



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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

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## **Philadelphia, Do you See What I See?**

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by Terry Anne Wildman

Why is it important to teach poetry in schools? How can we teach it in a way that does not intimidate students but instead excites them? This unit explores various strategies to engage students in writing poetry. In our reading curriculum, poetry is interwoven throughout the school year. It can easily get lost in the shuffle while teachers focus on non-fiction informational texts, text dependent analysis, and constructed responses.

This unit also focuses on using poetry to help fourth graders find their voice in order to articulate their thoughts and experiences about living in Philadelphia. Teachers can modify this unit to fit their own city. My students attend an inner city school with over 600 students ranging from Pre-Kindergarten to Fifth Grade. Our state testing begins in third grade and our benchmark testing is completed in grades one through five. In the midst of this testing environment, teachers find they struggle to cover all topics and genres that they would like to cover. The Pennsylvania Common Core Standards for fourth graders include explaining major differences between poems, drama, and prose and referring to structural elements of each when writing and speaking about texts. This unit uses Kenneth Koch's "poetry ideas" along with other strategies to engage and encourage students to write what they are thinking and feeling about living in Philadelphia. Drawing on Rudyard Kipling's "Philadelphia," Carl Sandburg's "Chicago," and Walt Whitman's "The Great City," students will use poetry ideas to write poetry about living in a big city.

(Developed for Language Arts, Writing, and Poetry, grade 4; recommended for Language Arts, Writing, and Poetry, grade 5)

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