



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

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## **Listen to the Sound of My Voice: Teaching Poetry to Make Language Whole**

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by Jeanette Gibson

I will teach this unit over a three-week period as part of my American Literature curriculum. I will focus on the experience of sound in poetry to stimulate listening in students. In doing so, I will strengthen their listening skills to "make language whole." I have tried to show how listening underpins all the activities in my English classroom. It is an eleventh-grade class but my students are tenth graders on an accelerated curriculum.

I have selected four poets: Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Robert Frost and Walt Whitman. Each of these poets is gifted and models a different style of poetry. Hughes wrote many poems that echoed blues rhythms. McKay wrote an emotional sonnet, "If We Must Die," that encouraged African-Americans during a dark time in their history. Robert Frost was a master of blank verse, and Walt Whitman was an ingenious trendsetter with his free verse. The selected poems are engaging and age-appropriate for my students.

I will also use audio recordings, reading aloud, discussion, thinking-aloud, and listening to music as basic activities in interacting with each poem. These primary activities will stimulate other activities such as classroom discussions, writing, research, collaborative group work, analysis, evaluation and feedback.

(Developed for American Literature 03, 05, and 07, grade 10; recommended for Language Arts, grade 9, World Literature, grade 10, American Literature, grade 11, and British Literature, grade 12)

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