



This in-class activity was developed in conjunction with Lightbox interviews with Solmaz Sharif and Tyehimba Jess. For more information, please see [www.lightboxpoetry.com](http://www.lightboxpoetry.com).

## Finding Texts

In her debut collection, *LOOK*, Solmaz Sharif transforms the language U. S. Department of Defense Dictionary to create new political and aesthetic possibilities in her poems. In this in-class activity, students will experiment with generating new poems from found texts and will reflect on what transforming language from different genres and linguistic realms highlights about the material of writing and our individual values as a writer.

### Part I

For this assignment, the instructor will bring in photocopies of a variety of texts from different genres, places of publication, and intended audiences and uses, such as, for example:

1. A *New York Times* article published today
2. A few sections of a technical manual for an electronic device or appliance
3. A selection of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel translated from French
4. A blog, journal entry, Twitter feed, or comments section from the Internet
5. An article from a specialized medical journal or a theoretical article by Judith Butler

### Part II

Each student will take language from these original texts and copy them down in their notebooks—words, phrases, whole sentences or paragraph. Juxtapose language from these various texts. What different textures and meanings do fragments from these diverse sources evoke and enact? Try to craft a draft of a piece that uses language from each of the 5 texts. Can you create something coherent out of the fragments? Or do the stark shifts between these texts enact an incoherence that has political or aesthetic force? Experiment reordering and juxtaposing these bits of language. You might try adding in your own language to expand the work of the original texts or you might remain strict and use only found words, phrases, and passages to create new work.

### Part III

Share some of these pieces created from found language. What were you and your classmates able to create out of these source texts? Reflect on the process of how you transformed that language of the original texts by providing the new context of your creative piece. What changed? What does the practice say about what you value as a writer—coherence, narrative, argument, image, association, figuration, silence, the visual space of the page? What does the practice of using these found texts say about language itself as a material for making poems and other kinds of texts?