



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
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## **Invisible Migrations: The Journey from Spanish to English and Back Again Through Performance Poetry**

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### **Introduction**

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How do we address our own relationships with language? What are the immediate and/or historic origins of our heritage? How do we form identities around language? How can poetry highlight the beauty of communication across cultures? This unit explores ways to celebrate bilingualism in schools and surrounding neighborhoods through close readings of Spanish and English performed, spoken words. Students will address their own relationships with language through their own varied vocabulary in order to explore how our identities are formed through our language during a three-week unit. In the context of an English class, students will reflect on personal aspects of language acquisition and ultimately compose a poetic narrative expressing the intangible journey towards fluency in a bilingual poem, with the expectation of an oral performance.

### **Rationale**

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This unit is inspired by the power of words expressed through the many students own trials and tribulations as they attempt to "find the flow", and in that spirit I open with a quote from "Bilingual/Bilingue" by professional poet Rhina P. Espaillat, who made the journey and returned to tell the tale:

My father liked them separate, one there, one here (alla y aqui), as if aware that words might cut into his daughter's heart (el Corazon) and lock the alien part to what he was - his memory, his name (su nombre) - with a key he could not claim.  
(<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/175878> )

With life, comes language. In a classroom, our close proximity to others makes us feel both camaraderie and claustrophobia, and often we address our experiences with others through whatever language we've acquired up to that point. We tend to rely on a primary language, but our experience with others quickly lends us new vocabulary with which to communicate our identities and our experiences to those around us, and we are

changed forever. In this context, poetry is those moments when our language becomes fluid, flowing and we feel the thrill of expression. While all the arts provide the support and guidance we need to live life to the fullest, the spoken and in particular the written word has distinguished humans from all other species. The usual growing pains of living are simultaneously an experience with language and one with our emotions, creating an invisible union that grows exponentially stronger with classroom education.

The history of the human race is full of exploration, just as nearly every text we read in a literature class is built around an attempt to explore both a tangible and intangible conflict of some kind through reading, speaking, listening, and writing. Urban, suburban, rural, or wild areas may face a variety of challenges, and as a Language Arts teacher I am tasked with categorizing every literary conflict as either "internal", residing in the soul, psyche, emotions, or mind of the character affected, or "external", coming from outside the person and occasionally involving a direct threat. Language is both internal and external, both emotional and physical, and bilingual students have the opportunity to navigate the private world within themselves and the very public world of communication with others in twice as many pathways.

Poetry both written and spoken has always played a significant role in addressing both internal and external conflicts in both the characters and voice of the poet, but also of the readers, or audience. Good writing, and in particular good poetry, is not just of benefit to the author, but to everyone who comes into his sphere of influence. Students in a bilingual classroom will acquire new words in both languages, from both peers and the instructor who may be older, may have a wider breadth of vocabulary in either language, but is nonetheless a companion on the journey into verse and expression, in any language. Where we are writing, what we read, and what students experience outside of the classroom are all key factors in the material towards which students will gravitate and will need to identify issues with which they identify in order to find where they flow and where they feel barriers. The intangible will become tangible as students work either independently or in groups to research current newspaper articles addressing those specific issues around bilingualism in their area, including signage and graffiti. Meanwhile, the teacher's job will be to facilitate reading, speaking and listening to professional poems through "close readings", seeking to address bilingualism. With language at the center of our exploration of what exists as an "invisible city", students will navigate their own paths into and through the avenues of expression towards greater language acquisition.

## Objectives

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An essential method of analysis will be using the "close readings" to analyze poems word by word and phrase by phrase to understand the ways in which students can then write and perform their own poems. The overall goal, beyond any distinct performance piece by a student poet, however, is to see how we might use artistic expression as a means of transforming our very turbulent emotions around language into an activist stance filled with clarity and conviction, accompanied by an equal amount of spoken and written fluency towards the subject of bilingualism. Can the practice of language arts, in sometimes hidden and surprising ways, be a source of devotion and heightened sensitivity to our common humanity, despite our varying levels of language fluency (in either Spanish or English, or any other language for that matter)? Can writer's workshops, such as those through the Philadelphia Youth Poetry Movement, within my own classroom, or facilitated by teachers like me around the world, allow for the turmoil of investigation to result in catharsis and ultimately, a kind of resolution and salvation?

The wonderful reality of reading and writing poetry is that it takes so many forms of expression: there is in fact something for everyone. To go a little deeper, there is something beyond just pleasure at a pretty or delightful poem, because poems that challenge, probe, explore, and even confront our sensibilities can somehow jar us out of complacency into a wider sense of our society, our selves, and even our very reality. There is a wonderful line by E.M. Forster in the Atticus Bookstore near Yale University that says "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?" We must write, as writing manifests those feelings that lay hidden in our souls, and in our hearts. Miguel de Cervantes once said "The pen is the tongue of the mind"; who has not heard or read some comment from a friend, a news investigator, and in particular a poet, and responded gushingly with "That's exactly how I felt!" Reading poetry opens us to a kind of self-invested empathy, in which we genuinely feel for the author of a poem. As the Merriam English Webster dictionary defines compassion, "sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it", and yet acting compassionately towards the speaker of the poem most definitely benefits its readers as well. This exhilarating and fundamentally human emotion is highlighted through the Philadelphia Youth Poetry Movement, Brave New Voices, and organizations like it around the country whose spoken word, slam, and performance poetry produces literature with an eye towards social justice, even when they are having a little fun. These groups are sprouting up around the globe in international circles as well, just as "Poetry Out Loud" has gone from being local to national to international.

## Background

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My students at Thomas Edison High School in North Philadelphia, just like my former students in West Philadelphia, bring a variety of local and international experiences to the table when they attempt to speak and write. Largely Hispanic, Edison is defined as a bilingual school, and serves the neighborhood across Theodore Roosevelt Boulevard from Olney High School, where I taught for four years. While Olney was composed of equal parts African American, Latino, and, different from Edison, Asian students, along with a smattering of possibly 10% immigrants from over 40 countries, it is separated from Edison by the visible barrier of Roosevelt Boulevard, or Route One. While rt.1 runs the length of the city from deep West Philadelphia at the three-way intersection of Darby Road, Chester Pike, and Lansdowne Avenue 5 miles to cross the Schuylkill River, a stretch called City Line Avenue. Upon crossing the river, however, Route 1 begins a 2 mile path as a highway called Theodore Roosevelt Expressway. My own neighborhood is at the base of this section, about ten minutes East by car to City Hall and the center of the city establishment. Running North and East for the length of the rest of the city, twisting and turning nearly 14 miles to the edge of Philadelphia's geographical boundary in Bensalem county, what becomes Theodore Roosevelt Boulevard physically interrupts the residential articulation of Philadelphia's diverse neighborhoods. Philadelphia is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest city in the United States, next to New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Atlanta, (*footnote*), and slightly ahead of Phoenix, with a population hovering around 1-1.5 million people. Nonetheless, while the Boulevard and North and Northeast Philadelphia's visible boundaries are clear in the streets and engineering boundaries of bridges and pedestrian crossings, the invisible boundary between people of the region, like many American cities, is language. While about 225.5 million people in the United States, or approximately 80% of the overall population in the 2007 census spoke English, nearly 20% spoke a language other than English at home, and 8% spoke nearly no English at all (as reported in *Bilingualism in the USA*, by Fredric Field, p.10 - [http://books.google.com/books?id=bIsHiWDNLZQC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ViewAPI#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=bIsHiWDNLZQC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ViewAPI#v=onepage&q&f=false)). Spanish language accounts for nearly 34.5 million people, or 12%.

English language acquisition is not as necessary for social interaction among Spanish speakers within the "Hunting Park" area surrounding Edison, as there are a plethora of shops, people, schools, and recreational activities within close range where Spanish is the dominant tongue of discourse. Nonetheless, to succeed financially, to understand the city and country's laws, housing contracts, business codes and tax structure, one really needs to learn English fluently. In 1998 I had graduated college at Temple University in North Philadelphia and began a graduate course in TESOL, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, and chose Edison as my site for tutoring in English after school. My older brother and I had scrimmaged with teams of wrestlers from Edison throughout high school, growing up in the Germantown section of Northwest Philadelphia, and I liked the idea of returning there as soon as my teacher suggested I go. Students from Nicaragua, Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador, Venezuela, and in particular Puerto Rico graced my small space in the library those afternoons at Edison, struggling to capture the sounds and inflections of my native language. I had studied Spanish from 7<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> grade in upper school, as my school called it, suffering through the ineptitudes of my limited memory skills with teachers from Paraguay, Peru, and Ecuador. As I grew older I attended classes in Spanish language at college as an undergraduate with teachers from Argentina and Puerto Rico, but I learned Spanish more predominantly through reaching out for the kindness of Spanish-speaking strangers up and down the East Coast, and throughout a year spent living in Albuquerque, New Mexico, my fascination with the language grew.

Foreign languages often allow for what feels like confidential communication between old friends. Outsiders become insiders, strangers become fellow travelers, and grim communication becomes an experiment in choosing strategic combinations of words from a limited palette of colorful possibilities. I feel as though when I travel from my home, either by foot, bike, car, or public transportation into Edison's neighborhood, I leave behind the creature comforts of safety, not because of any danger in terms of violence, but in how I embark on a transcendental journey to another way of seeing the "City of Brotherly Love", or to use the title poets C.A. Conrad and Frank Sherlock give their 2010 chapbook about Philadelphia, "The City Real and Imagined". In that book of one long poem about our city, they say quite eloquently "Something intangible / is here beyond exhaust / the smell of flower sweat / the smell of printing" (p.59). Throughout my own life I have hosted international students from South Korea, Mexico, and Germany; I spent a month at an international summer camp in New Hampshire, where my best friends were Koreans, Russians, and French campers who challenged me at the game of table tennis ("ping-pong"), an activity where language became less necessary than communal fun. In one formative experience, I was paid by the Philadelphia Tourist Bureau to interview international visitors to the Liberty Bell about their travel activities and countries of origin. Later, a relationship with a German woman for two years taught me that language can at times be less relevant than other forms of communication. Even my mother worked with the Philadelphia International Business Exchange and hosted businesspeople from all over the world for several years, from Russia, France, Eastern Europe, England, and Latin America, while I traveled to cities throughout the Soviet Union for a few weeks as a senior in high school. Philadelphia becomes an ideal junction, as almost any city in the world today, for the kinds of language exchanges and diverse international interactions that make conversation a greater transfer between people than any other transaction we might have, even than with money. Language becomes an invisible link that bounds us to one another, as a means of working through emotional journeys as well as in navigating the physical world in which we travel.

I am only 15 minutes from Edison by car, but a world away. Just as many Latinos are migrants to the United States and away from homes far in the distant South of our hemisphere, so does reading take us across some invisible boundary, much larger a leap than Roosevelt Boulevard's ten lanes of traffic going Northeast and Southwest at any speed? As Hazel Rochman points out perceptively, "Reading makes immigrants of us all - it takes us away from home, but more important, it finds homes for us everywhere."

(<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/22123-reading-makes-immigrants-of-us-all-it-takes-us-away> ) In Chicano/Native American Jimmy Santiago Baca's early collection of poetry, *Immigrants In Our Own Land*, he stirs the pot with

I practice being myself, And I have found parts of myself never dreamed of by me, They were goaded out from under the rocks in my heart When the walls were built higher, When the water was turned off and the windows painted black. (<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/238136>)

Santiago Baca, who learned to read while imprisoned for six and a half years in prison, spent the final three years in solitary confinement, reading. His first poem out of confinement, when in his own words he was "experiencing the power of literature, and it was changing my mind" (<http://www.progressive.org/radio/baca09.html>), was called "Immigrants in our own Land".

## Demographics

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For many of the students at Thomas Edison High School, language can be a very similar barrier as the one described by Jimmy Santiago Baca, in addition to other issues. 95.7% of the population resides below the poverty line, according to School District of Philadelphia documentation, 25.8% are English Language Learners, and 23.4% have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) due to some kind of physical or intellectual disability. There were 1257 students in 2013, with 80.6% Latino and 16.9% African American ([https://webapps.philasd.org/school\\_profile/view/5020](https://webapps.philasd.org/school_profile/view/5020)). Appearances are deceiving; if the statistics were all anyone ever saw of Edison High School, or any other school around the globe, we would surely miss a deeper layer running not so invisibly near the topical surface. In January 2013 there was a bomb threat called in to the school in the middle of the morning. Many kids would take it as a joke, others as a hassle, still others as an excuse to miss class; all would have to leave the building, and for a brief moment embark on a journey together from the school at 2<sup>nd</sup> street and Luzerne, as a collective community. Each member of the community, some pocketed together in small groups of close friends, would trek, luggage on backs and in hand, between the graveyard across Luzerne and through the surrounding factory district together towards Clemente Middle School. Clemente is also bilingual, and many of the kids leaving Edison went to middle school there, or have friends, neighbors, and siblings who attend. ABC Action News (<http://abclocal.go.com/wpvi/story?section=news/local&id=8957445> ) devoted 20 seconds to the minor news event, and fewer than 5 lines of sparse text, but for many kids it was a subtle sign of an invisible current. Are we not all migrants towards understanding ourselves? One student filmed the whole exodus from a smart phone in his right hand, audio on, and captured the conversations of his peers along the way, the expletives, the rich profanity, the laughter at each other's jokes, and the breathing and shuffling sounds of people walking. Someone posted the video on YouTube for all to see, and it reveals a type of behind the scenes glimpse into the world of an Edison teenager. Language seems to flow from one to another student as they step briskly away from the building, just as they briskly enter an unknown day, without expectations, and never truly knowing that they are becoming visible, and that having become visible on film, they become fixed in time like a permanent memory.

## Performance Poetry Groups Nationally

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We trespass on each other's space on a regular basis, sometimes on purpose, sometimes accidentally. If the bomb were a joke, it also carried with it another metaphor for another concept: poetry. In "Louder Than A Bomb", a documentary made in 2012 out of a Chicago production company, the film highlights at least four spoken word performers from throughout the country. One of the young poets, Adam Gottlieb, says "Writing a poem is not changing the world; meeting new people, and understanding new people, and really feeling inspired by people different than you, I would like to say that that's changing the world, and if not, it's definitely coming much, much closer" ("Louder Than a Bomb" trailer, 2009). While Philadelphia is smaller than Chicago, the Philadelphia Youth Poetry Movement has attracted 18 teams in 2013 to its Friday afternoon performances, and nearly 250 kids fill the audience from 4:30-6:30pm in the city's Franklin Institute Science Museum upper floor auditorium. While kids can be heard yelling "Don't be nice!" at the beginning of a piece, that encouragement has an ironic twist to it, in that the teams competing against one another serve primarily as one large team, cross-pollinating one another's work with styles, techniques, and subject matter. While the premise is not unlike the Louder Than a Bomb scenario, students in Philadelphia have developed a unique approach to addressing more than just interpersonal issues, and have moved on towards confronting peers' behavior outside of the realm of the poetry community. Recent poems have included speaking out against flash-mobs, street harassment, and gun violence, in addition to poems about body image, sexual identity, and homelessness.

As poetry teachers, we have several agendas, among them raising the literacy levels of our students so they can not only read a greater diversity of poems independently, but also in order to fathom the work so deeply as to turn their own poems into works of social significance. For instance, in PYPM Program Director and Latina poet Denice Frohman's "Weapons" she describes visiting West Philadelphia High School in 2012:

The security guard...asks me if I have any weapons I hold up my book; he doesn't find that funny. Tells me to empty pockets, walk through metal detector, 8:03am....

She is there to talk about poetry with 122 of West's students, but also much more:

I ask them if they have dreams. 11 students raise their hands, barely above their shoulders, as if they are sitting in history class, unsure of getting the wrong answer.... But they are far too familiar with the right to remain silent.... The Principal is afraid they will leave with weapons, I am afraid they will not know the ones that already exist. *(reproduced with special permission from the author, Denice Frohman)*

Frohman refers to how the students believed "poetry is what old white people do", and do not connect what she does with what they could be learning inside a school classroom. In Michel de Certeau's "The Practice of Everyday Life", he writes about what Frohman relates through her poem when he says "the everyday has a strangeness that does not surface" (de Certeau, p.93). He goes on to say "A migrational, or metaphorical, city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city." (ibid) The metaphorical city is the City of Brotherly Love, where I was born and where my students and I live together, is intertwined with the language with which we attempt to define it. Laurence Perrine in "Sound and Sense-An Introduction to Poetry" wrote "Poetry is as universal as language, and almost as ancient. The most primitive peoples have used it, and the most civilized have cultivated it" (Perrine, p.3) He goes on to say that "poetry might be defined as a kind of

language that says more and says it more intensely than does ordinary language." (ibid) Language has different uses, and it is with this in mind that we look at some specific poems by young people and adults that seek to address bilingualism in performance.

Def Poetry Jam, a famous TV show from the late 1990s in New York featured two brothers from Camden, New Jersey I've met and hope to work with at some point as I assemble my own city of poets for this poetry unit around language, once wrote and performed a poem called "Dreams Are Illegal in the Ghetto". In the team poem, the two brothers alternate lines with one another, riff off what the other says, and create the picture of an American family as Anglo and dismissive of minorities as could be. The two authors imagine what if it were their dream, and not someone else's reality, but are interrupted by the musical refrain "Dreams are illegal in the ghetto...". Let us imagine a place where we need not dream of anyone else's reality, but like the great novel of vignettes by Italo Calvino "Invisible Cities", can picture something so illusory as to be seductive, for as one character says to another, "With cities, as with dreams: everything imaginable can be dreamed, but even the most unexpected dream is a rebus that conceals a desire or, its reverse, a fear. Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears . . . and everything conceals something else." "Cities also believe they are the work of the mind or of chance, but neither the one nor the other suffices to hold up their walls. You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours." (Calvino, p.44)

## Front Region and Back Region

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If there are the lives we live off the stage, providing material and content for a poet to sit in private and scribe his verse, there is also life on the stage, the microphone in front of the nose and nearby the mouth, an instrument through which we reach the audience. In "Regions and Region Behavior" by Erving Goffman, the author describes these two areas in terms of (1) "front region" (ie. the stage) and (2) "back region" (ie. life *off* the stage). Front region behavior of the type concerning performance poets is distinguished by being "in visual and aural range of the audience" (p.107). In the experience of teenage poets today, there is a near constant exchange between front and back region in the way performers are inspired to write, just as a jazz musician is soaking up the music of living until he can pick up his instrument and play with it again. More than just a formal front region as defined by the stage, the lights, an audience and a microphone, however, performance poets so enjoy the act of formal language performance they engage with the spoken word as a daily conversation with their intended audience and may feel as if cameras are watching and might YouTube them at any moment. For example, witness the spontaneity and immediacy of a poem like "F\*ck I Look Like" by Kai Davis, who when she performed the poem that went viral on YouTube in 2011 was only an eleventh grader at Central High School in Philadelphia. Her off stage, or back-region behavior is never seen on video, but her public persona (front region) seems to blur the lines between anything private (back region) and the persona of an outspoken, outraged and downright confrontational student in her performance on stage, and her words flow as if she is in the thrilling exhilaration of spontaneous anger, where every word is like a football she carries tightly under her arm, dodging defenders and leaping high into the end zone. Witness her words yourself at: ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NISakKDA\\_A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NISakKDA_A)).

I look like I'm not s'posed to be standing here next to you  
Like we in the same class but your idea of Advanced is too advanced  
And my mind can't match you I think it's my vernacular  
How I got twice the consonants and twice the apostrophes  
So my philosophy can't be valid  
How I speak slave and you speak slave master....

Davis accomplishes fluency in both her own vernacular, using profanity like music, and also successfully criticizes the system in which she feels oppressed: the classroom, white society, and formal, grammatically correct language. In protesting against violent student Flash-Mobs, at another event Kai Davis was reported yelling, "The revolution must come or it's over for us!" (<http://Philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2011/08/15/young-poets-speak-out>). Surely she is a type of language revolutionary (she calls herself an "Identity Activist") and she represents the kind of response out of frustration and anger that I believe students can use to process into productive creative expression. She does so with true poetic flourishes, like the rhymes "slang/twang" and managing to connect the sound in "boss" with "flaws" in a near rhyme. Her comparison between Mark Twain's writing style and that of Maya Angelou points to a kind of consciousness celebrated and validated by departments of literary criticism and published works. The conflict stems from a deeper concern with language at its core purpose: she believes she is being marginalized philosophically because she doesn't talk right, and then when she does talk right, or at least get the right answers and "sound like I read a book before...", she gets criticized for acting "white". Her main criticism of her peers and her teacher is that she feels stereotyped and placed in a box out of which she is not free to roam and be herself: "all this is is self-hate..." seems to be her description of what is really going on. To go a little deeper, she may be cutting to the heart of the challenge against bilingual education, that there is a standard, grammatically correct speech, and that because she didn't grow up talking that way she is assumed to be not as smart as others, when in fact her insightful poem and her biting wit show nothing could be farther from the truth.

## Monolingualism vs. Bi/Multilingualism

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In "Tongue Tied", a work of staggering genius and full of compassionate poetry and prose from the perspective in support of bilingual education, author Otto Santa Ana writes that "The ideology of 'monolingualism' provides a false excuse to blame these children for their educational circumstances...(teachers) easily succumb to an unspoken misconception: the smartest child in the room is the language and the dialect of the teacher." (p.4). Kai Davis, and countless other non-English-speaking or non-standard-English speaking students know intuitively: the pre/mis-conception that these children are not just as brilliant as every other kid in their own way becomes, as Santa Ana says "creates a self-fulfilling prophecy". Someone once said it is easier for the confused kid to be the bad kid than to be the dumb kid, and far more socially acceptable in America, and so we have inner city schools here that are filled with so-called "bad kids". Ironically, according to a National Public Radio report on May 14, 2013, "The Latino high school dropout rate has fallen by half over the past decade - from 28% in 2000 to 14% in 2011" (<http://www.npr.org/blogs/codeswitch/2013/05/14/183813129/Latino-High-School-Grads-Enter-College-At-Record-Rate> ). Stereotypes seem often to be based on anecdotal evidence rather than statistical analysis. In "Bilingualism in the USA", the authors assert that "bilingualism is a normal condition that affects people around the globe - there is no urban society that is untouched...(and) the U.S. may need to reconsider preconceived notions of language and culture in the light of the nation's true multilingual history" (p.290-1). In the final words from NPR's report, Latinos "are the future of our country".

In a poem called "Healing Earthquakes", by Jimmy Santiago Baca, he relates how when he was a kid he experienced terrible racism towards his grandfather because of English language deficiency. He writes in this patchwork of excerpts:



(p. 166) My behavior shattered By outsiders who came To my village one day  
Insulting my grandpa because he couldn't speak English English – The invader's  
sword The oppressor's language That hurled me into profound despair... (p. 167) Me  
porto bien, Grandpa, Grandpa, Your memory Leafing my heart Like the sweetly  
fragrant sage... (p. 168) The world was never the same Because it was the first time  
I had ever experienced racism, How it killed people's dreams, and during all of it  
My grandfather said, Portate bien, mijo, Behave yourself, my son, Portate bien. (in  
"Tongue Tied", p.166, 167, 168)

Here, the metaphor of the sword reminds me of Conquistadores coming to the Americas, and leaving all of Latin America speaking the Spanish language ever since. The introduction of the Grandfather's Spanish, however, reminds me that a new conquerer has arrived to cut the metaphorical tongue from the old man's mouth: now he must speak English, and yet in his hesitation he is called "dumb". This is the same way many Chicano-Latinos have been treated in school. The complacency of behaving gives rise to anger, and I am more inclined to fight for dignity for the elder, rather than be complicit in the invisible prison into which he seems locked. Juan Felipe Herrera wrote

Lissen To the whistle of night – bats "Oye Como Va?" . . . Jut out to sea, once  
again – this slip Sidewalk of impossible migrations. Poesy mad & Chicano-style  
undone wild. Language escapes me. Passion is smoke. I dissolve.  
(<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/241376>)

Martin Espada, another poet anthologized frequently in school textbooks, uses the haunting image of the sword as well. In a self portrait poem from his own website  
([http://martinespada.net/My\\_Name\\_is\\_Espada.html](http://martinespada.net/My_Name_is_Espada.html)) he recounts the images self-associated with his surname:

Espada: sword in el Caribe, Rapier tested sharp across the bellies of indios,  
steel tongue Lapping blood like a mastiff gorged on a runaway slave, God gleaming  
brighter than the god nailed to the cross, Forged at the anvil with chains by the  
millions Tangled and red as the entrails of demons.

Espada seems to recount the horrors of the Spanish attack on native peoples in the Caribbean, blaming the same God who inspired them, and twisting the images like eviscerated intestines he describes as possessed by demons. Even in his allusion to the Mastiffs, great dogs whose size and ferocity were used by the Romans and Spaniards to keep enemies at bay, and even worse, to hunt slaves, mix the very physical with the spiritual. He continues:

Espada: sword in Puerto Rico, family name of bricklayers Who swore their trowels  
fell as leaves from iron trees; Teachers who wrote poems in galloping calligraphy;  
Saintcarvers who whittled a slave's gaze and a conqueror's beard;

The personal in Espada's poetry ("family name") is again juxtaposed with the terrifying symbol of the sword, the image of the bricklayers and their trowels awakening our sense of labor and work and sweat and toil, but also the physical auralty of the trowels falling and hitting the ground. And can calligraphy gallop like a horse? The Spanish conquistadores brought horses to the Americas to rise up greater than the indigenous peoples, the slaves whose faces are just as much a part of the sculptor's art as the slave masters. He finishes with a return to the by now mythic image of the sword:

The slave of the saber riding a white horse by night Breathe my name, tell me to taste my name: Espada. ([http://martinespada.net/My\\_Name\\_is\\_Espada.html](http://martinespada.net/My_Name_is_Espada.html) )

This sensory overload touches on the breath and taste of an invisible journey: our own names, and the search to understand ourselves. We attempt to drive language like a vehicle, but it is not always the one who drives us onward like we are passengers; instead, we are language, and we are also the continuous journey, from Spanish to English, and back to Spanish again, as we take ownership of the language of our oppressors, seeking always to own our own voice.

## Strategies

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Student writing is so often about voice: narrating a private discovery, finding a persuasive argument, exposing some injustice or inaccuracy in our society that needs a remedy, describing a scene, story, or experience, even writing for business purposes and coming across like a professional. Nonetheless, voice for a poet can vary in more interesting ways. When we say voice in poetry we are looking for a perspective as well as a unique spirit, distinct from others. Maybe the voice in the poem is a lost grandmother, maybe it is a mountain, but voice evokes the spirit of the one from whom the words come, and by extension, the poet becomes a mountain, becomes a spirit. Voice can also mean ownership of the subject, of the poem, and of the act itself of writing and having a voice. At Edison High School, as I imagine at any other school across the city of Philadelphia, the nation or even the world, students need to find their voice. They need to be able to express their concerns, their problems, as well as their successes and their love. Contrary to many across the industry that education has become, voice is not found in one language alone. In order to value a student's ideas, we have to validate the student; this does not mean a carte blanche acceptance of everything they do as much as a celebration of their selves, their identities, and their voice. In a bilingual school, this voice comes in Spanish as well as English, so that language minority children can have any opportunity to speak in their own defense. For the marginalized student, as well as for the struggling reader and writer, this type of validation of the student voice is key. For this reason, I chose the poems I did for this unit, as well as the complimentary tone towards the material in the poets' writing. This is best practice for a teacher hoping to find success in an inner city, suburban, rural, or even wilderness school setting. One of the tremendous attributes of the book "Mother Tongue" by Otto Santa Ana is that by "interweaving gripping compositions about the lives of language minority students with critical readings about their education, (it) may sensitize those readers who lived their lives speaking only English, and often only Standard English. Such readers are often unaware of the costs that hurtful English-only and Standard English values impose on other Americans." (Santa Ana, p.4)

Students will need to learn a lot of vocabulary, like sponges in an ocean of language, but this happens naturally out of the relationships we build with them, as well as through direct instruction, guided instruction, and independent practice. "Close Readings", in which each word is explored in short poems like the ones in this unit, allow students to savor, absorb, and digest the practical and the conceptual in reading, and later writing, poetry. Ultimately, this will be explored in depth through the student activities, as we make the journey from Spanish to English and back again, and the invisible meanings of poetry become visible.

## Activities

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(For approximately four to five 90 minute, block schedule class periods)

### Lesson One

**Objectives:** Students will collaboratively develop a map of language "pockets" (also called "nodes") in their neighborhood communities through brainstorming, discussion, and research (making the invisible city visible); furthermore, students will be able to develop a piece of poetic/descriptive/expository writing around the question: "How does language play a role in your pocket of the neighborhood?" and "How is place important to language use?" using vocabulary introduced by the students' prior knowledge and extended by the teacher; finally, students will be able to reread, review, and revise a creative writing poem in a homework assignment for the next class meeting.

**Materials:** maps of the surrounding neighborhoods, city, country, and world; internet access, computer, projector, speakers; 3x5 inch note cards; writing paper; writing tools; a list of vocabulary terms (see below).

**Standards:** PA.CC.1.2.9-12.K / PA.CC.1.3.9-12.I - Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade-level reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies and tools. PA.CC.1.4.9-12.A - Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately.

**Do Now:** Describe the place you feel most comfortable speaking and what you can talk about there on a 3x5 note card, using whatever language necessary (Spanish, English, etc.) It might be helpful to project a sample response on the board, or a model paragraph such as might take 3-4 minutes to write:

My favorite place to connect with friends and interesting strangers is The High Point Café in Northwest Philadelphia, where a lot of teachers and writers gather to eat, drink, socialize, read and do work. They have good food, tea and coffee, but most importantly I feel safe and at home, even while I am on a sort of social stage. I know and like all the people who work there, I get free drinks, and I like the quiet music they play. In addition, the art on the walls is always entertaining and I usually meet someone exciting and new there during the active conversations we have together.

**Direct Instruction:** Project a map of the region for students; use it constructively to identify the location where *you* feel most comfortable speaking for yourself (ie. home, the local bar, café, religious center, etc.) For me this is The High Point Café, owned by my sister in the Mt. Airy section. This place, where "phatic communion", or small talk occurs, can be an introduction for students learning English to understand the meaning of phrases such as "What's up?" which is really a statement or greeting, more than a question in need of an answer with information (<http://grammar.about.com/od/pq/g/phaticterm.htm>). Here we discuss the kinds of expressions used to build community and create connections with people. Students can build a kind of camaraderie by using Google maps, Google earth, and hard copies of local maps to focus attention on their own language centers and communities, beginning to discuss and connect areas in common, as well as common expressions, as the invisible social landscape becomes more visible.

**Guided Instruction:** Distribute highlighter markers and copies of "A Place Without Shame" by David Baraza

(available in "From Totems to Hip Hop", p.100-101 or in a pdf. through searching Google). Ask students to listen as you read the entire poem aloud straight through, and ask them to highlight any unfamiliar words or confusing phrases as you read, using the highlighter markers (this can also be done with regular pens or pencils, by circling and underlining, and can be easily followed with the next step: a close reading. Assign each student a partner (some may choose to work in threes) and have them seek to help one another answer the questions they have about the highlighted/ underlined/circled words and phrases, writing down explanations on the page as they discuss them. Some words that may arise include: "caravan", "invisibility", "insecurity", "marginality", "bear hug", "explodes", "encouraged", "unintelligible", "shackles", and "self-doubt". Circulate as they work in this modified Think-Pair-Share activity, noting the words with which they struggle, as well as facilitating their cooperation and reiterating the directions (these could also be printed at the top of the poem paper). Reconvene and discuss each line of the poem word by word, line by line as a class, being careful to stimulate every pair to contribute and take turns explaining the lines to one another systematically. By the end of about 20 minutes the poem should be clear in meaning to everyone. Some of the key lessons will be around the following elements of:

*Voice:* the particular identity and characteristics of the speaker in the poem (it is important to note that this is not the same as the author), demonstrated in the repetition of the term "we" throughout the poem; also, the use of Spanish throughout the poem indicates the speaker is of Hispanic descent, as are his comrades and fellow travelers; pay attention to the beginning of the poem, where Baraza's speaker says

We come unnoticed from the barrios

and later

On arrival we leave our invisibility In the car and lock the door. As we enter the house We wipe insecurity off our shoes and hang our marginality on the rack

and still later

the voiceless are heard the invisible take form

As the theme of this unit is that the invisible becomes visible, it is important to stress the metaphorical journey we take as individuals, and as a class, from our invisible connections with one another and move towards making them visible in the form of poetry on the page. One further way this is accomplished in the poem is also through:

*Line Breaks:* the way the poet breathes in the poem, and allows us to savor the moments described in its lines. Each line is a shot from the camera of the poet, focusing our attention on an important experience in the journey of the poem. Finally, this is not a poem with the flourishes of rhyme or alliteration, but it is rich in

*Extended Metaphor, Imagery, and Personification:* Baraza gives voice to fear, self-doubt, and confidence by embodying them in movements by the end of his poem: "runs", "crawls" and "dances", respectively. Ultimately, the shame of the title gives way to a much more enduring positivity, concluding his verse with music making "everything better".

*Independent Practice:* Next, students will embark on writing a poem that captures the place they described earlier in the "Do Now" exercise at the beginning of the class period, but paying careful attention to their own "voice" in the poem, the line breaks they use, and in developing some sort of metaphor, imagery, or

personification of the place and emotions associated with the place they describe in their own poetry. In essence, the independent practice is where they synthesize and concretize all the work of the previous class work together, only now independently. Using the poem as a model, students new to poetry writing can focus on descriptive language, devoting themselves towards describing the place, and exploring how that place is more than it is. In other words, developing the place as larger than life, as a metaphor for something greater. A second element of doing so can be the use of personification, giving the place human characteristics, thus personalizing the place. Meanwhile, the bilingual student can look, either by necessity or out of a creative impulse, towards using Spanish throughout the poem, or whichever language is most comfortable. More advanced writers can play with the voice in the poem, challenging themselves to write outside of an autobiographical stance: developing the poem from some other person's point of view, or even from the point of view of that place of language use, to further use personification.

Review/Wrap-Up: Even if students are not entirely finished with their own poems (they will have time to finish them independently at home, though do not let them know this ahead of time to maintain a sense of urgency during class), use a moment to review the key concepts of the period: (1) language and its expression from and about place, as well as about itself and its own purpose (2) making the invisible visible through (a) having an experience with a poem, and (b) transforming that experience with our own experiences into (c) a visible poem, and (d) sharing that visible poem with the class.

Exit Ticket: Have students use another note card to write a reflection on the process: How did the invisible neighborhood of a language "pocket" become visible in their poem? Write a paragraph reflecting on the process (the experience) of creative writing. While they are writing, use an attendance sheet to mark down the progress every student has made towards a poem:  $\frac{1}{4}$  page,  $\frac{1}{2}$  page,  $\frac{3}{4}$  page, etc. In this way students will see they are expected to write during class, as much as they should add to that work at home.

Homework: Students should complete for submission to you a completed poem, mixed with Spanish or English, or whichever language they feel most comfortable writing their words. Later, they should be prepared to have the poem stand on its own, or be able to explain to the class the words that have no apparent translation. Each poem can be roughly a page in length (some more, some less). The additional time at home will allow students to make their poems closer to ready for prime time, in which (later) they will be expected to read the poem aloud for the class.

## Lesson Two

Resources:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paM03zurPQw> = Mayda del Valle "Descendency"

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sa7IfuXT\\_Bc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sa7IfuXT_Bc) = Mayda del Valle "Tongue Tactics"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2O2EpxLY4w> = Mayda del Valle "TEDx Youth"

Objectives: Students will be able to critique student poems from an earlier class with a focus on voice and narration after performing a close reading of a bilingual poem as a class and writing an analytical critique of that poem.

Materials: Previous drafts of poetry by students, internet access, computer with projector and speakers, copies of "Tongue Tactics" by Mayda del Valle (found in "Russell Simmons Def Poetry Jam on Broadway...and More",

p.145-148). Take time to read the poem ahead of time to identify sections, phrases, and words from the poem into a list to assign to individual students, pairs, or groups (depending upon the size of the class, some may need to read more than one); internet, computer, projector and speakers.

Standards: PA.CC.1.3.9-12.K - Read and comprehend literary fiction on grade level, reading independently and proficiently. PA.CC.1.4.9-12.A - Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately. PA.CC.1.4.9-12.C - Develop and analyze the topic with relevant, well-chosen and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic;

Do Now: Assign students the question: "What makes you angry about language?" and have them write an explanation in exactly 25 words, using both Spanish and English to answer the question, or a mix of their primary languages.

Direct Instruction: Explain that as speakers in any language we often experience difficulty coming up with satisfactory wording for what we desire to say; this process of choosing the right words to express ourselves in literature is called "Diction", as in "dictionary". Often we are criticized for our use of language, whether it is *what* we say or *how* we say it; what we hope to accomplish in this particular class period is a sense of group movement towards finding words that will not just communicate meaning but also express emotional power, and in so doing produce an exhilarating experience for readers and, in performance, an audience. Break students into groups as in the past class period, either in new arrangements (ideal, and can be done by explaining that this is a new assignment, or a new project) or in the same teams as before, depending upon attendance. Each person, pair, or team is responsible for explaining one of the assigned words, phrases, or lines (use your best judgment in distributing these responsibilities). Read the poem aloud for the class once then allow everyone to digest the material further through a video performance of the poem (see [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sa7IfuXT\\_Bc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sa7IfuXT_Bc) = Mayda del Valle "Tongue Tactics").

Guided Instruction: Next, have students, piece by piece, explain their understanding of the poem's individual parts. Your job as teacher is to keep the ball rolling, facilitating the progression of the poem and looking for teachable moments in which to write vocabulary on the board (or even better, have students do so) and clarify key elements such as "voice", "story/plot", "diction" (word choice), and the "volta" (emotional "turn", or transition). In such a "close" reading of the poem, some exciting highlights can be found in the lines below:

"Pue vete p'al carajo cabron" (the first use of Spanish in the poem, that serves as an early "volta", and almost a foreshadowing of the power and anger we are to experience later in the poem)

and

"I'm declaring a state of language revolution...threatening to leave our civilization speechless... (she compares her poetry, and her flow, to an uprising)

and

"dictionaries are on Prozac...I'm crossing borders, abriendo puertas" (she opens invisible doors that nonetheless block our path, like stuttering, and like criticism from outside)

and finally

"I'll still be here with these tongue tactics never getting these gramatics

correct" (teaches students not to worry about the specifics as much as the flow, the rush, and the emotion of the poem).

Allow students to express their opinions of the poem here, in an open forum, so that in their written critique they have already had some practice formulating a stance, as well as allowing them the opportunity to hear other student voices on the content of the poem. There is no "correct" interpretation or critique of the poem, as much as there is no "correct" way to express oneself, though this is certainly one lesson of the poem. Ask them, does the Spanish ring true? Do words and expressions in one language sometimes ring more true compared with another language? Do you feel a surge in energy through any specific lines of the poem? How do the two languages flow together to create the overall poem's effect? I would find it helpful with my students to use a three-column "pros/cons/quotes" organizer, and even provide some guidance to struggling readers and writers by completing the organizer as a class before entering quiet, independent writing time, in which some students may also benefit from a word bank of poetry vocabulary terminology.

Independent Practice: In the last phase of class, followed by a sanctioned, if organized, break, through a viewing of a TED Talk by the poet (found through YouTube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2O2EpxLY4w>), students can discuss amongst themselves responses to the talk (about 6 minutes) and then settle into writing a critique of the poem for submission by the end of the period. "How is the poem effective, or not so, at communicating an emotional experience to its audience?" The written response can be accomplished within the structures established in your classroom (previous writing methods and techniques, graphic organizers, TAG-it-a-3, etc.) or by the simple structure of positioning them in relation to the two Common Core Standards: "Write informative / explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately (PACC.1.4.9-12.A)" and "Develop and analyze the topic with relevant, well-chosen and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic (PACC.1.4.9-12.C)", in addition to the guiding question. If students have access to computers or smartphones, they should feel free to do quick work of finding the poem and any ideas that stem from researching its origins, and its Spanish. (Be careful not to rely too much on this method, as it can ultimately be distracting and can draw the activity into a multiple class period exercise.) I've resisted providing a direct example here, as it can often become less a model and more of a template. In an effort to stress the importance of individual voice, I think students should struggle a little to find a voice in criticism as well as in writing poems; in a sense, they will find their own natural ability to "swim", though if a student seems to "sink", then as the teacher/lifeguard it becomes important to cheer them on a bit, and even to provide flotation devices in the form of sentence starters or phrase prompts.

Review/Wrap-Up: In bringing the class together again as a whole group, and as students conclude their paragraphs of criticism, it will be helpful here to have students raise hands and volunteer 3-4 highlights of the class period in a share-out. This serves to review and connect students to the material even further.

Exit Ticket: Finally, students should exchange poem drafts with one another for homework (it might be useful to have an intern or a student who finished earlier than others make copies of the poem drafts in case the work should get lost there is an original) and distribute them among partners and group/team members. \*Be cautious not to violate students' privacy: some may want you and you alone to read their work, and one method can be to do so ahead of class critiques in an additional step to assure students their work is valid and worthy of close scrutiny; if so, exit tickets can instead consist of either reading one another's critiques (in which the same caution is advised) or in showing for the class one more video of Mayda del Valle (I recommend "Descendency" at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paM03zurPQw>). You be the judge of what's

best for your class.

Homework: Read another student's poem and provide a critique similar to the ones done during class time, if possible, using a rubric and 3 column graphic organizer.

### Lesson Three

Resources:

<http://www.connotationpress.com/featured-guest-editor/july-2012/1468-natalie-diaz-poetry> = Natalie Diaz's poem "Mujers de Sal" (at the bottom of the page)

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/blog/2012/05/conversation-poet-natalie-diaz.html> = Natalie Diaz discusses language(s) and identity

<http://podcast.lannan.org/2012/11/06/natalie-diaz-reading-30-september-2012-video/> = Natalie Diaz poetry reading video

Objectives: Students will be able to assess a writer's style and tone in poetry; students will be able to reread, revise, and rewrite a draft of a poem, giving emphasis to methods of tone and style, in addition to earlier vales of voice, diction,

Materials: Internet access, computer, projector, speakers; copies of the poem for students; 5x7 inch note cards

Standards: PA.CC.1.3.9-12.K - Read and comprehend literary fiction on grade level, reading independently and proficiently. PA.CC.1.4.9-12.X - Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences. PA.CC.1.5.11-12.B - Evaluate how the speaker's perspective, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric affect the credibility of an argument through the author's stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone. PA.CC.1.5.9-12.E - Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks.

Do Now: Where are you from? What are your origins and ancestry? How far back can you go while maintaining accuracy? What challenges do you face in doing so? Have students write to these topical questions on a 5x7 inch note card.

Direct Instruction: Is it possible we don't even know who or where we come from? All of us face this mystery at some point in our lives (some sooner than others-be sensitive here). Our intangible, or invisible heritage is visible in our speech patterns as much as in our bloodline. From developing a written voice earlier, we now move towards developing a spoken voice, as we listen more carefully to performances of poetry in the next two class periods.

Guided Instruction: Perform a close reading of Natalie Diaz's poem "Mujers de Sal"; the class should be able to do so more efficiently and quickly by now than in the past. For variety, assign individual students each line, depending upon the number of students in the room. Pay special attention to the line "*she didn't know the language but smelled the meaning in their breaths*"; it suggests that even with the mystery of language, our sensory perception allows us to find meaning through other methods. Lastly in this guided phase of student work, teachers should show to the class the video of Ms. Diaz:



<http://podcast.lannan.org/2012/11/06/natalie-diaz-reading-30-september-2012-video/> . (She does not appear until the 5-minute mark—take it from there.) Open a discussion: how does she use inflections to create a mood? How do her words, her very pronunciations present the stanzas of the written poetry in audio? How is her spoken reading of the poems a significantly different tone from her tone in conversation, in between the poems? Are her poems like prayers, like songs?

Independent Practice: Ultimately, students should learn to practice their own poems aloud. They should get their poems back from one another, or if you took the other route, from you, and begin to read them aloud to one another in pairs. The reading aloud should be preceded by a chance for everyone to read the criticisms quietly to themselves, with time to digest all the feedback, and possibly with a chance to revise and rewrite the poems as well. In fact, often the way a poem comes across orally can direct changes and a transformation in writing. By the conclusion of the class period, students will need a break, and a video of Natalie Diaz discussing her work and identity (<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/blog/2012/05/conversation-poet-natalie-diaz.html>) will round out her exemplary work and settle students back into a writing mode.

Review/Wrap-Up: Review the meaning(s) of identity, returning to the theme of the period, and how students can add into their poem a sense of their own identities and the meaning of their unique heritage, taking pride in and giving respect to that identity.

Exit Ticket: Have students write an "I Think/I Wonder" on the reverse side of their 5x7 note cards. Assign a written explanation of Natalie Diaz's work, as well as how students imagine themselves at the center of their own literary journey: "Who is Natalie Diaz and why does she write as she does? Who are you and why do you write as you do?"

Homework: In anticipation of learning performance methods directly in the next class, homework will be a final draft of the poem.

## **Lesson Four**

Resources:

(<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/177383>) = text of Martin Espada's "Alabanza"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3anlr7vAIQ> = Martin Espada reads "Alabanza" live

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crgrvnnE1ZU&list=FLFC8D-t3ziTQ8RKZG2ijSHg> = Denice Frohman's "Unlitter Us" campaign advertisement in Spanish

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NISakKDA\\_A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NISakKDA_A) = Kai Davis' poem "I Look Like"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOnQch7bhVY> = Denice Frohman's poem "Abuela"

Objectives: students will be able to evaluate and draw lessons from a variety of spoken word performances utilizing Spanish language, culminating in practice for a live performance in the next class period.

Materials: computer, projector, speakers; a graphic organizer (see "Direct Instruction")

Standards: PA.CC.1.5.9-12.E - Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks. PA.CC.1.5.9-10.C - Integrate

multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source. PA.CC.1.5.11-12.B - Evaluate how the speaker's perspective, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric affect the credibility of an argument through the author's stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone.

Do Now: What do you praise? Who among us deserves praise? How do we judge one person over another? Have students write their responses on a 5x7 inch note card.

Direct Instruction: In this class period, we will observe and learn to critique video performances of others, as well as practice their own poems for a performance during the next class. We will learn to evaluate and score pieces based on their own merits, and emphasis will be upon finding the assets in our own poems, and upon enhancing those qualities we deem most successful to a public performance. We will use the scoring method of the Philadelphia Youth Poetry Movement (PYPM) Slam League, though scoring methods vary across the country (and internationally), and the scores judges assign to any single performance ultimately depend upon their unique individual experiences, and is never an exact science. Poems are scored on a 1-10 scale; at PYPM performances there are 3 rounds, with each team competing in the first two, in which at least one poem must be a group poem. Teams scoring the highest in the first two rounds qualify for the third round, but the winner of the team scoring is based solely upon the single performance in the third and final round. Distribute a graphic organizer that allows space for a name, an overall score, and 3 categories: physical presence, emotional intensity, and diction, and have students familiarize themselves with the material. Lastly, show the poem "Alabanza" to them on video, and lead a discussion around the method of singing words: How effective is it? How corny? How powerful? Use the rubric/graphic organizer to score him as a group. Next, play Denice Frohman's video for "Unlitter Us": How does she announce her words carefully so that the message gets through to listeners? How is the music in the background effective at creating atmosphere? How could it be replicated with a second poet performing a song, a beat, or words or sounds? Finally, play Kai Davis' poem without the sound on, paying attention to only her physical movements and facial expressions, and discuss with students their predictions surrounding what she might be saying. You decide whether you even play the poem at all with the sound on-it's powerful, but you might want to think seriously about the language and what's appropriate in your school. Ultimately, end with a return to Denice Frohman and her poem "Abuela": How does she use Spanish as a means to establishing intimacy with her audience? How can you do the same? You can extend these activities to a more than one day, having students take note of their favorite parts, their "highlights", and their poetic flourishes, but all activities should lead towards students developing their own work, and their own performances.

Guided Instruction: Coordinate partners in the room. Students should read aloud their poems to their partner, several times, while the listener takes notes of highlights and acts as a coach, directing the reader towards possible changes, possible moments of emphasis, and possible opportunities for physical theater. Have them switch roles, and repeat the process. If you can bring in a teacher with theater experience, or if you have your own, this can enhance their work, but I believe young people have an inner critic who is the best judge of all; your job is to circulate and guide this criticism.

Independent Practice: Finally, students should return to the drawing board, so to say, and take notes on where their poem may need revision. If pressed for time, this can be done as homework, but emphasize an internal reflection here.

Review/Wrap-Up: Call on students to share out their insight into their work. Doing so is the culmination of a lot of work, so make it worth it.

Exit Ticket: Have students identify in a 3/2/1 activity 3 things they learned, 2 things they'd add to the process of discussion, and 1 question they still have.

Homework: Memorize poems for a presentation/performance in the next class period, or for a special event of some kind. Emphasize "practice, practice, practice" in rehearsal.

## **Lesson Five**

Objectives: Students will be able to present poems in performance for the class, or even better, in a public forum: for a wider audience, for YouTube, for a documentary or film.

Standards: PA.CC.1.5.9-12.D - Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective; organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

Do Now: Have students turn in for publication a copy of their finished poem, and any biographical information or autobiographical writer's statements.

Direct Instruction, Guided & Independent Practice: up to the discretion of the teacher and based upon the parameters of your performance context

Review/Wrap-Up: Share your own reflections on the process of the invisible becoming visible: How has your consciousness, or understanding, of your own language evolved or changed since the beginning of this unit? How have your invisible emotions become visible through seeing poetry performed? (or through performing poetry)

Exit Ticket: Have students reflect on the writing and performing process as well, with the same questions you asked yourself to share in the Review/Wrap-Up.

## **Appendix**

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<http://www.pdesas.org/standard/commoncore> = Pennsylvania Department of Education

### **Websites**

<http://pypm215.org/> = Philadelphia Youth Poetry Movement main page

<http://www.cnn.com/2011/LIVING/07/08/philadelphia.slam.poetry/index.html> = CNN article on PYPM and PYPM youth poets

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/> = The Poetry Foundation

<http://voca.arizona.edu/index.php?tagsearch=espa%C3%B1ol> = University of Arizona audio recordings ("Voca")

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