

Writing Activity: A Poetic Summary

Directions: The poem “History” summarizes centuries of conflict in thirty-one lines. Using the information in this cluster and what you already know, write a poem that summarizes some aspect of the war in Vietnam.

Poets use different techniques to summarize, or compress, themes and feelings into a few well-chosen words. For example, the poet of “History” *catalogs*, or lists, a series of wars fought in Vietnam. The poet unifies the poem by following chronological order and repeating the word *killed*.

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Another approach is to build a poem around a single image. By focusing on a single event—say the death of a soldier—the poet lets the details stand for a larger meaning: the cruelty of war or the courage and sacrifice of soldiers.

Use one of the above techniques (or another approach of your own) to compose your poem. You might use the exercises on the next screens to help generate ideas. There is no “right” way to compose a poem. Use these exercises to “think on paper.” Don’t feel that you have to fill in every blank. For example, you might get an idea for a poem by listing several key words. Once you have a poem started, come back to your chart only if you are stuck.

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Summary: _____

Main Image or Event: _____

Will you use a list or catalog? If so, what events or objects will you list?: _____

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Key Words: _____

Other: _____

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Use the best images, words, lists, and topics in your poem.

Remember, **a strong poem**

- places emphasis on language as well as the topic
- may employ rhythm and/or rhyme
- may use figurative language (simile, metaphor, and personification)