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

Poetic Visions and Versions of America

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Poetry and America. The two topics seemingly have not a lot to do with each other and certainly, do not seem of interest to most teens across the nation. This year-long unit combines these two dynamic topics into something that will be engaging and thought-provoking for students in a high school setting. Originally designed for an AP Language and Composition class, this unit brings poetry into the conversations about what America is and should be. The goals are to include more poetry in a typically non-fiction focused classroom and to sharpen analysis and writing skills, while deepening students' understanding of the world around them.

What is most useful about this unit is that the poems suggested can be used to pair with novels, plays, essays, and visuals that are also used in a Literature classroom. Poets emphasized are Walt Whitman, Woody Guthrie, and Bob Dylan (a "Whitman tradition") to Emily Dickinson, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Sylvia Plath (women in the same time span on gender and race in America). This unit offers ways to approach the poems and engaging activities to help guide students to create their own visions and versions of America through poetry -- a much needed conversation in these divisive and confusing times.

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

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