

# CONCRETE POETRY

Cathy Tacci Beck

Concrete poetry is one of my favorite lessons to teach in my graphic communications class. It is a visual poem where

typography or text is placed in a particular arrangement to create a visual image. According to Wikipedia, concrete poetry is “sometimes referred to

as visual poetry, a term that has now developed a distinct meaning of its own. As such, concrete poetry relates more to the visual than verbal arts.”

## The Art Problem

A graphic design problem such as concrete poetry provides students with the opportunity to make connections to other disciplines. In this assignment, I asked students to write a poem containing words, rhythm, or rhyme, that focused on the sub-

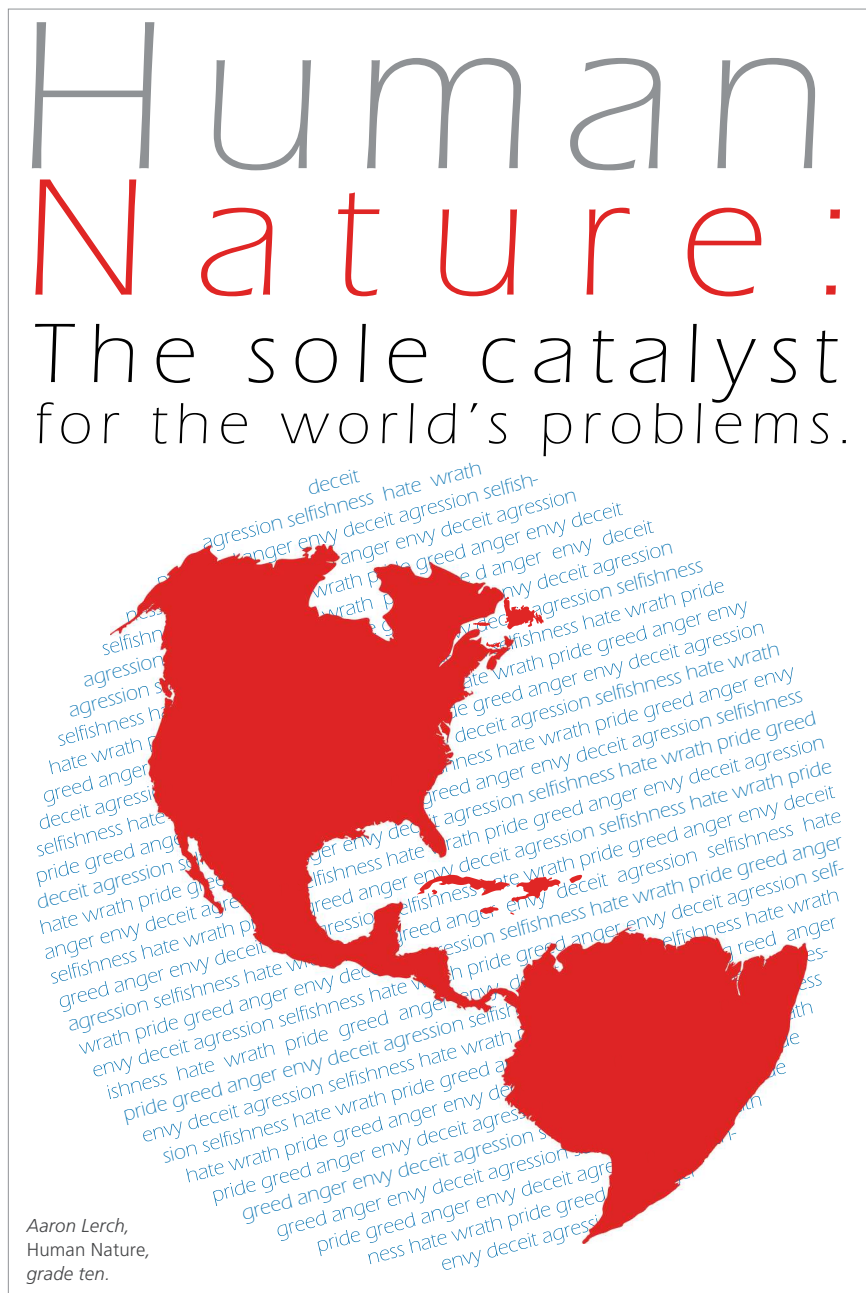
Concrete poetry is a visual poem where typography or text is placed in a particular arrangement to create a visual image.

ject of discrimination, allowing them to voice their concerns about any form of discrimination or bullying as it applies to social, economic, political, environmental, or cultural issues. I asked them to focus on a topic that was personal to them.

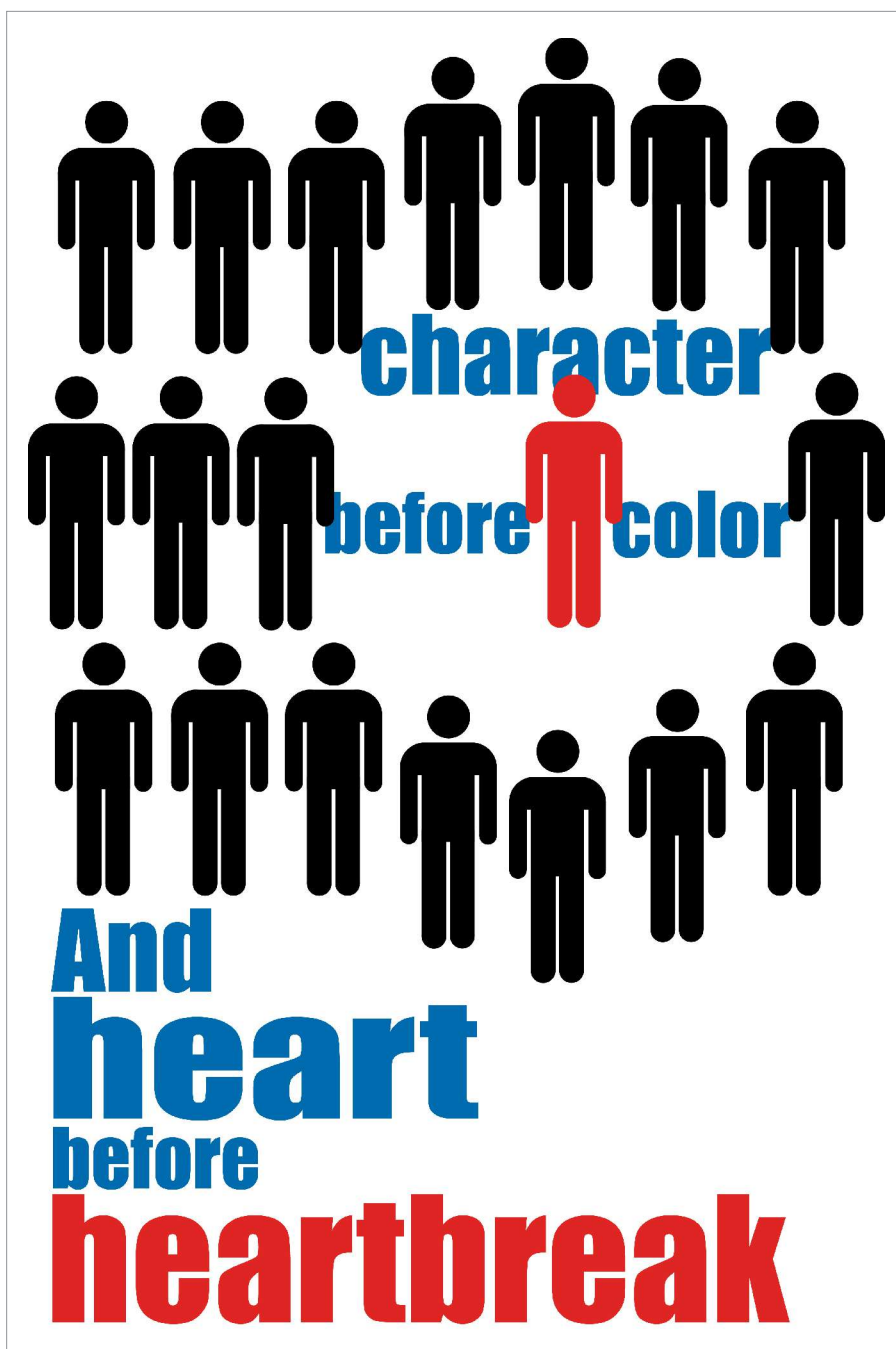
## Artists Communicate

Next, students viewed and discussed the artworks *Lotto: American Dream* by Luis Cruz Azaceta and *Neo-Racism* by Juan Sanchez. After viewing these works, students had a better understanding of how artists can communicate the meaning of discrimination.

Although these works of art are not examples of concrete poetry, they are excellent examples of how artists communicate strong messages to the viewer through visual imagery and written words. We then discussed the impact of these messages and the importance of the incorporation of language within the compositions. Luis Cruz Azaceta speaks out on poverty economics,



Aaron Lerch,  
Human Nature,  
grade ten.



Aaron Lerch, Character Before Color.

and the American Dream, and Juan Sanchez examines racism.

#### Discrimination as a Big Idea

Many school cultures today refer to discrimination as bullying. Students are exposed to all types of bullying,

such as cyberbullying, physical bullying, verbal abuse, and gossip. Both of our featured artists address diversity and issues that surround socioeconomics, politics, cultural differences, anti-Semitism, biases, and bigotry, or in other words, bullying.

Our school devotes a significant amount of time addressing issues associated with tolerance, bullying, and discrimination in an effort to make all students feel safe and secure in school. We have workshops with invited guest speakers who discuss topics such as gender equality, racism, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, age discrimination, and disability awareness.

#### No Place For Hate

For their concrete poetry artworks, students focused on topics that were personal to them or situations they had experienced. They wrote their verbal messages and then drew thumbnail sketches for poster ideas. Students translated these ideas into digital imagery using Adobe Illustrator. Some students' works ended up as well-designed graphic posters, while others were beautifully illustrated concrete poetry.

When the lesson was complete, students shared their artworks with the entire school population and public by hosting a gallery opening to show their artwork. The exhibit was titled *No Place For Hate*, and it was well received by all and was recognized by the Anti-Defamation League, whose mission is to enable schools to challenge anti-Semitism, racism, and bigotry.

In an effort to rid our culture of predispositions, bullying, intolerance, and prejudices, our students have created works of art with insightful and meaningful messages. 🌀

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#### NATIONAL STANDARD

*Presenting: Interpreting and sharing artistic work.*

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#### WEB LINKS

[www.luiscruzazaceta.net](http://www.luiscruzazaceta.net)

[www.artnet.com/artists/juan-sanchez-2](http://www.artnet.com/artists/juan-sanchez-2)