



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

*to strengthen teaching in public schools®*

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2017 Volume III: Poetry and Public Life

---

## **America the Beautiful: A Look at Race and Acceptance in America through Poetry**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 17.03.08, published September 2017  
by Debra Titus

Is your poetry curriculum in need of depth? Is there more to poetry than just similes and metaphors? To what degree is it necessary to read beyond the lines and discover the complexity in which the poet scribes? These questions are pivotal to the educator that teaches poetry. Is it enough to pinpoint figurative language, or should students seek more? Students need the opportunity to transcend the words on the page, and dig for deeper meaning. Analysis of poetry is at a deficit across the educational stratosphere and even more so at the elementary level. Students need to grapple with complex text in different ways. Starting with poetry that they can relate to may be a way to bridge the gap.

In this six week unit, students will read a plethora of poems. Students will study Black poetry, and its depiction of race, acceptance and beauty in America. Students will examine poetry through sequence in time, starting with Negro Spirituals and Hymns, and progress to Blues and Harlem Renaissance Poetry, Contemporary and Modern Poetry and conclude with Hip-Hop. This unit is intended for students in fifth grade, yet can be weaved into poetry units at the intermediate and secondary levels.

(Developed for English Language Arts, grade 5; recommended for English Literature, grades 9-10)

---

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

©2023 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University, All Rights Reserved. Yale National Initiative®, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute®, On Common Ground®, and League of Teachers Institutes® are registered trademarks of Yale University.

For terms of use visit [https://teachers.yale.edu/terms\\_of\\_use](https://teachers.yale.edu/terms_of_use)