

Guerrilla Poetry

This handout will tell you all about guerrilla poetry- and give you the opportunity to write your own guerrilla poem.

What is guerrilla poetry?

Guerrilla poetry involves publishing poetry in unexpected and unconventional ways in unexpected and unconventional places.

Guerrilla poets like to choose unusual media or materials for their poems.

They avoid publishing their poems using black text on a white page.

The term guerrilla poetry comes from the word “guerrilla”, which describes a type of soldier who uses the element of surprise and fights battles in ways that challenge the expected ways of fighting.

Guerrilla means “little war” in Spanish. Poets who publish guerrilla poems are fighting their own “little war” to find new audiences for and new ways of writing poetry.

Their unusual methods are like a “surprise attack” on the reader.

What are some types of guerrilla poetry?

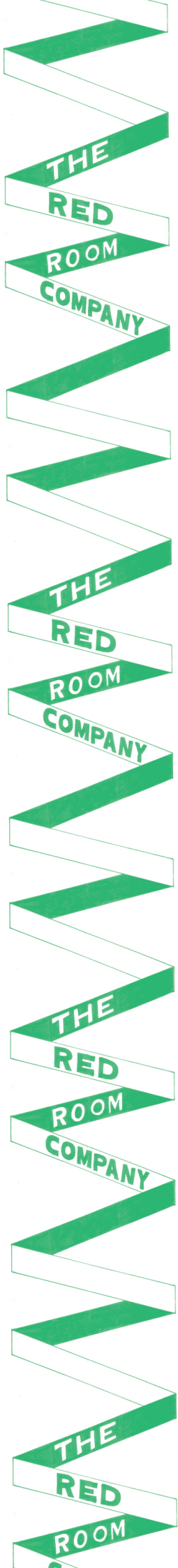
Guerrilla poetry can take the following forms:

- broadsiding (broadsides are poems left secretly and subversively in unexpected places such as on the seat of a bus or in the pages of a book in a shop)
- chap books (chapbooks are cheaply produced and often handbound books of poetry. Some guerrilla poets distribute their chapbooks by leaving them on public transport, on the shelves of libraries, in people’s letter boxes or sneaking them into their shopping trolleys)
- chalking (using chalk to write poems that will wash or fade away)
- driveby poetry (poets performing a poem as they drive by or past their audience)
- installations
- transient art (art that is not permanent)
- performance poetry
- graffiti or stencil art
- publishing poetry on the sides of buses or on the back of toilet doors
- poem in a pocket (sneaking up on someone and secretly leaving a poem in their pocket!)



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Background:

Emma Kalusche and her classmates at Pedare Christian College had the exciting opportunity to compose a guerrilla poem- and to submit a photograph of the unexpected location in which they published it.

Early in Term One of 2011 they worked with teacher Meghan Brunet and NSW poet Craig Billingham to compose guerrilla poems as part of their involvement with Papercuts, The Red Room Company's national poetry education program.

Students at Pedare Christian College explored activities from the Toilet Doors education kit, which is based on a previous Red Room Company public poetry project.

In 2004 and 2006 The Red Room Company commissioned poets to compose poems for posters that were displayed on the back of toilet doors in City of Sydney buildings, Qantas Clubs and Greater Union cinemas.

You can see some more of the guerrilla poems produced by Emma's classmates throughout this document

You can read more about The Red Room Company, Papercuts and The Toilet Doors Project at the links below:

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Composing your own Guerrilla Poem

Activity:

Express yourself by composing your own guerrilla poem inspired by the photographs taken by students at Pedare Christian College in South Australia.

Your task is to compose a poem that takes poetry to a new audience in an unexpected way. Your poem should be no more than twenty lines.

The purpose of your poem is to surprise the reader and challenge their expectations of poetry.

Think up an unusual or unexpected place to exhibit your guerrilla poem and then take a photograph of it in this location.

Some things to consider:

When publishing your guerrilla poem in a public place it is important that you use just a bit of common sense.

- Ask permission to publish your guerrilla poem if you do this in a public place or on property that does not belong to you.
- Ask permission before you use objects or materials to create your guerrilla poem.
- Avoid publishing your guerrilla poem anywhere that might be illegal or will offend or upset anyone.
- Make sure the display of your guerrilla poem does not cause any damage or leave any marks. It should not pollute the environment.
- Always clean up afterwards.
- Keep yourself safe and don't take risks by publishing your poem in a dangerous or unsafe place.

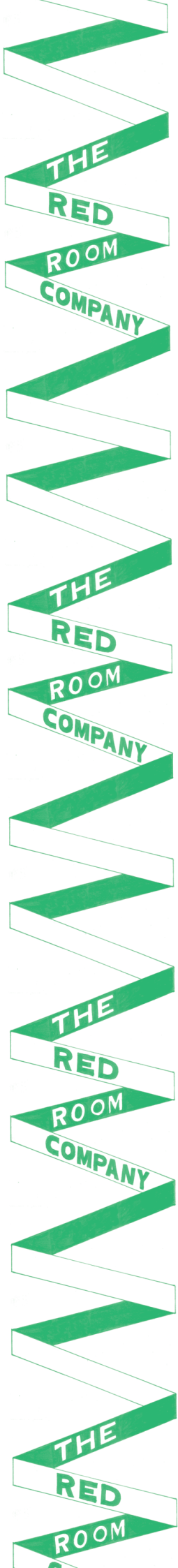
Many guerrilla poets are very concerned about the environmental and social impact of their work and so ensure that their poetry does not leave a lasting record of its existence.

In 2010 The Red Room Company briefly considered releasing into the sea poems that had been sealed in bottles as part of our Sea Things public poetry project. We did not do this



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as it would have been littering- and damaging to the environment.

Remember that your guerrilla poem might just visit the location you have chosen. The poem in a place will be a transient or temporary artwork, but the photograph will be the permanent record of publication.

Publishing your guerrilla poem:

The folks at The Red Room Company and Spineout would love to see your guerrilla poems and photographs- and we just may publish them on our websites.

You can email your photograph of your guerrilla poem to: **Spineout**

You can submit your poem to Spineout by clicking on the link below:

<http://www.spineout.com.au/submissions.cfm>

Make sure you read the Spineout guidelines before you submit your photograph of your guerrilla poem.

<http://www.spineout.com.au/page.cfm?id=139>

You can also submit your poem and image to: **The Red Room Company**

Email your photograph as an attachment to Tony Britten at:

education@redroomcompany.org

Make sure you tell us your name, address, age and school. It helps if you put your name and school in the subject line of your email.



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Gallery of Guerilla Poems from Pedare Christian College

Students in Year 10 at Pedare Christian College in South Australia produced an amazing range of guerilla poems. Their guerrilla poems were published in birdcages, on the walls of public bars and shops, in the windows of businesses and even engraved on a piece of slate that was then displayed in a fish tank.

One poem was even published at the bottom of a bowl of milk and cereal (after the student realized it was illegal to leave poems in cereal boxes in supermarkets!)

Human bodies were also used to publish poems: one student decided to compose a poem about warfare and published his poem on the bodies of the boys who were playing a game of football.

Another decided to compose a poem and post it to a randomly selected address in Victoria. His photograph featured the letter just as it was sliding into the slot of a post box.

To ensure an element of surprise in readers one Pedare student placed their poems under car windscreen wipers so that drivers would initially believe they were getting a parking ticket. On examining the paper they found under their wiper they were then disarmed to discover they had instead been gifted with a poem.

One of the Pedare students composed a poem about US politics. It was then posted on Youtube and the clip was labeled with the name of Call of Duty, the amazingly popular first person shooter game. Youtube users and Call of Duty fans that expected to see a clip about their favourite game would instead be surprised to see and read a poem about US engagement in foreign wars.

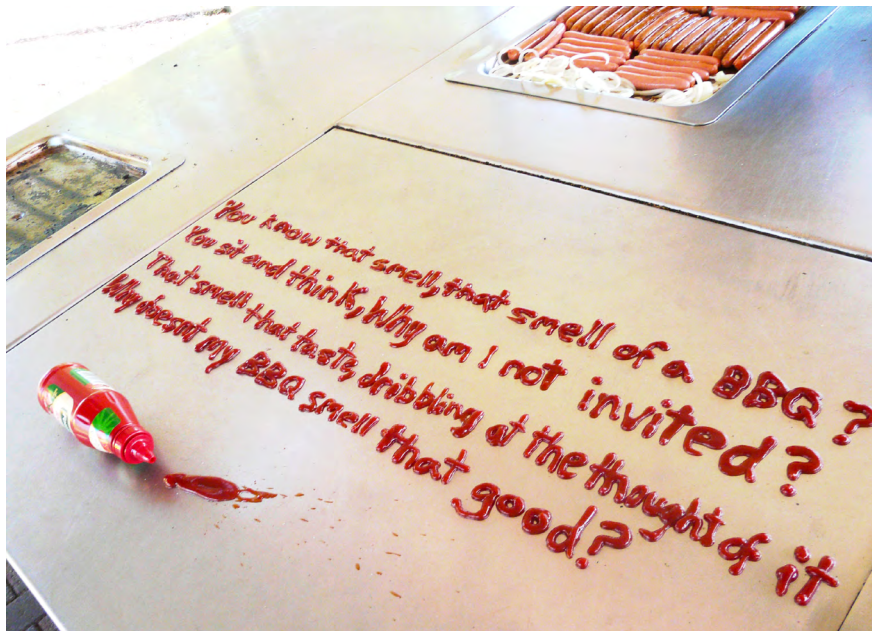
Some of the students endeavoured to choose media that related to the subject matter of their poem. This included writing a poem about a reef on a piece of wood that resembled driftwood and a poem about body image written on the body of a plastic Barbie-like doll. We've included a selection of the images below.

We hope these wonderful works inspire you to create your own guerrilla poem and send it to Spineout and The Red Room Company.



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