

A verse novel is a book composed entirely of poems. The poems are about similar topics individually, but put together will form a story. To write a verse novel requires being able to get to the point in less words. **Writing** the same story in prose would be different because poetry can express things that regular writing can't. I will compare *Dust of Eden* by Mariko Nagai and *Red Butterfly* by A.L. Sonnichsen for these three points: if the individual poems can stand alone, if each poem contributes to the whole, and if the poems work visually on the page.

The book *Dust of Eden*, told in first person, was written by Mariko Nagai. The title *Dust of Eden* stands for the place where Mina's family wasn't welcomed even though it was their home. This book has one hundred and twenty-one pages and is historical fiction because the story is fiction but it uses real events that happened in history. Most of this book takes place in Minidoka, United States. The main character's name is Mina and she is around thirteen years old. She is a risk-taker and is very brave. For example, a police officer said something offensive to her mom and she talked back even though her mom told her not to. Mina's father is important because Mina was always thinking about him after he was taken away. Her grandpa taught her different things about life and her mother worked really hard so they can put food on the table everyday. The antagonist in this book is society because they are forcing all Japanese families to be put in camps even though they are innocent. **Therefore**, showing discrimination.

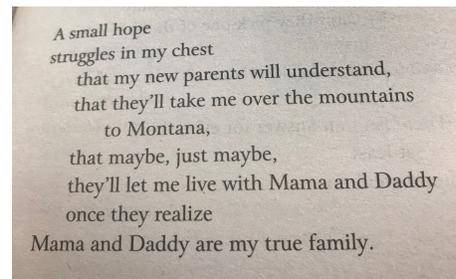
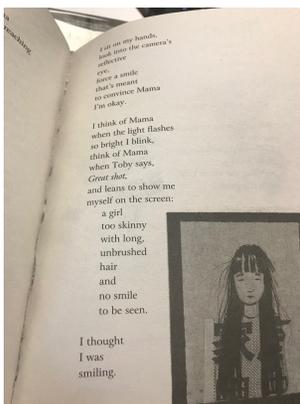
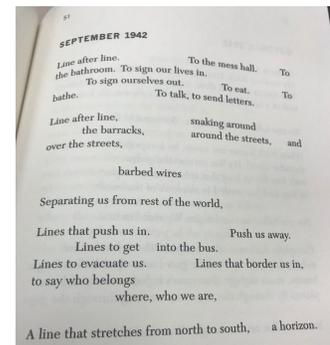
The book *Red Butterfly*, which is also told in first person, was written by A.L. Sonnichsen. The title *Red Butterfly* symbolizes the red gauze butterfly hair pin that the orphanage director, Mrs. Lee, gave Kara, the main character. Kara really liked that hair pin, and then she couldn't find it. She left it on the table next to her bed and then the next morning, it was gone. She searched and searched for it, **and** eventually gave up. Right before she left the orphanage, someone found it and gave it back to her. **After** she left the orphanage, this hairpin reminded her of her life living in China. The main character in this book is Kara. She is eleven years old and missing two fingers on her right hand. She was abandoned when she was very young and adopted by another woman, which she now calls her Mama. They have money problems even with the money that their dad sends them so Kara thinks that it is best to move to Montana with their dad and sister, **but** her mom doesn't want to. Kara tutors Zhao Bin in English, even though her mom did not want her to. Zhang Laoshi was the neighbor that discovered Kara when she was first abandoned. After Kara was forced to go to the orphanage, she met Toby, who was a physical therapist that inspired her. Later, Kara received a letter saying that the Gurnseys wanted to adopt her. This book has three hundred and eighty-five pages and is realistic fiction because the settings are real and every event in the book could have happened in real life because girls or kids with a disability were often abandoned when they were little because their parents wanted a healthier boy that is stronger and can help them do work. **However**, if the main character was a boy, then this story would be completely different because the boy would not have been abandoned. Most people in China at that time wanted a strong healthy boy, so he wouldn't be abandoned. The setting of this book is in mostly in the city of Tianjin in China. Some parts of the book were at Kara's apartment in Tianjin, some were at the orphanage, and some were at the Gurnseys' house. The antagonist in the book is the orphanage because Kara hated the orphanage because it showed how many kids were left behind because they had a disability or wasn't good enough to keep.

In comparing the verse novel *Dust of Eden* and the verse novel *Red Butterfly*, it is

important to consider if the individual poems are able to stand alone. If you choose any poem from the book *Dust of Eden*, you might have to infer a little about what is happening in the poem. For example, in *Dust of Eden*, Mariko Nagai writes “We have one week/To get ready./It’s only been one week/Since Mother and Grandpa /Went to the Japanese/American Citizens League.../We have a week to say/Good-bye, a week/To pack everything up./It’s a week that/Seems not long/Enough,/But forever.” (22) You have to infer a little about what the author is talking about. But, if you read the book, you would know that they had to pack up to move to the camp. It is harder to fully understand what is happening in the poem. In *Red Butterfly*, the reader can understand the individual poems easily without the need to infer. A.L. Sonnichsen writes, “Don’t ask for more,/Kara,/than what I give you,/Because I’m giving you everything” (35). You can see that the speaker is a parent or someone that cares for Kara and gave up a lot for her. The speaker, which in this poem is Kara’s mother, seems to care a lot about Kara and wants the best for her. To compare these two books, there are many similarities and differences. This poem is easier to understand individually although the poems from both books can stand alone. It is essential to understand this because a good verse novel should be composed of individual poems. If the poems can’t stand by itself and make sense, then it is more like a prose novel with varied line spacing.

When you compare verse novels, it is also important to look at if each poem contributes to the main idea of the story. None of the poems in these two books are added in poems that don’t make sense. All of them fit with the overall message in the book. For example, in *Dust of Eden*, the author writes “We’re best friends, no matter what, Jamie/Says as we sit under the Christmas /Tree together. We’re best friends until/We die, I say./She hands me a small packet wrapped/In a bright red wrapping paper./Open it, open it, she urges. Mr. Gilmore’s humming/Drifts in from his workshop in/The backyard, and Mrs.

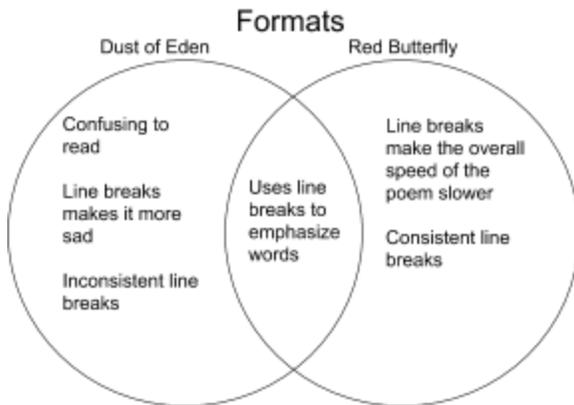
Gilmore’s baking/Smells of cinnamon and nutmeg.” This is like a flashback showing how they were all really happy together and were really good friends. This shows how much Mina’s life has changed over the past few years. In *Red Butterfly*, the author writes “A small hope/Struggles in my chest/That my new parents will understand,/That they’ll take me over the mountains/To Montana,/That maybe, just maybe,/They’ll let me live with Mama and Daddy/Once they realize/Mama and Daddy are my true family.” (219). The poem is to the right. This shows how much Kara wants to return to her old family even though there is a new family that really wants to adopt her. This new family is like a “perfect” family, and Kara thinks that she doesn’t fit in. Kara loves her old family very much and would do anything to go back to them again.



The last point in comparing *Dust of Eden* and *Red Butterfly* is the format of the poems.

Dust of Eden is written in many different formats. All pages are free verse, but the line spacing is varied from page to page. In between some poems, the author, Mariko Nagai, adds letters either sent by Mina, Mina's father, or Mina's brother. The letters and the inconsistent line spacing made the book confusing to read because the setting jumped from place to place. The inconsistent line spacing made it hard to keep track of where you were. For example, one page in the book had lines of the same poem scattered around on the page. This made the reader

move their eyes across the whole page and not just one section. *Red Butterfly* is written mostly as a standard free verse poem. The line breaks are consistent, and the novel mostly consists of many short poems. The author also included pictures. Overall, *Dust of Eden* was written in a more creative way, but I felt that *Red Butterfly* was easier to understand. These poems are similar because they use line spacings to emphasize words. They are different because To the left is a venn diagram comparing the two.



In conclusion, I think that *Red Butterfly* demonstrated better quality because the line spacing was even so it was easy and smooth to read. Also, the author added a lot of emotion into each poem. In *Dust of Eden*, the author had uneven line spacings and that made the novel harder to read because you had to move your eyes around the whole page and sometimes you would lose your place. Both these verse novels were written in free verse, but the formatting in *Dust of Eden* made it more confusing. Overall, I think *Red Butterfly* by A.L. Sonnichsen better demonstrated these three qualities.