

Cento Prompt

- A cento is a literary work (usually a poem) that is made up of parts from other works, such as poems or passages from other authors. The word comes from the Latin word cento, which means "patchwork garment". The earliest examples of centos can be found in the works of Homer and Virgil. Modern centos are often witty and use the juxtaposition of images and ideas to create irony or humor. (Google)

The following is an example in English, taken from The Dictionary of Wordplay (2001) by Dave Morice (also from Google):

I only know she came and went, (Lowell)
Like troutlets in a pool; (Hood)
She was a phantom of delight, (Wordsworth)
And I was like a fool. (Eastman)

Crow Cento

The way a crow shook down on me,
such an awkward dance, these gentlemen
in their spottled black coats, how peaceable.

Crows startle the clouds with grievances
never resolved, it seems. For lonely men to see
a crow fly in the thin blue sky, picking through trash

near the corral; that fool crow, understands the center
of the world as greasy scraps of fat caught at last
in their black beaks. Crow nailed them together.

How the crow dreams of you, flying the black flag
of himself. He tried ignoring the sea, but it was bigger
than death, just as it was bigger than life.

Each of them thought far more than he uttered.

(I can't recall or locate who put together this Cento, but the lines are from: Robert Frost, Ted Hughes, Judith Barrington, Robert Lowell, Mary Oliver, Joy Harjo, John Clare, and Vachel Lindsay

More on and about Cento, collage poems:

This may well be old hat to experienced poets, but I thought I'd bring in some more information and suggestions about Cento

In a way The Wasteland by T.S Eliot is a Cento, incorporating lines from Homer, Virgil, Whitman, Shakespeare, and Bram Stoker.

In Italian Cento also means 100. Some poets write one-hundred-line centos.

Many Centos are too long to copy here.

I found a great page on-line called Cento Fever Workshop with lots of Cento start ideas such as:

- ~Epistolary Cento— lines collaged into a letter of sorts
- ~You might work from the poems in one anthology.
- ~You might work with recognizable lines from one well-known poet's work. I'm thinking Emily Dickinson, Mary Oliver, Robert Frost.
- ~Sometimes it helps to find one line that moves you from any single poem, then search for or remember lines poems that have similar or compatible subjects

~What about making a cento out of lines from your own poems.
~Often, tradition has it, centos credit the sources of specific lines or a more general listing of poets from whom lines were lifted.

Unspoken Word Cento
(A patchwork Poem of Borrowed Lines)

I want to believe
in all that has
never been spoken, (1)

that words are maps (2)
but so much depends (3)
on the silences.

What makes a fire burn
is the space between the logs. (4)
You must enter

the small silences
between the leaves (5)
Let's weave a nest of silence (6)

from which all the unspoken
words might fledge.

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- 1-Rilke
- 2- Adrienne Rich
- 3-William Carlos Williams
4. Judy Brown
5. John Moffett
6. May Sarton