

**Teaching Guide**  
*Knock-Off Monarch* by Crystal Stone

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## Letter to Educators

I created this resource so that it could have a broad reach—if you're a high school teacher, undergraduate instructor, or graduate-level professor, this resource is meant to assist you with the planning process, which often takes hours of writing and revision. It's meant to make it easier for you to make the choice to read *Knock-Off Monarch* with your students and modeled after Callista Buchen's Teaching Guide for her collection *Look Look Look*.

This packet includes discussion questions that explore the construction of the book as a whole, discussion questions that explore individual poems, and close-reading, analytical exercises that could allow students to apply what's present in *Knock-Off Monarch* to their own writing. There are teacher's notes, too, for how to execute the lessons and two student-facing worksheets that can be printed.

Of course, this teaching guide is not all-inclusive. There are aspects that you might like to revise or adapt, which is why I've made it editable. If you'd like teacher's notes and student-facing materials for some of the general writing prompts, feel free to email me. I'd be happy to create those resources for you to support your work as an instructor and to say thanks for considering my work for a deep-dive with your students.

## Discussion Questions that Explore Craft & Argument (book as a whole)

A chapbook or full collection of poems should, ideally, be more than just a private “best of” anthology of your work. The poems should be in conversation with one another, building and complicating a more complex argument, or telling a larger narrative, or exploring a question or series of questions in greater depth. Like a finely curated museum exhibit, the whole experience of the book should be greater than the sum of the individual poems.

- How do the poems seem to be ordered in the collection? What kind of narrative does it evoke? Is there a unifying purpose for each section? If so, name the theme or goal of each individual section. Compare the responses to the goal or theme of the collection as a whole.
- Each section of the book is separated by a picture of a different stage of the monarch’s life. How does this visual change or develop your reading of each individual section?
- What is the function of the recurring biblical story poems? What work do they do to develop the narrative?
- What does the title mean? How does the author use the title to contextualize us with her purpose?
- Who are the speakers in *Knock-Off Monarch*? What do they want? Do they all want the same things? What is at stake for the poet? What poems, lines, and images are suggestive of the stakes?
- The poems in *Knock-Off Monarch* take various forms: some are more formal whereas others are more playful (and the poem reflects the shape of a familiar noun like a strawberry). How do these visuals impact the reading experience and the development of the narrative?
- Describe the voice in *Knock-Off Monarch*. Is it singular or plural? What are some recurring trends you notice across poems? Explain.
- How do the “after” poems work in conversation with the speaker’s own poems. Is the voice still the same? Explain.
- Consider the first and last poems of the book. How does the placement of these poems impact the narrative? How do you enter the space of *Knock-Off Monarch*? How are you exiting it?

## Discussion Questions that Explore Craft & Argument (individual poems)

“Strawberries” and “Family Creche” are both concrete (or shape) poems.

- Describe the function of the visual in each individual poem. Is it the same? What seems to inspire the visual in “Strawberries?” How about in “Family Creche”?
- Describe the speaker. What are the speaker’s attitudes, voice, and tone? Are they the same?
- What has changed in the speaker’s life between these poems? How do we see those attitudes emerge in the final poem, “I take care of myself, but the people around me don’t”?

Many poems seem to be about identity formation. While some are direct, such as “Self Portrait in Philadelphia” and “Self Portrait as a Wildfire,” others are more obscure in the exploration of self, like “Moses Attends a Roller Derby Game” and “Noah Goes to Rehab.”

- What do you make of these varying approaches to exploring identity?
- How do the poems articulate the concerns about self, particularly in the presence and absence of the objects in the poems? What images clarify your understanding?
- How does titling a poem “Self Portrait \_\_\_\_\_” versus creating a self-portrait through a persona poem in another speaker’s voice change our relationship to the speaker? How does it help us understand the self differently?

Poems like “House Keys” and “Breathless Autumn” are “after” poems. There are few of these throughout the book.

- Why do poets choose to write “after” poems? When would you write one? Why?
- How does knowing the writer of a poem is invoking another established writer change your reading of the individual poems? Their form? Content?

Poems like “Transformation,” and “Portrait of the Sun on a Woman” have a lot of white space or caesuras in the middle of the lines of the poems.

- How does the white space change your reading experience?
- How would punctuation or line breaks change the meaning of the poem? Why choose to exclude them?

## Personal Questions: For Whole Group Discussion or Journaling Exercises

- What kind of messages about daughterhood, womanhood, and sexuality does the book seem to explore? In what ways have you encountered similar narratives in your life, whether in relationships with other people or in your lived, gendered experience of the world?
- In poems like “Vashti,” “Delilah,” “Peter and Ralph Waldo Emerson Walk Through the Woods,” we see the author re-writing biblical childhood characters. What stories did you grow up hearing? How did they change your relationship to yourself and the world around you? Which stories would you like to re-write now as an adult?
- Is there ever a time that you felt like an outsider or felt part of a community? To what extent? Is there a poem that speaks to that particular experience as an outsider or imposter?
- “First Impressions” explores the many first impressions people have of her. What are some of the first impressions friends had when meeting you? How do you present yourself to the world? What ways are a bit misleading?
- “Autumn in Mississippi” and “Poverty” show us some struggles from the author’s life that impacted her sense of self. Have you ever lived in a new place that changed you? Maybe it was coming to college, maybe it was going abroad, maybe it was just moving into a room or apartment that wasn’t shared. What changed as a result of that?

## Classroom Activities to Kick-Start Conversations (Potential Warm-Ups)

These are meant to be low-stakes ways of involving the classroom in the ideas of the book.

- 1) Ask students to draw a picture that represents the mood or feeling they had after reading the collection. Have them share their pictures with the class and compare the feelings that they had. What was similar? What was different? Create a gallery walk or class photo essay of their pictures to change the medium as they explore these ideas and guide the students through an alternate exploration of the poems.
- 2) Split students into small groups. Assign them each a section of the book. What is the mood and theme of that section? Does the picture at the beginning of the section match the poems there? If not, what would you change about the illustration already present? Draw that new version and share with the class.
- 3) Give students independent reflection time to determine what was their favorite poem. Why did that one or two stand out? Why? Have them turn and talk to a partner about their impressions before beginning the whole class discussion.
- 4) Pick a longer poem in the book for the students to redact. Make sure they read the poem first. How does their redaction change the message of the original work? Why were those words and line breaks essential for the message? This could be an entry into a conversation about word choice, craft, and storytelling.

## Classroom Activities: Line Break Exploration

The objective of this small-group activity is to help students understand better why poets choose the forms they do. It'll also help them develop their understanding of the line. For this activity, students should re-read "Telling Stories" and read Dana Levin's Essay, "[Where It Breaks: Drama, Silence, Speed, Accrual.](#)"

You can have the students read Dana Levin's Essay as their warm-up exercise before entering small groups, or for homework. They'll want to take notes on the short essay.

After they complete the small groups exercise, have student groups present their poems via a projector or Elmo so students can *see* the line breaks. Compare: where did each group choose to break the lines? Were they the same spots? Did they pick different spots? How did each of the new line breaks shift the drama, silence, speed or accrual of the poem? Discuss whole class.

[Student-facing small group activity sheet on the next page]



Course Code XXX: Course Title XXX

***Knock-Off Monarch: Line Break Exploration***

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Re-read “Telling Stories” and Dana Levin’s Essay, “[Where It Breaks: Drama, Silence, Speed, Accrual.](#)”

**Part-One: Close Reading “Telling Stories”**

1. Describe the structure and organization of “Telling Stories.”
2. Describe the pace of “Telling Stories.” Since it doesn’t use lines, what other strategies does the poet use to create drama, surprise, silence?
3. Describe the tone of “Telling Stories.” What strategies does the poet use to convey it?
4. Describe the theme or argument of “Telling Stories.” How does the poem convey these ideas? How does the form contribute to this?

**Part Two: Application of Theory**

5. Using Dana Levin’s essay as a guide, re-lineate the poem into enjambed lines. Will it be one stanza or multiple? Will the line length be uniform? You decide together where the line and stanza breaks belong.

### **Part Three: Analysis of New Poem**

6. Describe the poem's new structure. How did you organize it?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. Describe the poem's tone. How do the current line breaks influence the poem's tone?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Describe the pacing or speed. How do the current line breaks influence the poem's speed?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. Describe the theme or argument of the new version of "Telling Stories." To what extent does the poem's new form impact the theme and argument? What new elements are emphasized?

## Classroom Activities: Understanding Form and Organization

The objective of this exercise is to give students a revision exercise for their own poetry. It'll also instruct them in the form of a pantoum. Students will need to re-read "Ketoacidosis," "Describing Memory," and [this basic information about a pantoum](#) for homework before the class period.

The first part of this activity will be a classroom discussion. Introduce them to the pantoum, using "Ketoacidosis" as an example. Discuss:

- What is the impact of the repetition of lines? The mood?
- How did the speaker incorporate surprise while following the form?
- What ways did the speaker break the form?
- Why do you think the author chose to use this form given the content? How are they connected.

They will then have an independent exercise where they will re-write "Describing Memory" into a pantoum. Here are the rules:

- They will make a **five-stanza pantoum** using the student activity sheet (next page)
- They will not add any lines, but they can reorganize the lines (the last line can become the second line, etc.) any way they like
- They can change **one punctuation mark** and **up to two words** per line to fit the new structure.

After the students have about 15-20 minutes of independent time to craft their new version, have them turn and share with a partner. Together, they will discuss the following questions:

- Describe the organization of the new poem. How did the form change the mood or feeling of the piece?
- How did the form change the theme?
- How did the form change pacing?
- How did the form change the drama?
- Did you re-organize the poem the same way your partner did? If not, what were the differences? How did those differences shift the poem in a different way?

[Student-facing activity sheet on the following page]

Course Code XXX: Course Title XXX

***Knock-Off Monarch: Form and Organization Exploration***

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Take “Describing Memory” and turn it into a five stanza pantoum using the following outline (without having a rhyming word as the ending). Make sure to follow these rules:

- You must use every line in the original poem.
- You cannot add any lines, but you reorganize the any way they like (i.e., the last line can become the second line, etc.)
- You can change **one punctuation mark** and **up to two words** per line to fit the new structure.

**Part One: Writing the New Poem**

Title: Describing Memory

A: \_\_\_\_\_

B: \_\_\_\_\_

C: \_\_\_\_\_

D: \_\_\_\_\_

B: \_\_\_\_\_

E: \_\_\_\_\_

D: \_\_\_\_\_

F: \_\_\_\_\_

E: \_\_\_\_\_

G: \_\_\_\_\_

F: \_\_\_\_\_

H: \_\_\_\_\_

G: \_\_\_\_\_

I: \_\_\_\_\_

H: \_\_\_\_\_

J: \_\_\_\_\_

I: \_\_\_\_\_

C: \_\_\_\_\_

J: \_\_\_\_\_  
A: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Part Two: Exchange with a Peer**

Directions: Read your partner's version. Answer the following questions.

1. Describe the organization of the new poem. How did the form change the mood or feeling of the piece?
2. How did the form change the theme?
3. How did the form change pacing?
4. How did the form change the drama?
5. Did you re-organize the poem the same way your partner did? If not, what were the differences? How did those differences shift the poem in a different way?
6. When you're both finished answering these questions, discuss together aloud.

## Specific Writing Exercises Inspired by *Knock-Off Monarch*

- Many poems in *Knock-Off Monarch*, such as “Noah Goes to Rehab” and “Moses and Zipporah Attend a Roller Derby Game,” re-write biblical characters into a present-day context. They consider: what would happen if history was present today? Think about historical or mythological characters you grew up hearing about. If they entered the modern day, where do you think they would end up going? Write a one-stanza narrative poem placing them in a modern place and context.
- In *The Triggering Town*, Richard Hugo talks about the word, phrase, or space that “triggers” the poem. Consider Stone’s poem “Where” and the function of the repetition of the word homonym “pour” and “pore.” Pick a homonym (preferably that has a noun and verb version) to repeat in multiple lines. The poem should begin with three different people, or settings performing that verb. Use this as a “triggering town” for a longer poem that could deviate from that structure.
- In “I take care of myself, but the people around me don’t,” the title bleeds into the first line. Create the first line of a poem and move it up to your title, line broken as if the title was a single line stanza in the poem.
- “In the Living Room,” “In the Woods,” and “On Becoming” are written almost as bullet points: where a stanza is a singular thought or sentence—most of the time, only one line long. Go to a space where you can be alone in a public space, keeping a list of all the nouns you see. Write three concrete lines grounding readers in the space and thoughts of the speaker; after we’re grounded, in the fourth or fifth line, use a noun from the space to be a verb, (i.e., “I feather my words a skin of window or truth” or “The tree surrogates poetry, deer.”). In the fifth or sixth line, clarify that statement, what we’re supposed to take away from the moment transcending logic. (i.e., “When I see myself, I don’t recognize beyond.” Or “The deer remind me that people wander off.”)
- “Family Creche” is written in the shape of a creche or manger to represent the season and placement of the narrative. Formally, it’s an example of a tradition called “visual poetics” that is constantly evolving. Think about a life-changing memory. Where were you present? Write a prose poem about that event first; then, space it in a way that occupies the shape of an element of that memory.
- Consider “One and Two Star Reviews of Storybook Land” and “One and Two Star Reviews of Fenian’s Pub.” This is part of a tradition of found poems, where we “see” poems in our everyday lives. Consider one or two locations that changed your life. Explore the reviews online. Can you make a found poem that tells your story there but from the collective stories written in the reviews? Try it out.
- “God is” and “How to Prevent the Formation of Ice Crystals in Your Heart” each compares an animal metaphorically to a proper noun (the self, or God) in order to describe the proper noun better. It creates distance between the narrator, but still shows something valuable about their experiences. Do some research: is there an aspect of an

insect or animal's life that can be a metaphor for your situation or your belief about another person? Write a "Self Portrait as a \_\_\_\_\_" or "\_\_\_\_\_ is" poem and explore.