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### Incorporating Poetry back Into the Curriculum

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Incorporating Poetry Back Into the Curriculum

By

MaryAnna Bournazakis

May 2013

A project submitted to the  
Department of Education and Human Development of the  
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science in Education

Incorporating Poetry Back Into the Curriculum

By

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### *The Problem:*

When I began teaching I was overwhelmed with excitement that I, finally, had the opportunity to expose young, moldable and eager minds to the beautiful works of poets such as; Maya Angelou, Langston Hughes, Robert Frost, Billy Collins, and countless others. Poets such as these have encouraged me throughout my life with their messages of inspiration and their stories of struggle and oppression. With high school being such a challenging and isolating time in an adolescent's life, naturally, poetry is a safe outlet to turn to find comfort and companionship. I was eager to show my students that they, too, could find solace in literature. Unfortunately, with changing state standards taking the forefront in New York State classrooms and state testing being the driving force behind everyday lesson plans; poetry is quickly being excluded from being taught in classrooms and becoming more of an "extra" activity or an occasional "fun day" lesson. There are a few reasons this is happening. Mainly, because daily lesson plans are expected to directly connect to the English Language Arts State Test to ensure students and schools receive a passing score. There is an extremely aggressive push inside schools that makes sure teachers are delivering daily lessons that provide adequate practice to their students for the annual state test. The New Common Core require students to make evidence based claims in their writing with the evidence mainly coming from the provided informational texts. Unfortunately, poetry does not fit into this rigid guideline. Therefore, many districts now have their own required reading that takes up a lot of real estate in the classroom. These chosen readings are mainly non-fictional texts because that is what the state uses on their ELA standardized test.

Another reason poetry is not being taught as much anymore is because it is considered, by students, too hard, or arcane, or obscure. The majority of today's adolescents are not interested in reading and studying poetry written by historical figures or scholarly writers of the past. Somewhere along the way, students may have developed a stereotype that poetry was dull and boring and too difficult to understand. I can recall past students who thought all poetry was written like the works of Shakespeare. They had no idea that poetry could be modern and fun much like song lyrics.

A third reason teachers are straying away from teaching poetry is because teachers are unsure how to reach poetry correctly. This insecurity and apprehension could be a result of a past failed attempt to incorporate poetry into the curriculum or it could stem from the reluctance of students to engage in reading and writing poetry. Teachers are aware that their students' reading abilities need to be at a certain level to fully understand and comprehend poems. If students are not reading at grade level, then, teachers know poetry will be all that more difficult to teach. When this is the case, a poetry unit could do more damage than help. This issue was addressed in an article in the *English Journal*. An unknown writer made the following statement, "The teaching of poetry in the secondary schools, as far as the majority of students is concerned, is largely a failure. And there is no solution, at present, for this difficult, vexing problem." In response to this statement, William J. Grace wrote,

"The article presents candidly the experience of conscientious teachers throughout the country, an experience that is all too often disillusioning. But the author, though he raises questions of the utmost interest and states that there is a need for a radical re-examination of the accepted methods of teaching poetry, does not

himself answer the question of how poetry can be taught. It is the object of this project to indicate a method that we believe will make it possible to teach poetry in the classroom with a heightened probability of success.

The basic difficulty which has to be overcome is one that the article in the *English Journal* fully realizes. Students speak one language; poetry is likely to speak another. How is a teacher to communicate, to use Dr. Mortimer Adler's term, a poem to students who have not reached a sufficient level of understanding to comprehend the material? Are we to paraphrase a difficult poem and reduce it to the terms of a student's language? Or are we to bring the class to the requisite level of understanding that will enable them to enjoy the poem in the language in which it was written? We take the objective of a class in poetry to fulfill the latter purpose. We maintain that this can be done by establishing a very careful groundwork in the teaching of a poem. (Grace, 124)"

This reinforces the point K.J. Wagner made in an article where she quoted a message a colleague had given her during her attempt to painlessly bring poetry into the classroom.

It stated, "Teach poetry? But I don't know anything *about* poetry. Besides, I have to prepare my students for high-stakes testing. I don't have time for additional material."

Even though the desire to teach poetry may be present, there seems to be too many requirements being demanded from teachers now leaving them with no choice but to omit poetry. This quote gives us a glimpse of how ELA teachers are currently feeling panicked and overwhelmed when it comes to meeting all of their teaching requirements in a rigid time frame (especially now during this period of transition in standards).

Often, poetry is perceived to high school students as either deceptively simple or

completely incomprehensible. Over the course of their years in school students may have been expected to analyze poetry in the way Billy Collins writes in his “Introduction to Poetry” , “beating it with a hose/to find out what it really means,” which may have turned them off to poetry, or created negative associations with it. Students may need to unlearn the idea that poetry is difficult to interpret or only has one interpretation. If an educator’s goal is for students to understand, value and appreciate poetry, we must engage them with the real essence of poetry, the power of words and language and the infinite ways that poets of all ages and cultures have exploited and stretched the genre. Students should be amused, excited, intrigued, and inspired by languages capacity to relay experiences and emotions. They should experience the poetry first and then use these experiences as a doorway to learning about analysis, forms, sub-genres, structures, literary devices and the historical and social contexts in which the poems were created. (nyc.gov, 12)

In the book, Better Answers Written Performance that Looks Good and Sounds Smart by Ardith Davis Cole says, “Prompts that inspire student interest – ones they can personally relate to –are great teaching aids” (Cole, 13). Using song lyrics as a writing prompt, either for a warm-up or an essay topic is a great way to incorporate poetry into lessons that provides a positive experience between students and poetry. Choosing songs of high student interest as writing prompts can lead to writing lessons with high engagement. Adolescents find comfort in music and their favorite artists, whether it be hip-hop, rock, country or rap. Song lyrics are a form of poetry that teenagers listen to and find comfort in. Unfortunately, most young adults do not realize that the songs they listen to everyday, the songs that provide comfort and stir emotions are modern day poems. Poems do for people exactly what song lyrics do; music is just another form of

poetry. This is a bridge educators can use to reach reluctant readers and writers of poetry. Every time I played a song from a CD for my students I had complete attention from everyone in the room. My students would get enthused and light-up and listen/read the lyrics like they worshiped them. The engagement came naturally because music is a connection to students as individual people. Connecting lyrics to poetry, with the use of songs that have been strategically chosen to relate to young adults, inspires students to do their best work. I can recall each year mentioning to my students that we would have a unit on poetry and each time I would receive reluctant grunts and moans from the majority of each class. When I would ask them why they were not interested in poetry they would make comments such as, “It’s too hard” or “It’s boring” or “It’s for old people.” My students were very intimidated by poetry because it was a foreign concept to them. They did not have any positive previous exposure, so their perceptions were that poetry is stuffy writing written in strange formats that they would be expected to understand.

*Significance of the Problem:*

As an educator omitting poetry from the English Language Arts curriculum poses a serious problem. I entered the educational field to make a difference in adolescents’ lives, to be a mentor and positive role model to students who may be lacking that in their home lives. Poetry is an exceptional learning tool that can be used to make connections with students in order to build a trusting relationship between teacher and student. It provides opportunity to bridge the underlying gap between adult and child.

More so, poetry helps build an atmosphere of trust and safety within the classroom amongst students. Expecting ELA classrooms to be driven mainly by

informative text with an emphasis on assessments that restate the facts is creating a new sort of environment in ELA classrooms. ELA has become more like Social Studies where students read and take notes and write an essay or take a quiz based on what they read. The freedom is being taken away from ELA and it is no longer the class where students are allowed to be creative and original. Motivation is imperative when it comes to student success and if a teacher has a personal bond with her students, then, they will put forth effort in her class a lot more so than if they did not feel relevant or if there was no personal connection established. When poetry is discussed and taught it encourages active participation and ignites personal connections. Poetry is such an important relationship and trust building tool that it is a true disservice to students across New York State that it is slowly being forced out because of the New Common Core Standards and required district readings that go along with the changes.

*Rational:*

Poetry builds bridges inside the ELA classroom. Omitting it from lessons and only focusing on required informational texts and the required evidence based writing pieces that go along with the text leaves very little time for teachers and students to really bond and build a trusting relationship. Each student needs to feel important inside the classroom, otherwise, their motivation and chance for success greatly diminishes. ELA teachers need to teach poetry to build connections which leads to increased motivation and ensure student success. Time needs to be devoted to discussion of the written word and the feelings associated with it. Connections need to be made between literature and life and students need time to process and share their connections. Poetry is a wonderful way to reach students, especially during their challenging high school years. Poems

should be used as a teaching tool to help students establish an emotional connection to content. As this project will demonstrate, research shows that poetry helps students with vocabulary, reading comprehension, and critical writing skills. In addition to ELA class, poems could, also, reinforce lessons from History class should the two teachers work collaboratively. Selecting poems to accompany related texts or articles to deliver the emotional/humorous side of an issue leads to the personal connection that students need to better understand new information.

Unfortunately, making poetry useful, according to new district and state requirements, in the classroom has become increasingly challenging for many teachers. Several of the middle school teachers within my district have cut it out of their teaching all together. As admirers of literature, I am sure they would love the opportunity to still teach it. However, with all of the requirements placed upon us from the district, poetry has become excluded from being taught all together. Teachers just do not have enough time to meet all of their obligations and still devote an entire unit to poetry.

The 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade NYS ELA state test does not ask students to write/create an original poem where they will be scored on thought, originality and creativity, so, naturally, the district I was in did not see the importance of teaching a lesson that required students to create a poem. Excluding poetry from the ELA curriculum is not allowing students to have a voice and speak and write about personal interests of their own which would ultimately improve writing skills and increase engagement.

Upon realizing that neither my district or department was going to require me to teach any poetry , I made the personal decision to incorporate poetry into my lessons and make it meaningful to my students, while still fulfilling my obligation to connect each of

my lessons' objectives to the state test. Each year, without fail, poetry ignited a flame under some students that normally remained silent. It made students who did not have any confidence in their writing skills gain confidence because they realized they could create original pieces of work and have it appreciated by their classmates. (Incorporating time into lessons that allows classmates to offer positive feedback about original creations or presentations reinforces this even further.) It helped reluctant readers through the use of simple, short lines. Above all, adolescents love to draw connections to their home lives and poetry has a plethora of themes and topics that any teacher could choose from to connect to their students.

*Purpose:*

The purpose of this project is to display an English Language Arts Poetry unit that engages students and teaches to the New Common Core. While student achievement on state tests is every teacher's goal, exposure to various poems and writers should be considered equally as important as exposure to informational texts. This poetry unit is purposeful in the fact that it builds connections within the classroom. It, also, sharpens students' vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing skills. Through the use of inspirational poems this unit will evoke student engagement and spark interest because students will be allowed to make personal connections. The lessons contained clearly align with the NYS State Standards and adequately prepare students for the NYS test, all the while, allowing students to be creative and explore their own voice and individuality.

*Definition of Terms*

**Common Core Learning Standards in New York State:** The New York State P-12 Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) are internationally-benchmarked and

evidence-based standards. These standards serve as a consistent set of expectations for what students should learn and be able to do, so that we can ensure that every student across New York State is on track for college and career readiness in literacy no later than the end of high school. The New York State Education Department (NYSED) will continue to develop educator resources to support the successful implementation of the CCLS in classrooms across New York State over the next several years. In the 2012-13 school year, all teachers in grades Pre-K-8 are implementing CCLS-aligned instruction; all teachers in grades 9-12 should be in the process of implementing CCLS-aligned units and building content capacity.

**New Media:** Refers to on-demand access to content any time, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation. Another aspect of new media is the real-time generation of new, unregulated content.

**No Child Left Behind:** Often referred to as NCLB. A federal law passed under the George W. Bush administration. NCLB represents legislation that attempts to accomplish standards-based education reform. The law reauthorized federal programs meant to hold primary and secondary schools measurably accountable to higher standards. It also provided more opportunities to parents for school choice and placed a greater emphasis on reading in schools. NCLB is written so that it requires 100% of students (including special education students and those from disadvantaged background) within a school to reach the same set of state standards in math and reading by the year 2014.

**Poetry:** (ancient Greek = I create) is an art form in which human language is used for its aesthetic qualities in addition to, or instead of, its notional and semantic content. It

consists largely of oral or literary works in which language is used in a manner that is felt by its user and audience to differ from ordinary prose.

**Scaffolding:** Temporary guidance or assistance provided to a student by a teacher, another adult, or more capable peer, enabling the student to perform a task he or she would otherwise not be able to do alone, with the goal of fostering the student's capacity to perform the task on his or her own later on.

### *Overview*

Self-expression is a key component that adolescents at a certain stage of development (high school) need to be aware of and understand. Students are undergoing dramatic change during this time of their lives--they are moving from Erikson's Industry versus Inferiority stage to Identity versus Role Confusion stage. Poetry is a literary genre in which adolescents can learn to express themselves and find their identity. (Mowery, 2002). This curriculum unit introduces poetry and increases student interest in poetry.

The provided unit is a clear example of a Poetry unit that teaches to several state standards. It includes multiple teaching strategies that we already use on a daily basis from think-pair-share, read-alouds, group work, evidence based questioning, active reading strategies such as annotating the text, presentations, etc. Some lessons include differentiated models that can be used on the diverse populations' within the classroom. Other lessons include current music and song lyrics that students could easily relate to. Flocabulary has been incorporated bringing hip-hop to the unit, along with several popular poems providing ample exposure to poetry for the students. Young adults can easily identify with the poems selected as they carry the theme of *Self and Identity*.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### *Preparing to Teach Poetry*

At the beginning of each school year, teachers know what they have to teach and how they are going to teach it. They know where they need their students' abilities in English Language Arts to be by the end of the academic year and have an idea of how they are going to get them there. In the book Instruction for All Students, author Paula Rutherford says, "teachers are planning in a standards based environment". This is often called "backwards" because we "begin with the end" in mind (Rutherford, 34). "The end in mind cannot be a particular activity or project, chapters in a book, or completion of a packaged program. We have to be clear about how what students are doing in the classroom is tied to the outcomes we seek this year and throughout their K-12 educational experience (Rutherford, 34)." With the outcomes we seek being to have our students prepared to take the state exam in April, as well as, adequately prepare them for the following school year; it is clear why poetry is becoming one of the last forms of literature teachers are choosing to utilize in ELA today. Poetry has not been incorporated into the New Common Core nearly as much as other forms of literature (e.g. evidence based informative/explanatory texts). Therefore, poetry is being taught less and less as the recent years have gone by. Whether the reason teachers are now reluctant to teach poetry is because it will not be on the state test, or because they are unsure themselves how to effectively teach it, or because teachers sense a disconnection between their students and poetry and fear they may engage themselves in an unsuccessful unit, it is unfortunate and unnecessary.

In March of 2013, Dr. John B. King Jr., the Commissioner King on Common Core Implementation, sent a letter to all teachers in New York State. He wrote, “Three years ago, in the fall of 2009 and early winter 2010, the Board of Regents launched an educational sea change in New York State. The goal of the Regents Reform Agenda is very straightforward: all students should graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college and careers. One of the key pillars of that agenda is the shift to the Common Core Standards .” This reform has impacted the way ELA teachers plan class lessons and has caused the selected reading materials to change drastically.

This project offers a variety of lessons and ideas that can help teachers incorporate poetry into their curriculum in a non-threatening way that is comfortable for both teacher and students. The theme of this unit is, *Self and Identity*. It could be used solely in ELA class or ELA teachers could possibly work collaboratively with History teachers and modify the lessons using historical poetry (e.g. Harlem renaissance, The Great Depression).

#### *Why Teach Poetry?*

Poetry, as frightening as it can be to some students is, also, very intriguing because of its short, simplistic style. Carol Clark, author of “Why Teach Poetry” from the Teachers Guide to *Poetry in Six Dimensions: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Voices*, writes, “In our technological age of “sound bites” and short attention spans, the brevity and compression of poetry are especially appealing to students. The same student who might balk at reading ten pages of prose for a homework assignment may show more enthusiasm and care in the preparation of a ten-line poem, simply because it seems more manageable.”

Ms. Clark goes on to say, “I have discovered, especially in recent years, that my students are genuinely intrigued by the ideas as well as the form of poetry, even if they have had limited experience with reading poems. Clark offers a very important point that the same issues can be taught using poetry instead of prose. She has found that in recent years her students have actually preferred the short, direct form of poetry as opposed to lengthy prose. Poetry can aid in engagement in its form and style alone. With engagement established an emotional connection and deeper understanding of the topic being covered should come more naturally for students. In this day and age, students are accustomed to getting whatever they need quickly, whether it be through text messaging, video games, Google, television, etc. This generation has grown up in a culture that enables people to get whatever they need instantly. For students who are not avid readers and cringe at the thought of lengthy reading assignments, poetry is an excellent alternative. Just because it can be read in a fraction of the time as prose, the impact is just as great and, in my opinion, usually greater because it offers an emotional side to the text.

Clark goes on to recognize that reason poetry is often attractive to students because they associate it with song lyrics. She writes,

“Students sometimes associate poetry with the lyrics of popular music or with the search for individuality. Topics such as identity, discovery, family relationships, survival, change, mortality hopes, and dreams are of primary interest to young people searching for self-awareness in an uncertain world. By addressing such topics, poetry often has the ability to reach the heart of the young reader with more intensity and immediacy than some of its prose counterparts. It also helps students discover the interconnectedness of all literary genres, especially when a course exposes them to fiction, poetry, and non-fiction on related topics or themes.

The value of presenting students with a range of poems is self-evident. Because moving from reading and recognition of ideas to expressing one’s own thoughts is a natural process, reading poetry can enrich a student’s particular cultural experience. The teacher who combines poetry reading with both analytical and creative writing assignments will find that students make a natural bridge between

cognitive learning and personal expression; each actively reinforces the other. Reading poetry and writing in response to it can also stimulate an interest in further reading of poetry and other genres thematically related to the poems studied.

In addition to the psychological and intellectual reward poetry can provide, reading it can have practical value. Studying poetry can be a source of enhancing reading and analytical skills. Understanding poetry demands that one pay close attention to text, especially to diction, grammar, and syntax; this process naturally strengthens reading comprehension skills. College students frequently report the importance of such exposure and training as they pursue challenging advanced literature courses. Whether a returning student reminds me that “the more poetry the better” or a high school freshman tells me that “poetry slams are cool,” I know that teaching poetry requires a commitment that is intrinsically rewarding—for teachers and for students of all ages. Older students benefit from the language study and attention to detail that both the poems and the students’ responses demand; poetry’s rhythms and rhymes attract younger students to the beauty and functions of language. At my school (covering grades six through twelve), we try to find a definite place for poetry in every English course, not just a day here or there on which we fill in an odd space with a few poems, but a serious two-or three-week unit of study that takes students from an introduction to a welcome familiarity with this versatile and engaging genre” (Clark, 1).

Clark brings up an extremely good point that college students express the importance of learning poetry in high school. The new Common Cores’ entire premise is based upon preparing our students for college and career readiness. Poetry directly aids in this preparation. Even the beginning level English courses will be challenging for students in college if they do not receive a proper introduction to poetry in high school.

### *Poetry and Engagement*

Poetry is: 1.) Literary work in which special intensity is given to the expression of feelings and ideas by the use of distinctive style and rhythm. 2.) A quality of beauty and intensity of emotion regarded as characteristic of poems: "poetry and fire are nicely balanced in the music". By definition, poetry is an acceptable form of literary work that should be used in the curriculum along with informational text and evidence based readings. The extra benefit of poetry is it attaches emotion to its meaning.

We all know poetry is personal and can evoke feelings from us that we may not feel comfortable talking about. This may be especially difficult for adolescents when in a classroom filled with their peers. However, this can be said for *any* risk taking in the classroom. Therefore, in order for a poetry unit to be successful it is necessary for the teacher to create an atmosphere that is respectful of one another right from the beginning. Once students feel safe, they will become engaged in the lessons. Tristan de Frondeville, a former teacher who has, also, coached educators and written curriculum, heads PBL Associates, a consulting company dedicated to project learning and school redesign, travels the country coaching other teachers on how to engage students' everyday. He has created a list entitled, Ten Steps to Better Student Engagement. Number 1 on his list is: *Safety*. He writes, "Student engagement starts with creating an emotionally safe classroom. Students who have been shamed or belittled by the teacher or another student will not effectively engage in challenging tasks. Consider having a rule such as "We do not put others down, tell others to shut up, or laugh at people." Apply it to yourself as well as your students. This is the foundation of a supportive, collaborative learning environment. To learn and grow, one must take risks, but most people will not take risks in an emotionally unsafe environment." Once security has been established, the teacher can count on engagement from students. A great way to get the students involved in creating the tone inside the ELA classroom is to have them, in their small groups, create a list of behaviors that are acceptable and not acceptable. After they are finished, put all of their responses on an anchor chart and hang it in the classroom for them to see every day. This way each student has ownership in the proper way to act and can be held accountable if they choose not to act respectful. In reference to this project it would be

beneficial to have this discussion with students prior to Lesson #2, the “I Am” poem because that is a lesson that requires students to be vulnerable as they get to know each other and respect in the classroom is necessary to ensure a successful outcome.

### *Real-Life Connections*

As a teacher, your students are not going to successfully learn the material they need to learn if they do not see a point in learning it. That is why we are always trying to get them to see the bigger picture and understand that there is actually a reason/purpose for the issues we cover. Sarah Ramp, creator of, Professional Teaching Development Digital Portfolio, states, “From my experiences thus far, both as a teacher and a student, I have found that it is much easier to learn something when there is an obvious purpose behind it. I do not expect my students to blindly memorize facts and concepts without knowing why, because I have a hard time doing it myself. That is why I feel it is so important to expose the students to the bigger picture and help them to have an understanding of how the concepts they are learning will benefit them in the future by helping them develop real-world connections. With a purpose behind the learning, students are more likely to excel in their studies, which will help them to continue to be successful for the rest of their lives.” This basic understanding can be applied to all subject areas, especially ELA where our topics vary so greatly. In the subject ELA, it is usually a concept we are teaching or a style of writing. The actual topic is not as relevant a other core subjects. However, choosing topics that reach students and enable them to make real-life connections further strengths our lesson plans. Poetry and song lyrics provide ample opportunity to tie key terms and lessons to real-life topic discussions and writing prompts.

*The Unit: The Benefit of Using Poetry to Teach Content*

The article, “Teaching Content Subjects Using Poetry,” based on the book, Poems for Teaching in the Content Areas, written by J. Patrick Lewis, states “Using the poems to raise issues is a key teaching idea that asks students to think with the facts about a topic. I recommend raising issues wherever possible because issues invite students to use the facts gathered to create new understandings and develop social and community responsibility.” Raising issues with the use of poetry reinforces the idea that poetry can bring emotion to a topic which makes the issue more relevant to students. In turn, students will retain the information because they have established an emotional understanding of the issues being taught/discussed.

A collection of poems for ELA is the first step to bringing a human element and a personal, often humorous touch to the topics being studied. This helps students retain information and vocabulary. When this connection happens they obtain vivid and/or humorous mental images that forge remembering connections.

A second benefit of using poetry to teach content is poems are short and cut to the heart of a topic. You can use a poem to connect students to your content topic in powerful and memorable ways (e.g. Lesson # 8, “Wordplay,” from Flowcabulary.com is a catchy way to remember 11 examples of figurative language). Then, as students learn more about the topics, they link new information to their own lives and make connections to other texts and experiences. Once personal connections have been established between student and content engagement increases which ensures greater success.

Thirdly, and perhaps most important, poetry helps students explore important issues, issues that extend beyond the classroom into their lives, communities, and the

world. This unit contains poems on self and identity. These themes are sure to spark lively discussions that can enhance classroom discussions and writing assignments. It is this stepping beyond the facts (making connections, analyzing information, and creating new understandings) that enables students to “get into” the lesson and see its relevance to their lives and their world (Scholastic, 1).

Poetry does not just have to connect with self and identity. It is a wonderful way to connect topics among ELA and History class. It is a great tool for teachers to work with collaboratively to merge subjects, therefore, reinforcing each others lessons in both classes. In History class, historical records reveal factual evidence, but poetry can lend meaning and emotional dimension to the telling of history.

Whether poetry is taught solely in ELA class or in conjunction with Social Studies it is a way to bring deeper meaning of factual based texts to adolescent minds. Students need to feel that what they are doing is relevant. They long to understand why they are asked to do certain assignments. Probably every teacher has had to answer the question, “Why are we doing this? We are never going to use this in life.” Poetry provides meaning through personal connection. Students will produce more detailed and elaborate writing assignments if there is a deeper understanding of the literature created. If they connect emotionally to a topic they will produce thoughtful, explanatory responses, as opposed to, simply writing with no emotion behind their ideas. More importantly, with the personal excitement and connection created students will enjoy writing much more and be more willing to put the extra effort into their assignment. When an issue becomes personal the engagement ignites. Adolescents love to write/talk about themselves, poetry provides the perfect opportunity. Simply citing textual

evidence in writing responses does not ensure leaning is taking place and, sadly, it creates robots out of our students who are expected to simply restate what they just read.

Individuality is eliminated in their responses when teachers focus all of the attention on restating facts, as the Common Core suggests. True understanding does not occur unless an emotional or relevant connection is made. Poetry puts emotion into a non-fiction article and makes writing assignments more meaningful and enjoyable.

*Poetry is a Powerful Medium for Literacy and Technology Development*

Studies have been conducted to show that poetry helps improve literacy skills. Dr. Janette Hughes from the University of Ontario Institute of Technology boldly supports poetry in her article, “Poetry: A Powerful Medium for Literacy and Technology Development”. In a time when the focus is on improving literacy, she asks, “What role might poetry, a genre that is often marginalized in the English Language Arts classroom, play in literacy development? How can poetry be taught in ways that engage students, so that we can tap into its literacy-enhancing power?” She looks at the big picture of poetry. The power that it holds to shape our way of thinking and the way we handle life issues. She writes,

“Poetry should have a central place in all of our lives, not only for the aesthetic pleasure it affords, but also for its ability to awaken our senses, connect us with ourselves and others, and lead us to think in synthesizing ways, as required by its use of the language of metaphor. Poetry’s conciseness, its brevity, and its power to convey so much in such a limited space is its appeal. Peacock calls poetry “the screen-size art” that provides a “quick dive in a deep pool,” offering “depth in a moment, using the depth of a moment” (page 13). Poetry encourages an economy and precision in language that transfers to other types of oral and written communication. Michaels suggests, “Reading and writing poems can help us discover profound truths we didn’t realize we knew” (page 3).

“Poetry evokes feelings and provokes thoughts about complex social issues. Poetry is more than a vehicle for expression; it is also a way of knowing. Poetry both requires and facilitates a concentration of mind or sustained attention to which our hectic lives have unaccustomed us. The

linking of the strange with the familiar through the image or even through well-placed line breaks is perhaps what makes poetry so powerful. Poetry transforms the way we see the commonplace through new perspectives” (Hughes, 1).

Dr. Hughes research supports the idea that poetry has the power to improve literacy. She believes it is important for students to read or write or construct texts in multiple genres. Moving beyond pen and paper and using a variety of representing strategies (including visual arts or drama, for example) provide students opportunities to express themselves and demonstrate their understanding in alternate ways.

Hughes says “A focus on oral language development through the reading and performing of poetry acknowledges that sound is meaning. When we hear the sound of the words in a poem read aloud, we gain a better understanding of the meaning of the writing. We can involve students in the dramatic exploration of poems in a variety of ways, including choral reading, readers’ theatre, dance drama, shared reading, or role play. Such approaches provide opportunities for students to play with the words of a poem and to experience it lifted from the page.” Through her research, Dr. Hughes has found that poetry has the power to influence several areas of ELA. She states,

“This kind of attention to the language and rhythms of a poem serves to expand oral and written vocabulary. Research tells us that children with well-developed oral skills are more likely to have higher achievement in reading and writing as well. It also helps evoke a sensorial response to the poem. Students should be encouraged to express the kinds of connections to feelings and senses that they experience, ideally in small or large groups where they can discuss these responses among themselves.

By involving their students in such performances and discussions, as well as in the reading and writing of poetry, teachers can support the multiple goals of literacy development, including making inferences, identifying the main idea, making judgments and drawing conclusions, clarifying and developing points of view, and making connections” (Hughes, 2).

As mentioned above, several teacher goals of literacy development are practiced through the use of poetry. The state test focuses on each of the areas mentioned; inferencing, identifying the main idea, drawing conclusions, clearly stating your point of view or the point of view of a character, and making connections. Poetry allows the opportunity for these skills to be practiced just as strongly as prose.

However, the added benefit of poetry is that it includes the emotional element of the literature. The emotional element is the piece that “hooks” the reader.

Research strongly supports that poetry is an extremely useful teaching tool.

Below is an outline of the benefits of incorporating poetry into the curriculum:

- Poetry awakens our senses, helps us make connections to others, and leads us to think in synthesizing ways, as required by the use of metaphor.
- Paying attention to the language and rhythms of poetry helps build oral language skills.
- Children with well-developed oral language skills are more likely to have higher achievement in reading and writing.
- Creative applications of new media that build on the literacies students have already developed outside of school can help teachers tap into the literacy-enhancing power of poetry.

In regards to how poetry influences student learning in the digital age, Dr. Hughes retells an experience where students enjoyed the use of poetry to assist them in their poetry/technology project. Through the combination of technology and poetry students were able to view poetry with a better understanding. She writes,

“Literacy includes an understanding of how texts are constructed (taking into consideration the author’s assumptions, the targeted audience, and the medium used) and how a variety of forms of representation work together to convey meaning. Kress argues that very soon the screen (whether TV, computer, cell phone, or other emerging technology) will govern all of our communication practices. Students will understand language use within an electronic medium. In digital environments, different modes of expression or “modalities” – aural, visual, gestural, spatial, and linguistic – come together in one environment in ways that re-shape the relationship between printed

word and image or sound. This change in the materiality of text – that is, the media that are used to create the text – inevitably changes the way we read/receive the text and has important implications for the way we construct/write our own texts.

Consider a group of students in an Ontario school who used PowerPoint Presentations to create a Dr. Seuss-like poem for a class project. The students combined sound/music, text, and images to synthesize their ideas. In one student's words, not only was the project "fun" but students were able to "see poetry differently" when they created their poems on screen. The use of new media adds multiple layers of meaning and interpretation of a poem in ways that are not available with a conventional textual format" (Hughes, 3).

Poetry is much like the media devices adolescents use everyday. Students come to school with literacy experiences and skills that remain largely untapped in the classroom setting. They are accustomed to reading texts that combine image, sound, and words, which are often found in digital spaces that are bound up in social practices. Consider how many hours students log on Facebook, MSN, or MySpace. Hughes asks, "How could we help our students further develop their visual and digital literacy skills to think more critically about how images, sounds, and print text work together to communicate meaning?" She suggests, "Poetry is meant to be lifted from the printed page and explored in multi-modal ways (visually, gesturally, aurally). The use of new digital media for reading, writing, and representing poetry encourages an exploration of the relationship between text and image and how images and sound might be used to mediate meaning-making.

New media have an immersive and performative potential that encourages students to get inside a poem and play with it. Giving students opportunities to create poems or respond to and annotate existing poems using new media provides them with opportunities to use the technology in meaningful ways (Hughes, 3).

Following is an example of a practical way of how a teacher with even minimal technology skills might use new media to explore poetry:

**Creating digital poetry:** Students can use MovieMaker to create their own digital poems or to represent an existing poem through multimedia. This program is very simple to use and provides students with simple instructions through the creation process. Students can use scanned or downloaded images or, even better, take their own photos with a digital camera. They organize their images and use the voice recording feature to read the poem aloud. They can add sound effects, a soundtrack of music they have created, or clips of music that come with the program. Most significantly for the study of poetry, these new media allow students to have oral readings linked with their print version of the poem, an approach that honors the multimodal nature of poetry and students' multiple literacies.

Hughes has demonstrated how our students are already immersed in new media so the question is no longer whether we should use digital technologies in the classroom, but rather how they are being integrated into the curriculum.

#### *Connecting Poetry to the Common Core Standards*

According to Dr. Nile Stanley, a reading specialist, researcher, and professor of education, "Poetry helps students do well on high stakes tests because it gives their minds an exhilarating workout. Poetry inspires students to read more, imagine more, think more, discuss more and write more" (Wagner, 2005). Poetry allows students to gain understanding of content beyond the facts written out. It allows them to understand the ideas and feelings associated with issues being studied. This is the emotional connection that is so important when teaching. This connection sparks student interest and engages students who need more than strictly factual information. The New Common Core Standards focus on areas such as, citing textual evidence, writing arguments to support claims using textual evidence, participation in a range of collaborative discussions, routine writing, presentation of information clearly and logically so listeners can follow, etc.

Dr. Stanley also notes that poetry, “massages the heart, cares for the soul, and preps students on life’s tougher questions that are seldom asked on high stakes tests. What are the costs of not including poetry in every child’s education? What damage is done to children’s well being who are denied poetry? Can one be a full human being without poetry?” Although, these concerns could, potentially, appear a bit dramatic they hold a lot of truth. As this project presents, poetry adds an element of emotion to factual studies. If we are not asking our students to think beyond the text and grasp the emotions associated with prose, then we are creating robotic learners. We are, essentially, training our student to read, actively re-read, re-tell the facts, then, summarize the facts. That robotic formula does not help our students develop an emotional connection with literature and the events it covers. Dr. Stanley is asking us to consider that studying poetry helps students beyond the classroom into their daily lives. Our students gain readiness for college and careers through analyzing and discussing poetry. They are given opportunities to think about their reactions to poems and, then, encouraged to share their opinions with each other. Classroom discussions are much more personal and students could learn from each others original points of view. Poetry is the gateway to getting our students to think deeply. So, essentially, it is necessary to continue to incorporate poetry into the curriculum. The damage being done is that we are not allowing original thought and creativity to grow within each individual. To truly prepare our students for college and careers, as the state requires, poetry should be required in every ELA classroom.

All of the new requirements can easily be achieved through the use of poetry as this project will display. The New Common Core has been transitioning into classrooms

for the past few years (since 2009). This has required teachers and administrators to attend new training workshops and develop new lessons. With the focus mainly being to prepare our students for college and career readiness through the use of evidence based factual articles, naturally, poetry has not been the first type of literature teachers are reaching for. Hopefully, in the years to come, as educators become more comfortable with this huge shift in teaching and as the state works out all of the glitches in this new plan, teachers will start feeling more comfortable and capable and return to using poetry lessons to execute some of their objectives.

### Chapter 3: Application

#### *Project Summary*

The following project is a unit on Poetry for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders. The theme of the unit is, *Self and Identity*. This is a popular theme amongst middle and high schools in ELA class, as it can be applied to several issues covered within the curriculum while strongly connecting to some real-life issues of an adolescent. When I taught middle school in the Greece Central School District this was the theme for my 8<sup>th</sup> graders and through my research I have found other districts use it, as well. All of the poems selected throughout this unit relate to self or identity in some way. They have been strategically chosen to enhance engagement and create personal connections with the students. This Poetry unit consists of 12 lessons and should take between 20 to 25 days to execute. It contains several teaching strategies such as; cooperative learning, chunking and questioning aloud, acting out a poem, daily re-looping of previous learned material, graphic organizers, K-W-L, small group guided discussion, active reading (annotating the text), presentations, oral sharing, modeling, projects for unit assessments, etc. Several teaching strategies have been incorporated in attempt to meet the needs of every student. This unit includes the use of historical poetry, modern day poetry, song lyrics, a hip-hop rap about figurative language, music, and audio versions of poems from Utube. All of the lessons and activities throughout the unit meet the objectives of the Common Core and aid in preparing students for the New York State test.

**Unit Plan:** Poetry

**Theme:** Self and Identity

**Essential Questions:** How do poets express themes of self and identity?  
How can I express myself through poetry?

**Examples of Core Vocabulary:** POETRY

rhythm	prose	sonnet	haiku	elegy	free verse	lyric
lyrics	onomatopoeia	ode	narrative	rhyme	allusion	personification
assonance	metaphor	simile	symbolism			

### FOCUS QUESTIONS

- 1.) What is poetry? What is a poem? How do we make meaning of poetry?
- 2.) How important is word choice to a poet to express themselves.
- 3.) What strategies can we use to understand poetry?
- 4.) What is the difference between the speaker in the poem and the poet?
- 5.) How does word choice help readers experience poetry?
- 6.) What devices do poets use?
- 7.) How do poets express themes of self and identity in their work?
- 8.) What makes a poet's voice intense, unique and memorable?
- 9.) What are some different poetic forms and structures and how do they affect meaning?
- 10.) What is the significance of poem's cultural and historical context?
- 11.) How does performance affect the meaning of the written word in a poem?
- 12.) How are song lyrics and poetry alike and different?
- 13.) What is poetry? What is a poem? What do all poems have in common?

**STUDENT OUTCOMES:** What will students know, understand and be able to do by the end of this unit?

- read, discuss, perform and appreciate a variety of poems
- analyze poems and identify different poetic forms and devices
- create original poetry using various forms and incorporate various poetic devices
- compare, contrast and evaluate poetry
- research the cultural and historical context of poems/poets
- know and understand the body of work and cultural/historical context of at least one poet

**ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS :** What are the big ideas?

- Poetry can be interpreted in many ways
- Poets make deliberate and thoughtful decisions about style, tone, rhythm, structure and word choice
- Poetry can take many forms
- All poetry has (this open-ended statement can be decided upon by teacher and students at the end of the unit)
- Poetry is about the use of carefully chosen language
- Poetry is an important and valued literary genre

**Essential Questions:** How do poets express themes of self and identity?  
How can I express myself through poetry?

**Focus Question Planning:** Teacher should determine how many focus questions to address in any given week and how many class lessons are needed to address each focus questions.

Focus Questions	Teaching Points	Vocabulary	Activities/Assessments
What is poetry? What is a poem?	<input type="checkbox"/> Defining poetry <input type="checkbox"/> Poems are about language and communication <input type="checkbox"/> word in poems are important and selected with care <input type="checkbox"/> poems can have common elements <input type="checkbox"/> poetry can be defined in multiple ways <input type="checkbox"/> poems can have many forms and structures	Emotion Tone Theme Connotation Prose Rhythm	<input type="checkbox"/> Anticipation Guide <input type="checkbox"/> Poetry Splash <input type="checkbox"/> Exit slips <input type="checkbox"/> Define poetry <input type="checkbox"/> Think/Pair/Share <input type="checkbox"/> Independent Work <input type="checkbox"/> Group Work
How do we make meaning of poetry?	<input type="checkbox"/> experiencing a poem <input type="checkbox"/> how to organize our thoughts and ideas about poetry <input type="checkbox"/> tone and meaning are conveyed through the poet's word choice rhyme and rhythm influence meaning	Theme	<input type="checkbox"/> Annotate poems <input type="checkbox"/> Write using free verse <input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on poems read Respond to poems

Focus Questions	Possible Teaching Points	Vocabulary	Activities/Assessments
<p>What strategies do we use to understand poetry?</p> <p>What devices do poets use?</p> <p>What is the difference between the speaker in the poem and the poet?</p> <p>How does word choice help readers experience a poem?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> understand how imagery and figurative language impact meaning</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> interpret poems</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> paraphrase poems</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> reread poems</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> discuss poems</li>   <li><input type="checkbox"/> imagery</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> figurative language</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> sound devices</li>   <li><input type="checkbox"/> how to identify the speaker in the poem (understand the nuances between speaker and poet)</li>   <li><input type="checkbox"/> studying and analyzing poets' word choice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Denotation and connotation</li> </ul>	<p>Paraphrase, interpret, analyze,</p> <p>Simile, metaphor, personification,</p>       <p>Connotation, denotation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Paraphrase poems or parts of poems</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reread poems</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Annotate poems</li>   <li><input type="checkbox"/> Write and use figurative language and poetic devices</li>   <li><input type="checkbox"/> Read poems and identify speaker</li>   <li><input type="checkbox"/> Read poems with strong sense of voice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Compare and contrast poets' voices</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Write poem where each word matters</li> </ul>



<b>Focus Questions</b>	<b>Possible Teaching Points</b>	<b>Vocabulary</b>	<b>Activities/Assessments</b>
What is poetry? What is a poem? What do all poems have in common?	<input type="checkbox"/> How to synthesize and draw conclusions based on study of poems		<input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate, consider and list characteristics of all poems <input type="checkbox"/> Define poetry

*Instructional Outline*

Lesson #	Lesson Topic/Activity
Lesson #1	<b>The Poetry Splash:</b> Introduction to poetry. What is a poem? What is poetry?
Lesson #2	<b>“I Am” Poem:</b> Students get to experience the creative process and develop a poem that is personal. Focus on creating an environment of respect and trust during the unit.
Lesson #3	<b>Free Verse:</b> Becoming an active reader by annotating the text. Students write their thoughts as they read directly next to the text.
Lesson #4	<b>Analysis of Theme:</b> Determining theme within poems by reading, re-reading and close reading.
Lesson #5	<b>Introducing Poems with Themes of Self and Identity:</b> Add to students growing understanding of poetry by connecting students with poems that which they can easily identify with. Analyze how poets express their self and identity within their poems through tone, mood, title, capitalization, punctuation, and repetition.
Lesson #6	<b>Playing with Words:</b> Discover how word choice helps readers experience poetry. Appreciate how poets play with language and make meaning with word choice.
Lesson #7	<b>Rhythm:</b> “We Real Cool” by Gwendolyn Brooks. Understand how poets build rhythm with words and line breaks. Listen to audio of poem. Students perform the poem.
Lesson #8 (Part 1)	<b>Figurative Language:</b> Discover poetic devices that poets use. Introduce: imagery, simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, personification, and allusion. Understand how poets use figurative language to convey meaning through close reading of several poems.
Lesson # 8 (Part 2)	<b>Figurative Language:</b> Flocabulary. Reinforce vocabulary of 11 types of figurative language through the hip-hop song, “Wordplay”.
Lesson #9	<b>Tone and Meaning:</b> Examination of how tone and meaning are conveyed through the poet’s critical word choice.
Lesson #10	<b>Interpreting Poetry:</b> Interpretation of modern day song lyrics. Consideration of how performance affects our understanding of poetry.
Lesson # 11	<b>Performance in Poetry:</b> View the performance of Knicks’ Poetry Slam 2009 at Youtube – performances by B. Yung and Sonya Li. Demonstration of how dramatic reading can impact tone and meaning.
Assessments	<b>Project Ideas and Choices</b>

## **Lesson #1:** The Poetry Splash

**Focus Question:** What is poetry? What is a poem?

**Teaching Point:** Students will read poems that will help them construct a definition of poetry while understanding some common elements

**Why/Purpose/Connection:** Use the Think/Pair/Share Poetry Anticipation Guide to get students thinking about their prior experiences and beliefs about poetry.

**Materials/Resources/Readings:** Copies of several powerful poems and/or songs that will appeal to students. They can be typed in advance and placed at each group's table at the beginning of this lesson.

Suggested Poems:

- 1.) "Eating Poetry" by Mark Strand
- 2.) "Introduction to Poetry" by Billy Collins
- 3.) "Alone" by Maya Angelou
- 4.) "I'm Alive, I Believe in Everything" by Lesley Choyce
- 5.) "Exit" by Rita Dove
- 6.) "As I Grew Older" by Langston Hughes

**Unit Introduction:** Students will be reading and discussing a variety of poems with similar themes. Students will also analyze poetry, write and perform poetry and complete a project about a poet or poems of their own choosing. Students will listen to and read lyrics and will have an opportunity to write and share their own songs. Students will also learn about the structures and devices that poets use to convey emotions, ideas and to create meaning. As they read the poems throughout the unit, they will increase their understanding and appreciation and will be challenged to add to, change, or rethink their initial definition and concept of poetry.

Poetry Splash is an activity to get students to dive into poems without too much explanation beforehand. The goal is to use poems that will be appealing to students and that show the students poetry can be fun, surprising and really interesting.

### **Model/Demonstration:**

Invite students to complete the anticipation guide and then briefly share their answers with the class. If any students express negative opinions about poetry, it is hoped that their perceptions will change as they progress through the unit. The answers to the anticipation guide will give teachers a quick assessment of what students assume and understand about poetry (anticipation guide attached).

Poetry splash immerses students in short poems and allows them to respond to them quickly using simple marks. Divide class into groups. Each group of students should receive one copy of each (short) poem listed above. Ask students to select a poem to read independently. While reading, students can annotate the text using the following marks:

**Symbols**

- \* This word or line is cool
- ! This is something important
- ? I don't get it: I don't understand this line or phrase

When completed with reading and marking the poems, students can share their thinking about their personal interpretation and responses to the poems.

**Independent/Pair/Group Work:**

Direct each student group to select one poem that they all feel very strongly about. Once the group settles on one poem, the group will complete a What I Read - What I Think – What I Wonder graphic organizer about the poem. This graphic organizer will encourage students to notice the words and language used (what I read), then they will write what they think about the words noted (what I think) and finally write down what questions or wonderings they have about the poem (what I wonder). Teachers may wish to model this activity before asking students to complete the template with a poem of their choosing.

Poem to Model: “Eating Poetry” by Mark Strand

Read the poem aloud to the students, then reread the poem and complete the template (using chart paper or board) and model what you are thinking as you read.

What I Read	What I Think	What I Wonder
The poet has eaten poems	I don't think he has really “eaten” them	I wonder why that would make a librarian upset
The dogs are on the basement stairs	This is a little scary	I wonder what it means to introduce the dogs?
I lick her hand	Did he turn into a dog?	I wonder what is real and what is meant to be shocking or surprising?

Encourage students to read the poem again and then lead a class discussion. Below are some suggested questions:

What did you like about the poem? How did the poem make you feel? Which words or phrase did you like?

What words or phrases need clarification? What surprised you?

What do you think the poem is about? What might this poem be saying? How can we define poetry?

Distribute the What I Read, What I Think, What I Wonder graphic organizer and direct students to complete the chart with their chosen poem.

**Differentiation:**

Students can practice reading the poems aloud. Students can reread and mark other poems. Students can write a personal response to the poem. Students can share their responses with a partner.

**Assessment:**

Check for understanding as groups share their interpretations of their poem. Review student annotations made to text.

**Exit Slip:** Each student can write a definition of poetry.

## Poetry Anticipation Guide

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Place the letter A or D to indicate whether you Agree or Disagree with the statements below.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1.) The true meaning of a poem can only be understood by the person who wrote it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2.) Poems look different from other types of writing.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3.) Poems are always about emotions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4.) Poems always rhyme.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5.) Poems are boring.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6.) A poem cannot be fun or funny.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7.) No poem can ever be completely understood.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8.) The sound of words is important in poetry.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9.) Every poem uses symbols.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10.) Line breaks and stanzas tell you how to read a poem.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11.) Each poem has its own rhythm.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12.) A good poem makes you feel something.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13.) Poems are quick and easy to write.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14.) Poems are hard to understand/figure out.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15.) Poems should use standard English/conventions of grammar.



**Eating Poetry**

By: Mark Strand

I

Eating Poetry

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.  
There is no happiness like mine.  
I have been eating poetry.

The librarian does not believe what she sees.  
Her eyes are sad  
and she walks with her hands in her dress.

The poems are gone.  
The light is dim.  
The dogs are on the basement stairs and coming up.

Their eyeballs roll,  
their blond legs burn like brush.  
The poor librarian begins to stamp her feet and weep.

She does not understand.  
When I get on my knees and lick her hand,  
she screams.

I am a new man,  
I snarl at her and bark,  
I romp with joy in the bookish dark.

**Introduction to Poetry**

By: Billy Collins

I ask them to take a poem  
and hold it up to the light  
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem  
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room  
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski  
across the surface of a poem  
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do  
is tie the poem to a chair with rope  
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose  
to find out what it really means.

**Alone**

By: Maya Angelou

Lying, thinking  
Last night  
How to find my soul a home  
Where water is not thirsty  
And bread loaf is not stone  
I came up with one thing  
And I don't believe I'm wrong  
That nobody,  
But nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

There are some millionaires  
With money they can't use  
Their wives run round like banshees  
Their children sing the blues  
They've got expensive doctors  
To cure their hearts of stone.  
But nobody  
No, nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Now if you listen closely  
I'll tell you what I know  
Storm clouds are gathering  
The wind is gonna blow  
The race of man is suffering  
And I can hear the moan,  
'Cause nobody,  
But nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

**I'm Alive, I Believe in Everything**

By: Lesley Choyce

Self. Brotherhood. God. Zeus. Communism.  
Capitalism. Buddha. Vinyl records.  
Baseball. Ink. Trees. Cures for disease.  
Saltwater. Literature. Walking. Waking.  
Arguments. Decisions. Ambiguity. Absolutes.  
Presence. Absence. Positive and Negative.  
Empathy. Apathy. Sympathy and entropy.  
Verbs are necessary. So are nouns.  
Empty skies. Dark vacuums of night.  
Visions. Revisions. Innocence.  
I've seen All the empty spaces yet to be filled.  
I've heard All of the sounds that will collect  
at the end of the world.  
And the silence that follows.

I'm alive, I believe in everything  
I'm alive, I believe in it all.

Waves lapping on the shore.  
Skies on fire at sunset.  
Old men dancing on the streets.  
Paradox and possibility.  
Sense and sensibility.  
Cold logic and half truth.  
Final steps and first impressions.  
Fools and fine intelligence.  
Chaos and clean horizons.  
Vague notions and concrete certainty.  
Optimism in the face of adversity.

I'm alive, I believe in everything  
I'm alive, I believe in it all.

**Exit**

By: Rita Dove

Just when hope withers, the visa is granted.  
The door opens to a street like in the movies,  
clean of people, of cats; except it is your street  
you are leaving. A visa has been granted,  
"provisionally"-a fretful word.  
The windows you have closed behind  
you are turning pink, doing what they do  
every dawn. Here it's gray. The door  
to the taxicab waits. This suitcase,  
the saddest object in the world.  
Well, the world's open. And now through  
the windshield the sky begins to blush  
as you did when your mother told you  
what it took to be a woman in this life.

**As I Grew Older**

By: Langston Hughes

It was a long time ago.  
I have almost forgotten my dream.  
But it was there then,  
In front of me,  
Bright like a sun--  
My dream.  
And then the wall rose,  
Rose slowly,  
Slowly,  
Between me and my dream.  
Rose until it touched the sky--  
The wall.  
Shadow.  
I am black.  
I lie down in the shadow.  
No longer the light of my dream before me,  
Above me.  
Only the thick wall.  
Only the shadow.  
My hands!  
My dark hands!  
Break through the wall!  
Find my dream!  
Help me to shatter this darkness,  
To smash this night,  
To break this shadow  
Into a thousand lights of sun,  
Into a thousand whirling dreams  
Of sun!

**Lesson 2: "I Am" Poem**

**Focus Question:** How important is word choice to a poet to express themselves.  
How does word choice help readers identify and relate to poetry.

**Teaching Point:** To understand that poetry can be tangible and enjoyable. To have students break the ice in the classroom by revealing two characteristics about themselves that they are willing to share with the entire class which will aid in creating an environment that is safe and free of judgment.

**Why/Purpose/Connection:** To appreciate that a poet's word choice must be very carefully selected and carry the power to convey the poet's full meaning. Each word used within poetry is intentional and helps deliver the theme of the poem.

**Materials Needed:** Template of "I Am" poem  
Model of "I Am" poem written by teacher

**Model/Demonstration:**

- 1.) Have the poem template on the smart board/overhead projector and do a think aloud as you model the process of creating a poem.
- 2.) Teacher should have a model poem already created to share with the class. This will demonstrate to the students how to properly present a poem. Diction, voice level, posture, and clarity should be enforced. Stress the importance of honesty within the created poem.
- 3.) When students are creating their poem teacher will walk around and conference individually.

**Independent/Pair/Group Work:**

- 1.) Students will work in pairs and help each other brainstorm ideas/adjectives that best suit them.
- 2.) Students will work independently as they create their poem (20 - 30 minutes).
- 3.) Have students partner with each other to provide feedback
- 4.) Students will present their poem to the class.

**Assessment:**

Students will be graded based on their final product according to the guidelines of the rubric provided.

## Model “I Am” Poem

### FIRST STANZA

**I am** (2 special characteristics you have) I wonder (something of curiosity)

**I hear** (an imaginary sound) I see (an imaginary sight)

**I want** (an actual desire)

**I am** (the first line of the poem repeated)

### SECOND STANZA

**I pretend** (something you actually pretend to do) I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)

**I touch** (an imaginary touch)

**I worry** (something that bothers you) I cry (something that makes you sad)

**I am** (the first line of the poem repeated)

### THIRD STANZA

**I understand** (something that is true) I say (something you believe in)

**I dream** (something you dream about)

**I try** (something you really make an effort about) I hope (something you actually hope for)

**I am** (the first line of the poem repeated)



**“I Am Poem” Rubric**

<b>Category</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
Spelling and Grammar	No Errors in spelling or Grammar	No more than 1 spelling and grammar errors	Two spelling or grammar errors	More than Two spelling or grammar errors
Visual Connection to poem	Visual is neat, in color, and represents the poem.	Connection to poem is unclear, but is in color and neat.	Connection to poem is unclear, and visual is not neat OR not in color.	Connection to poem is unclear, visual is not neat AND not in color.
Poem Content	Poem reveals information about the author, and follows the basic format.	Poem deviates from the basic format, but still reveals information about the author.	Poem is in free form, and reveals little about the student.	Poem does not resemble the basic format at all, and tells nothing about the student.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Total Score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Focus Question:** How do we make meaning of poems?

**Teaching Point:**

To learn to recognize and appreciate free verse.

To begin to think deeply about ideas by annotating text after re-reading.

**Why/Purpose/Connection:** To add to students' understanding of poetry by giving students a strategy to help them make meaning of the text.

**Materials/Resources/Reading:** Copies of "Hanging Fire" by Audrey Lorde

**Model/Demonstration:**

Motivation: Ask students to define "free verse" and discuss their responses. You might also have students reflect on the previous day's poetry splash activity. It is important for students to be exposed to a large number of poems to add to their understanding of the genre and to help them grow in appreciation of poetry. It is also important that students learn that what appears to be a simple poem at first reading can often reveal deep and powerful emotions when examined closely.

Distribute copies of the poem "Hanging Fire" by Audrey Lorde to each student. Read the poem aloud and ask students to mark up their copy of the poem (while you read) using the symbols learned in the previous lesson (\* ! ?).

Explain that the poem is written in "free verse," which describes a style of poetry written without using strict rules, structure or rhyme. Connect this to students' earlier definition of free verse when you introduced the term.

After students listen to and mark responses to the poem, they can share and talk about their reactions before they dig deeper into a rereading and analysis of the poem.

Some discussion questions for students to consider as they dig deeper:

Who is speaking in the poem?

How are they speaking to the reader?

What do you think this poem is about?

What is the speaker worried about?

What else can you figure out about the state of mind of the writer?

Why does the poet repeat "and momma's in the bedroom with the door closed?"

What do you think you know about the poet after reading this poem? What specifically in the poem reveals their character/emotions/fears?

Do you ever feel like the writer of this poem?

What is the structure of this poem? (Poem has three stanzas, there is no punctuation except at the end of each stanza, poet asks lots of questions yet no question marks are used, conversational, stream of consciousness, the words flow freely (free verse), etc.)

Where does the poet use language in surprising ways? (“my skin has betrayed me”)

Is the poet complaining? Why or why not?

Is there conflict in this poem? Is it internal or external? How do we know?

Explain the importance of reading a poem more than once. Ask students to discuss the poem after repeated readings. What did they notice that they did not notice after the first reading? What more did they learn about the poem or the speaker?

Pick 1-2 student volunteers to read the poem aloud.

### **Annotating the text:**

Tell the students that active readers think while they read and take notes about what they are reading and thinking. Annotating text is what they did when they used simple marks to describe their thoughts after reading a poem (in earlier lesson). Tell students that they are now going to annotate the text by writing their thoughts while reading. The thoughts should be written right next to the text that they are thinking about (as opposed to using a separate page). Remind students that as they read they should think about what they are reading – what questions come to mind? What confuses them? What conclusions are they drawing? What are they feeling? What do they imagine/see as they read the word/line/poem/?

Here are some explicit ways to annotate text:

- Underline or circle important words (words that surprise you, or words that create strong pictures in your mind as you read)
- Write your thoughts/conclusions/interpretations in the margin
- Write a short summary at the end
- Write a question: what is confusing? What are you wondering about?
- Write what you think is the most important feeling conveyed
- Draw a picture of what you are thinking or imagining
- Comment on a word or phrase that conveys a strong image or feeling Guided

### **Practice/Independent Exploration**

Have students spend about 10 minutes rereading and annotating the text. Then give them a few minutes to share their responses with a partner or within a group.

Next, engage in a whole class discussion. Encourage students to explain what they learned, what they noticed or experienced based on a close re-reading of the poem and while annotating the text.

**Writing:** Students can try writing a poem in free verse that begins with the same lines of the poem “I am fourteen”(use their actual age) and ask them to free-write for 5 minutes. After 5 minutes of writing, students can share their free verse poems.

**Differentiation:** Some students may need to re-read the poem often, chunk the poem into parts or have the poem read to them by another student. If students can’t seem to get started on their own poem, they can also write a response to the writer of “Hanging Fire” asking questions and using free verse.

**Assessment:**

Students can complete a character web that demonstrates their understanding of the speaker in the poem “Hanging Fire.”

Students can also write a reflection that expresses their feelings and thoughts about the poem and how they define poetry at this time.

**Hanging Fire**

By: Audre Lorde

I am fourteen  
and my skin has betrayed me  
the boy I cannot live without  
still sucks his tumb  
in secret  
how come my knees are  
always so ashy  
what if I die  
before the morning comes  
and momma's in the bedroom  
with the door closed.

I have to learn how to dance  
in time for the next party  
my room is too small for me  
suppose I die before graduation  
they will sing sad melodies  
but finally  
tell the truth about me  
There is nothing I want to do  
and too much  
that has to be done  
and momma's in the bedroom  
with the door closed.

Nobody even stops to think  
about my side of it  
I should have been on Math Team  
my marks were better than his  
why do I have to be  
the one  
wearing braces  
I have nothing to wear tomorrow  
will I live long enough  
to grow up  
and momma's in the bedroom  
with the door closed.

**Lesson #4:** Analysis of Theme**Focus Question:** How do we make meaning of poetry?**Teaching Point:** To read, reread, question and think about poems for deeper meaning and analysis (theme)**Why/Purpose/Connection:** To challenge students to think critically and deeply about the poems they read and to add to students' growing understanding and appreciation of poetry**Materials/Resources/Readings:** Highlighters, chart paper

"Mentor" by Thomas Murphy

"Wheels" by Jim Daniels

"The Meadow" by Kate Knapp Johnson

"In the Well" by Andrew Hudgins

"Otherwise" by Jane Kenyon

"Lesson" by Forest Hamer

"I've Been Known" by Denise Duhamel

"My Life" by Joe Wenderoth

"Hate Poem" by Julie Sheehan

"Before the World Intruded" by Michele Rosenthal

"Kyrie" by Tomas Tranströmer

"End of April" by Phillis Levin

**Model/Demonstration:**

Most likely students will have experience with identifying theme in literature. Begin this lesson by asking the students: What is a theme? Can poems have themes? How do we determine a theme?

After a brief class discussion and charting of student responses, distribute copies of the poems listed above. Allow students some time to preview the poems and then ask them to select one poem. Ask students what they think it means to read a poem "closely and deeply." Tell them that they will read their selected poem this way. By practicing this strategy, students will be able to analyze poems for greater understanding and appreciation as well as identify theme.

Model with a class shared reading of the short poem: "Mentor" by Thomas Murphy. Read the poem aloud once, give students time to think about the poem and then read it again. Ask the students to consider the title of the poem – "The Mentor." What is a mentor? (teacher, adviser, etc.) Now focus students' attention on the dedication – Who do they think Robert Francis might be? Why might a poet dedicate a poem to someone? What is the speaker in the poem feeling sorry about or regretting? How do we know this? What might be the theme of this poem? Perhaps: If I knew then what I know now, I would have appreciated my mentor/teacher. Or: as time passed someone regrets not letting an important person know how important they were.

**Independent/Pair/Group Work:**

Return students' attention to the poem they selected for close reading and analysis. Encourage students to read the poem once to "try it on," then remind students to read the poem a second or third time. Students should be encouraged to annotate their poems. They should look for parts, phrases, words, or sentences that reveal something they think is important. They can underline these lines and write their thoughts about them onto the paper. They can also ask questions of the text.

This close reading and analysis can also be done as a pair or small group activity. This will allow students to think together and cooperatively about the text. If students will be working in pairs or groups you may want to tape a copy of each group's poem into the center of a large sheet of chart paper. As students read the poem, they can annotate the text by writing their comments/questions/findings onto the chart paper.

**Closure:** Student groups share their thoughts and the theme that they have identified. If time permits, student groups can exchange poems and repeat the analysis.

**Assessment:** Review student annotations and listen to student interpretations.

**Mentor**

By: Timothy Murphy

For Robert Francis  
Had I known, only known  
when I lived so near,  
I'd have gone, gladly gone  
foregoing my fear  
of the wholly grown  
and the nearly great.  
But I learned alone,  
so I learned too late.

**The Meadow**

By: Kate Knapp Johnson

Half the day lost, staring  
at this window. I wanted to know  
just one true thing

about the soul, but I left thinking  
for thought, and now -  
two inches of snow have fallen

over the meadow. Where did I go,  
how long was I out looking  
for you?, who would never leave me,  
my witness, my here.

## Wheels

By: Jim Daniels

My brother kept  
 in a frame on the wall  
 pictures of every motorcycle, car, truck:  
 in his rusted out Impala convertible  
 wearing his cap and gown  
 waving  
 in his yellow Barracuda  
 with a girl leaning into him  
 waving  
 on his Honda 350  
 waving  
 on his Honda 750 with the boys  
 holding a beer  
 waving  
 in his first rig  
 wearing a baseball hat backwards  
 waving  
 in his Mercury Montego  
 getting married  
 waving  
 in his black LTD  
 trying to sell real estate  
 waving  
 back to driving trucks  
 a shiny new rig  
 waving  
 on his Harley Sportster  
 with his wife on the back  
 waving  
 his son in a car seat  
 with his own steering wheel  
 my brother leaning over him  
 in an old Ford pickup  
 and they are  
 waving  
 holding a wrench a rag  
 a hose a shammy  
 waving.

My brother helmetless  
 rides off on his Harley  
 waving  
 my brother's feet  
 rarely touch the ground-  
 waving waving  
 face pressed to the wind  
 no camera to save him.

**In the Well**

By: Andrew Hudgins

My father cinched the rope,  
a noose around my waist,  
and lowered me into  
the darkness. I could taste

my fear. It tasted first  
of dark, then earth, then rot.  
I swung and struck my head  
and at that moment got

another then: then blood,  
which spiked my mouth with iron.  
Hand over hand, my father  
dropped me from then to then:

then water. Then wet fur,  
which I hugged to my chest.  
I shouted. Daddy hauled  
the wet rope. I gagged, and pressed

my neighbor's missing dog  
against me. I held its death  
and rose up to my father.  
Then light. Then hands. Then breath.

**Otherwise**

By: Jane Kenyon

I got out of bed  
on two strong legs.  
It might have been  
otherwise. I ate  
cereal, sweet  
milk, ripe, flawless  
peach. It might  
have been otherwise.  
I took the dog uphill  
to the birch wood.  
All morning I did  
the work I love.

At noon I lay down  
with my mate. It might  
have been otherwise.  
We ate dinner together  
at a table with silver  
candlesticks. It might  
have been otherwise.  
I slept in a bed  
in a room with paintings  
on the walls, and  
planned another day  
just like this day.  
But one day, I know,  
it will be otherwise.

**Lesson**

By: Forrest Hamer

It was 1963 or 4, summer,  
and my father was driving our family  
from Ft. Hood to North Carolina in our 56 Buick.  
We'd been hearing about Klan attacks, and we knew

Mississippi to be more dangerous than usual.  
Dark lay hanging from the trees the way moss did,  
and when it moaned light against the windows  
that night, my father pulled off the road to sleep.

Noises

that usually woke me from rest afraid of monsters  
kept my father awake that night, too,  
and I lay in the quiet noticing him listen, learning  
that he might not be able always to protect us

from everything and the creatures besides;  
perhaps not even from the fury suddenly loud  
through my body about his trip from Texas  
to settle us home before he would go away

to a place no place in the world  
he named Viet Nam. A boy needs a father  
with him, I kept thinking, fixed against noise  
from the dark.

**I've Been Known**

By: Denise Duhamel

to spread it on thick to shoot off my mouth to get it off my chest  
to tell him where  
to get off  
to stay put to face the music to cut a shine to go under to sell  
myself short to play  
myself down  
to paint the town to fork over to shell out to shoot up to pull a  
fast one to go haywire  
to take a shine to  
to be stuck on to glam it up to vamp it up to get her one better to  
eat a little higher  
on the hog  
to win out to get away with to go to the spot to make a stake to  
make a stand to  
stand for something to stand up for  
to snow under to slip up to go for it to take a stab at it to try out  
to go places to play  
up to get back at  
to size up to stand off to slop over to be solid with to lose my  
shirt to get myself off  
to get myself off the hook

## My Life

*after Henri Michaux*

By: Joe Wenderoth

Somehow it got into my room.  
I found it, and it was, naturally, trapped.  
It was nothing more than a frightened animal.  
Since then I raised it up.  
I kept it for myself, kept it in my room,  
kept it for its own good.  
I named the animal, My Life.  
I found food for it and fed it with my bare hands.  
I let it into my bed, let it breathe in my sleep.  
And the animal, in my love, my constant care,  
grew up to be strong, and capable of many clever tricks.  
One day, quite recently,  
I was running my hand over the animal's side  
and I came to understand  
that it could very easily kill me.  
I realized, further, that it would kill me.  
This is why it exists, why I raised it.  
Since then I have not known what to do.  
I stopped feeding it,  
only to find that its growth  
has nothing to do with food.  
I stopped cleaning it  
and found that it cleans itself.  
I stopped singing it to sleep  
and found that it falls asleep faster without my song.  
I don't know what to do.  
I no longer make My Life do tricks.  
I leave the animal alone  
and, for now, it leaves me alone, too.  
I have nothing to say, nothing to do.  
Between My Life and me,  
a silence is coming.  
Together, we will not get through this.

## Hate Poem

By: Julie Sheehan

I hate you truly. Truly I do.  
 Everything about me hates everything about you.  
 The flick of my wrist hates you.  
 The way I hold my pencil hates you.  
 The sound made by my tiniest bones were they trapped  
   in the jaws of a moray eel hates you.  
 Each corpuscle singing in its capillary hates you.

Look out! Fore! I hate you.

The blue-green jewel of sock lint I'm digging  
   from under my third toenail, left foot, hates you.  
 The history of this keychain hates you.  
 My sigh in the background as you explain relational databases  
   hates you.  
 The goldfish of my genius hates you.  
 My aorta hates you. Also my ancestors.

A closed window is both a closed window and an obvious  
   symbol of how I hate you.

My voice curt as a hairshirt: hate.  
 My hesitation when you invite me for a drive: hate.  
 My pleasant "good morning": hate.  
 You know how when I'm sleepy I nuzzle my head  
   under your arm? Hate.  
 The whites of my target-eyes articulate hate. My wit  
   practices it.  
 My breasts relaxing in their holster from morning  
   to night hate you.  
 Layers of hate, a parfait.  
 Hours after our latest row, brandishing the sharp glee of hate,  
 I dissect you cell by cell, so that I might hate each one  
   individually and at leisure.  
 My lungs, duplicitous twins, expand with the utter validity  
   of my hate, which can never have enough of you,  
 Breathlessly, like two idealists in a broken submarine.

**Before the World Intruded**

By: Michele Rosenthal

Return me to those infant years,  
before I woke from sleep,

when ideas were oceans crashing,  
my dreams blank shores of sand.

Transport me fast to who I was  
when breath was fresh as sight,

my new parts — unfragmented —  
shielded faith from unkind light.

Draw for me a figure whole, so different  
from who I am. Show me now

this picture: who I was  
when I began.

**Kyrie**

By: Tomas Tranströmer

At times my life suddenly opens its eyes in the dark.  
A feeling of masses of people pushing blindly  
through the streets, excitedly, toward some miracle,  
while I remain here and no one sees me.

It is like the child who falls asleep in terror  
listening to the heavy thumps of his heart.  
For a long, long time till morning puts his light in the locks  
and the doors of darkness open.

**End of April**

By: Phillis Levin

Under a cherry tree  
I found a robin's egg,  
broken, but not shattered.

I had been thinking of you,  
and was kneeling in the grass  
among fallen blossoms

when I saw it: a blue scrap,  
a delicate toy, as light  
as confetti

It didn't seem real,  
but nature will do such things  
from time to time.

I looked inside:  
it was glistening, hollow,  
a perfect shell

except for the missing crown,  
which made it possible  
to look inside.

What had been there  
is gone now  
and lives in my heart

where, periodically,  
it opens up its wings,  
tearing me apart.

**Lesson #5** (4 Days in Length): Introducing Poems with Themes of Self and Identity

**Focus Question:** How do poets express themes of self and identity?

**Teaching Point:** To read and interpret poems with themes of self and identity

**Why/Purpose/Connection:** To add to students' growing understanding of poetry by connecting students with poems with which they can easily identify. (This theme should be revisited in future lessons)

**Materials/Resources/Reading:** Copies of the poems below:

"I'm Alive, I Believe in Everything" by Lesley Choyce

"On Turning Ten" by Billy Collins

"Self-Portrait at 28" by David Berman

"Hereditry" by Thomas Hardy (included)

"Conceit" by DH Lawrence (included)

"Lost" by David Waggoner

"My Life" by Joe Wenderoth

"I'm Nobody" by Emily Dickinson

"Ode to Family Photographs - Will You Know Us?" By Gary Soto

"Alone" by Maya Angelou

"I Am" by Voltaraine De Cleyre (included)

**Model/Demonstration:**

Begin by using a poem that can be readily understood and appreciated to demonstrate, such as Billy Collins' "On Turning Ten" or Leslie Choyce's "I'm Alive, I Believe in Everything." Project the poem from the website onto a smart board, use laptops, or distribute copies of the poem to your students. Read the poem once through from beginning to end so that students experience the language and flow of speech. Elicit student reactions and then reread the poem a second time. After the second reading engage students in an analysis of the poem.

**Possible questions for discussion:**

What do you think is meant by the title? Why is this line repeated?

What extremes or opposites are mentioned in this poem? Why? What is the effect?

Do you think the speaker in the poem believes in things that seem contradictory? Why or why not?

What is the tone or mood of this poem?

Is there a rhythm to this poem? If yes, what is it?

What do you think is the message or theme of this poem? Why?

Notice the use of punctuation and capitalization – why do you think the poet does this?

How do you think this poem is meant to be read? What tells you this?

After a discussion of the poem let students read the poem again in small groups or independently and ask them to write a response or reflection about the poem in their writer's notebooks.

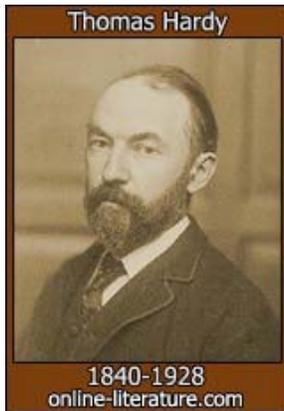
**Independent/Pair/Group Work:**

Distribute copies of the other poems listed in the materials section of this lesson.

Students can work in pairs or small groups to read and interpret another poem with a similar theme.

**Extension:** Challenge students to read the poem “I Am” by Voltarine De Cleyre who lived from 1866-1912, “Conceit” by D H Lawrence, or “Heredity” by Thomas Hardy (poems included with this lesson).

Students can compare and contrast classic poets’ use of the themes with that of more contemporary poets (Billy Collins, Maya Angelou, etc.)



Heredity by Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), English

I am the family face;  
 Flesh perishes, I live on,  
 Projecting trait and trace  
 Through time to times anon,  
 And leaping from place to place  
 Over oblivion.  
 The years-heired feature that can  
 In curve and voice and eye  
 Despise the human span  
 Of durance - that is I;  
 The eternal thing in man,  
 That heeds no call to die.

From Moments of Vision, Macmillan and Co., 1917.



Conceit     DH Lawrence (1885-1930), English

It is conceit that kills us

and makes us cowards instead of gods.

Under the great Command: Know thy self, and that thou art mortal!

we have become fatally self-conscious, fatally self-important, fatally  
entangled in the cocoon coils of our conceit.

Now we have to admit we can't know ourselves, we can only know about  
ourselves.

And I am not interested to know about myself any more,

I only entangle myself in the knowing.

Now let me be myself,

now let me be myself, and flicker forth,

now let me be myself, in the being, one of the gods.

From The Complete Poems of DH Lawrence.



I Am        Voltairine de Cleyre (1866-1912) American

I am! The ages on the ages roll:  
 And what I am, I was, and I shall be:  
 by slow growth filling higher Destiny,  
 And Widening, ever, to the widening Goal.  
 I am the Stone that slept; down deep in me  
 That old, old sleep has left its centurine trace;  
 I am the plant that dreamed; and lo! still see  
 That dream-life dwelling on the Human Face.  
 I slept, I dreamed, I wakened: I am Man!  
 The hut grows Palaces; the depths breed light;  
 Still on! Forms pass; but Form yields kinglier  
 Might!  
 The singer, dying where his song began,  
 In Me yet lives; and yet again shall he  
 Unseal the lips of greater songs To Be;  
 For mine the thousand tongues of Immortality.

From Selected Poems of Voltairine De Cleyre, 1892

## Lesson #6: Playing with Words

**Focus Question:** How does word choice help readers experience poetry?

**Teaching Point:** To understand and appreciate how poets manipulate words and language

**Why/Purpose/Connection:** To appreciate how poets play with language and make meaning with word choice.

### Materials/Resources/Reading:

PBS website – Bill Moyers Fooling with Words. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/foolingwithwords/>

The following poems are available on this website:

“adam thinking” – Lucille Clifton

“Please Fire Me” – Deborah Garrison

“Halley’s Comet” – Stanley Kunitz

“Jump mama” – Kurtis Lamkin

“Riding into California” – Shirley Geok-lin Lim

“Yesterday” – W.S. Merwin

“X” – Amiri Baraka

### Model/Demonstration:

Write the following quote onto the chalk board or onto chart paper:

“Fooling with words is the play of poets”

Ask students what they think this quote means. After students respond with some thoughts and reactions remind them it is important to understand that at the heart of poetry is a fascination with language and the power of words.

Tell students that the quote is taken from the PBS website Fooling with Words which features poets who use language in very specific ways to get their point or experience across to readers.

Tell students that they will read some poems from this website to understand and experience the ways that these poets push the boundaries of language (in terms of word choice and in their use of imagery, line breaks, rhythm, etc.).

*Model with a class shared reading of the poem "adam thinking" by Lucille Clifton.*

After students listen to you read, discuss the poem. What are their initial thoughts? What is Adam thinking and why? How does the poet use language in this poem? Where are the strong words or images in this poem? Why does this short poem have such a profound affect on the reader?

Have students listen to Lucille Clifton read one of her poems “Come Celebrate with Me” at [http://www.pbs.org/wnet/foolingwithwords/main\\_video.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/foolingwithwords/main_video.html) Ask students to discuss and share their reactions to the poet reading her poem. What did they like? What did they notice? What parts did the poet stress? Why? Did the experience of hearing her read her poem add to their appreciation of the poem? Why or why not?

**Independent/Pair/Group Work:**

Students can now explore the poems on their own, in pairs or in small groups. If lap tops are available, students can be given the PBS website and they can locate the poems on their own. You can also make copies of the poems suggested in the materials section of this lesson.

Students will select and read three poems. The pairs or groups will read each poem several times and then analyze the three poems looking for ways that the poets have used language and how they have “fooled” with words. Students will consider the questions:

How does the poet use language in this poem?

Where are the strong words or images in this poem?

Does this poem have a profound affect on the reader? Why or why not? Which of the three poems do you think uses language in the most interesting or powerful way?

Students should locate examples in the poems that support their thinking.

**Share/Closure:**

As students are working on their poems, circulate among the groups and select a few groups to share their observations with the whole class. Be sure to select groups that were able to focus on how the poets used language.

**Extension/Writing:**

Students can practice writing a poem where their word choice is very deliberate and thoughtful. For students who do not feel comfortable writing a poem, they can look for other poems that use language in powerful ways.

**adam thinking**

By: Lucille Clifton

she  
stolen from my bone  
is it any wonder  
i hunger to tunnel back  
inside desperate  
to reconnect the rib and clay  
and to be whole again

some need is in me  
struggling to roar through my  
mouth into a name  
this creation is so fierce  
i would rather have been born

**Lesson #7:** Rhythm “We Real Cool” by Gwendolyn Brooks

**Focus Question:** What poetic forms and devices do poets use?

**Teaching Point:** To understand how rhythm, diction and line breaks enhance the experience of a poem for a listener

**Why/Purpose/Connection:** To appreciate how poets build rhythm with words and line breaks

**Materials/Resources/Reading:** Copies of “We Real Cool” by Gwendolyn Brooks  
Computer to listen to audio

**Model/Demonstration:**

Distribute copies of “We Real Cool” to students. Give students time to read the poem silently on their own. Divide students into groups and ask them to reread and consider how the poem should be best read aloud.

Students should consider when to pause, why, what words to stress and why. Students should also consider the poem’s effect on the audience.

Students should also think about how white space affects this poem.

Provide students with 15 minutes to prepare a performance of the poem. Their performance should express their understanding of the poem. You can also allow students to use props.

Student groups can then perform the poem for each other and discuss.

After all groups have performed the poem and discussed the performances in relation to how the poem was interpreted by the audience, listen to the poet read her poem at poets.org (<http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15433>). Students can then compare their versions to the poet’s.

Alternate Activity: Rewrite the poem as one long sentence and challenge students to rewrite the poem in poetic form considering line breaks and white space. After students have rewritten the poem and a few have shared (at the board or on an overhead projector) distribute copies of the poem as written by Gwendolyn Brooks. Discuss student choices and how they are alike and or different from the poet’s. How have their decisions changed the way the poem is read aloud or silently?

**Independent/Pair/Group Work:**

Groups perform their poems. Teacher leads a class discussion.

**Assessment:**

Exit Slip: Have students write a reflection on their experience with “We Real Cool.” Challenge students to define poetry after this lesson. How has their definition changed since the unit started?

**We Real Cool**

By: Gwendolyn Brooks

The Pool Players.  
Seven at the Golden Shovel.

We real cool. We  
Left school. We

Lurk late. We  
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We  
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We  
Die soon.

## Lesson #8 (Part 1): Figurative Language

**Focus Question:** What poetic devices do poets use?

**Teaching Point:** To learn how poets use figurative language to convey meaning

**Why/Purpose/Connection:** To broaden students understanding and use of words and phrases when interpreting poetry and song lyrics and when creating poetry.

### Materials Needed:

- Copies of the Figurative Language handout (definitions of literary terms)
- Copies of the following poems:

Mentor Text: “Identity” by Julio Noboa Polanco

Practice Texts:

“My Papa’s Waltz” by Theodore Roethke

“Young” by Anne Sexton

“Ode to Family Photographs” by Gary Soto

“We Real Cool” by Gwendolyn Brooks

“The Negro Speaks of Rivers” by Langston Hughes

### Model/Demonstration:

Motivate the students by reading the following description aloud:

“She slithered into the room quietly and listened. After several days of observing, she finally uncoiled her long limbs, stretched her neck, leaned against the desk and began speaking, swaying as she spoke. With those first words, she began to slowly poison their minds.”

1. What two things are being compared? [a woman and a snake]
2. How is the woman described? What does she resemble?
3. Why would the writer liken a woman to a snake? Consider what effect the writer was after.

The example from the passage above is a metaphor. A metaphor is an unlikely comparison between two things that does not use the words like or as. A metaphor can be one word, one sentence or it can be extended throughout an entire stanza or poem. In the example above, the words slithered, uncoiled, stretched, swaying and poisoned all contribute to the metaphor of woman as snake.

Remind students that writers have many ways to use language figuratively to enhance their writing.

Distribute and review Glossary of Figurative Language. Teacher should briefly model the activity using the poem “Identity” by Julio Nobao Polanco, using the Glossary as a reference. Flowers and weeds are two central images within the poem. Ask students to first brainstorm what they think these words mean generally and then the teacher should model how the two images are used as extended metaphors within the poem and juxtaposed to develop two distinct images about identity. After the mini-lesson and class discussion about figurative language, the class can continue to develop their figurative language skills by selecting their own poem and working in small groups.

**Independent/Pair/Group Work:**

Once students have a basic understanding of the terms, tell them that they will work as a group to hunt for figurative language in a poem of their choice.

See above list of poems recommended for this lesson. The poems have been used before and the idea is to revisit the same poems but to read them with a different purpose to deepen their analysis and thinking.

Divide class into several groups and have them choose (or assign them) one or more of the figurative language terms: imagery, simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, personification, and allusion. Each group’s task is to create a chart that includes the following:

1. Title of poem that includes the term(s)
2. An “in your own words” definition of the term
3. An example of the term from one of the poems (cite the title and author of the poem)
4. A student-created example of the term
5. A picture that illustrates the example from one of the poems or the student example.

Title of Poem that uses figurative language	Type of Figurative Language (simile, metaphor, etc.)	Definition in your own words	Example of figurative language as used in poem	Student example

**Differentiation:**

Students reread and mark poems. Students share responses and work in small groups.  
Students conduct a gallery walk of work by others within their class.  
Students extend the activity and learning by using a song of their own selection.

**Share/Closure:** Conduct a gallery walk of each chart. Students read and share responses and can use post-its to comment on each others' charts.

**Assessment:** Circulate as the groups work on their posters, guiding them to evaluate and edit their work before transferring to the poster.

**Homework/Extension of Activity:**

1. For homework, ask students to find examples of metaphor or other figurative language used in a song they like.
2. Use the Songfacts and/or Lyrics Freak Web sites, or provide students with additional time for research in the computer lab or on a classroom computer. Note that the sites might contain explicit lyrics and that students should be supervised while accessing them, or teacher can select appropriate lyrics.
3. Tell students they will select one song and print or write the selected song's lyrics for the following day's activity. Teachers should caution students against sharing explicit lyrics and should provide students with guidelines for "keeping the lyrics clean" for this activity. Lyrics can also be screened by teacher before they are shared with other students.

**Songfacts**

<http://www.songfacts.com/>

Songfacts provides information about a huge collection of songs, including links to printable lyrics.

**Lyrics Freak**

[http://www.lyricsfreak.com/a\\_top.html](http://www.lyricsfreak.com/a_top.html)

Browse or search this database of song lyrics.

## Figurative Language Graphic Organizer

Title of Poem and figurative language	Definition of term in your own words	Example of term from poem with explanation	Student example of term	Illustration of term

**Identity**

By: Julio Noboa Polanco

Let them be as flowers,  
always watered, fed, guarded, admired,  
but harnessed to a pot of dirt.

I'd rather be a tall, ugly weed,  
clinging on cliffs, like an eagle  
wind-wavering above high, jagged rocks.

To have broken through the surface of stone,  
to live, to feel exposed to the madness  
of the vast, eternal sky.  
To be swayed by the breezes of an ancient sea,  
carrying my soul, my seed,  
beyond the mountains of time or into the abyss of the bizarre.

I'd rather be unseen, and if  
then shunned by everyone,  
than to be a pleasant-smelling flower,  
growing in clusters in the fertile valley,  
where they're praised, handled, and plucked  
by greedy, human hands.

I'd rather smell of musty, green stench  
than of sweet, fragrant lilac.  
If I could stand alone, strong and free,  
I'd rather be a tall, ugly weed.

**MY PAPA'S WALTZ**

By: Theodore Roethke

The whiskey on your breath  
Could make a small boy dizzy;  
But I hung on like death:  
Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans  
Slid from the kitchen shelf;  
My mother's countenance  
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist  
Was battered on one knuckle;  
At every step you missed  
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head  
With a palm caked hard by dirt,  
Then waltzed me off to bed  
Still clinging to your shirt.

**Young**

By: Anne Sexton

A thousand doors ago  
when I was a lonely kid  
in a big house with four  
garages and it was summer  
as long as I could remember,  
I lay on the lawn at night,  
clover wrinkling over me,  
the wise stars bedding over me,  
my mother's window a funnel  
of yellow heat running out,  
my father's window, half shut,  
an eye where sleepers pass,  
and the boards of the house  
were smooth and white as wax  
and probably a million leaves  
sailed on their strange stalks  
as the crickets ticked together  
and I, in my brand new body,  
which was not a woman's yet,  
told the stars my questions  
and thought God could really see  
the heat and the painted light,  
elbows, knees, dreams, goodnight.

**Ode to Family Photographs**

by Gary Soto

This is the pond, and these are my feet.  
This is the rooster, and this is more of my feet.

Mama was never good at pictures.

This is a statue of a famous general who lost an arm,  
And this is me with my head cut off.

This is a trash can chained to a gate,  
This is my father with his eyes half-closed.

This is a photograph of my sister  
And a giraffe looking over her shoulder.

This is our car's front bumper.  
This is a bird with a pretzel in its beak.  
This is my brother Pedro standing on one leg on a rock,  
With a smear of chocolate on his face.

Mama sneezed when she looked  
Behind the camera: the snapshots are blurry,  
The angles dizzy as a spin on a merry-go-round.

But we had fun when Mama picked up the camera.  
How can I tell?  
Each of us is laughing hard.  
Can you see? I have candy in my mouth.

**The Negro Speaks Of Rivers**

By: Langston Hughes

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the  
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.  
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.  
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.  
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln  
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy  
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

**Lesson #8** (Part 2): Figurative Language Flocabulary

**Materials:** Speakers to play figurative language song, lyrics (printed or projected)  
Audio website to hear song, <http://www.flocabulary.com/figurative-language/>  
Flocabulary figurative language worksheets

1. Listen to Flocabulary's figurative language song, "Wordplay," with your class. Tell students that the song defines 11 types of figurative language, as well as giving examples of each. Focus on no more than five terms per lesson, to give students time to review each term in depth.
2. After the song has played, review the terms to be focused on in the lesson by clicking on the lyrics. Ask students to record the term definitions in their Figurative Language Notes chart. Ask students to identify the usage of the figurative language in the lyrics and record that in the chart, too.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Figurative Language Notes

Use this sheet to review different types of figurative language. Students can begin with 5 terms of their choice, and continue on another sheet if they'd like to focus on more terms.

#### Learn From the Song, "Wordplay"

**Term**

**Definition**

**Examples in the  
Song**

**Your Examples**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Figurative Language

### Matching

Match each example to the literary device it uses. Some examples may use more than one device.

Literary Device	Example
1. Alliteration	a. This is the hardest worksheet that has ever been made!
2. Allusion	b. Franklin rode his limousine past the homeless people.
3. Assonance	c. Without the air conditioner, my room was an oven.
4. Hyperbole	d. The wind sang a lovely song in Marco's ear.
5. Irony	e. Marisol jumped into the pool with a splash!
6. Juxtaposition	f. Her voice sounded like nails on a chalkboard.
7. Metaphor	g. Ken's speech was as inspiring as President Kennedy's famous speech about going to the moon.
8. Onomatopoeia	h. The loon flew through the smooth dunes in June.
9. Personification	i. The new guy was as friendly as a rottweiler who just had his tail stepped on.
10. Pun	j. Marcia made milk chocolate macaroons for Mardi Gras.
11. Simile	k. The astronaut thinks that flying is too plane.

Copy of the song, "Wordplay" (Class will listen to this on audio)

Meet Will, a youngin' with an old soul,  
 An emcee who wants to be the next to blow.  
 Imagine: he's in a dark room in Manhattan,  
 Scrapping, scribbling on napkins,  
 Trying to make a living off rapping,  
 But skills, he lacked them. Nobody thought that it would happen,  
 Until one day, Will switches his style,  
 Gets deep, and his wordplay gets witty and wild.  
 He used to sound so embarrassing,  
 Now peep all the metaphors and comparisons.  
 His life is a highway, but he'd confess,  
 He has a plan but needs a GPS.  
 He's using references and allusions,  
 A lyrical Houdini, creating illusions.  
 Dolphins in '72 - he won't lose,  
 Up by the first alarm, he's not snoozing.  
 You'll be amazed by every phrase,  
 He will come correct with the wordplay.  
 Literal lines that block his way,  
 He will come correct with the wordplay. (x2)  
 Comparing with like or as, he's dropping similes,  
 Taking little steps like a centipede.  
 He's sharp like a laser, sharp as a razor,  
 In a night as dark as Darth Vader.  
 Dude can juke and adjust his position,  
 Contrasting two things in juxtaposition,  
 From weak to made, cheap to paid,  
 A creep to a dude who leads the way.  
 Using personification, what's he doing?  
 Making objects and animals seem human.  
 The moon smiles as the city breathes,  
 He can feel the heartbeat of the city streets.  
 A live show? You really oughta see it.  
 Will will drop some onomatopoeia,  
 Words that sound like what they describe,  
 Now the crowd's buzzing - it's alive.  
 You'll be amazed by every phrase,  
 He will come correct with the wordplay.  
 Literal lines that block his way,  
 He will come correct with the wordplay. (x2)  
 Will he exaggerate? Use hyperbole?  
 He's the best ever at it, so certainly.  
 With assonance, vowel sounds he's repeating,  
 He seems the least beat in any season.  
 His fans are legion, all the boneheads who bring beef  
 Leave with lots of lyrical lesions.  
 That's alliteration - same sound sentence,  
 It's commonsense - he's calm with the confidence.  
 Using irony, opposite meaning,  
 His lines hit as soft as iron, believe him,  
 Good with the puns and the wordplay, oh my,  
 Going deep in double meanings like they were a coal mine.  
 Will's skills are sick like ERs, you heard of this?  
 Get hit and you'll see stars like Copernicus.  
 If you only have one chance to shine,  
 You better get up, get out and go wild.

## **Lesson #9:** Tone and Meaning

**Focus Question:** What poetic devices do poets use?

**Teaching Point:** Examine how tone and meaning are conveyed through the poet's word choice

**Why/Purpose/Connection:** to add to student's growing understanding of how critical word choice is to poets.

### **Materials Needed:**

Copies of "We Wear The Mask" by Paul Dunbar

Copies of "Hanging Fire" by Audrey Lorde

Copies of "My Papa's Waltz" by Theodore Roethke

(copies of these poems have been provided earlier in the unit)

For this lesson use poems that have already been used or read in class (the poems above were used for the Poetry Splash) so they can serve as mentor texts. Students will already have some initial understanding of the poem before they explore tone.

### **Model/Demonstration:**

**Motivation:** Brainstorm a list of words that convey strong feelings. List the words on the board and lead a discussion of what feelings the words may convey.

Review the definition for tone or ask students what they think it means. After student share their thoughts tell them that tone generally refers to the way we use our voice to enhance the meaning of spoken words. We have all heard a variety of tones when people speak. An angry tone, a frightened tone, a happy tone is simple to distinguish in speech (when someone is talking). Voices and tone in poetry, however, are relayed in print and since we do not witness the poet or speaker using his/her voice, tone and body language to communicate, we must infer by reading the words. Tone is revealed most often in diction (speech, pronunciation), but also through images, cadence (tempo), rhythm, or other techniques such as font size, spacing, and capitalization.

Model using the poem "My Papa's Waltz" by Theodore Roethke.

Read the poem aloud to the students, then reread poem and model filling in the template (using chart paper or board), demonstrating what you are thinking about the poem's tone as you read. The poem can be interpreted in two ways (see below) depending on how the students infer the tone of the poem.

Possible Interpretations for the poem;

Bittersweet, Reminiscing: The father works a lot and drinks, but the author is recalling a time when the father was there, and telling the reader how close the father and son were. The poet may be reminiscing about an encounter with his dad from his early childhood.

The second is a less nostalgic, more adult interpretation. The father comes home from work and has had too much to drink, but his actions are seen as a little menacing. The wife is frowning in fear or worry. The father's knuckle is raw, implying a possible prior fight. There is a sense that the dance is rough and has the potential for danger.

There may be a combined interpretation of the two listed above; the idea is to have students look closely at the language and consider if the words in context of the poems are more negative or positive to help reach an interpretation. The interpretation should be based on looking at diction, considering the rhythm and other techniques for conveying tone.

Create a chart on the board with three columns (see below). Have students listen to "My Papa's Waltz" and model finding words and phrases in this poem that suggest tone. Model the chart with a few examples before students are asked to complete the chart.

Word or phrase from Poem	What tone do words suggest?	Connotation: positive, negative or neutral
beat time on my head	rough, abusive; or playful	negative; or positive
romped	playful, energetic	Positive
scraped	rough	negative
waltzed	playful	positive

**MY PAPA'S WALTZ**

By: Theodore Roethke

The whiskey on your breath  
Could make a small boy dizzy;  
But I hung on like death:  
Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans  
Slid from the kitchen shelf;  
My mother's countenance  
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist  
Was battered on one knuckle;  
At every step you missed  
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head  
With a palm caked hard by dirt,  
Then waltzed me off to bed  
Still clinging to your shirt.

Discuss the poem in terms of tone. Lead the discussion based on some of the following parameters:

Diction (word choice and its connotations)

Rhyme scheme (Is there rhyme or slant rhyme present?)

Images (Are the images beautiful? light? dark? frightening?)

Review how Tone and Mood work together. Complete the poem with the students to model how they can use the words to interpret tone. Have the students reach an interpretation of tone and meaning. After this activity transition to the group activity listed below.

**Independent, Paired or Small Group Work:**

Have students choose any of the poems previously introduced (except “My Papa’s Waltz”) to analyze tone. Use either “We Wear The Mask” by Paul Dunbar, “Hanging Fire” by Audreya Lorde, or “I, Too, Sing America” by Langston Hughes. Group students according to their choices. Make sure there are no more than 3 students in each group. While each student is responsible for taking notes there should also be a timekeeper, discussion leader and presenter. Students will create a three-column chart listing words or phrases from the poem that they feel relay the tone/emotion and whether it is positive or negative.

After the students have analyzed tone in their poem and shared their findings with the class you can have an extension activity by having them write a poem attempting to use a strong and decisive tone.

**Differentiation:**

Students can practice reading the poems aloud. Students can reread and mark their group poems.

Students can write their personal poems. Students can share their findings with a partner.

**Share:** Groups share their charts and poems.

**Assessments:** Teacher reviews student T-charts and poems.



## Lesson #10: Interpreting Poetry

**Focus Question:** How does performance affect our understanding of poetry?

**Teaching Point:** Students will consider how performance and interpretation influence meaning.

**Why/Purpose/Connection:** Students can see the connection between traditional poetry and modern day song lyrics. They can appreciate the chosen words and how music is a form of poetry, as well.

### Materials Needed/ Resources

Recording of “All Apologies” by Nirvana

<http://www.pandora.com/music/song/nirvana/all+apologies>

Recording of “All Apologies” by Sinead O’Connor

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuHxqzgFLvQ>

### Model/Demonstration:

Play each song. The written lyrics should also be available for students. After each song, have students write down the images that came to mind as they listened to each song.

Discuss student responses.

Ask students:

How did their responses to each version of the song differ? How were their responses the same?

How did each artist interpret the lyrics?

In what ways are the songs like poetry? How are they different?

Do they contain poetic devices (rhythm, tone, theme, imagery, etc.)?

Provide copies of the lyrics. Ask students to consider if the written lyrics could be interpreted differently had they not listened to the songs.

### Independent/Pair/Group Exploration:

Provide access to “Ain’t No Sunshine” by Akon

(Lyrics: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/aint-no-sunshine-lyrics-akon.html>) and the original

version by Bill Withers. (Withers lyrics: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/aint-no-sunshine-lyrics-bill-withers.html>; Withers video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tIdIqbv7SPo>)

Students can compare and contrast the two versions.

### Closure:

Pose this question: have student’s definition of poetry changed? Let students discuss their thoughts and responses to the question. Are song lyrics poetry? Why or why not? If they are, are they always, or just sometimes? When are they?

**Extension/Assessment:** Have students find cover versions of songs they like and analyze how the different versions, singers and musical arrangements affect meaning and interpretation.

## **Lesson #11:** Performance in Poetry

**Focus Question:** What is the importance of performance in poetry?

**Teaching Point:** To understand how a dramatic reading can impact tone and meaning

**Why/Purpose/Connection:** Learning to perform poems dramatically will increase student understanding of the poems they read.

### **Materials/Resources/Reading:**

Chart paper, highlighters, index cards

Copies of Performance Annotation chart Copies of Warm-Up hand out

**Model/Demonstration:** View the performance of Knicks' Poetry Slam 2009 at Youtube – performances by B. Yung and Sonya Li at  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLGpOboonlk> Sonya Li's performance  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNuhJE9I0Qo> B. Yung's performance  
 (Please note, not all performances at the Slam are appropriate for school use.)

Lead a discussion or ask the following questions:

What do the students notice about how the poem was presented (body language, position on the stage, voice tone, expression, gestures, etc.)? How did the performance techniques add to the experience of the poem? What was the overall tone or mood of the poem? What techniques did the performers employ? How did you (as a listener) respond to the performance? To the poem?

### **Independent/Paired/Small Group Work:**

Distribute copies of the following poems to students and ask that they select the one that they wish to perform.

“Fast Break” by Edward Hirsch

“This Moment” by Eavon Boland

“The Death of Santa Claus” by Charles Webb

“The Rider” by Naomi Shihab Nye

Have students work in pairs to read and then annotate the poem with (\* ! ?).

Encourage students to read the poems more than once. Pairs/groups will share and discuss the poem.

Conduct a brief whole class discussion while encouraging students to identify what is most important about their poem.

Students will then work in their groups or pairs to plan and practice how they will perform their chosen poem. Give students 15-20 minutes to prepare.

Before the performances begin share the warm-ups with the class and encourage students to use the exercises to prepare. Vocal and physical warm ups are included with this lesson.

Before students perform, remind them of respectful audience behavior. Then, each group takes turns performing their poems.

**Share/Closure:**

After the performances lead a class discussion. Allow students to respond to each other's presentations. Some questions to consider:

How was the performance received? What was the most important thing to come across to listeners? Was this intended? How did the performances affect the listener's interpretation of the poem?

**Assessments:**

Student performances (teacher can audio or videotape, and use rubric to rate). Annotated poems that students created to accompany their performance.

### Rubric for Poetry and Performance

	A	B	C	D	F
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Everyone in the group remains on task.</li> <li>- The work is completed in class thoroughly with a healthy group dynamic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most of the members of the group were on task for the majority of the time.</li> <li>- Most of the work was done thoroughly, but there was some catching up at the end.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some of the members of the group were on task; others had issues.</li> <li>- The job got done after a rush at the end.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group members were on task sometimes.</li> <li>- Your work was somewhat finished, but there was a lot more time spent talking about the work rather than doing it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There was a lot of discussion about everything, but not much else.</li> <li>- There was no real work accomplished.</li> </ul>
Knowledge of the Poetry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Your interpretation of the poem was clear in your presentation.</li> <li>- Your interpretation was unique and interesting. You communicated it in an interesting, engaging and fun way.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Your knowledge of the poetry was apparent.</li> <li>- You had a clear interpretation that you successfully conveyed to the class.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Your interpretation was present, but not entirely clear.</li> <li>- It seemed like you needed some more time to prepare.</li> <li>- The audience has some idea of what you are talking about.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Your interpretation was unclear or not complete.</li> <li>- You seemed confused at times.</li> <li>- The audience was confused.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It seemed like you were not very familiar with the poem or did not really know what the poem was about.</li> <li>- Your confusion was apparent to the audience.</li> </ul>
Showmanship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You were so much fun to watch!!!</li> <li>- You really brought the audience in and they wanted more.</li> <li>- I felt like I was at a real poetry slam.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You were fun to watch.</li> <li>- You were creative and the audience enjoyed your performance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You were fun to watch.</li> <li>- You seemed to lose focus at points, but overall it was a good show.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You lost focus at some points and lost your composure.</li> <li>- I was rooting for you... but you didn't quite pull through.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You did not try to win over the audience.</li> <li>- You were monotone.</li> <li>- You struggled with your reading.</li> </ul>

Overall Presentation and Creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You were creative and interesting to watch.</li> <li>- I was impressed with your obvious depth of knowledge, showmanship, care, and knowledge.</li> <li>- Your presentation was outstanding and showed obvious time and effort.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You were creative and interesting to watch.</li> <li>- You knew your stuff and it was clear in your presentation.</li> <li>- It is clear that you used your time wisely and were ready to present.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Your presentation had flaws: parts were better than others.</li> <li>- You obviously tried with this, but it didn't completely come together.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You were not prepared and therefore your performance was flawed.</li> <li>- You needed more time to really give a quality performance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You just read from the page.</li> <li>- Your effort was not apparent.</li> <li>- You did not provide a comprehensible interpretation of the text.</li> </ul>
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Group Member Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Name and Author of Poem: \_\_\_\_\_

### Slam! Poetry Performance Annotation Chart

Line From the Poem	Body Language, Gestures	Placement on the stage	Who is speaking the line and to whom?	Tone of voice (loud, soft, fast, slow, overlapping, waiting for one another, long pauses, no pauses)	Additional dramatic elements

**Fast Break**

In Memory of Dennis Turner, 1946-1984

By: Edward Hirsch

A hook shot kisses the rim and  
hangs there, helplessly, but doesn't drop,

and for once our gangly starting center  
boxes out his man and times his jump

perfectly, gathering the orange leather  
from the air like a cherished possession

and spinning around to throw a strike  
to the outlet who is already shoveling

an underhand pass toward the other guard  
scissoring past a flat-footed defender

who looks stunned and nailed to the floor  
in the wrong direction, trying to catch sight

of a high, gliding dribble and a man  
letting the play develop in front of him

in slow motion, almost exactly  
like a coach's drawing on the blackboard,

both forwards racing down the court  
the way that forwards should, fanning out

and filling the lanes in tandem, moving  
together as brothers passing the ball

between them without a dribble, without  
a single bounce hitting the hardwood

until the guard finally lunges out  
and commits to the wrong man

while the power-forward explodes past them  
in a fury, taking the ball into the air

by himself now and laying it gently  
against the glass for a lay-up,

but losing his balance in the process,  
inexplicably falling, hitting the floor

with a wild, headlong motion  
for the game he loved like a country

and swiveling back to see an orange blur  
floating perfectly through the net.

**This Moment**

By: Eavan Boland

A neighborhood.  
At dusk.

Things are getting ready  
to happen  
out of sight.

Stars and moths.  
And rinds slanting around fruit.

But not yet.

One tree is black.  
One window is yellow as butter.

A woman leans down to catch a child  
who has run into her arms  
this moment.

Stars rise.  
Moths flutter.  
Apples sweeten in the dark.

**The Rider**

By: Naomi Shihab Nye

A boy told me  
if he roller-skated fast enough  
his loneliness couldn't catch up to him,

the best reason I ever heard  
for trying to be a champion.

What I wonder tonight  
pedaling hard down King William Street  
is if it translates to bicycles.

A victory! To leave your loneliness  
panting behind you on some street corner  
while you float free into a cloud of sudden azaleas,  
pink petals that have never felt loneliness,  
no matter how slowly they fell.

**The Death of Santa Claus**

By: Charles Webb

He's had the chest pains for weeks,  
but doctors don't make house  
calls to the North Pole,

he's let his Blue Cross lapse,  
blood tests make him faint,  
hospital gown always flap

open, waiting rooms upset  
his stomach, and it's only  
indigestion anyway, he thinks,

until, feeding the reindeer,  
he feels as if a monster fist  
has grabbed his heart and won't

stop squeezing. He can't  
breathe, and the beautiful white  
world he loves goes black,

and he drops on his jelly belly  
in the snow and Mrs. Claus  
tears out of the toy factory

wailing, and the elves wring  
their little hands, and Rudolph's  
nose blinks like a sad ambulance

light, and in a tract house  
in Houston, Texas, I'm 8,  
telling my mom that stupid

kids at school say Santa's a big  
fake, and she sits with me  
on our purple-flowered couch,

and takes my hand, tears  
in her throat, the terrible  
news rising in her eyes.

## Ideas for Culminating Projects

The projects below should be introduced to students after the first week of the unit. In this way, students can work on their projects as they work through the unit. Provide each student with a folder. In this folder students will keep all their notes, drafts, poems, research, etc. that will be used for the final project.

The following culminating projects provide students with an opportunity to apply their learning in a variety of ways.

**Option 1:** For students who wish to write their own poetry (or song lyrics): Create a poem anthology consisting of 8-12 original poems (or songs). Challenge the students to think about an overarching theme or strand (for example love poems, or poems about school, family, etc.) that relates to all the poems in some way. The Poetry anthology must include a title for the collection of poems, an introduction, dedication, a table of contents, and a short bio of the student- author.

**Option 2:** For students who wish to analyze and collect the poems of others

Select 8-12 poems to include in a poetry anthology. For this project, the students will act as editors. They will select the poems based on a specific theme or strand that appeals to them. Each poem that is selected for the anthology must be accompanied by an explanation as to why this poem is being included in the collection. The explanation should state why this poem is of particular appeal to the student and how it fits with the other poems in the collection. Students will need to determine a title for the collection, an introduction, dedication, table of contents, and a short bio of the student-editor.

**Option 3:** For students who wish to analyze a collection of poems by one poet

Select 8-12 poems written by the same poet to include in an anthology. For this project the students will act as editors. Each poem that is selected for the anthology must be accompanied by an explanation as to why this poem is being included in the collection. The explanation should state why this poem is of particular appeal to the student and how it fits with the other poems in the collection. Students will need to determine a title for the collection, an introduction, dedication, table of contents, and a short bio of the student-editor.

Encourage students to be creative and include illustrations if they choose.

## Chapter 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

### *Putting It all Together*

To get students thinking about how their new learning is meaningful and connected to prior learning and future learning, at the end of the unit engage students in thoughtful discourse and activities that affirm the relevance of what they have learned. Encourage students to ask the bigger questions about their lives as readers and thinkers and to raise important issues that push their in-school learning toward meaning and purpose in the world outside of school.

Revisit the question that was asked at the beginning of the unit: What is a poem? Students will realize that this is not an easy question to answer. Can they identify the things that all poems have in common? Is this possible? Can poetry be defined? Why or why not? What do students believe all poems have in common? Why?

Ask the students to think about and discuss the following questions:

- What have I learned about poetry?
- Is this important?
- What have I learned about myself as a reader, thinker and writer?

Revisit students' poetry anticipation guides that they completed at the beginning of the unit. Students can reflect on their initial responses and think about how their opinions have changed (or not).

This unit of study was largely based on the research and findings of Anna Commitante, Kateri Kennedy, Amber Najmi-Shadid, Denise Jordan, Laura Isabella Robertson, and Stephanie Wallgren, a group of New York City based educators who value the inclusion of poetry in English Language Arts class.

### *Conclusions*

In summarization, the purpose of this project was to explore the various ways poetry effectively enhances learning. Poetry improves reading comprehension, writing skills, critical thinking, vocabulary, and engagement. Research identified specific studies and teacher anecdotes that touched on the reasons poetry is being taught less and less. This project is a Poetry unit for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades that educators could use to meet several objectives in the New Common Core. The theme is *Self and Identity* and the skills covered include; vocabulary, understanding the use of figurative language, free writing, astute word choice, interpretation of the written word, public speaking, how to convey and understand tone and meaning through word choice, determining theme, and creative writing. Several teaching strategies were incorporated to effectively reach the diverse needs of students. These strategies include: active reading by annotating the text and by using symbols next to key points, group work, a variety of graphic organizers (character web, K-W-L, compare/contrast), presentations, think-pair-share, ticket-out-the-door, and pre-planned questioning. Rubrics have been provided throughout the unit to ensure students are always aware of what is expected from them.

Experienced teachers have documented the various reasons poetry works so well when teaching ELA. One overarching reason, pointed out by Carol Clark, author of the article, “Why Teach Poetry” is the commonality among song lyrics and poetry. It is an instantaneous hook for reluctant readers. The short, simplistic style of poetry attracts students who are intimidated by lengthy texts. Above all, the emotional connection that poetry brings to factual articles strengthens students understanding of the text and helps them produce more thorough and comprehensive pieces of writing in response to the

literature. With that said, unfortunately, still many teachers have stopped including poetry in their curriculum. The reasons for this include: some students perceive it as too difficult, therefore, creating a huge hurdle for the teacher, teachers are unsure how to accurately teach poetry, students may not be reading at grade level making some poems challenging to comprehend, and the changing state standards have not incorporated poetry as much as it has included non-fictional pieces.

In lieu of the fact that there are several reasons why teachers have been choosing *not* to teach poetry in recent years, this project is an example of a Poetry unit that enables educators to effectively incorporate poetry back into their lesson planning, yet, still feel that they are providing a valuable education to their students. The poems provided have been strategically chosen to relate to the theme of *Self and Identity*; a theme that many (if not all) adolescents can relate to. Teenage years are full of change, uncertainty and questions. The selected poems allow these issues to be discussed, as poetry not only works as an effective teaching tool, it provides the opportunity to discuss extremely important issues in young adults' lives. Poetry creates a connection between the text and the students. It enables students to feel the emotions associated with the text, making the topics covered in class much more tangible and relevant. Poetry, also, allows students a chance to show their individuality and offer his/her own opinion on a topic. Doing this allows students to feel relevant in class as they share their unique thoughts. Unlike prose, it does not leave students restricted to simply restating the facts found within the text. This Poetry unit provides ample opportunity for students to work together and share ideas before they create writing pieces or presentations. The element of individuality that poetry brings to a classroom greatly impacts learning and enhances engagement and,

when administered correctly, creates a relationship of trust and respect between peers and amongst student and teacher. By only using non-fiction and evidence based texts, ELA is changing into a class that does not nurture individuality and creativity.

I can recall my high school ELA classes and how much I enjoyed them because it was the only core subject I was allowed to write how I felt about issues. I was able to display who I was as a person and discuss or write about topics that were important to me. My high school English classes were full of choice and gave me the freedom to use my imagination when completing assignments, unlike any other class in school. I carried this freedom over into my ELA classroom when I became a full-time teacher in 2006. As a result, my students would constantly tell me that they loved that they could be creative and they flourished during class discussions and in writing assignments, especially during our Poetry unit. However, in 2009, as the district started requiring us to change our focus in class and start teaching a formulated style of writing that would help the students score higher on the state test, the freedom slowly started being drained from my class. Even though I had the overwhelming urge to encourage my students to find their voice as a writer and be original in their writing style, my hands were tied, and I had to teach my students exactly how to form each paragraph according to the new requirements sent down from the district. With this major shift in teaching ELA, poetry lost its place and became increasingly difficult to continue to incorporate into the curriculum. By the time I left that teaching position in 2012, many of my colleagues had stopped teaching their poetry units. A couple ELA teachers, including myself, continued to teach poetry, however, we had to make an extra effort and get together and revise our units to ensure our lessons met our new objectives.

As Dr. Hughes pointed out in her research, poetry should undoubtedly be taught in every ELA class because it helps improve literacy skills. She pointed out that poetry shapes our way of thinking and prepares us for life issues. Hughes thought outside of the box and created ways in which poetry could reach students of this generation; a generation so consumed with new media. For example, Dr. Hughes combined poetry with modern day technology and created opportunities for students to use computer programs to create poems accompanied by a movie that detailed the feelings associated with the words. She found that students respond favorably to this type of assignment. In the future, teachers need to be proactive and create poetry lessons that reach today's generation. Whether they use song lyrics, digital books, computer programs or Facebook, teachers should change with the times and begin creating poetry lessons that involve some form of new media. As presented in Dr. Hughes research, the students thought lessons like this were fun and were highly engaged.

The goal of the New Common Core Standards is that all students should graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college and careers. Districts and teachers need to remember that college is going to expect students to have a basic understanding of poetry. High school teachers need to continue to include a thorough unit of poetry in their plans that prepare students for college, careers, and life. Hopefully, as schools and the state work together to perfect this new set of guidelines it will be discovered that poetry needs to reclaim its place in English Language Arts class. To prepare our students for college and careers it is absolutely necessary to teach poetry in high school.

*Reflections on the Unit*

While it would be great to think that this Poetry unit could bring quieter students out of their shell and allow the more creative students to flourish; it is imperative to ensure that trust and encouragement are established early on in the year. The teacher needs to go over the level of respect required in the classroom in order for these lessons to truly be successful. Once trust has been established the idea is that students will have the confidence to participate in class discussions, presentations and writing. Even after the ground rules has been set, the teacher should consistently rotate amongst groups to ensure conversations are encouraging as opposed to discouraging.

A second important factor when creating this unit was the variety of poems chosen. The poems selected are all connected to the theme, *Self and Identity*. Young adults can easily relate to this theme and offer personal thoughts and experiences enriching class discussion which will, ultimately, improve their assignments. The poems chosen cover various issues in adolescents' lives. These issues include: parents, youth, struggles, loneliness, adversity, opportunity, adventure, uncertainty, etc. Teacher should note it is very important to select poems that his/her group of students are interested in and can relate to.

Many of the studies on incorporating poetry into ELA lessons expressed the importance of adding the emotional connection to non-fictional literature and evidence based texts. Providing students with the ability to understand the feelings behind an issue being studied enables students to look beyond the facts and develop a deeper understanding of the text. This connection strengthens critical thinking skills and increases the ability to produce better writing pieces. For the purpose of this project, a

couple song lyrics and hip-hop educational song were included to demonstrate that modern day music lyrics can be read as poems and used to teach poetry. This allows the teacher the opportunity to engage even the reluctant learners. However, it is important that each teacher chooses songs that fit the interests of his/her students.

### *Suggestions for the Future*

With all of the changes taking place inside schools it is important to remember that students are young people who are in the midst of the most challenging and confusing years of their lives. It is imperative that teachers keep this at the forefront of their mind as they prepare lessons and as they conduct class each and every day. As employees of the state, we are required to follow the directives sent down from our administrators, district, and state; however, we need to keep in mind that our students are not robots that we need to program to produce adequate writing pieces on tests. They are young adults with emotions that are trying to find their voice. We need to remember to build lessons into our curriculum that celebrate our students' individuality and allow them to bring their unique personalities into class discussions and writing pieces. Poetry is the bridge that connects students to teacher, it brings relevance to factual based text with emotion, and it opens the door to creativity in ELA class.

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