



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.

Hidden Readings

Some of the poems in Tyehimba Jess's collection of poems, *Olio*, are printed on perforated pages so that readers might tear them from the books to give them greater flexibility in folding and reading them in unexpected ways. In this in-class activity, students will experience for themselves this function of Jess's poems and reflect on how this practice relates to intellectual and aesthetic elements of his project as a whole, as described in his Lightbox interview.

Part I

Read a few of the poems from Tyehimba Jess's collection, *Olio*. You might begin with the selection available [here](#). In your notebooks and in discussion as a class, describe what you make of their striking visual arrangements on their pages. How do you choose to read the poems? What other ways can you think of that a reader might approach this task?

Part II

Read a selection of other poems that creatively reimagine the field of the page for new possibilities for reading. You might look at, for example:

[e. e. cummings, "l\(a\)"](#)

[Terrance Hayes, "The Golden Shovel"](#)

[George Herbert, "Easter Wings"](#)

[Mary Ellen Solt, "waterfall"](#)

[George Starbuck, "Sonnet in the Shape of a Potted Christmas Tree"](#)

[Mary Szybist, "How \(Not\) to Speak of God"](#)

[Phillip B. Williams, "Inheritance: Anthem"](#)

Part III

Read Tyehimba Jess's answer to question 2 in his Lightbox interview about new possibilities for reading his poem, "Mark Twain vs. Blind Tom."

Part IV

Distribute paper copies of "Mark Twain vs. Blind Tom" to the class. In small groups, have the writers fold the paper copies of the poem to see how many new ways of experiencing Jess's work they can discover.



Part V

Reflect of this unique function of Tyehimba Jess's poetry in *Olio*. What does this say about language as a material? What does this say about our traditional ways of reading? How does this connect to Jess's interest in uncovering and making available "hidden histories" within his work?