



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2008 Volume II: American Voices: Listening to Fiction, Poetry, and Prose

The Poetry of Self: Using American Voices to Shape Your Own Voice

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After teaching middle school students for a few years, I've realized that these students are mere clones of what they see on television and in movies. They have no idea of who they are as individuals. While teaching them poetry will not be the answer to all the questions they may have about who they are, where they've come from and where they're going, it can help them voice some of the emotions they may begin to feel along their journey to self-discovery. Throughout this unit, students learn to appreciate the difference that using their own voice can make in the interpretation of a piece of writing. They learn that there are many ways of expressing themselves and see that they have a voice that can become powerful, whether or not it is heard. The students will learn that their voices are essentially their backgrounds or identities. They've come from somewhere that is important and it's now necessary that everyone knows.

This unit, produced as a result of the American Voices seminar, combines poetry writing and interpretation, poetry in performance, and various American authors and poets. I teach eighth grade Communications (English grammar and Reading combined) at an arts academy. Our school works in partnership with a local arts organization, Manchester Craftsmen's Guild (MCG) to integrate arts into the curriculum.

In this unit, the students will find their voices by completing a myriad of reading and writing exercises. Those newly found and/or formed voices will enable the students to create their own individual poetry anthologies, a class anthology, and to deliver a poetic monologue, about a topic of their choosing, to an audience. With the assistance of MCG, the monologues will be audio and/or video recorded for the students.

(Developed for English, grade 8; recommended for English Language Arts and Poetry, grades 6-9)

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