Pantoum Portrait Poem

With Pam Hart

Writer in Residence
Inspired by Bisa Butler
at the
Katonah Museum of Art
katonahmuseum.org
Pantoum Portrait Poem Writing

• Whether this is your first poem or your 20th, this exercise offers a chance to look and think about several Bisa Butler’s portraits
• Included are two artworks for inspiration PLUS
• Brief history of the pantoum form
• Suggestions to help you look, think and brainstorm before writing
• Strategies for writing
• Template/description of the pantoum
• My pantoum as example
• Paper, pencil/pen, or computer are all you need to get started!
One of two artworks by Bisa Butler

Anaya with Oranges, 2017
Cotton, organza, chiffon, lace and netting
36 x 20 in
Think about which piece calls to you

The Safety Patrol, 2018
Quilted and appliquéd cotton, wool and chiffon
82 x 90 in.
About the pantoum form

• The pantoum originated in Malaysia in the 15th-century as a short folk poem, usually made up of two rhyming couplets to be recited or sung

• Over time, it was altered and adapted by poets from other parts of the world

• Rhyming and brevity aren’t as important or necessary
Gathering Words & Ideas

• Select one of the beautiful portraits created by Bisa Butler
• Spend some time looking closely and slowly
• Zoom in to notice details

• These questions can help you look, think and write as you collect some words
  • What do you see? Colors, shapes, patterns, people, expressions, personalities
  • Describe what these young people remind you of
  • Describe the mood or the personality of any of the young people in the artwork
  • Use one of your senses to describe some details that inspire you: Sight, sound, touch, smell, taste
Anaya with Oranges, 2017
Cotton, organza, chiffon, lace and netting
36 x 20 in
The Safety Patrol, 2018
Quilted and appliquéd cotton, wool and chiffon
82 x 90 in.
Start by quickly writing 2-5 sentences and consider these strategies:

- Go inside the artwork & write about one or more of the characters
- Connect the artwork to your life, experiences, memory, friends, or family
- Write about a color, line, shape or some other detail in the artwork

- Follow the portrait pantoum poem pattern (see next slide)
Guide for Writing a Pantoum Portrait Poem

BEGIN with 4 original lines
1. ________________________________________
2. ________________________________________
3. ________________________________________
4. ________________________________________

REPEAT lines 2 and 4 and expand on ideas in 5 and 6
2. ________________________________________
5. ________________________________________
4. ________________________________________
6. ________________________________________

REPEAT lines 5 and 6 and expand on ideas in lines 7 and 8
5. ________________________________________
7. ________________________________________
6. ________________________________________
8. ________________________________________

FINALLY, repeat lines 1, 3, 7 and 8 in the following order
7. ________________________________________
3. ________________________________________
8. ________________________________________
1. ________________________________________

Repetition is used by visual artists and writers
ANAYA WITH ORANGES
By Pam Hart

Anaya looks at you with bold strong eyes
Her arms stitched tight against her dress
Oranges twirling like wild suns
Shine brightly behind Anaya’s one big self

Anaya’s arms are stitched tight across her dress
Red flowers, yellow seeds, the details inspire
And shimmer behind Anaya’s one big self
Slices of the world rolling through her life

Red flowers, yellow seeds, the details inspire
Anaya is looking and taking you in
Slices of the world rolling through her life
She has dreams and ideas spinning in her head

Anaya is looking and taking you in
Oranges twirl like wild suns
She has dreams and ideas spinning and spinning
Anaya looks at you with her bold strong eyes

*NB: I don’t repeat my lines the same way and that’s okay!*
When you finish

• Read your draft
• Check to make sure you’ve used strong, beautiful words
• Read your poem again – this time out loud to hear its flow
• Revise if you hear or see word(s) you want to change
• Think of a title
• Share your Pantoum Portrait Poem
  • Take a photograph of your poem
  • Post to Facebook / Instagram with hashtag #KatonahMuseumAtHome
  • Read your poem, record and post

Thanks for being Inspired by Bisa Butler!