I loved you then!

The grime was no man's grime but death and human
locomotives,

all that dress of dust, that veil of darkened railroad
skin, that smog of cheek, that eyelid of black
mis'ry, that sooty hand or phallus or protuber-
ance of artificial worse-than-dirt—industrial—
modern—all that civilization spotting your
crazy golden crown—

and those blur thoughts of death and dusty loveless
eyes and ends and withered roots below, in the
home-pile of sand and sawdust, rubber dollar

bills, skin of machinery, the guts and innards
of the weeping coughing car, the empty lonely
tincans with their rusty tongues alack, what
more could I name, the smoked ashes of some
cock cigar, the cunts of wheelbarrows and the
milky breasts of cars, wornout asses out of chairs
& sphincters of dynamos—all these
entangled in your mummied roots—and you there
standing before me in the sunset, all your glory
in your form!
A perfect beauty of a sunflower! a perfect excellent
lovely sunflower existence! a sweet natural eye
to the new hip moon, woke up alive and excited
grasping in the sunset shadow sunrise golden
monthly breeze!
How many flies buzzed round you innocent of your
grime, while you cursed the heavens of the rail-
road and your flower soul?
Poor dead flower? when did you forget you were a
flower? when did you look at your skin and
decide you were an impotent dirty old locomo-
tive? the ghost of a locomotive? the specter and
shade of a once powerful mad American locomo-
tive?
You were never no locomotive, Sunflower, you were a
sunflower!
And you Locomotive, you are a locomotive, forget me
not!
So I grabbed up the skeleton thick sunflower and stuck
it at my side like a scepter,
and deliver my sermon to my soul, and Jack's soul
too, and anyone who'll listen,
-We're not our skin of grime, we're not our dread
bleak dusty imageless locomotive, we're all
beautiful golden sunflowers inside, we're bles-
sed by our own seed & golden hairy naked ac-
complishment-bodies growing into mad black
formal sunflowers in the sunset, spied on by our
eyes under the shadow of the mad locomotive
riverbank sunset Frisco hilly tincan evening sit-
down vision.

Night Palace

by Joanne Kyger

The best thing about the past

is that it's over

When you die

you wake up

from the dream

that's your life

Then you grow up

And get to be post-human

in a past that keeps happening

ahead of you

In a Station of the Metro

by Ezra Pound

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Diving into the Wreck

by Adrienne Rich, 1973

First having read the book of myths,
and loaded the camera,
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,
I put on
the body-armor of black rubber
the absurd flippers
the grave and awkward mask.
I am having to do this
not like Cousteau with his
assiduous team
aboard the sun-flooded schooner
but here alone.

There is a ladder.
The ladder is always there
hanging innocently
close to the side of the schooner.
We know what it is for,
we who have used it.
Otherwise
it is a piece of maritime floss
some sundry equipment.

I go down.
Rung after rung and still
the oxygen immerses me
the blue light
the clear atoms
of our human air.
I go down.
My flippers cripple me,
I crawl like an insect down the ladder
and there is no one
to tell me when the ocean
will begin.

First the air is blue and then
it is bluer and then green and then
black I am blacking out and yet
my mask is powerful
it pumps my blood with power
the sea is another story
the sea is not a question of power
I have to learn alone
to turn my body without force
in the deep element.

And now: it is easy to forget
what I came for
among so many who have always

lived here
swaying their crenellated fans
between the reefs
and besides
you breathe differently down here.

I came to explore the wreck.
The words are purposes.
The words are maps.
I came to see the damage that was done
and the treasures that prevail.
I stroke the beam of my lamp
slowly along the flank
of something more permanent
than fish or weed

the thing I came for:
the wreck and not the story of the wreck
the thing itself and not the myth
the drowned face always staring
toward the sun
the evidence of damage
worn by salt and away into this threadbare beauty
the ribs of the disaster
curving their assertion
among the tentative haunters.

This is the place.
And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair
streams black, the merman in his armored body.
We circle silently
about the wreck
we dive into the hold.
I am she: I am he

whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes
whose breasts still bear the stress
whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies
obscurely inside barrels
half-wedged and left to rot
we are the half-destroyed instruments
that once held to a course
the water-eaten log
the fouled compass

We are, I am, you are
by cowardice or courage
the one who find our way
back to this scene
carrying a knife, a camera
a book of myths
in which
our names do not appear.

Riprap

by Gary Snyder, 1969

Lay down these words
Before your mind like rocks.
 placed solid, by hands
In choice of place, set
Before the body of the mind
 in space and time:
Solidity of bark, leaf, or wall
 riprap of things:
Cobble of milky way,
 straying planets,
These poems, people,
 lost ponies with
Dragging saddles—
 and rocky sure-foot trails.
The worlds like an endless
 four-dimensional
Game of Go.
 ants and pebbles
In the thin loam, each rock a word
 a creek-washed stone
Granite: ingrained
 With torment of fire and weight
Crystal and sediment linked hot
 all change, in thoughts,
As well as things.

You Reading This, Be Ready

by William Stafford

Starting here, what do you want to remember?
How sunlight creeps along a shining floor?
What scent of old wood hovers, what softened
sound from outside fills the air?

Will you ever bring a better gift for the world
than the breathing respect that you carry
wherever you go right now? Are you waiting
for time to show you some better thoughts?

When you turn around, starting here, lift this
new glimpse that you found; carry into evening
all that you want from this day. This interval you spent
reading or hearing this, keep it for life—

What can anyone give you greater than now,
starting here, right in this room, when you turn around?

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird

by Wallace Stevens

I

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II

I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

III

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV

A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

VI

Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.

VII

O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

VIII

I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

X

At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.

XI

He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

XII

The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

Sci-Fi

by Tracy K. Smith

There will be no edges, but curves.
Clean lines pointing only forward.

History, with its hard spine & dog-eared
Corners, will be replaced with nuance,

Just like the dinosaurs gave way
To mounds and mounds of ice.

Women will still be women, but
The distinction will be empty. Sex,

Having outlived every threat, will gratify
Only the mind, which is where it will exist.

For kicks, we'll dance for ourselves
Before mirrors studded with golden bulbs.

The oldest among us will recognize that glow—
But the word *sun* will have been re-assigned

To the Standard Uranium-Neutralizing device
Found in households and nursing homes.

And yes, we'll live to be much older, thanks
To popular consensus. Weightless, unhinged,

Eons from even our own moon, we'll drift
In the haze of space, which will be, once

And for all, scrutable and safe.