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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2009 Volume IV: The Sound of Words: An Introduction to Poetry

Discovering Voice

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The most ancient of literary genres, poetry uniquely lends itself to the primacy of sound through conveying a sense of thoughts, feelings, and meaning. Poetry foregrounds sound as an organizational principle. Students often struggle with detangling form from function, which is surprising in that patterns of sound are primary in our acquisition of language. Students need to have a stake in their work in order to have bought in. For many of our students that is a connection to self.

Students already have a fundamental relationship to poetry in the form of music. This has only been furthered by the advent of the iPod and the variety of MP3 players available allowing students to readily access, store, share, and collect music. Because of this emergent technology, students seem to be even more enamored with sound than ever. However, we must not forget that sounds awaken us. The natural poetics of rhythm and meter helps us connect with poetry in the very organic sense of sound. Students cannot see poetry without hearing poetry.

By the end of this unit, students will write and discuss the issue of intellectual property in popular music basing their arguments in examples from the canon of authentic poetic literature.

(Developed for AP English Literature and Composition, grade 12; recommended for AP English Literature, Composition, and World Literature, grades 11-12)

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