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2014 Volume II: Playing with Poems: Rules, Tools, and Games

Life Happens: Thinking about Key Life Transitions and Identity through Poetry

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by Brandon Barr

Overview

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 I was much farther out than you thought And not waving but drowning. Stevie Smith
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[1]

These lines from a modern poem by Stevie Smith speak to the difficulties students face that teachers are often unaware of and do not understand. A key theme in this poem is the importance of recognition—the speaker is reaching out and trying to be seen because help is needed while the other individual in the poem fails to recognize the need. Students reach out because they want adults in their lives to understand and recognize the challenges they face. Students want to be recognized as dynamic, memorable, unique individuals.

As teachers, our challenge is to create opportunities to recognize what is going on in each student's life. Teachers should strive to know what has an impact on students, what interests them, and what makes each unique. Many teachers are simply too far removed from their own experience as teenagers to fully appreciate how difficult that time period can be for adolescents. Students in middle school face a multitude of changes as they progress through adolescence such as growing up physical growth/revolutions, dealing with death, moving from one neighborhood or region to another, evolving friendships and relationships with family. These changes can impact students emotionally and academically. Even though these changes often consume students' attention and focus, they are often not addressed in class. Students need an appropriate time and space to explore some of the difficult changes that they will come to face as they mature. This unit will address some of the key changes 8 th grade students face through reading poetry that addresses issues of identity and producing expressive, well-constructed poetry.

Poetry is a key genre of Language Arts classrooms; it is short, dense, complex text that can be used to engage students in rigorous thinking processes. This unit will promote reading and writing several poetic forms and patterns with two intentions: producing poetry that is authentic and personally meaningful and using knowledge that is gained through closely reading poetry to decode meaning and develop an appreciation of poetry produced by others. Students will be introduced to a variety of poems in order to find a couple that fit their experiences, thoughts, and ideas. The mentor texts that have been selected for this unit will help students to see that poetry is a vehicle for self-expression and an opportunity to grapple with issues that

deeply affect them.

Demographics: Identity and Latino Adolescents

Nightingale Elementary is a Chicago Public School that educates a predominantly Latino student body of roughly 1,400 students in grades PreK-8. The student population is 97% low income and nearly half of the student population receives bilingual services to help students transition from Spanish to English instruction. As a school, Nightingale has one of the largest bilingual student populations in Chicago Public Schools. The diversity in ability and experience with English that students bring to class deeply impacts the way that teaching and learning occur at Nightingale School. Teachers at Nightingale constantly reflect on differentiation and data during weekly grade level meetings. Regardless of whether a student is Special Education, bilingual, talented, or working at or below grade level, it is important to structure lessons and activities to challenge all learners.

Before focusing on instruction, building a classroom learning community is exceptionally important in my specific teaching context. Research indicates that "for Mexican Americans and other Latinos, more of whom drop out than complete high school, creating schools that care about them and believe in their intellectual abilities could have profound effects on their educational success or failure." [2] Due to their limited time and laser-like focus on delivering content-area instruction, it is easy for teachers to overlook the need to earn trust and establish an ethic of care with students. Focusing solely on content and neglecting emotional domains is problematic for a number of reasons. Latino students face a number of barriers to academic success that are well-documented; a couple of key challenges revolve around a high drop-out rate, lower standardized test scores than Anglo students, issues related to immigration, and issues related to English acquisition. [3] Rather than allow these challenges to impede student success, teachers need to acknowledge the barriers students face by carefully crafting classroom exercises that are more holistic and student-centered. Teachers need to strive to help students navigate difficult teenage years when they are developing who they are and what they believe. Student identity is multi-faceted and consists of multi-dimensional attributes; the evolution of these attributes and the growing awareness of self is what many refer to as identity construction. [4] Identity construction has a profound impact on teaching and learning for Latino students.

Identity construction is at the forefront of the thoughts and actions of teenagers, and there are multiple layers to it. For the predominantly Latino student population I teach, the blending of two or more cultures presents challenges. The juxtaposition of traditional Mexican cultural norms with the norms of an English-dominant American society creates difficulty for students: they may see themselves as different from their parents who (often) immigrated to the United States. [5] Traditional gender roles and family structures that parents came of age in such as the powerful role of the father, the importance of adhering to traditional [generally] Catholic teachings, and other structures create a large generation gap between parent and child. [6] Working-class Latino teens recognize that their parents want a better life for them and that they value their children learning English as a primary language in order to "protect their children from discrimination." [7] Despite recognizing the best intentions of their parents, the world Latino teens navigate is a difficult one. Latino teens are often charged with translating and advocating for their parent's needs, who face barriers such as segregation, cultural biases, institutional discrimination and the stresses of often living in high levels of poverty. [8] The assimilation process should be openly discussed in a caring way with students. Teachers need to acknowledge

that Latino students face pressures at times to fit into two cultures while attempting to negotiate their own identity. Rosenblatt (quoted in Pytash) wrote, "'the capacity to sympathize or to identify with the experience of others is a most precious human attribute'". [9] Pytash continues, "Educators argue that schools should be a place of learning and a place of caring." [10] Teachers need to let students know that it isn't an easy world that they are navigating and show empathy.

In addition to the challenges that my students have to face by virtue of being urban Latino youth, they also have to deal with their own emerging adulthood and learn to develop a sense of themselves. The process of identity construction is not an easy one. Research indicates that it involves a period of exploration and a trial of various identity alternatives and ultimately committing to one of more of the identity alternatives to shape them as individuals. [11] These various identity alternatives often present themselves in media that children access and peer friendships/relationships. Teens use these alternatives to determine what fits or best represents them as individuals. Teachers can play powerful change agents in the development of students by getting them to think and question these identity alternatives that exist in identity construction through careful selection of readings and tasks.

The content of the unit will address identity construction through multiple poetry readings around different aspects of identity construction and seminal events that make individuals who they are. In one of the readings from the unit, "Autobiography in Five Short Chapters," the speaker of the poem makes a realization that he or she is prone to making the same mistake over again. In each stanza, the speaker develops a growing realization that in order to avoid making the same mistake over and over, that we shouldn't "pretend" with ourselves or fall into the same "habits;" by chapter five of the poem, the speaker knows to avoid even going down the street that leads people off track. [12] Thematically, this connects to unit because teens make bad decisions; they will be able to connect with the speaker of the poem who has a habit of making bad decisions and falling into the same habits. Before I read the poem, I will jokingly say that Nelson really meant to call this poem, "Mr. Barr's Love Life." It is a light-hearted way to address an issue that many teens face; they tend to make the same errors and beat themselves up over it. Structurally, Nelson employs a form that kids can use to organize their thinking by treating stanzas as chapters or different realizations about something. Students can use this form to think about their own lives and growing identities.

Identity influences a teenager's academic development. In a research study of 148 eighth graders that used student surveys to determine student perceptions about reading strength, the importance they placed on reading, and the role of race and genre, the Hispanic subgroup had the lowest self-concept as readers. [13] In fact, the study found that Hispanic males reported the lowest overall average self-concept, or perceived reading strength, of the subgroups studied. The study made the following determination:

> Given … a lack of engagement by teens, and especially Hispanic youth, it appears to be essential to have materials these students want to read and find relevant to their lives. Perhaps they would then value reading more and ultimately improve their reading and self-concepts for reading. [14]

If both the reading and the writing that students are asked to do in class do not speak to the life experiences of students, they will not respond as favorably as they would if tasks are carefully selected to either speak to their experiences or provide a framework for students to express what is relevant to their lives. Careful and precise selection of readings and tasks is paramount for meaningful instruction. Students need the chance to think about who they are and wish to become before we instruct them.

The Intersection of Identity, Poetry, and Instructional Practice

Because identity construction has a definitive and measurable academic and emotional impact on teens, teachers must consider effective methods and instructional moves that they can use to drive learning, taking into account how students view themselves and others. Maehr makes several suggestions about instructional moves that a teacher should make in order to help student's think about their identity and promote student engagement: Allow time and opportunity for peer interaction to occur, build an environment of acceptance and appreciation of all students, encourage programs that take advantage of students' backgrounds and experience, give optimal choice in instructional settings, and foster participation in co-curricular, and extra-curricular settings. [15]

Teaching students about various frames/genres of poetry, students can use the forms that work best for them in order to produce work that authentically builds on student experiences and backgrounds. The numerous subgenres of poetry that are included in this unit are complex, rigorous texts that meet the Common Core State Standards. Shanahan and Shanahan note that most students need "explicit teaching of sophisticated genres, specialized language conventions, disciplinary norms of precision and accuracy, and higher-level interpretive processes [to be successful readers]." [16] By defining poetic terms and forms with students and talking about them as a group, students will develop the language that they need to be successful in rigorous academic reading. Going along with Shanahan and Shanahan's logic, this type of direct instruction goes along with the need for continued high-level literacy skills instruction as text complexity increases in middle school. [17] Reading poetry allows for students to be engaged in reading complex text in a manner that is not overwhelming given the brevity of most poems. If students are taught and modelled the language of discussing literature and poetry through classroom discussion and close reading, then they should grow more proficient at analyzing it independently when instructional scaffolds are removed.

For example, one of the frames that will be taught in the unit is rhyme. One of the poems that we will explore is "Incident" by Countee Cullen:

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 Now I was eight and very small, And he was no whit bigger, And so I smiled, but he
poked out His tongue, and called me, 'Nigger.'… Of all the things that happened
there That's all that I remember. 18
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The poem is short, but it is tightly woven together by the rhyme at the end of each line. This rhyme initially gives the poem a very sing-song type of rhyme. I would point this out after they read it independently and I read it to them expressively in order to highlight rhyme and diction. I would have students come together and perform a tableau activity with groups to capture the moment that the happy-go-lucky nature of the speaker changes by staging the climax of the poem. I would engage in some guided questioning to highlight how the rhyme acts as a form that provides a frame to narrate the speaker's experience. We would also have a safe discussion about the effects of racism on an individual. In the poem, it is evident the speaker is deeply impacted; the individual could not remember anything from Baltimore after spending half a year there besides being referred to by a racial slur. This builds off of Maehr's suggestions for successful literacy instruction. In the poem above, rhyme is a frame that students will learn about for communicating their own experiences through poetry; this poem that rhymes also addresses racism which issue of relevance for my students.

An additional consideration in studying poetry is thinking about what it allows us to do with students.

Meaningful tasks promote student engagement and learning. [19] Frye and Fisher note that motivation reaches its lowest levels around the time that most students are in seventh grade. [20] They advocate that it is important to counter this lack of motivation through group work, but it needs to be group work with a meaningful task. The article defined the framework for a meaningful task using the acronym TARGET (Task, Autonomy, Recognition, Resources, Grouping, Evaluation, and Time). [21] For example, music can be used to think about how repetition is effective as a way to bring cohesion to ideas. In one of the pieces that we'll explore in the unit, "Cat's in the Cradle," students will look at the lyrics of the song as a form of poetry and see how the repeated structure of narrative, dialogue, and refrain create a frame for a narrative to be told through the song:

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 A child arrived just the other day He came to the world in the usual way But there
were planes to catch and bills to pay He learned to walk while I was away And he
was talking before I knew it and as he grew He said, "I'm gonna be like you, Dad
You know I'm gonna be like you" And the cats in the cradle and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man in the moon When you comin' home, Dad, I don't know
when But we'll get together then You know we'll have a good time then My son turned
ten just the other day He said, "Thanks for the ball, Dad, come on let's play Can
you teach me to throw?" I said, "Not today I got a lot to do", he said, "That's
okay" And he walked away but his smile never dimmed And said, "I'm gonna be like
him, yeah You know I'm going to be like him" And the cats in the cradle and the
silver spoon Little boy blue and the man in the moon *When you comin' home, Dad,* I
don't know when But we'll get together then You know we'll have a good time then… [22]
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This song, which I have used before to teach about repetition, dialogue, and narration, is a much more compelling way to address all of those elements of poetry and good writing than other more traditional means. Students understand the dialogue and the story that are part of this song because they have experienced or anticipate experiencing the same role reversal in the near future. In the song, the story that is being told is that the kid wants to spend time with his dad, but he is too busy with life. When the dad finally has the time, the kid becomes too busy to spend time. The dialogue makes this song personal; it is a conversation that many of us have had with our parents without thinking. The refrain sets up a subtle shift from the dad being too busy to the son finally being too busy as the song progresses through the refrain. The shift that occurs in the song is something that poets do all of the time; they create a form and intentionally break the form that has been created for effect. The richness of being able to communicate all of this through a song that is meaningful for students is important. The value of creating meaningful tasks cannot be underestimated when it comes to raising the level of motivation for students.

Frye and Fisher articulate what should be included in creating an effective task:

> The collaborative task should require students to utilize previously learned concepts in a new
> way, the task should [not] be beyond their capabilities, but rather… structured in such a way that
> the outcome is not a given (in other words a certain level of ambiguity creates rigor and promotes
> learning), [the activities should have students] closely listening to each other and building an
> understanding of one another. [23]

In the Playing with Poems Seminar, the environment was essentially what research indicates is a best practice. No set outcome was clear before reading; the participants had to do the cognitive work in order to build collective knowledge through reading and talking out selections. Teachers listened to one another and

built an understanding of what they read based on collaborative conversations. Through the course of the seminar, everyone spoke and contributed meaningfully to the group's growing awareness of poetic form and function. This scenario can be recreated in a middle school classroom setting through careful selection of task, text, and discussion protocol. It is important to note that rather than become tempted to make the assignment simpler, it is important to focus on creating meaningful tasks that engage all learners. [24] By selecting a topic that is already something on the forefront of many students' minds (such as identity and life changes) and adhering closely to the standards by engaging in close reading of poetry and looking at form, students will not be put off by the cognitive demands that are placed on their minds while reading and producing poetry and sharing their written work.

Writing Poetry

Research also indicates that students experience multiple benefits when they produce their own poetry. Producing poetry requires students to think specifically using knowledge of craft and precision with words to communicate specifically within a genre. Smith argues that it is important to establish a "word-rich environment" for students to have frequent opportunities to hear, speak, and write words and concepts that are new to them. [25] Reading poetry and subsequently producing it requires students to think and be selective with diction. This careful selection of words introduces new vocabulary to many students when they share drafts of poems and their final products.

Besides academic benefits, there are also social and emotional benefits for students that produce their own poetry. In one research study of 22 students, teachers hosted a writing club that met before school for one day a week. [26] In this study, students were allowed to produce different types of creative writing which they could not during the normal instructional day due to time constraints. [27] Students wrote creatively and shared their work at a culminating event and with teachers after dedicating tremendous amounts of time to their writing, in some cases 16 weeks on one written piece. [28] The researchers found that what drove student participation in the program was that their natural developmental needs to search for identity and meaning are not being met during the normal school day. This program filled a void that existed in their curriculum. [29] Having an outlet like poetry fills a void that is needed for many students, so much so that students were willing to come to school early to explore their thoughts in writing. Having students draft poetry in class will enable them to experience what these students experienced during morning sessions.

Audience

Having an authentic audience to read and share work with is important for students. Research suggests that if classrooms are to be spaces for students in which identity can be challenged and refigured through play and poetry, then classroom poetry performances are a powerful opportunity for identity construction and creating authorial voices for their peers. [30] Since students will be writing and sharing their work with an audience, students will produce work that reflects attention to craft and voice. The power of sharing poetry is evident. In making observations for a research study, one researcher captured a student's thoughts about audience and

poetry:

> Danielle explained why she read her poetry aloud: 'I wrote a lot of stuff that people didn't know about me. When I read it, they understood. A lot of people tell other people about it even though they weren't supposed to, and they make fun of me, but I still don't care.' Danielle wanted her classmates to understand her identity as she reconstructed her history, performing her identity as writer and student. [31]

Even though this child was subject to an inappropriate response from her audience (and that is something that definitely needs to be addressed before deep and intimate poetry reading and sharing occurs), it is beneficial for a child to be understood. I think to a student that I taught several years ago. Francisco's method of expressing himself was writing poetry. He would often leave a poem on my desk or the librarian's desk expressing thoughts that he had. He found his voice through poetry and wanted us to recognize his growing awareness at the time. He went on to participate in Louder than a Bomb in high school and had a poem published in an article in which he advocates for students who are undocumented. [32] In elementary school, the audience was teachers that he knew cared. Francisco later realized that he had important issues to advocate, and poetry became what he used to address a wide audience. Having an understanding audience is powerful and can dramatically impact students in a positive way when they are adequately prepared to share with an audience.

To better frame the importance of being understood and what recognition means, it may help to think back to what Fisher and Frye concluded about recognition (as part of the TARGET acronym) and what Smith alluded to in her poem. Students want to be recognized as individuals who possess unique talents, skills, and abilities. Recognition should also be a key element in developing tasks for students. When thinking about the types of learning activities that we ask of students, it is critical to think about the larger implications of the work that students produce. [33] If teachers believe that students can change the world and that the work they produce can impact the world positively, then it is critical for teachers to be thoughtful about the products that students are to produce share with a larger audience. In order for recognition to occur, the reach of student work has to go beyond the eyes of one teacher. It should allow for students to express and think through some issues that are personally meaningful on a grander scale; sharing their work must also occur. As demonstrated in Danielle's observation, it is critical to create safe opportunities to share, the operative word being "safe". While teaching this unit, much work must be done to create a classroom culture that allows students to share their work safely without the risk of being put down or bullied.

In order to have this type of reach, I have thought deeply about the process and product of this unit. Students will work to produce multiple drafts of poems across a couple of genres and themes. They will submit poems that they believe best reflect their ability and success based on their growing awareness of poetry as a genre. Students will be taught ways to give feedback that is positively framed during the unit while they share drafts of their work. In addition, in order to amplify student work and give their efforts the recognition it deserves, select students will act as editors to add poems to a blog that will be read, maintained, and commented on each week by students. Comments in the blog will be required, but the blog is also moderated by me. Comments will not be able to go live unless they have been vetted to ensure they are appropriate. Students will have the chance to have their work shared with a larger audience within the school community and enjoy the satisfaction that goes along with having a piece that is published.

Technology, specifically different web 2.0 applications, has unlocked access to larger audiences that students need for their work. Students of the 21 st century are accustomed to constant connection through numerous

platforms; their writing "uses the mediums of instant messaging (IM), text messaging (texting), Twitter, and email, as well as shared electronic documents and postings on blogs and social networking sites." [34] Since students are accustomed to writing for an audience, it is critical that this unit have an audience and reach beyond just the teacher. Websites such as Tagxedo, DomoAnimate, Wordle, and Glogster are just some of the recent 2.0 applications that have promoted student poetry and writing to larger audiences and increased student motivation. [35] For the purposes of this unit, I plan to use Blogger as a venue for communicating student work. It is hoped that this will provide the recognition and motivation needed to make this unit engaging for all students.

Objectives and Common Core State Standards

Objectives

This unit is intended for students in 8 th grade. Developing instructional rigor and promoting complex thinking are critical elements of the demands of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS); this unit addresses those demands through three key objectives. Students will learn about ways that identity is constructed and how it can be used as a lens to reflect on individuals and categorize others into groups. Students will close read multiple poems that address identity construction looking specifically at style, structure, and theme in order to develop proficiency reading complex text. Finally, students will use some of the structures and styles of authors that were read as well as other poetic structures to produce poetry that will be shared using a web 2.0 platform.

Common Core State Standards

Reading

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
2. Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
3. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas
4. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
5. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently

Writing

1. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
2. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others.
3. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
4. Apply grade 8 Reading standards to literature (e.g., "Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on

themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new") [36]

Essential Questions/Enduring Understandings

What is poetry? What are strategies for reading it? Producing it? Interpreting it?

Poetry is a grouping of many genres that use words creativity to develop images in the reader's mind and communicate ideas. There are many poetic frames that can be used to produce poetry. There are also many strategies for interpreting poetry that require a deep knowledge of poetic conventions.

How do others deal with life changes and issues of identity?

People will always have transitions to make in life, but everyone handles them differently. By reflecting on what others have done when faced with a big life transition or issue of identity, students can learn from their experience and do a better job of coping.

Strategies

This unit will rely on several teaching strategies and methods that are explained below as I implement them in my teaching. I draw upon the strategies to guide and scaffold instruction so that complex text can be deciphered and collaborative conversations may be had:

Shared Reading

Shared reading occurs when students join and share the process of reading as a teacher or other expert reader reads and models particular aspects of the text. During a shared reading, students have access to the text and can follow along with the teacher or expert's fluent and expressive reading. Shared reading is a form of explicit modeling that makes particular reading processes and reading strategies easy for students to understand.

For the purposes of this unit, shared reading will be used at the start of the unit to get students comfortable annotating text and developing text dependent questions that require textual evidence. Through the shared reading, it is hoped that students understand close reading and text annotation through my explicit sharing of my thinking.

Close Reading

Close Reading is a process in which students engage in purposeful rereading of a particular text with the intention of drawing out specific aspects of the text that may not be apparent after an initial reading. During a close reading, teachers develop text dependent questions that guide students to think deeply about text.

For the purposes of this unit, close reading will be used to look at the craft and form of selected poems. Each close reading of a poem will start with students reading and annotating the poem using selected marks. They will be guided through several rereadings of the text in order to pull out various elements that are contained within the poems.

Class Discussion

For the purposes of my classroom, class discussion builds off of questions that are prepared in advance by the teacher. The goal of a classroom discussion is to volley student thinking off of each other in order to build collective knowledge. This method of facilitating classroom discussion from student-to-student also fosters a classroom climate of respect for the ideas of others.

The specific protocol of a classroom discussion is as follows: I will develop specific questions before the lesson that are asked of the class. A student volunteers to start the conversation and then other students respond to each other's thinking. While students are discussing, I take notes to guide other instructional moves and tally student's participation to make all individuals accountable for speaking. If I see a chunk of kids that are not participating in a larger group, I will select a few questions for students that are share and have students discuss with partners or tables and tell those children that I am specifically looking for them to share their thinking. I want all students to talk and share their thinking; they all have equally important things to say. If they are capable of expressing their thinking at length, it promotes deep understanding. It is critical to get everyone talking more and for the teacher to facilitate and not always dictate.

Partner Reading

Partner reading consists of students working in pairs or in groups of three to read and annotate text together. During partner reading, students take turns reading with periodic periods that they stop to discuss what they read. With poetry, partner reading is helpful because students will be more apt to pick up on elements of the form of the poem through reading it aloud versus reading and annotating it individually. Poems that have elements that would become more apparent though reading it aloud will be partner read. Students will also have to record their thinking on their partner reading sheets.

See appendix #3 for the sample contents of what a partner reading sheet would contain for my students.

Student Readings

Subgenre of Poetry	Topic	Suggested Reading with Students
Rhyme	-Perception vs. reality -Suicide/ perception vs. reality -Sarcasm -Problematic home life -Racism	-"We Wear the Mask" Paul Laurence Dunbar -"Richard Cory" Edwin Arlington Robinson -"Have a Nice Day" Spike Milligan -"My Papa's Waltz" Theodore Roethke -"Incident" Countee Cullen
Repetition/ Refrains/ Songs	-Culture/defining personal elements -Inspiration/ Identity definition -Cultural identity -Growing up/ Role reversal -Cultural identity	-"Where I'm From" George Ella Lyon -"Still I Rise" Maya Angelou -" 'Mexican' Is Not a Noun" Francisco X. Alarcón -"Cat's in the Cradle" Harry Chapin (song) -"I am not My Hair" India (song)
Found Poems	-Resisting change	-"For Olive Garden" Brandon Barr (see Appendix #2 for poem and link to the article)
Six Word Memoirs	-Various	-Six-Word Memoirs: Life Stories Distilled See:http://www.npr.org/2008/02/07/18768430/six-word-memoirs-life-stories-distilled
Free Verse	-Loss of innocence -Not caring about what others think -Not being cared about/ imagery/extended metaphor	-"The Death of Santa Claus" Charles Harper Webb -"Warning" Jenny Joseph -"The Rose that Grew from Concrete" Tupac Shakur
Poems Containing Dialect	-Language confusion -Capturing the voice of an individual	-"At a Bus Stop in El Barrio" Rodrigo Toscano -"When Malindy Sings" Paul Laurence Dunbar

Haiku	-Various	-Multiple haikus from the New York Times about New York-See: http://haiku.nytimes.com/
Specifically Latino	-Straddling cultures -Straddling cultures	-"Fences" Pat Mora -"Legal Alien" Pat Mora
Other	-Poetic frame for thinking about life -Perceptions of Others	-"Autobiography in Five Short Chapters" Portia Nelson -"Fat Man" Niall Janney
Sestinas	-Failed love -Death	-"Sestina" Ciara Shuttleworth -"Sestina" Elizabeth Bishop

Explanation of Selected Readings

I have grouped student readings loosely by subgenres of poetry. Based on each subgenre, I am going to briefly explain why I selected the readings that I did and how they fit within the larger context of identity, major life changes, and also how they function as mentor texts that students can look to for form in producing their poetry.

Rhyme

There are five poems that are included in the rhyme subgenre that will be read as part of the unit:

- "We Wear the Mask" Paul Laurence Dunbar
- "Richard Cory" Edwin Arlington Robinson
- "Have a Nice Day" Spike Milligan
- "My Papa's Waltz" Theodore Roethke
- "Incident" Countee Cullen

Each of these poems uses rhyme as a method of linking ideas together to create flow through extensive use end rhyme. By looking at these poems, I hope that students see that rhyme can be used in sophisticated ways to link ideas. I also hope that students unpack issues of identity in each poem. In the case of "We Wear the Mask," it is hoped that students recognize issues of power that is embedded in covering up one's true feelings. In "Richard Cory," it is hoped that students will see how rhyme is used to create narrative flow, and by the end of the poem of the flow of the poem is broke by the suicide of Richard Cory, a person who seemingly had it all. This will allow for a chance for me to model sharing the story of Rudy, who serves as inspiration of the unit. In "Have a Nice Day," I want to highlight how rhyme is used to create an exchange between two people; another way that students can use the form of rhyming to address something difficult. The poem "My Papa's Waltz" creates an image of a less than ideal father that still clearly loves his child despite being seriously flawed. I believe this will resonate with a lot of my students; rhyme is used to create narrative flow. In "Incident," the speaker in the poem comes face-to-face with racism. I will highlight in my reading how rhyme's sing-song nature captures the speaker's childlike innocence that is shattered by experiencing racism.

Repetition/Refrains/Songs

There are three poems and two songs that are included in this subgenre that will be read as part of this unit:

- "Where I'm From" George Ella Lyon
- "Still I Rise" Maya Angelou
- " 'Mexican' Is Not a Noun" Francisco X. Alarcón
- "Cat's in the Cradle" Harry Chapin (song)
- "I am not My Hair" India (song)

The poem "Where I am From" uses repetition to consider the seminal elements that shape the speaker in the poem's existence. The repetition of "I'm from" in the poem holds ideas together and gets students to think about what the impact that a phrase that is repeated can have on a reading. Students will use the "Where I am From" poem as a mentor text to create their own version of the poem. "Still I Rise" was selected because I want students to see how Angelou uses the repetition of that line as an answer to the obstacles that the speaker in the poem has faced throughout her life. The ending of "I rise" being repeated also suggests movement and overcoming. "'Mexican' Is Not a Noun" is filled with repetition and parallel structures; it should cause good discussion because it is slightly provocative with its word choices and ideas. My hope is that it gets students to think about their culture in a slightly more nuanced manner. The "Cat's in the Cradle" is a song that addresses growing up and its impact on family. This song is powerful for students; when I share it with students I try to get them thinking about theme. As part of this unit, I also want to focus on how repetition and the refrain move the narrative along in the song. I will also get students to think about the effect of having a nursery rhyme as a refrain has on their listening/reading of the song. The song "I am not My Hair" focuses on identity; it begs the question, if I am not my hair, then what am I? I will also focus on this song on how a refrain is used for emphasis and cohesion.

Found Poems

"For Olive Garden" Brandon Barr (see Appendix #2 for poem and link to the article)

For found poetry, I am going to emphasize that poems can be found in almost anywhere. I will share my process. Students will look for their own found poems to share with others. Everyone will produce a found poem. This will also act as prior knowledge for later in the year when I have students create found poems in IWitness when we study the Holocaust: http://iwitness.usc.edu/SFI/Activity/Detail.aspx?activityID=86

Six Word Memoirs

Six-Word Memoirs: Life Stories Distilled

See: http://www.npr.org/2008/02/07/18768430/six-word-memoirs-life-stories-distilled

For six word memoirs, I will allow students to explore the website above to think about their lives or the life of someone dear to them. In addition to producing a six word memoir, they will need to write an explanation of the six word memoir is fitting. This will help me to understand my students better.

Free Verse

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 "The Death of Santa Claus" Charles Harper Webb "Warning" Jenny Joseph "The Rose
that Grew from Concrete" Tupac Shakur
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For free verse, I selected three very different types of poems that address issues of identity and life changes in different ways. In "The Death of Santa Claus," the poet addresses the theme of loss of innocence as Santa playfully dies as a child is being told that Santa does not exist. As with the poem that we read about the

Christmas tree (which was really addressing a person embracing death) in seminar, sometimes it is good to create an alternate story/image/metaphor in order to address a difficult life change or element of identity. In a similar vein, "The Rose that Grew from Concrete" uses extended metaphor to think about something that has grown out of less than ideal circumstances. This poem will challenge my students to think beyond literal. "Warning" is a fun poem that will illustrate to students how to build ideas. She uses transitions in the poem and a question to mark the turn of the poem. It also gets students to think about how people change as they age.

Poems Containing Dialect

- "At a Bus Stop in El Barrio" Rodrigo Toscano
- "When Malindy Sings" Paul Laurence Dunbar

Both of these poems allow students to see the power of thinking intentionally about the speaker of a poem and capturing how that speaker's rhythm and cadence of speech. For "At a Bus Stop in El Barrio," I would read the part that is a heavy accent and have someone call the other part out. I would want students to think about the effect that dialect has in the poem and how accents affect communication. In similar fashion, "When Malindy Sings" is a poem that uses a different dialect put quickly puts the reader in a very different time and place. From both of these poems, students should see the potential of capturing dialect in their work.

Haiku

Multiple haikus from the New York Times about New York

See: http://haiku.nytimes.com/

The haikus that are on the New York Times website about New York address a variety of themes. I plan on letting students explore the website, find one they like, and talk about it with peers. I will focus on the power of haiku to create imagery. Students will create a few of their own.

Specifically Latino

- "Fences" Pat Mora
- "Legal Alien" Pat Mora

Even though my students are Latino, they face many issues related to identity and life changes that go beyond culture. For that reason, I have shied away from incorporating a ton of specifically Latino poetry. Even so, there is a poem in dialect and with repetition that also address issues that impact Latino students. Four poems I believe is a good number for readings without becoming repetitious and heavy-handed with cultural identity. Students will have the chance to explore cultural identity more through their writing should they choose to do so.

In the poem "Fences," issues of power arise as tourists are able to enjoy a beach that the people who live in the area cannot. I would want students to think about power relations in the poem and the poet's use of repetition at the end of the poem. In "Legal Alien," the poem suggests what it feels to be like between cultures; the speaker is clearly uneasy about not fitting in either American or Mexican culture. This poem should elicit a strong response from students who are straddling cultures.

Other

- "Autobiography in Five Short Chapters" Portia Nelson
- "Fat Man" Niall Janney

These two poems didn't fit with any other category, so I labeled them other. "Autobiography in Five Short Chapters" will serve as another possible form for student poetry to follow. In the poem, the speaker traces his/her back decision-making into stanzas. I believe the form will work for many students who struggle to organize their ideas in poetry. The poem "Fat Man" is a great poem to think about incorporating a turn or changed perspective on things.

Sestinas

- "Sestina" Ciara Shuttleworth
- "Sestina" Elizabeth Bishop

Both of these poems reveal the form of a sestina. The form of a sestina is another framework for students to follow to express their ideas. It is also a playful form that requires students to carefully select words that can be used in multiple ways. These two particular sestinas also happen to address topics that relate to the unit, love and death. The sestina is another potential frame for students to use to communicate ideas through poetry.

Scope and Sequence of Unit

Phase One

The scope of the unit will follow three phases. The first phase entails doing the readings above. In thinking about each of these phases for classroom use, the first phase will take the longest as it addresses a multitude of different readings that students will complete. In planning, I anticipate that in order to read, annotate, reread, discuss, and work through the poems above will take roughly two weeks of school. For the lessons revolving around reading poems for identity themes and poetic forms, I would attack breaking down theme and form for students with multiple poetry readings to get students thinking about the form of poems and content. There are multiple strategies to draw upon and many directions that a teacher could go in depending on student need and interest.

The objectives for the first phase of the unit come from the broader unit objectives: students will learn about ways that identity is constructed and how it can be used as a lens to reflect individual and categorize others and students will close read multiple poems that address identity construction looking specifically at style, structure, and theme in order to develop proficiency reading complex text.

A sample activity during this phase of the unit will involve making several key points about a particular genre of poetry that will be explored through a poem that addresses an issue of identity via a specific poetic framing device. For example, one lesson that will occur will be made about rhyme through a minilesson that is recorded on an anchor chart. There are three key points about rhyme will be included on a chart for classroom viewing:

> ## Rhyming in Poetry
>
> Rhyming in poetry brings together two words that often have no relationship in an effort to create a relationship that doesn't normally exist.
>
> Rhyming in poetry goes back to an age when poetry was sung and was used to make verses memorable. (Think about why a poet might what to use this in their poetry today based on that thinking).
>
> Rhyming promotes rhythm and beat within a poem and helps to create structure that holds stanzas and poems together. By creating a structure, a poet can use the structure to link ideas and break the structure to add emphasis or point something out to a reader.

Students will be provided with copies of the following two poems: "We Wear the Mask" by Paul Laurence Dunbar and "Richard Cory" by Edwin Arlington Robinson. Students will read "We Wear the Mask" independently. As they read the poem independently, they are marking the text using an annotation system that is part of close reading. They are looking to add their thoughts, identify words they don't know, and questions they might have. I will ask students to share out (as a type of formative assessment to guide my questioning). I will then read the poem out loud. I will ask students to think as they follow along to pay attention to the speaker in the poem. I will ask students to consider the poet's choice of "we" and the why someone would wear a mask by jotting a few notes down on their copy of the poem. I would continue to ask students questions about the poem; students would jot down their thoughts on the poem, discuss with their peers, and then we would come together and have a classroom discussion. Given that the specific teaching point for this point is observing the function of rhyme, I would discuss why rhyming is an important structure in the poem after I get kids to see that element within the poem. I would repeat a similar process for "Richard Cory." Generally, I would hope to go at the rate of roughly two poems a day.

Phase Two

The second phase will involve students producing their own poetry based on the forms that we explored in our reading. The second phase will involve students using elements of the poems that we read and discussed to produce their own poetry that deals with changes and identity; this will take roughly one week for students to think of topics and draft a few poems.

In this phase of the unit, several different forms will have been explored. Students will have access to anchor charts like the one above about rhyming to guide their drafting, to essentially play with poetry. It is going to be beneficial for students to produce roughly two poems that speak to the forms and thematic content of the unit. From these four poems that are drafted, students need to select two poems that they feel best reflect their work to pursue further in the third phase of the unit.

Phase Three

The third phase will focus on refining and sharing the poems that students have completed in order share their work online. The third phase of the unit will take roughly two weeks for students to get/share feedback and self-select their best two poems to be shared with an online audience. This should take roughly two weeks of getting peer feedback, my feedback, and refining their work. Students that are willing will work as editors throughout the year to maintain a blog of classroom poetry. Students will comment and respond to the work of their peers throughout the school year.

Appendices

#1-Inspiration for Unit

This unit comes from an experience that I had with a student that I taught several years ago. Rudy was an average student. He liked the social aspects of school more than the academic side of it. There were times that he didn't do homework and had forgetful lapses that middle school students are occasionally prone to have. With that noted, he also had an infectious laugh and had an insane obsession with Hillary Duff. He was a pleasure to be around. There is a picture of him and I and a small group of other students that I have on my television in my living room from a golf convention that I brought students to one year. He wasn't particularly interested in golf, but he enjoyed the chance to socialize with his friends and was open to new ideas and trying new things.

He also faced hardships. When I taught him in 8 th grade, he was grappling with issues of identity and sexuality. As a teacher, I suspected these issues and was hyper-focused on creating an environment that allowed for him to grapple with these issues so that he felt comfortable and could grow into a man that was confident and self-assured. I wanted Rudy to grow up and be Rudy. When he told me he was gay, it wasn't a big surprise. I was glad he was comfortable enough to tell me and confident enough in himself to share. It was validating to know that my efforts to create open communication meant something to him and that he felt he could confide in me that he was gay. It wasn't easy for him to say, and I am fairly sure that not many people knew beyond me. It was ok; Rudy was Rudy. Nothing changed when he formally told me what I already suspected. We kept in contact throughout his time in high school. He faced more difficulties and hardships with family and other adolescent issues such as growing up, not being accepted, moving and adapting to adulthood. When it came time for college, he continued to struggle.

One day, he asked if he could come and observe my classes and help out. Overwhelmed with the start of the school year and hosting a student teacher, I told him that it wasn't a good time and that I needed to be focused on getting the year off to a good start. He was understanding and assured me that everything was on track and that he looked forward to learning about teaching in order to give back and help others. I told him that I admired his growth and maturity. That was the last time we were in contact. He committed suicide a few weeks after our last exchange, and I was shocked. I had never had a student or someone I know commit suicide. Things seemed like they were finally going well for him. My thoughts have dwelled on him for a long time and shape my thinking behind this unit.

In teaching this unit, I hope that I can give students a chance to express themselves in a manner that might give them some piece of mind and think about who they are becoming as individuals. I hope to do more listening than speaking and connect with my students through poetry. I believe the readings above allow for emotional connections to be made between teachers, students, and poetry.

#2-Found Poem

Below is an example of a found poem that I wrote in response to a business article titled, "For Olive Garden, the menu is worth more than new décor." I organized this poem from phrases that were included in the article that expressed a need for change at Olive Garden. I happen to enjoy the Olive Garden and like it the way it is, and use the language of article to express my dislike for the changes that are about to occur. Link to the original article:

http://finance.yahoo.com/news/for-olive-garden—menu-s-worth-more-than-new-decor-175954828.html

 "For Olive Garden" Formidable restaurant, nowhere near to giving up. An olive and cheese small plate, crab-topped chicken and a burger, salmon with bruschetta. This latest attempt to spur customers, another reason to complain. Its standard fettuccine and breadsticks fare will be modernized, will be served on all-white plates, but much of this is folly. Remodeled shops? New logo and foods, a new light? This latest attempt, the main takeaway is a simple one. The Italian-themed chain is worth more than new décor, but the company is convinced. Keep attention on what truly matters! Fettuccine and breadsticks! Its new-look restaurants, this latest attempt to spur customers, serious reasons to worry, providing doubters further reason to gripe.

#3 Partner Reading Sheet

When I make copies of this for my students, I set this up as a landscape document. Students are given this to fill out as they read in pairs to think out the poem. While reading, students should alternate lines. One student will read orally while the other follows along. It helps students to engage in reading poetry as a collaborative activity. I will walk around and take notes to pull together the classroom into discussion once students finish reading and thinking about the poem. They write their responses directly in the boxes below:

Look at the title of the poem. What does it tell you before and after you read? Write what you think before in one color and what you think at the end in another color.	Paraphrase what is going on in the poem in your own words. Are there any changes in time? (Look for transition words).Tell me what goes on in the world of the poem before you try to interpret the meaning of it.
What are some of the literary devices that the poet is using to suggest meaning that go beyond what is happening in the poem? Look for figurative language like similes, metaphors, personification. Based on these what you know is going on, what do you think the poet thinks about his/her subject?	What do you think the poet is trying to say through this poem (theme)? Give evidence from the poem and explain it in your answer.

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Notes

1. Stevie Smith, *Not Waving but Drowning*

2. Alicia Rodriguez, *Latino Education, Latino Movement*, 381–400.

3. Ashley Ross, Latino Representation and Education: Pathways to Latino Student Performance, 69.

4. Ann Marie Smith, Poetry Performances and Academic Identity Negotiations in the Literacy Experiences of Seventh Grade Language Arts Students, 202-218.

5. Alma M GarciÃ¬a, The Mexican Americans, 42.

6. Norma Williams, *The Mexican American Family*, 1-12.

7. Alma M GarciÃ¬a. The Mexican Americans, 39.

8. Ibid.

9. Kristine E. Pytash, *Using YA Literature to Help Preservice Teachers Deal with Bullying and Suicide.*

10. Ibid.

11. J. E. Marcia, *Development and Validation of Ego-identity Status*, 551-558.

12. Portia Nelson, *Autobiography in Five Short Chapters.*

13. Arlene L. Barry, *Reading Preferences and Perceptions of Urban Eighth Graders*, 353-374.

14. Ibid.

15. M. L. Maehr, *Culture and Achievement Motivation*, 887-896.

16. T. Shanahan & C. Shanahan, *Teaching Disciplinary Literacy to Adolescents: Rethinking Content-area Literacy*, 40-59.

17. Ibid.

18. Countee Cullen, *Incident*

19. N. Frey & D. Fisher, *Motivation Requires a Meaningful Task*, 30-37.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Cat Stevens, *Cats in the Cradle* lyrics.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. T. Smith, *Teaching Vocabulary Expeditiously: Three Keys to Improving Vocabulary Instruction*, 20-25.

26. B. Ruben & L. Moll, *Putting the Heart Back into Writing: Nurturing Voice in Middle School*, 12-18.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ann Marie Smith, *Poetry Performances and Academic Identity Negotiations in the Literacy Experiences of Seventh Grade Language Arts Students*, 202-218.

31. Ibid.

32. See http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/05/27/17694000-undocumented-military-cadets-molded-for-success-then-cast-adrift for the article with Francisco's poem.

33. N. Frey & D. Fisher, *Motivation Requires a Meaningful Task*, 30-37.

34. Kimberly Kimbell-Lopez, Carrice Cummins, and Elizabeth Manning. *Web 2.0 Tools: Building Structures for Poetry*, 9-24.

35. Ibid.

36. *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and technical Subjects.*