

Harmonizing Words and Body

A GUIDE THROUGH SOMATIC POETRY



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Introduction to Somatic Poetry

Welcome to the threshold of a profound exploration — the world of Somatic Poetry. Here, we venture into a domain where the whispers of the body meet the pen's dance, crafting a language that speaks from the core of our being.

Somatic Poetry: An Alchemy of Embodiment and Verse

Somatic poetry is not merely the art of words; it is the embodiment of experience. It's where each breath, sensation, and emotion finds its echo in the written word. This integrative practice honors the body's wisdom and the transformative power of poetry, weaving them together to express the ineffable — truths that reside within the sinews and spirit of our human form.

As a licensed marriage and family therapist, integrative mental health specialist, and somatic expert, I've seen firsthand how somatic awareness can enrich creative expression. Through somatic poetry, we dialogue with our body, listening to its subtle cues and narratives. The process is revelatory and healing, offering a mirror to see ourselves in our raw, unfiltered beauty.

The Significance of Somatic Poetry

The significance of somatic poetry lies in its capacity to bridge the gap between the conscious and the subconscious. It is a gentle yet potent tool that bypasses the analytical mind, allowing the body's intuitive knowledge to flow freely onto the page. In my practice, this union of kinesthetic intelligence and poetic craft has unlocked new pathways for clients to access and articulate their inner experiences — fostering healing, growth, and a profound sense of connection to their authentic selves.

The Interplay Between Body Awareness and Creative Expression

In somatic poetry, body awareness is the canvas, and words are the strokes. As we tune into the nuances of our physical sensations — the tension, the ease, the rhythm — we grant them a voice. This voice can roar in verses of strength, whisper in lines of vulnerability, or sing in stanzas of transformation.

Creative expression, then, becomes an act of liberation. It allows for the untold stories of the body to unfold in metaphors and imagery that transcend conventional language. This process can be deeply therapeutic, providing a means to navigate and make sense of life's complexities, traumas, and joys.

Embrace this journey into somatic poetry with an open heart and a willing spirit. Let us explore how the alchemy of movement and metaphor can harmonize the body and soul, crafting poetry that heals, empowers, and transforms.



Somatic Exercises

Mindful Breathing

Welcome to the gateway of mindful breathing, a foundational practice that unites the mind, body, and spirit. Let's begin by finding a comfortable seated position, feet grounded, spine tall but relaxed. Close your eyes gently.

Take a deep breath in through your nose, feeling your abdomen expand, inviting calmness with each inhalation. Exhale slowly through your mouth, releasing any tension you're holding.

With each breath, imagine drawing in peace and stillness. Exhale stress, worries, and busy thoughts. Notice the rhythm of your breath, the coolness as you inhale, the warmth as you exhale. Let this rhythmic cycle of breath guide you into a state of deep relaxation and present-moment awareness.

Body Scanning

Now, let's deepen our connection with our bodies through a mindful body scan. Continue to breathe deeply and evenly. Bring your attention to the top of your head. Notice any sensations here—tingling, warmth, or maybe neutrality.

Gradually move your awareness down your body—your forehead, eyes, cheeks, and jaw. Allow each part to relax as you shift your focus down to your neck, shoulders, all the way down to your fingertips.

Continue to guide your awareness down your chest, abdomen, hips, legs, and finally to your toes. If you encounter areas of tension, breathe into them, inviting relaxation and release. This body scan not only enhances bodily awareness but prepares you for deeper somatic exploration.

Movement and Gesture

Next, we'll explore how movement and gesture can unlock poetic potential. Stand up (or simply sit up with an erect posture) and give yourself some space. Start by shaking out any stiffness, letting your arms and legs loosen.

Now, let's flow into movement. Raise your arms slowly above your head, stretching upwards, then gently sway side to side. Imagine each movement as a willow tree's branches on a river bank, expressing your inner emotions, thoughts, and stories.

Incorporate gestures that resonate with you. It could be a hug to self, symbolizing self-compassion, or reaching outwards, embracing the world around you. Notice how each movement feels, and let this awareness inspire your creative expression.

Integrating Qigong

Finally, we introduce Qigong into our somatic poetry journey. Qigong, an ancient Chinese practice, harmonizes body, breath, and mind through gentle movements.

Let's start with Zhan Zhuang [jon jwang], or Standing Like a Tree. Stand (or sit with spine erect and feet planted) with your feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent. Hold your arms in front of you as if hugging a large tree. Feel rooted to the ground, stable yet relaxed.

Lastly, we Sink Qi [chee]. Imagine gathering energy, arms at your sides with each inhale, raising your arms up the side of your body like you are drawing a large circle up and over your head, then floating the hands down the front of your body, directing the energy down to your lower abdomen, your dantian, with each exhale. Repeat this process and feel it center and ground you, enhancing your energetic awareness.



Poetry Prompts

From Sensation to Verse

What is the most subtle sensation you feel in your body right now, and how would you describe it as a landscape?

If the rhythm of your breath were a weather pattern, what would the forecast be in your poetic verse?

Embodying Emotions

Your current emotion has a texture and a type of movement; how would you weave these into a stanza?

Imagine your emotions are a chorus in a song; what lyrics do they sing about your inner state?

Nature and the Body

Choose an element from nature that resonates with you today. How does your body represent this element in the form of poetry?

Your body's story is part of the earth's geology; what would a poem about its layers and fossils reveal?

Ancestral Echoes

Consider the stories held within your bones. How would you craft a poem that honors these narratives?

Write a dialogue between your body and the body of an ancestor, what would each of you say?



Renowned Somatic Poets

These poets and their works are more than a reading list; they are an invitation to experience poetry as a living, breathing organism that nourishes the mind-body connection. Let their words guide your senses on a journey through landscapes, both internal and external, and discover how poetry can be an embodied act of healing. Dive into the transformative world of somatic poetry with these luminous voices:

CA Conrad dances at the edge of poetic innovation, bringing forth "Ecodeviance: (Soma)tics for the Future Wilderness." Their (Soma)tics rituals call to the wild within us, asking us to engage with our environment in ways that awaken every cell. It's poetry that doesn't just sit on the page—it stirs the soul and shifts the way we move in the world.

Sherman Alexie captures the heartbeat of his Spokane/Coeur d'Alene heritage. His verses carry the weight of raw emotion and lived truth, crafting a tapestry that intertwines personal saga with a profound cultural pulse. Each line leads back to the resilience and enduring spirit of Indigenous identity.

Joy Harjo, with the grace of her position as the US poet laureate, crafts a symphony of words that link personal journey and ancestral song. Her collections are a rich soil where Native American histories and present-day narratives grow together, revealing how spirit and endurance are etched into every aspect of existence.

Natalie Diaz is a conjurer of the physical form, bringing to life the sensuous tapestry of love, longing, and identity. Her background as a Mojave and an athlete infuses her poetry with a kinetic energy that grounds and elevates, crafting a language that touches the heart as deftly as a basketball swishing through a hoop.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson is a beacon of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg storytelling. Through song, word, and a fierce call to activism, her work is a journey into the healing power of land and legacy. Her poems don't just speak—they resonate with the drumbeat of revival and the footsteps of a people moving forward in strength.



Somatic Elements in Poetry

Use these annotations as a map to navigate the rich landscape of somatic poetry. By engaging with the text on a bodily level, you deepen your understanding and appreciation of the poem's power to move and transform us from within.

Breath and Pacing: Pay attention to how the rhythm and line breaks affect your breathing as you read. Does the poem cause you to hold your breath with suspense, breathe rapidly with excitement, or exhale slowly with relief? Poets often use the structure of their work to mimic the natural rhythms of the body.

Visceral Imagery: Look for descriptions that invoke a physical reaction. Does the language make you feel warmth, cold, or a tingling sensation? Poetic imagery can often elicit bodily responses that parallel the emotional impact of the words.

Movement and Stillness: Notice when a poem's narrative or imagery involves motion or a lack thereof. How does it relate to the theme or emotion being expressed? Does the stillness evoke calm or tension, does the movement convey freedom or restlessness?

Metaphor and the Body: Metaphors often draw on the body to express abstract concepts. For instance, a "heavy heart" or "butterflies in the stomach." Consider how these phrases connect the physical and emotional realms, enhancing the somatic experience of the poem.

Emotional Echoes: Reflect on how the poem resonates with your experiences and emotions. Do certain passages trigger a memory or sensation within your body? This connection can be a powerful somatic element, linking the personal with the universal.

Sensory Details: Identify the use of sensory language that appeals to touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell. These details can create a multi-sensory experience that grounds the reader in their body, making the poetic journey an immersive one.

Physicality of Language: Be aware of how the poem feels in your mouth and throat as you read it aloud. The physicality of language, its sounds, and textures can produce a somatic effect, contributing to the overall impact of the poem.



Deepening Somatic and Poetic Awareness

By pondering these questions, you will delve into the interplay of somatics and poetics, enriching your engagement with the poetry and deepening your understanding of the body's role in the expressive process.

Inner Resonance

As you read the poem, which words or phrases resonate most deeply within your body? Where do you feel this resonance, and what sensations arise?

Emotional Cartography

Can you map out the emotional journey of the poem within your body? Which areas feel activated or soothed as you traverse through the verses?

Mind-Body Dialogue

How does the poem facilitate a conversation between your mind and body? What new understandings or perspectives emerge from this dialogue?

Visceral Vocabulary

Identify a moment in the poem that evoked a strong visceral response. What was happening in the poem at this moment, and how did your body react?

Embodied Empathy

In reading about another's experiences, how does your body empathize? Does your heart rate increase? Do you feel tension, warmth, or a sense of opening?

Rhythmic Reflection

Reflect on the rhythm of the poem. How does its cadence mirror physiological rhythms such as heartbeat or breathing? How does aligning with this rhythm affect your reading experience?

Physicality of Language

Choose a line that you find particularly powerful. Speak it aloud and notice how the words feel in your mouth and body. Does speaking the poem change your experience of it?

Sensory Integration

- What sensory experiences does the poem invoke? How do these add to or change your understanding of the poem's themes or messages?

Movement and Memory

- Does the poem inspire you to move or hold stillness in any particular way? How do these movements, or lack thereof, relate to your personal memories and experiences?

Ancestral Echoes

Consider the cultural or familial history that may inform your somatic reactions to the poem. How do these deeper connections influence your reading and interpretation?



Embracing the Journey

As we reach the end of this guide, let's pause and take one more deep, grounding breath together. Ready? Inhale into your belly for a count of 1...2...3...4...5, and exhale 5...4...3...2...1. You have traversed the landscapes of your body through the vehicle of poetry, engaging with the visceral language of your experiences and emotions. It's been a journey of awakening — to the subtle whispers of your muscles and bones, to the rhythmic pulsing of your heart, to the ebb and flow of your breath — all dancing to the cadence of your unique poetic voice.

The practices and prompts in this guide are more than just exercises; they are invitations — to connect, explore, express, and heal. They beckon you to continue engaging with the somatic realm, to honor the stories etched in your sinews, and to celebrate the authenticity that emerges when you give voice to your innermost self.

May the poems you've read and written act as signposts, guiding you back to your body's innate wisdom. May the questions you've contemplated inspire ongoing curiosity and compassion towards yourself and others. May the techniques you've learned be woven into the tapestry of your daily life, enriching each moment with the artistry of mindful embodiment.

Remember, this conclusion is not an end but a threshold. Step forward with the knowledge that each breath is a poem, each movement a stanza, each moment an opportunity to create and connect. Carry these insights and practices with you as tools for resilience and sources of joy.

Thank you for embarking on this somatic poetry journey. May the path ahead be filled with discovery, growth, and an ever-deepening harmony between your words and your body.

In solidarity and with heartfelt gratitude,

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