



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
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## **Looking Forward: Whitman and the Creative Spirit in American Poetry**

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### **Overview**

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My curriculum unit focuses on the poetry of Walt Whitman and how his legacy is sustained in American poetry. Through the study of a wide variety of poems—from classic to contemporary—the unit introduces students to Whitman's innovative ideas and American poets, who, like Whitman, challenge conventional thinking and help us redefine our world. This creative act of re-imagining our world is revolutionary and the particular province of the poet. Through a variety of methods, I invite students to explore this province, learning how poets observe closely, raise provocative questions, embrace originality, and seek candor. I want students to see poetry as a form of creative expression. Like other creative arts, poetry makes you feel, think, and reassess. It can make you feel divine; it can make you feel uncomfortable; and it can, to quote the poet Robert Bly, make you "think in ways you've never thought before."<sup>1</sup> Recently one of my students said that poetry allows the reader to experience "moments of recognition." The idea that poetry can provide the catalyst to small epiphanies about who we are and how we can negotiate a complex world is exciting and provides a basis for the kind of stimulating, trans-disciplinary curriculum my students crave. The unit helps students know themselves better and shows them how creative thinking is accessible to everyone. Students will come to understand why poetry is such a powerful art form, worthy of their attention.

This six-week unit is designed for an eleventh-grade American Literature class at a small alternative high school in the city of Richmond, Virginia. It is also designed to prepare students for the Virginia Standards of Learning end-of-course test in English. The ultimate aim of the unit, however, is to promote creative, questioning behaviors in my students.

The weekly structure of this unit (which includes a Socratic seminar, model annotations, small group discussion, and creative exercises) offers students multiple ways to develop their appreciation of poetry and the creative process. Throughout the unit, I develop the thesis that there is an American poetic tradition—born in America with the work of Whitman—in which poets transgress traditional forms, ideas, and ways of seeing through their creative use of language. Students explore carefully selected, thematically-grouped poems (one theme per week) which encourage them to question their assumptions, think critically about complex subjects, and see language as a tool of great power.

## Rationale

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After teaching both literature and creative writing courses, I saw the need to link the reading, writing, and creative processes in the minds of my students, who often enjoyed poetry more when they were writing it. For me, enjoyment of poetry is a primary goal. Too often, students don't see the point of reading literature, especially poetry. They view language study—and specifically poetry study—as rigid, boring, and difficult. Students often want a "practical" application for all they do in school, and many do not initially see enjoyment of poetry as a meaningful goal. In all my teaching I challenge the idea that education is merely preparation for employment. Enjoyment of poetry, while perhaps not a marketable skill, actually confirms the power of language, enhances analytical skills, and affords reader and writers new ways of seeing the world. While my students will most likely not become poets, their ability to think critically and solve problems creatively will benefit them regardless of their professional or personal pursuits.

I also saw the benefit of exposing students to a diversity of poetry rather than focusing on a few popular poets. (At the same time I use multiple works by the same poet so students can see stylistic patterns of individual poets.) Analysis and the ability to explicate poetry are undeniably beneficial skills, but they will not develop unless poetry is directly relevant to the lives of my students. Using a variety of poems helps facilitate this goal. This unit thus attempts to develop students' analytical skills as well as encourage creative expression by generating excitement about language—its complexity, its flexibility, its form, and its sound.

As a writing teacher I've learned that many students do not believe they have anything of value to write about or share. Many students don't think of themselves as unique beings, often because they are hyper self-conscious, only viewing themselves through the lens of a dehumanizing and disempowering media. Often I read painful "teen-angst" poetry that, at some stage, is probably healthy and even essential for some students. However, students need the encouragement to explore themselves in more complex ways, free from the grip of trite expressions. I want them to use more concrete diction and avoid impersonal abstractions that ultimately devalue their uniqueness. Students also need a poetry unit to help them see their daily, "ordinary" experience as worthy of poetic expression. I invoke Whitman's phrase "and your very flesh shall be a poem" to remind my students that they must not be poets, but they must attempt to live "poetic lives" of true engagement with themselves and their world.

## School Profile

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This unit supports the larger mission of Open High School to create students who are self-directed, independent learners. Open is a community-based, alternative, public high school, which supports a student body of no more than 200. Students—from all over the city of Richmond—apply and go through an interview process in order to be accepted. Our criteria, however, is not just academic, so a wide range of skill levels are represented. Classes are fifty minutes each, four days per week. On Thursday, students take elective courses. While students must fulfill state graduation requirements, they are also allowed to self-select courses, which often include college, dual-enrollment, or non-traditional classes held off campus.

Because of its size, a sense of community prevails. The major organizing feature is the Family—composed of about fifteen students—where advising, support, and service learning opportunities occur. Students represent themselves at bimonthly Town Meetings where the whole school comes together to discuss issues of concern. Teachers are also on a first-name basis with students, which encourages more authentic relationships between students and faculty. We have a strong principal, whose participatory management system means that the faculty is consulted each week during staff meetings.

The student population is approximately 75% African American and 25% white. 27% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch in the 2004-2005 school year. In the two years that they have been required to pass state standardized tests, our students have performed well, and the school is fully accredited by the Commonwealth of Virginia. Over 90% of students attend college, although SAT scores are not competitive, and, true, across-the-board scholarship remains an unmet goal.

## Objectives

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This unit is intended to support National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Language Arts standards. The strategies are specifically designed to develop students' critical thinking, active reading, writing, listening, and oral language skills. In addition, students will be able to express themselves creatively, experiment with digital technology, and explore visual literacy as a complement to alphabetic literacy.

The unit also fulfills the Virginia Standards of Learning for Grade Eleven English and prepares students for the end-of-course test, which they must pass in order to graduate. Thus, students will

- read and critique various poems
- analyze and understand elements of contemporary and traditional poems
- identify poetic elements and techniques
- compare and contrast works of contemporary and past American poets.

## Strategies

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### Walt Whitman and the Creative Spirit

The unit begins with an introduction to Walt Whitman and his profound influence on American poetry. His innovative ideas are still current in 2005—the 150th Anniversary of the publication of *Leaves of Grass*—and his legacy is wide ranging. If there were a foundational text in American poetry, *Leaves of Grass* might be it. Roy Harvey Pearce asserts that "all American poetry [since *Leaves of Grass*] is, in essence if not in substance, a series of arguments with Whitman".<sup>2</sup> Certainly the more Whitman I read, the more I realized that many contemporary poets were the same poets that Whitman suggested "look back on me because / I look'd forward to them...."<sup>3</sup> And in "Poets to Come" Whitman directly demands: "you must justify me".<sup>4</sup> I became more and more interested in establishing a connection between the poetic past and the poetic present—an American poetic tradition where the poet's purpose was to be "transcendent and new."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, with the

transcendentalist ideas of Emerson and Thoreau, a new American identity was born, which insisted on limitless human potential and the importance of nurturing the creative spirit. Whitman solidified these ideas in poetry, and twentieth century poets have continued this tradition.

The 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass* provides a framework to understanding the creative imagination of Whitman. His constant revisions to *Leaves of Grass* (nine editions in all) are also a reminder to students that the creative process is just that—a process rather than a final, authoritative product. Whitman's skepticism towards "authority" itself is found in the Preface and provides an excellent introduction to the radical nature of his vision. The prevailing authority in terms of poetry was the European model, but Whitman tells us that "A heroic person walks at his ease through and out of that custom or precedent or authority that suits him not"; or again: "nothing is finer than silent defiance advancing from new free forms."<sup>6</sup> Whitman believed that we all have the potential to be heroic if we question tradition and resist the tyranny of conventional wisdom and the status quo. Indeed, Whitman embraced innovation and in so doing he embraced the creative spirit.

I have always been intrigued by the following passage from the Preface:

This is what you shall do: Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to every one that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men, go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young and with the mothers of families, read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of your life, re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem.<sup>7</sup>

This directive may be initially confusing to students. When asked to paraphrase, they often focus on the re-examination of what they're taught in "school, church, or in any book," an activity I encourage within the classroom. Other commands are also instructive, and can begin a lively debate on the larger message that Whitman is trying to convey. I also take the opportunity to point out that prose can be poetic, in this case through the diction, the punctuation, the use of active verbs, and the tone. It is also appropriate to ask students how they might direct others to live a more fulfilling life.

So here is Whitman's command that we, his readers, engage in a different kind of living, one that I would argue embraces the creative spirit. How do we define the creative spirit? The creative spirit is my term for a multi-faceted *way of seeing* that is accessible to everyone. Poetry is especially well suited as an artistic form to express this idea. The word poet derives from the Greek word for *maker* or *creator*. And language, on many levels, creates our reality. Poets' use of language allows them to define, redefine, question, and analyze the material and spiritual worlds. As poets well know, language allows for multiple possibilities, multiple meanings, multiple responses.

In order for students to explore the creative imagination, I ask them to consider creative people or personalities they know and describe their behaviors. Among other behaviors, creative people:

- challenge our thinking, causing us to rethink our assumptions
- ask questions
- avoid self-censorship

- face fears
- dare to be naïve
- consider possibilities
- make connections
- take risks, experiment, and play
- listen, observe, and wonder
- express themselves honestly
- reveal complex relationships
- see the ordinary as extraordinary
- revel in contradictions
- think positively
- work through frustration

This list is reviewed and expanded based on students' responses. It is then displayed on a large poster in the Poetry Corner of the classroom (where I house poetry collections, writing handbooks, dictionaries, thesauruses, etc.). Neither Whitman nor poets are alone in their use of these activities, and in some way this makes a larger point. Harnessing creativity is vital for any field of study, and, I would boldly argue, for creating a richer life in general, just as Whitman commanded. This list will be referred to through the unit to help students understand Whitman, other American poets, and their own imaginative selves.

After this introduction, I review poetry terms using an interactive PowerPoint presentation. Here an emphasis is placed on how poets use these elements to create a particular effect or inspire a particular feeling in the reader. After the presentation, students are given a handout of the slide show for study. They are responsible for knowing all terms and applying them on a quiz, a final objective test, and in their own original poetry.

To set Whitman in context, we briefly discuss 17th and 18th century poetic conventions in America, such as meter, rhyme, and elevated language. Poets like Anne Bradstreet, Phillis Wheatley, and the Fireside Poets borrowed their style from the European model. Themes were still lofty and bookish, rarely appealing to the common folk or ordinary experience. Defiantly, Whitman made that appeal, believing women were equal to men, poor people were as important as rich, and no human experience was unworthy of our attention, including the experience of our bodies. It was not until the 19th century with Whitman that we see true American poetic innovation. Whitman favored free verse, and is often credited with being the first American poet to use it.

We also discuss how alliteration, assonance, and consonance become essential sound devices for the free-verse poet, creating rhythm. Of course Whitman also relies on the natural rhythms of speech (cadence) and emphasizes the vernacular rather than the elevated style of his American and European predecessors. Like most poets, Whitman continues to use figurative language, but he places special emphasis on sensory imagery. We will also discuss anaphora, enjambment, catalogs, and parallelism. Students will be responsible for all terms.

At this point we study examples of contemporary poetry to connect the poetic present and the poetic past. On the overhead, we will first examine "Kissing the Toad" by Galway Kinnell, who credits Whitman as his "principal master."<sup>8</sup> This short, free verse poem provides an excellent example of consonance with the hard *k* sound and includes a vivid simile. The onomatopoeic "piss" will likely cause students to snicker, perhaps believing this to be an inappropriate word for a poem. This is a good segue for discussing the use of the vernacular and how critics believed Whitman to be obscene in his day for similar language choices. The last

italicized line, "*To love on, oh yes, to love on*"<sup>9</sup> seems reminiscent of Whitman's exaltations, and here we also have an allusion to a fairy tale and all the promises and mysteries that are transmitted therein.

Next, we look at poetry by Nikki Giovanni—the Walt Whitman Birthplace Association's 2005 Poet-in-Residence. Her free verse poem "Love in Place" is a good example of how important specific diction is to creating a unique statement, in this case about love. As with the Kinnell poem, I'll ask students to consider line breaks as an essential structural element. Why does Giovanni break lines where she does? We'll also look at Giovanni's "I Wrote a Good Omelet." Here Giovanni plays with syntax, mixing her verbs so that nonsensical phrases result. With little prompting, students can see the relationship between *how* Giovanni writes and *what* she writes: the confusing use of language reflects the confused state of love the speaker feels. I will also ask students to discuss the rhythm, rhyme, repetition, and punctuation choices and their effect. What, for instance, would be the effect if this poem were written in free verse like other poetry by Giovanni? Would it have the same resonance?

Lucille Clifton's "Quilting"<sup>10</sup> offers another interesting way to discuss language and the goals of poetry. Clifton invokes Whitman in her memoir *Generations* and has proved to be, like Nikki Giovanni, a favorite of students. I selected this poem primarily because of the questions at the end. Here the poet explicitly asks the reader questions, but so often the questions in poetry are implicit. I want students to see that because of the questions, multiple readings of poems are possible, but arguments also require textual evidence to be valid. After a dramatic oral reading of the poem, we begin brainstorming title implications. *Quilting* might evoke words like *folk art, craft, women, history, pattern*, among others. Clearly Clifton is interested in presenting two different orientations toward existence, worlds that are "spinning / away from each other." Quilting seems to represent one world, whereas the alchemists reside "some other where." Alchemy is an early unscientific form of chemistry that eventually led to modern science, and we're told "Their science freezes into stone" (a probable reference to the philosopher's stone and attempts by alchemists to magically create gold). The coldness contrasts to the warmth provided by the quilt, which comes about from a need to stay alive and preserve history. While the manufacture of gold was certainly not the only motivation for alchemists, it does raise valuable questions about greed and the cold rationality of science. Clifton appears interested in two types of private, esoteric knowledge—one practiced by men and one practiced by women. Interestingly, one could argue that both forms of knowledge involve art and science, imagination and rationality. The speaker then wonders if these two orientations can be reconciled with each other or whether they will continue to diverge. As readers, we are also invited to wonder and debate whether the speaker's concerns are valid. This process of questioning is something I want students to do with all the poetry they read.

For homework students will be asked to play with language by taking a selection from "Song of Myself" and manipulating the words to create a new poem. They will also be given another Whitman selection, written in prose format, and asked to create an original poem by manipulating structural aspects such as stanzas, line breaks, and punctuation. These creative exercises allow students to see the range of possibilities that language provides.

## **Celebration of the Self**

Just as Whitman created his own persona as *the* American poet and voice of a diverse nation, he asks his audience to re-invent themselves, especially in "Song of Myself." According to poet William Logan, Whitman "invented the self-conscious myth of the self that has been our chief mode of poetic understanding."<sup>11</sup> The idea of self-knowledge and recognition of the "divine self" plays a fundamental role in my classroom and in the selection of poems for this curriculum unit. I chose specific poems to help my students reorganize their world



so they can see themselves as heroic individuals with free will. Rather than an idle self-esteem booster, this is meant to provide a frame of reference to move students toward the questioning behaviors that are required for true growth.

We begin with a Socratic seminar on selections from "Song of Myself." These selections (1, 2 [lines 32-37], 24 [lines 497-526], 51 [lines 1324-1326], and 52) will be provided on a handout before our discussion. (See Classroom Activities, Lesson 1)

Next comes a whole class, interactive annotation of two Emily Dickinson poems: "Much madness is divinest sense" and "The Soul selects her own Society." These poems reflect Whitman's ideas about allegiance to the self, regardless of prevailing societal forces. Interestingly, in 1862 when Dickinson was asked if she had read Whitman, she responded "I never read his Book—but was told that he was disgraceful."<sup>12</sup> Still, one might argue that Dickinson's own reputation was enhanced by Whitman's because she, like Whitman, defied poetic convention to create startlingly innovative verse. The poems are difficult to discuss, both in terms of meaning and form, and provide a good opportunity to work on annotation skills, which are foundational to strong active reading skills. (See Classroom Activities, Lesson 2)

"The Soul selects her own Society" presents great ambiguity—a term I want my students to become familiar with as it applies to literature. We will first discuss personification of the soul and how pronoun references (like "she") are often unclear and need to be identified as the reader moves from stanza to stanza. The first line is manageable—the individual determines how she wants to live creating her own society, in this case a society of one. Here the speaker identifies the self as the "Majority," seeing it as divine (in opposition to the negative connotations of the word in the first poem). The soul then "shuts the door" to the external world. The word "Present" is challenging. Does Dickinson mean this as an adverb as in *here* or does she mean it as a verb as in *to give*? I leave these questions open for student interpretation and continue to the second stanza and ask students to consider where the personified soul is located. The words *door*, *gate*, and *mat* suggest she is at the threshold between the inner world of the self (inside a house) and the outer world of society (the street). The words "Chariot" and "Emperor" suggest authority and that which the soul rejects by shutting the door. She is, it seems, unimpressed with authority which conflicts with the self (an important theme throughout literature). Indeed, the soul is "unmoved" even as the Chariot "pauses" and the Emperor "kneels." In the third stanza it seems that the individual soul is of itself a "nation" entire (a majority of one), in no need of permission from outside authority. The soul chooses her own company, and perhaps closes the very agency of the soul—the heart and its valves—so that a stony resoluteness and commitment to the self is achieved. While this is only one interpretation, the purpose of this close reading is to show students that they can read critically if they slow down and ask questions of a text.

I will also ask students how this poem might be about solitude or love, applying what they know of Dickinson's background to a reading of the poem. Dickinson's unconventional use of capitalization and dashes is quite important, and we'll discuss these creative choices and their emphatic and temporal effects. Alliteration and repetition will also be highlighted. Naturally, these discussions will enhance students' language skills.

In addition, we will discuss the differences between Whitman's style and Dickinson's—a comparison that is helpful when approaching more contemporary poetry, which is often concise rather than effusive, as was Whitman's. While each poet formulated their own poetic sensibility apart from established literary traditions, their stylistic choices were very different. A brief summary will be shared on the overhead and discussed with students:

(table 05.01.10.01 available in print form)

Contemporary voices that echo Whitman's ideas about individuality include Jimmy Santiago Baca, Nikki Giovanni, and Yusef Komunyakaa. In Baca's "Who Understands Me But Me," the idea that the self is an evolving concept is beautifully explored in a way that resonates with troubled, inner-city youth. A brief consideration of Baca's biography will provide a context for discussing the poem, as well as proof that hardship can become a gift, if only we choose to see it this way. His use of cataloging, anaphora, and parallelism is also reminiscent of Whitman. In Giovanni's "Ego Tripping," celebration of the self is evident. Her rich use of allusion, hyperbole, repetition, and imagery inspires students to see themselves as a Whitmanesque hero, a divine manifestation of something powerful. Komunyakaa (who writes a beautiful homage to Whitman in the poem "Kosmos") provides another perspective on the divinity of man in "Slam, Dunk, & Hook"—a poem that may have special appeal to young male students. (See Classroom Activities, Lesson 3)

We will briefly discuss the tradition of the "brag" as a means of asserting oneself in a public way. Certainly much of Whitman's poetry evokes this ancient tradition which, as Logan notes, "echoed Homeric vaunts before battle, the boasts of Beowulf, the howls of the sagas."<sup>13</sup> Students may be more familiar with "your mama is so..." invectives and modern slam poetry. This war of words is especially apparent in Giovanni's poem, but all three poems involve a proud celebration of the self. So for homework, students will create their own "brag" poem, rejoicing in their unique being, applying poetic techniques and creative strategies reviewed thus far.

Whitman's celebration of the self included both spirit and body, challenging the spirit/body dualism that still infects our society and favoring a more holistic view of the self. In terms of poetry, students need to be aware that so many of our experiences are sensuous, that is, mediated by the body's five senses. So often we take our senses for granted, and I hope to return teenagers to an appreciation and attentiveness to their bodies. For adolescents, discussion of the body might make them uncomfortable, and it is important for this very reason. This also begins an important conversation about sensory imagery. I will perform a dramatic reading of "I Sing the Body Electric" [9], where we are asked to contemplate the infinite complexity and variety of our bodies.

Students, especially female students, are bombarded with media images that tell them they are insufficient in their less-than-perfect bodies. Poetry that embraces our aesthetic differences can be a powerful tool to help students see themselves and society differently. I will introduce students to Lucille Clifton's "Homage to My Hips." While perhaps not appropriate for every classroom, the poem humorously encourages students to reassess "ideal" body types. Marge Piercy also tackles the body—and dysmorphic disorder—in her poem "Barbie Doll," which I will share as another perspective from which to approach the subject of the body.

For homework, students will write a poem which celebrates a body part. There will be obvious restrictions, affording us an opportunity to discuss audience, as well as the difference between the personal and the private in writing. In *Risking Intensity*, Judith Rowe Michaels also suggests this exercise, and her sample student poems are impressive.<sup>14</sup>

## **Childhood**

As the unit moves into the topic of childhood, Whitman is still the guide. During the 19th century, there arose a greater awareness of children (as distinct from adults) and an interest in how they thought. In "There Was a Child Went Forth" the child sees and becomes an extension of what he sees. It is a poem that raises the



question of how we negotiate our existence in the company of others and in particular environments. It is also a poem that allows us to explore our own childhood and how we become who we are. Do we have control over our destiny when we can't control our past? This is a critical question for students, who too often have fatalistic ideas about their identities and their futures. A discussion of this poem can help students reframe their childhood even if it's a troubled one. (Education, in general, provides the means for this reframing, and the connection is worth discussing with students.)

"There Was a Child Went Forth" also provides a good opportunity to discuss formal elements, namely the paratactic style, reminiscent of the King James Bible—certainly one of Whitman's most important literary influences. Whitman seems to use this style to consciously highlight the tone of detachment: just as the phrases are disconnected, so seemingly are the varied facets of a child's life. Is this how children see the world? Or is this how adults see the world? Or is Whitman just asking us to consider our past as a key to understanding our future?

The camera-lens perspective seems to report objectivity, which allows for an interesting examination of possible implications. What is suggested about the child's personality by virtue of what he is exposed to? Such an examination—whether conducted as part of a Socratic seminar or as a writing assignment—will help students better understand the role their own environment plays in creating their identity. I focus on specific "scenes" of family life, city life, and the natural world, but also the following lines:

Affection that will not be gainsay'd, the sense of what is real, The thought if after all it should prove unreal, The doubts of day-time and the doubts of night-time, the curious whether and how, Whether that which appears so is so, or is it all flashes and specks? Men and women crowding fast in the streets, if they are not Flashes and specks what are they?<sup>15</sup>

This peculiar aside provides the only two questions in the entire poem, and seems to reveal the questioning mind of the child—no longer the passive watcher but the active interrogator asking "whether and how" about the world. While the poem may be autobiographical, Whitman's child might be any child whose experience creates an individual of great complexity and depth.

In an effort to understand children and our pasts, 20th century poets take the phenomenology of childhood in new directions. Contemporary American poets also challenge us to be brutally honest with ourselves to better understand the role our past plays in shaping our future. Certainly honesty is the hallmark of a good poet and an important concept I want students to apply to all their writing. While we here may "risk intensity" (to borrow a line from Michaels), honesty is an essential element of the creative imagination. Whitman rejoiced in this idea: "How beautiful is candor! All faults may be forgiven of him who has perfect candor."<sup>16</sup>

In Komanyakaa's "Venus's-flytraps" the speaker is a child who sees but doesn't yet understand his world, his family, his own backyard. In "i am accused of tending to the past," Clifton uses an extended metaphor to discuss history and its complexity. Many of Sharon Olds's poems explore similar terrain. Like Whitman, Olds does not shy away from explorations of the body as a valid topic of poetry, and some of these poems may be better left for students to discover on their own. Here we will examine three poems by Olds: "Rite of Passage," "Killer," and "I Go Back to May 1937." The first two poems describe a parent's view of a child and the later poem describes a child's view of parents.

Creative exercises include the writing of an original poem based on a childhood photograph. Students are asked to carefully select photos that tell a story or have an emotional impact. Students may write a poem

about their own photograph or exchange photos with another student and develop a poem based on visual codes alone. I remind students that they can revise their history through their writing, honestly giving voice to their childhood, or they may take on a fictional persona, using the photograph as a guide to an imaginary world. A dialogue poem is also a fun creative exercise, allowing students to take on other voices and view their world from other perspectives. Using alternating stanzas, two perspectives (e.g., child and parent) converse, developing students' ability to experience empathy—a trait so characteristic of Whitman.

## The Natural World

The Natural World is our next topic, challenging students to consider their relationship with that other environment, personified as Mother Nature (an interesting archetypal metaphor worth exploring). Why have poets so concerned themselves with nature? How has our relationship with nature changed over time? What are the implications of such changes? How are we affected by nature—in the short term? In the long term? What are the benefits of close observation, contemplation, and wonder? How can we benefit from seeing the ordinary, natural world as miraculous?

In Whitman's "We Two, How Long We Were Fool'd" we see the inseparability

of man and nature—a concept my students will have explored earlier in a unit on Transcendentalism. Among other poems, I am reminded of Wordsworth's "The World is Too Much With Us" and how the majority of my students do seem "out of tune" with the natural world. Whitman hopefully suggests that humanity was once "fool'd" but has returned to a natural state of unification. Not only is humanity inseparable from Nature, but Whitman also suggests that humanity should provoke the same wonder and exhibit similar contradictions. Humans, he seems to say, are a divine manifestation of nature itself. "Miracles" makes this same point and perfectly illustrates how the ordinary can be seen as extraordinary. Here we will reflect back on "Song of Myself" [6] when the child asks "*What is the grass?*"<sup>17</sup> and the speaker acknowledges only the mystery of the universe. This is the romantic Whitman, who accepts—even embraces—man's inability to impose a wholly rational order on the world. This idea becomes even clearer in the poem "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer," where Whitman recognizes the limitations of science to explain a relationship with the nature.

The natural world also provides a lens through which Whitman tries to understand the human situation. In "A Noiseless Patient Spider"<sup>18</sup> Whitman uses metaphor to talk about the condition of the "soul." The spider, silent and alone, "launch'd forth" his web tirelessly, connecting himself to a "vacant vast surrounding." The soul too is isolated, but tirelessly seeks spiritual unification with the larger world by "ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them." Discussion will focus on symbolism, imagery, diction, approximate rhyme, repetition, apostrophe, alliteration, and their effects on the reader.

I then compare Whitman's spider poem to Robert Frost's "Design,"<sup>19</sup> a lyric also featuring a spider. It provides an excellent contrast in form, allowing us to review the structure of a sonnet and iambic pentameter. When teaching this poem, I model my own thinking process for my students on the overhead projector by annotating the text. Students do the same on their own copy. (This practice of active reading can lead to more formal written explications of the poem.) We read the poem aloud once, all the way through. After sharing initial ideas, we examine the title. I ask them to brainstorm all their associations with the word "design" and generally come up with a list that includes *plan, create, devise, pattern, shape*. I share with them another connotation of the word in its plural form, *designs*, suggesting a secretive plan undertaken for selfish reasons. What I'm most interested in at this point is having them ask questions of the poem and notice possible layers

of meaning created through the creative use of language. I ask students to look closely at the diction used in the first octave. Generally the only words students are unfamiliar with are "heal-all" and "blight." The white plant "heal-all" (usually blue) was used in folk medicine, hence the name. And "blight" is a plant disease or something associated with ruin and decay. So already students begin to see how Frost is playing with irony. I then ask students what they see, focusing on the imagery of the first three lines. I have a student draw a primitive scene on the board: a fat white spider, sitting on a white plant, "holding up" a white moth. When asked to translate this visual description, students see that the spider uses the plant as camouflage to trap the moth in his web. We discuss the oxymoronic language of "rigid satin" and the pun "right" which suggests a witches' "rite" or ritual of destruction. If there is any question about the moth's status, it's cleared up in the last lines with the simile "dead wings carried like a paper kite." But this language also returns to the harmless imagery of a child's kite and a "snowdrop spider," echoing the initial innocence of the dimpled, cherub-like spider of the first line. Just from the first stanza we can see Frost's interest in the paradox of the natural world: *design* suggests creation as well as destruction.

The sestet begins with a question, essentially why is the flower white, with all the implications of innocence? And what force brought the white flower, white spider and white moth—innocent as they are—together to create this scene from the natural world?

The final couplet asserts a final question: "What but design of darkness to appall?— / If design govern in a thing so small." Is there a creative force of evil at work in the universe, masquerading as innocence? The final line seems to raise the question of whether any design—good or evil—exists in the universe. Perhaps Frost is asking us to consider our tendency to anthropomorphize the natural world and even its designer.

"Design" is a rich, accessible poem that makes students think about themselves and their relationship with the environment. It also allows students to work on scansion, rhyme scheme, and sound devices like alliteration, assonance, and consonance. I follow up Frost's poem with "Ode to the Maggot," returning to the work of Komanyakaa. Not only does the poem remind us of Whitman's declaration "For I do not see one imperfection in the universe,"<sup>20</sup> it helps elucidate Frost's argument in "Design" and returns us to the idea of unity expounded upon in "We Two, How Long We Were Fool'd."

While Wallace Stevens may seem counterintuitive to use in a unit on Whitman<sup>21</sup>, I employ his "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" to help students see the profound complexity of the natural world and the various perspectives through which we can see it. It is also a wonderful model for students to imitate, using any aspect of the natural world. I've developed a matching exercise on the poem inspired by Nancie Atwell's gloss of the poem in *Lessons that Change Writers*<sup>22</sup>. This activity has been surprisingly successful and has led to beautiful, original student poetry.

## **Democracy**

The unity of all things is a pervasive theme throughout Whitman's poetry, whether in the context of the natural world or the democratic principles of the human world. Whitman is most concerned with equality of rights, opportunity, and fair treatment. He was the voice of the common man, insisting that Presidents should take their hats off to the people and not the other way around.<sup>23</sup> We'll begin with "I Hear America Singing," an inscription to *Leaves of Grass*. This frequently anthologized poem demonstrates how individuality ("each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else"<sup>24</sup>) and the collective American society (there is no tension between the voices) can coexist. This is not a poem to dwell on, but students should be reminded that Whitman gave the mechanics, shoemakers, and mothers a voice, insisting on the value of ordinary people and the hard labor that provided the foundation for this country's wealth. "The Varied Carol" by David Graham<sup>25</sup> is

a powerful contemporary companion poem to "I Hear America Singing," focusing on what Whitman might hear today and what we still have the potential to hear if we're willing to listen.

Graham's poem also leads us back to notions of the body, and students can be reminded that Whitman's interest in the body was an expression of a democratic impulse—we are all the same in body, aristocrat and prostitute alike. In fact, "To a Common Prostitute" may be controversial but will provoke an important discussion about tolerance, morality, ethics and their place in a democracy. "For You O Democracy" is another simple affirmation of Whitman's ideal America, which also raises the question about Whitman's own sexual orientation and the place of alternative lifestyles in a democracy—a topic much in the news and worthy of open debate in the democratic classroom.

Whitman's experiences during the Civil War and his admiration of President Lincoln will be discussed to provide context for Whitman's ideas about democracy and his ideal America. Whitman was critical of slavery, sympathized with the slave, and saw the need to identify with the 19th century African American experience. In the 1855 Preface he declares his goal to "cheer up slaves and horrify despots."<sup>26</sup> It thus makes sense that Langston Hughes was heavily influenced by the work of Whitman, even writing an introduction to an anthology entitled *I Hear the People Singing: Selected Poems of Walt Whitman*. Hughes's poems "I, Too Sing America," "Old Walt," and "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," will be considered here.

In "I, Too, Sing America," the provenance of the poem is obvious, and provides an excellent opportunity to discuss stanzas and line breaks, which force the reader to pause and consider Hughes's experience and his hopeful expectations of the future. There is also an echo of Baca's "Who Understands Me but Me" in the laughter and beauty that Hughes focuses on. "Old Walt" is a playful ode to Whitman's eternal quest to capture America in poetic form. Rhythm, rhyme, and repetition highlight Hughes's lyrical talent, together with the influence of jazz and the Harlem Renaissance.

We will spend a bit more time on "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." Here Hughes has adopted the parallel structure, characteristic of so much of Whitman's poetry. The speaker's voice is that of an entire race, and the poem seems to be an Afro-centric argument claiming the mighty origins of the black race, through which all other races follow. The river is the symbolic source of all life, and this common speaker asserts a connection to one of the four sacred rivers in Eden—the Euphrates. The acknowledgement to W. E. B. Dubois, author of *The Souls of Black Folks*, supports this reading as Dubois's scholarship included attempts to trace black identity to African roots, anticipating black nationalistic movements and the creation of the NAACP. This poem is also reminiscent of Giovanni's "Ego Tripping" and may place the subtitle "(there may be a reason why)" in a new context.

Allen Ginsberg is a well-known literary descendent of Whitman. He reminds us of Whitman's insistence on democratic principles and his innovative, rebellious, playful spirit. Ginsberg's unconventional lifestyle mirrored his unconventional poetry, which seems to resemble stream-of-consciousness prose, taking Whitman's effusive verse even farther. Persuaded by the rebel poet Kenneth Rexroth, Ginsberg decided early not to just write a poem but "just write what I wanted to without fear, let my imagination go, open secrecy, and scribble magic lines from my real mind—sum up my life—something I wouldn't be able to show anybody, writ for my own soul's ear and a few other golden ears."<sup>27</sup> Students should hear the echo of Whitman (and even Dickinson) in this quote.

We briefly discuss the Beat Generation of artists, spending some time just looking at the evolution of the word

"beat." As with Hughes, jazz music seems to permeate Ginsberg's rhythmic verse. I also focus on specific diction, imagery, and the paratactic style, which students will imitate with original poetry. I read lines 1-8 of "Howl" encouraging students to read the rest independently. They are reminded that this was published in 1956—one hundred years after the publication of *Leaves of Grass*. The title will be discussed, as well as the characteristics of a generation (with the understanding that only a small selection of the poem is being read), and how this poem embraced a Whitmanesque rebelliousness in terms of subject matter, language, tone, and form. This can begin a stimulating discussion about rebellion itself and "respectable" rebellious leaders like Thomas Jefferson, Martin Luther King Jr., and Jesus. How is rebellion necessary to ensure democratic values? What aspects of American history were shaped because of dissenting voices? "Howl" led to the arrest of the publisher and poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti for the distribution of obscene material. He was exonerated in 1957, but as recently as 2000, a teacher in Jacksonville, Florida was prohibited from teaching the poem in an Advanced Placement English class.<sup>28</sup> So how do students feel about censorship in a democracy? This is a rich topic to discuss with students, allowing them to see that issues we face today are not necessarily new.

In Ginsberg's "Supermarket in California," Whitman himself is featured in a contemporary setting. The speaker, in a dream-like state, finds surreal juxtapositions, including Whitman wandering in the grocery store. Whitman, as was his nature, asks questions. He and the speaker begin to sample the bounty without paying—ignoring convention, lost in wonder. The speaker wonders about Whitman's wonderings, the America that Whitman knew, and the America that exists today. So how has America changed since the 19th century? In Whitman's time racism and sexism were primary challenges to the idea of democracy. What new challenges does our democracy face? Students will also be encouraged to read Ginsberg's "America" on their own and contrast it with Whitman's vision of the nation.

The final poem for treatment is Lawrence Ferlinghetti's "In Goya's Greatest Scenes." But first I'll share Ferlinghetti's online "non-lecture," *What is Poetry?*<sup>29</sup> to help students see how Ferlinghetti was influenced by Whitman. (They will also be asked to consider Whitman's instructions on living a poetic life and then select one definition that best represents their understanding of poetry. Then they write their own definition, using precise diction and figurative language.) I ask students to compare Ferlinghetti's poem to Goya's paintings, as well as various images of America's modern landscape, which Ferlinghetti is clearly critical of. Here I'm not only interested in Ferlinghetti's disillusionment with America, but also the difference between words and pictures—an idea we'll explore further in the final project.

At this time I'll share *The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*, which shows students that a real tradition of dissent exists in our national literature. The democracy that Whitman envisioned included all voices, even the unpopular ones, as this volume attests. Slam Poetry is the natural continuation of this tradition, and we'll discuss local opportunities to participate in performance poetry. Whitman, would surely approve of this poetry by the people, for the people.

As a final creative exercise in democratic values, students will identify a stranger, an acquaintance, or a friend, and, based on close observation, select an inspiring poem (written by an American poet) to give to the individual as a gift. This assignment involves "common folk" and the power of poetry to inspire us all. It is also a fun experiment in how language works. Students will write a reflective essay about the individual, the poem, and why this particular poem is most appropriate for this person. As an example, I read "Waitress" by Billy Collins and discuss my plans to share it with a real waitress.

## Evaluation and Final Multimedia Project

A final comprehensive unit exam will test students on analytical skills and application of poetic elements. It will include poems students have studied, as well as unfamiliar poems so they can apply skills in new situations—something they will be required to do on the state standardized test. Creative work will be collected in a poetry journal, and students will be assessed based on completion of assignment criteria. They will also be asked to revise poetry and submit to the school's literary magazine.

The final project will be a multimedia presentation designed to bring together emerging technology and the many ideas covered in this unit. Skill level and access to computers will help determine if students should complete this task individually or in groups. In my case, students will work in groups to create a poetry montage. Poets have long been interested in the relationship between image and text, as seen especially in ecphrastic poetry of the 19th and 20th centuries. The internet and digital technologies of the 21st century challenge poets and audiences to further examine the relationship between different modalities of discourse—visual, textual, and auditory. Here we are truly "looking forward" to new ideas about creativity and language.

Before I assigned such a challenging project, I decided to complete the project myself. Using iMovie, I created a five-minute film, which included still photos of Whitman; text from *Leaves of Grass*; various images related to the four themes (Celebration of the Self, Childhood, The Natural World, and Democracy); music; and sound effects. Students will view this model at the beginning of the unit, and I will discuss my own thinking and creative process. For example, each image was selected for a specific reason and arranged in a specific order. Text on the screen was also consciously manipulated to create a particular emotional and intellectual response in the viewer. Transitions and music were also carefully selected to highlight particular themes and evoke particular responses.

By the third week of the unit, students will prepare a group prospectus detailing plans and objectives for their project, which must reflect the work of one or more American poets and incorporate one of the four themes in a creative way. Obviously this project can be approached in multiple ways, and experimentation with both language and new technologies is encouraged, even at the expense of a final polished product.

Using the internet, digital cameras, and digital editing software, they will use the final week of the unit to finish the project. Students will be required to incorporate original text; research about the poet(s) and his or her contribution to American literature; text from one or more poems; still images; moving images; transitions; music; and sound effects. They must complete a storyboard (due by week four) and a final essay explaining the creative process, the choices made, the group dynamic, and whether goals were met.

This project was inspired by the website [www.poemsthatGO.com](http://www.poemsthatGO.com), which explores the intersection between poetry and new media. Here poems become interactive experiences, using multiple modalities. The site explores how our ideas about poetry and language are transformed by technology, and students will be given class time to explore this fascinating site. This project, however, allows them to become producers, not just consumers of technological innovation.



# Classroom Activities

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## Lesson 1: Socratic Seminar

### *Objectives*

The Socratic seminar requires students to personally engage themselves with a text. While there are many different ways to structure a seminar, the most important feature is its collaborative nature: the teacher is a facilitator rather than the "keeper of knowledge." The goal is to focus on higher order thinking—analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of ideas—in order to illuminate understanding.

Students must:

- come prepared with text, a question, and writing implements.
- sit in a circle (with larger classes consider using an inner and outer circle where the outer circle evaluates the discussion)
- raise their hands and wait for acknowledgment from the facilitator (but they are to address each other)
- take positions, agreeing or disagreeing with classmates or facilitator (but textual support must be provided to support opinions)
- be polite (disagreement with ideas rather than individuals is encouraged)

### Procedure

Students receive poems and rules prior to the seminar. After reading poems and defining any unfamiliar vocabulary for homework, students formulate one specific, open-ended question concerning themes and values (rather than facts). This question will be turned in prior to the seminar on an index card and may be used by the facilitator at any time during the discussion. Group discussion is based on a series of divergent (open-ended) questions and a few convergent (closed or "yes/no") questions in order to hold students accountable for reading. The discussion should be organic and questions are merely a guide for the facilitator. Both the facilitator and students should ask follow-up questions.

Examples of Facilitator Questions:

1. In "Song of Myself" [1], stanza one, what might Whitman be asking of his audience?
2. Why is the verb "loaf" essential to stanza two? Does our society encourage or discourage loafing?
3. Why do you think Whitman uses the image of shared atoms in stanzas one and three?
4. What do you think the speaker is "beginning" in stanza three?
5. What does Whitman mean by "creeds and schools in abeyance"? How does this relate to the section of the Preface we read yesterday?
6. Why might Whitman use the verbs "harbor" and "permit" in stanza four?
7. What does Whitman mean by "Nature without check with original energy"? What might nature "with" check and "without" original energy imply?
8. What does Whitman entreat his readers to do in [2]? How does this directive conflict with conventional ideas about education?
9. Why is Whitman considered the most "democratic" of poets?

10. What are contradictions? Why is Whitman comfortable with them?
11. What does it mean to be "untranslatable"? How is this ironic? What might a "barbaric yawp" be? What might it sound like?
12. What do you think the main idea of "Song of Myself" is? Why is "Song" in the title?
13. What poetic elements has Whitman used? What are the effects?
14. How are Whitman's ideas radical or revolutionary? What, if anything, do they attempt to "overthrow"?
15. How would you describe Whitman the poet. How does he employ the characteristics of a creative person? Is "Song of Myself" worth studying in 2005?

### *Evaluation*

I will monitor student responses and the type of response (based on Bloom's Taxonomy) on a chart. Each student is expected to actively participate and will receive an oral participation grade based on number and quality of responses.

## **Lesson 2: Active Reading through Annotation and Explication**

### *Objectives*

Active reading requires students to interact with a text, conversing with an author, a speaker, and ideas. This is different from the passive reading that many students are accustomed to and that does not promote comprehension skills. With all reading, I encourage students to read closely and annotate a text as they're reading. Here students learn to "read with a pen," hopefully developing a lifelong habit. After annotating a text, students can bring their ideas together in a prose explication (literally an "unfolding"), where they begin to interpret the meaning or significance of a writer's choices. This, in turn, can lead to more formal analytical, thesis-driven essays.

### *Procedure*

Using copies of poems on transparencies, colored markers, and an overhead projector, I model how to annotate a text. Students are given copies of the poem to take notes, and colored highlighters. This is an interactive process, as I ask probing questions of students, allowing them to discover possible meanings. Students are encouraged to grab a classroom dictionary or thesaurus to explore words as I write their questions, associations, and synonyms in the margins. I underline words or phrases using different colored marks to connect related ideas. Or I might circle, use arrows, and insert words to clarify meaning. I mark up the double-spaced text on the overhead, noting: questions; significant or intriguing vocabulary; tone; shifts; allusions; relationships; patterns; figurative language; and sound devices. We will also discuss what effects these poetic choices have on the reader. (If time permits, I might share the poem "Marginalia" by Billy Collins, which demonstrates that readers really do write in books.)

Example of Textual Annotation: In Dickinson's "Much madness is divinest sense," diction is of special concern and provides an excellent introduction to the concepts of denotative and connotative meaning. For instance, the terms "sanity" and "madness" might also be expressed as "rationality" and "irrationality." And "much" might be read as "much of" or "some," so these words are written above the original text. For this poem I bracket off the first two lines and ask students to attempt a paraphrase based on the initial paradox and our investigation of vocabulary. It might be something like "To a person with good judgment, what is considered insanity might actually be inspired wisdom." We continue this line-by-line reading. In line three I ask students what word they might insert to replace the first dash, so that the first line is mirrored. The word "is" is inserted

on the transparency so that we read "Much Sense [is] the starkest Madness" or "What is considered rational might actually be irrational." I underline the word "this" and ask what the pronoun refers to. A line is drawn from line five to line three, connecting the ideas visually. The "majority"—which we've identified as the dominant voice in society—agrees with "this." "Assent" (suggesting *agreement*) to the majority opinion implies "sanity," while "Demur" (suggesting *objection*) to the majority implies a threat and someone who must be controlled with physical force. Eventually the speaker's message becomes clear: the beliefs of the majority are considered acceptable, while those who dissent from the majority are considered dangerous.

### *Evaluation*

Students will be required to apply these techniques to other poems discussed in class as well as to unfamiliar poems on the final unit test. Their ability to write a clear, well-supported explication of a poem will provide evidence that active reading is being practiced.

## **Lesson 3: Small Group Discussion**

### *Objectives*

Within small groups students will read multiple poems and complete various activities including oral reading, analysis of diction, identification of poetic elements, comparative analysis, and visual interpretation. These informal discussion groups will also give students an opportunity to make personal connections to the poem that they might not otherwise make in a larger group.

### *Procedure*

Handouts with questions will be provided to guide group discussion, and the teacher will monitor by circulating around the room. Students will be required to take on different roles, such as reader, recorder, and reporter. Groups will select a different reader for each poem and read each aloud, paying special attention to pacing (which should be slower than usual), line breaks, and punctuation. Then, after informally discussing each poem, the recorder should write down answers to the questions in complete sentences. Answers should be supported by textual evidence. The reporter will present findings to the larger group.

### Example of Small Group Exercises:

1. Why does Baca view his situation as beautiful? What are other freedoms he has discovered? What negative characteristics does Baca admit to, even embrace as a means to an end? Identify significant images and figures of speech. How is the poem—in both form and theme—similar to "Song of Myself"? How can a bad experience ultimately be beneficial? Give specific examples.
2. How does Giovanni's poem resemble "Song of Myself"? How does it differ? Giovanni is using humor and playing with language. As a group, identify your favorite lines. Why might Giovanni end the otherwise free verse poem with a couplet? What does the subtitle "(there may be a reason why)" suggest to you?
3. In Komunyakaa's poem, what does the allusion to the Roman god Mercury (Greek god Hermes) imply? Why does he use the image of "bad angels" and what are the implications? What other allusions to myth or fairy tale does this poem contain? What does he mean by the word "metaphysical"? Why do you think that Sonny Boy played hard the day his mama died? What might the "trouble" be? Identify figures of speech. Select four successive lines and discuss the line break choices. How is this poem similar to "Song of Myself"?
4. Select one poem and, using materials provided, create a visual interpretation. Use both text and images

to illuminate your sense of what the poem means or what is significant. Include both the title and the author. Be creative!

### Evaluation

Written work and illustration will be turned in. Students will receive a class work completion grade if they remain on task. They will also be required to apply critical reading skills and identify poetic elements on a final unit test.

## Materials

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- student poetry journals for creative exercises
- overhead projector, transparencies, and colored markers
- dictionaries, thesauruses, writing handbooks
- poetry collections and anthologies
- art supplies (large construction paper, markers, etc.)
- computers and internet access
- digital camera and camcorder
- PowerPoint
- iMovie or other digital editing software

## Notes

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1. Robert Bly, "Things to Think," *Morning Poems* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 12.
2. David Caplan, "Whitman in Liege," *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, Vol. 81. No. 2 (Spring 2005): 196.
  3. Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, ed. Michael Moon (New York: Norton, 2002), 137.
3. Whitman, "Poets to Come," 14.
4. Whitman, "Preface 1855," 619.
5. Whitman, "Preface 1855," 624-5.
6. Whitman, "Preface 1855," 622.
7. Richard Tayson. "The Casualties of Walt Whitman." *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, Vol. 81. No. 2 (Spring 2005): 79.
8. Galway Kinnell, "Kissing the Toad," *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 25.
9. Lucille Clifton, "Quilting," *Quilting: Poems 1987-1990* (Rochester: BOA Editions Ltd, 1991), 3.
10. William Logan "Prisoner, Fancy-Man, Rowdy, Lawyer, Physician, Priest: Whitman Brags," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* (Spring 2005. Vol. 81. No. 2): 27.
11. Logan, 21.
12. Logan, 23.
13. Judith Rowe Michaels, *Risking Intensity: Reading and Writing Poetry with High School Students* (Urbana: NCTE, 1999): 19-22.

14. Whitman, "There Was a Child Went Forth," 307.
15. Whitman, "Preface," 630.
16. Whitman, "Song of Myself" [6], 30.
17. Whitman, "A Noiseless Patient Spider," 377.
18. Robert Frost, "Design," *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (New York: Henry Holt, 1969), 302.
19. Whitman, "Song at Sunset," 416.
20. See Wallace Stevens to Joseph Bennet, 1955, "Wallace Stevens: Excerpts from Letters," *Modern American Poetry: An Online Journal and Multimedia Companion to*
21. *thology of Modern American Poetry*. Ed. Cary Nelson. 1999. <http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/>> (20 July 2005)
22. Nancie Atwell, *Lessons that Change Writers* (Portsmouth, Heinemann, 2002): 156.
23. Whitman, "Preface," 617.
24. Whitman, "I Hear American Singing," 12-13.
25. David Graham, "The Varied Carol," *Visiting Walt: Poems Inspired by the Life and Work of Walt Whitman*. ed. Sheila Coghill and Thom Tamaro. (Iowa City: Iowa UP, 2003): 81-2.
26. Whitman, "Preface," 627
27. Allen Ginsberg, *The Portable Beat Reader*, ed. Ann Charters (New York: Penguin, 1992): 61.
26. Laura Diamond, "Teacher Faces Action Over Poem 'Howl'," *Florida Times-Union*, September 12, 2000.
27. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *What is Poetry?: A Non-Lecture*. Crossroads Online. Fall 1997. Poetry Society of America. <http://www.poetrysociety.org/journal/articles/whatispoetry.html>> (20 July 2005).

## Teacher Resources

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The Academy of American Poets. *Poets.Org*. <http://www.poets.org>> (16 July 2005).

An authoritative resource for teachers and students on poets, poems, films, audiofiles, and National Poetry Month.

Charters, Ann. *The Portable Beat Reader*. New York: Penguin, 1992. An accessible anthology of writings from Beat poets including Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and other major figures.

Classroom Electric: Teaching Dickinson, Whitman, and American Culture. 2001. <http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/fdw/>> (16 July 2005). A collection of websites on the two poets useful for both teachers and students. Includes links to original manuscripts, letters, maps, notebooks, rare photographs, and scholarship.

Genoways, Ted, Ed. *The Virginia Quarterly Review*. Vol. 81. No. 2. (Spring 2005).

A special issue with essays by twenty-five American poets and writers on Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, celebrating the 150th Anniversary.

Goleman, Daniel, Paul Kaufman, and Michael Ray. *The Creative Spirit*. New York: Dutton, 1992. A companion to the PBS television series and a general source on human creativity.

Library of Congress. *Revising Himself: Walt Whitman and Leaves of Grass*.

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/whitman-home.html>> (18 July 2005)

A website to accompany the 150th Anniversary publication of *Leaves of Grass*. The Library of Congress holds the largest archival collection on Whitman in the world.

Michaels, Judith Rowe. *Risking Intensity: Reading and Writing Poetry with High School Students*. Urbana: NCTE, 1999. A refreshing work for teachers who want their students to fully engage with poetry through both reading and writing. Includes lessons from poets and student poetry.

Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook: A Prose Guide to Understanding and Writing Poetry*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1994. A concise handbook on reading poems and exploring poetic elements such as sound, line, verse, diction, tone, and imagery.

**Walt Whitman Archive.** Eds. Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price.

<http://www.whitmanarchive.org/>> (16 July 2005). An ongoing scholarly research and teaching site that archives manuscripts, full-text versions of *Leaves of Grass*, images, audio, and criticism.

Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*. Edited by Michael Moon. New York: Norton, 2002. A definitive source for students and teachers of Whitman. Includes publication history, classic and contemporary criticism, and unpublished poems.

## Student Resources

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Coghill, Sheila and Thom Tammaro, eds. *Visiting Walt: Poems Inspired by the Life and*

Work of Walt Whitman. Iowa City: University of Iowa P, 2003. An essential volume of poetry inspired by Whitman. Includes 100 poems by 100 diverse poets, revealing Whitman's legacy and impact on American culture.

Eleveld, Mark, ed. *The Spoken Word Revolution: Slam, Hip Hop & the Poetry of a New Generation*. Naperville: Sourcebooks, 2004. A handbook on recent trends in poetry. Includes an introduction by Billy Collins, historical context, and examples of spoken word poetry. Also includes a CD with over 70 minutes of live poetry.

Kaufman, Alan. ed. *The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1999. A large anthology of subversive voices from the well-known Beats to more contemporary slam and performance poets.

*poems that GO*. Edited by Megan Sapnar and Ingrid Ankerson. Winter Issue. 2004. Number 15. <http://www.poemsthatgo.com>> (16 July 2005). A fascinating site that explores the intersection between poetry and new media. The site explores how our ideas about poetry and language are transformed by various technologies.

*The United States of Poetry*. Washington Square Films, 120 min., 1996, videocassette.

Produced for public broadcasting, an innovative document of poetry and the diverse voices of a country.



Vecchione, Patrice. *The Body Eclectic: An Anthology of Poems*. New York: Holt and Co., 2002. An accessible collection of poems about the body. It begins with a selection from Whitman's "I Sing the Body Electric" and includes classic and contemporary examples of how the body has been a topic of importance to poets around the world.

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