YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE
to strengthen teaching in public schools®

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

Making Our Communities Visible: Poetry, Rhetoric and Social Justice

Curriculum Unit 17.03.03, published September 2017
by Jo Anne Flory

Introduction

> "Poetry is always being created anew, in new places, by unforetold hands and voices. In this, it is like the many movements against demoralizing power. We don't know where either will come from." – Adrienne Rich[1]

From the militant performance poetry of the Black Arts Movement, to the playful, musical verse of Juan Felipe Herrera, many contemporary poets have addressed issues of social justice, with the goal of increasing the visibility of marginalized communities in America, and drawing attention to acts of injustice. Such poetry can foster a sense of community in several ways. Poetry which is written to be read aloud, such as performance poetry, can create a sense of community by exposing people to different perspectives, while also helping them "find new ways of looking at worlds they already know" [2] ; poetry focused on increasing visibility can empower communities by revealing their "vitality and beauty" to the world[3] ; finally, poets can foster community solidarity around social justice issues by appealing to a sympathetic audience.

During the course of this unit, I will immerse my students in reading and writing poetry, focusing on discussion of their own communities and the social issues that are important to them. We will study a series of poems linked by their emphasis on themes of social justice and community, written by contemporary African American, American Indian and Chicano/a poets. Teaching rhetorical elements through reading and writing poetry can give students a fun, fresh understanding of how those elements interact, while also giving them a voice to express their own views on issues they are passionate about. My hope is that reading the work of a diverse combination of contemporary poets, and relating the issues to our surroundings, will make writing poetry relevant and interesting to my students.

Teaching Situation and Rationale

I always teach a very diverse group of students, mirroring the diversity at East Central High School as a whole. East Central is located in East Tulsa, a very culturally and ethnically diverse area of the city. Over half the students at my school identify as Hispanic. The remainder are African American, White, Native American and Asian, and 6% identify as Multiracial. Tulsa is still a segregated city in many ways, so having having such diversity in my classroom is noteworthy.

I will implement this unit with my English III and AP Language classes, which are both comprised of students with varying ability levels, several of whom are (or have been) identified as English Language Learners. Most of my students qualify for free or reduced lunch, based on their parents' income. Many also work after school jobs (up to 30-40 hours a week), either because they are self-supporting or because they need to contribute to finances at home. While some are reading at or above grade level and are comfortable interpreting literature, others are reading below grade level and struggle with vocabulary development.

Because of the increased emphasis over the last several years on preparing students for standardized tests (in my case for the English III End of Instruction Exam), I believe poetry has often taken a back seat in the classroom to other genres of literature, particularly nonfiction analysis (which is often emphasized in the AP Language and Composition course). As a result, many of my students feel ill-prepared to read and interpret poetry. I want this unit to stimulate their creativity and sense of playfulness with language, increase their understanding of how rhetorical elements interact, strengthen their vocabulary development, and give them a voice to express their views on issues they are passionate about. East Tulsa is becoming increasingly "invisible" to many, primarily due to poverty and the violence that ultimately follows economic strife into the community. Poetry seeks out beauty and illuminates it through the language of the culture where it is found. Poetry has commonalities with the blunt and beautiful, simple and ingenious rhythms hip hop uses to define truth and beauty in the daily grind my students experience. These commonalities can lead students to make an almost subliminal connection between the two, making poetry the strongest genre to introduce and elucidate language, and encourage my students to become more observant of the small beauties in their communities and day-to-day lives.

Objectives

This unit addresses a number of learning objectives, as students engage in independent study and collaborative work. They will develop their literacy skills through reading and interpreting contemporary poetry from a variety of cultural perspectives, as well as composing their own poetry through modeling and collaborative exercises. Students will develop research and multimedia presentation skills through the creation of multimodal texts, and analyze literary elements and other rhetorical strategies that are employed to develop poetic language, using examples to support their analysis. Students will familiarize themselves with some of the major movements in contemporary American poetry, and draw connections between the texts, as well as engaging in collaborative discussions about their interpretation of the poems and the impact of the poetry on society. Finally, students will determine the literal, figurative and connotative meanings of words encountered in the poems, and analyze the impact of specific word choices, including language they find

particularly engaging, or beautiful.

The Unit

Implemented over a four-week period, this unit will be organized according to "themed" weeks, each focusing on a different aspect of poetry of advocacy and its relationship to community, from the perspective of African American, American Indian, and Chicano/a American poets. During week one, we will begin by studying the ways poetry, including performance poetry and popular verse, can be used to address social issues, through exposing listeners to perspectives different from their own (to foster empathy), and helping them view their own surroundings in a fresh way. We will also discuss how the rhythm of poetry can be used to galvanize an audience to take action. I will show clips of hip hop musicians and poets reading their poems on Def Poetry Jam (Common**),** "A Letter to the Law", Wyclef Jean**,** "Immigrants", and Joy Harjo**,** "A Poem to Get Rid of Fear"), as well as analyzing the lyrics to hip hop artist Jay Z's song "Minority Report" (an argument about the government's slow response to the Hurricane Katrina disaster). After listening to "Minority Report", we will read Nikky Finney's poem "Left", which addresses the same issue. Finney's poem uses "Eenee Menee Mainee Mo!" from Rudyard Kipling's "A Counting Song" as an almost musical refrain to emphasize the seemingly arbitrary response by the government to the Katrina disaster. Finney's angry tone is also in response to the context of Kipling's original line "Catch a nig*** by the toe", which students will need to be made aware of to fully understand the allusion and Finney's reaction to it. We will complete a Venn diagram to chart what we notice about the similarities and differences in the two responses, including observations about word choice and use of rhyme. I will provide each student with a composition book they will collage, personalize, and use to record notes about speaker, theme, vocabulary and other features of the poems; they will also use it as a place to record points of curiosity, news clippings and day-to-day observations.

During week two, comparing those two responses to the ongoing issue of socioeconomic inequality will lead into a discussion of the connection between poetic and rhetorical devices and meaning, as we play with language and continue our discussion of other ways contemporary poets have mixed poetry and music to comment on issues and galvanize communities (Amiri Baraka**,** "Why Is We Americans" and "The X is Black", Sekou Sundiata**,** "Bring On the Reparations", "Blink Your Eyes", "Hopes Up Too High" and Gil Scott**-**Herron**,** "Whitey On the Moon" and "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised"). As Jay-Z writes in *Decoded*, "Rhymes can make sense of the world in a way that regular speech can't"[4] . At this point, we will watch the video "Sekou Sundiata on music, poetry, East Harlem and activism", read David Brooks's essay "Poetry for Everyday Life", and begin a series of exercises related to playing with rhythm and metaphor, to encourage students to think metaphorically and have fun with language, without always looking for a "right" answer; this also continues to expose them to a variety of poets and social issues to discuss. As poet Natasha Trethewey describes learning about poetic language, "I had felt, as Orwell had, **'**the joy of mere words**'** in their juxtapositions…long before I was conscious of their political power".[5] I want students to begin to learn about poetic devices and rhetorical strategies by first noticing the sound of the language and the message, rather than beginning with analysis. As teaching poet Georgia A. Popoff writes, "approaching a poem as a formula to be analyzed and deconstructed drains the poem of its power". I will model her "layered approach of multiple readings, listening to the words, questioning vocabulary, identifying literary mechanisms, recognizing the musicality and then interpreting the metaphoric and linguistic expression".[6] Some of the rhetorical strategies and literary devices students will be familiar with from previous classes, and some will need to be introduced as we go;

students will record the devices in their poetry notebooks. Other poems we will interpret in class during this time will be chosen from the following: “Blood Gang Call” by Juan Felipe Herrera, “Plea to Those Who Matter” by James Welch, “New Rules of the Road” by Reginald Harris, and three sets of poems that address similar issues to compare and contrast: “Liberty Needs Glasses” by Tupac Shakur and “With Liberty and Justice For All” by Alurista; “You Can’t Out Muhammad Ali in a Poem” by Juan Felipe Herrera and “Narrative: Ali, a poem in twelve rounds” by Elizabeth Alexander; “Every Day We Get More Illegal” by Juan Felipe Herrera, and “To Live in the Borderlands Means You” by Gloria Anzaldua. Students will have a graphic organizer to record discussion notes for their notebooks, and I will introduce pertinent background information for these poems, so students understand the context. Depending on the time available in class, some of these poems (such as the three sets that address similar issues) will be completed in groups, with each group receiving a different set of poems to analyze and then sharing their interpretations with the class. These poems may also be used to have students choose one from the week, and share it with a friend or family member. Additional exercises will be chosen from the following: an introductory notecard exercise to introduce background interests; a trip outside to chart metaphors and similes from the world, first noting details, then creating a metaphor and a creative opposite; recording all the metaphors they come across in a day (in print or speech) in their poetry notebooks; recording “snippets of language”; playing Poetry Scrabble; writing a found poem using an article on an issue that’s important to them; writing their own “calling all…” poem, or chant poem, using Herrera’s “Blood Gang Call” or another list poem as a model (to emphasize repetition and variety, and parallel structure).

Nikky Finney says, “What is in the news keeps me writing poetry”[7] ; in the third week, I want students to think about how current events and the issues that stimulate their interests can connect to poetry, so each student will create a blackout poem using an article on a current event topic that interests them from *The New York Times*. During this process, each student will take their article and use a marker to black out all the words, except those that seem most essential to the subject, and create a poem from those words. Next, we will read a series of poems that promote community solidarity by appealing to a sympathetic audience through addressing social justice issues related to specific incidents. I will show footage of the LA riots from the documentary “OJ: Made in America” and then we will do a read around of the poem “Rodney King, the Black Christ of LA and All Our White Sins” by Juan Felipe Herrera. We will continue to use the process of interpretation and the organizers described in the previous week, as students take notes in their poetry notebooks. We will then read three more poems by Juan Felipe Herrera (“@ the Crossroads, a Sudden American Poem”, “Poem by Poem”, and “We Are Remarkably Loud Not Masked”), and students will write a process poem, using words from an article about an event they want to respond to. To compose a process poem, students write for three to five minutes about the article, then choose nine words from their writing and write them down as a vertical list. Then they copy my list of nine words from my own writing. They then write a poem in which the first pair of words appear within the first line, the second in the second line, and so on, for a nine-line poem. This writing activity gives students practice combining random elements with some structure to create a piece that captures their feelings about the topic of the article they read.

We will also read “When the World as We Knew It Ended” and “For Anna Marie Pictou Aquash, Whose Spirit is Present Here and in the Dappled Stars” by Joy Harjo, “Que Paso” by Juan Antonio Burciaga, “Autopsy”, “Another Proclamation”, and “Looking Glass” by Sherman Alexie, and a poem about the Tulsa Race Riot by AJ Smitherman. Students will be familiar with the context for some of these poems, but I will provide background information as needed; students will research the context of the poems as well. Where there are multiple poems by one author, the first poem will be discussed as a class, and the others will be interpreted during group work. Additional exercises include creating an infographic that includes a lune poem (in Canva or Storybird) responding to a historical event. In the first line of a lune, students write three words; in the second

line they write five, and in the third they write three. We will read several examples, so students can see a range of possibilities for conveying tone.

Finally, in the fourth week we will again look at poetry as a tool that can be used to empower communities, specifically through increasing visibility, developing self-awareness, and seeking truth through hearing and telling stories. This will build on the previous weeks, as students will bring their knowledge of the issues we have talked about, and see how we can use poetry celebrating community to address those issues by exploring the ways poetry can give students a new look at their surroundings, while also giving them a look into (and, hopefully, a new perspective on) the lives of others. First, students will draw a neighborhood map of places that are special to them, or that they visit or notice in their communities. We will watch a short interview with Juan Felipe Herrera where he discusses community and social justice. Students will keep a list of "captured talk" in their poetry notebooks as they go through their day and we will use that to write a poem modeled after "(Dawning Luz)" by Herrera using Storybird. We will go outside (or walk around the school) and play the "Images of East Tulsa" poetry writing game to observe the environment we are in every day more closely, and write a poem about it. We will read the following poems (together, or in groups) that describe community and culture to address issues of social justice: "Mexican Similarities/Mexican Differences" by Juan Felipe Herrera, "En El Barrio" by Alurista, "Ballad of the Morning Streets" by Amiri Baraka, "Footnote a Juan Felipe" by Juan Antonio Burciaga, "At Navajo Monument Valley Tribal School" by Sherman Alexie, "Gracias" by Juan Felipe Herrera. After reading and discussing the poems, students will create a small group photo poem (using Canva or Storybird) about their communities (school, home, etc.), using their own photos and the "I Am…We Are" model. To finish the unit, we will write a "Gracias" poem modeled after Herrera's, to address the people in our community we are thankful for. As a culminating activity, students will choose their favorite poem from the unit to submit for a published anthology.

Poetry, Advocacy and Community

How Performance Poetry Creates Community

Poetry which is written to be read aloud, such as performance poetry, can create a sense of community by allowing people to "learn about worlds different from their own," while also helping them see their own worlds in a new light.[8] From the poets of the Black Arts Movement to current Hip Hop artists, poets have combined poetry with other art forms to bring about "the renaissance of poetry as an oral art…performed in alliance with music and dance, to evoke and catalyze a community…against passivity and victimization".[9] Poet Adrienne Rich is speaking of the poets of the Black Arts Movement of the mid-1960's to early 1970's, such as Amiri Baraka, whose goals were to "address black audiences, celebrate African American cultural traditions, and take poetry, drama, music and visual art to the streets", while addressing political topics.[10] In taking their poetry directly into African American neighborhoods, these poets sought to unite and galvanize their own communities, which they did. Music was utilized as a way to connect with people in the community, and poems were a "script for performance",[11] that could create political change by liberating the text and bringing it to this new audience in a way that would be transformative for them. Singing, dancing and chanting their poems provided a meaningful connection with audiences that created community based on shared experiences.

This "dialectic between author and audience" to build community[12] continued in the poetry of Sekou Sundiata, as well as Gil Scott-Heron and the Last Poets in the late 1970's, and continues in the work of contemporary spoken word and Hip Hop artists. Sundiata provided a bridge between The Black Arts Movement and the spoken word poets of today, and Heron is mentioned, along with boxer Mohammad Ali (who released a spoken word album in 1963), among the "forefathers of Rap".[13] In "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised", for example, Heron mixes music and verse to illustrate the idea that commercialization has saturated modern culture, and true revolution happens in ways that cannot be captured by modern media. He is advocating militant black revolution in an era when revolution was not something you could sit home and watch on television, as he piles up allusions to the banal, overly commercialized culture he is railing against.

The connection between these artists and contemporary life underscores the idea that Hip Hop, like poetry, relies on sound devices, and illustrates the ways in which "popular poetry can signify disruptions, discontinuities and debates within American culture itself".[14] Again, music and words are being combined to allow poets to deliver a message about their everyday lives and identities. This interplay is intended to be transformative for communities; as hip hop artist Jay-Z writes, "Rhymes can make sense of the world in a way regular speech can't", as poets "bend language" to get to truth.[15] For example, he said that Hurricane Katrina "felt like something that was happening to black people, specifically…like history rerunning its favorite loop".[16] In his song "Minority Report", Jay-Z comments on the government's inadequate and arbitrary response to the disaster through exposing his audience to the news story (weaving excerpts from news reports through his lyrics) and commenting on the situation through wordplay. For example, in the line "Through his telescopic lens but he didn't scoop you", he plays on the double meaning of 'scoop'; as he writes, "it seemed like a metaphor for what was happening all over the country. We were all watching the story unfold but doing nothing".[17] The photographer is capturing the news story (a scoop), but not scooping the victims up from the flooding when they need help. Making his audience aware of instances of injustice and systemic oppression can enlighten them to the plight of others and facilitate change, by encouraging them to join together as one community, fostering an understanding that we are all part of the same world.

Poetry of "Visibility" and Community

Other poets whose verse is rooted in oral traditions have written poems to increase the visibility of marginalized communities, to empower them and foster a sense of ownership and community pride and make others take notice. Former Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera, who was active in the Chicano Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's, spoke of that time when he said, "There were so many voices, and we were all singing out and talking out…there needed to be a voice".[18] Herrera, and other Chicano poets of the 1960's and beyond, wrote poetry about their communities to provide that voice and increase knowledge of struggles in their communities, as well as to reveal the beauties of their daily lives. In his playful verse, Herrera gave voice to the struggle and spoke to Chicanos in their own language. The bilingual poetry of Alurista and Gloria Anzaldua was also written as a response to racial discrimination and was "designed to reach Chicano audiences in the service of solidifying identity and galvanizing radical action".[19] In her poem "To Live in the Borderlands Means You", Anzaldua writes of the reality of being caught between two worlds – what that looks and feels like, and what the implications are for Chicanos. Adrienne Rich writes, "In depicting lives ordinarily down-pressed, shredded, erased, this art reveals their vitality and beauty".[20] In "Every Day We Get More Illegal", Herrera also uses juxtaposition to emphasize the sense of displacement of many Mexican-Americans (such as my students). Increasing the visibility of the everyday lives of members of the Chicano community, as well as their struggles, creates empowerment, and increases cross-cultural understanding, and pride in the Chicano community. J. Michael Martinez is quoted in Francisco Aragon's essay in *The Racial Imaginary* as

saying “Racism is enacted to absent the parallel actor”[21] ; the poetry of Herrera and others functions to combat that invisibility and promote community.

The idea of increasing community visibility is another concern expressed in the verse of Amiri Baraka and hip hop artists. As Baraka says, “It wasn’t protest poetry I wanted to write, it was simply to continue the tales about our own lives”.[22] In poems such as “Ballad of the Morning Streets”, he meditates on the simple beauties of an urban environment that those on the outside might not see, or those on the inside might not appreciate. Hip Hop also promoted “the desire to have pride in one’s community, even if…that community was denigrated by outsiders”.[23] This was achieved, in part, through celebrating the small beauties of urban life, as well as its challenges, so people could be exposed to different perspectives.

American Indian poets, such as Joy Harjo, Sherman Alexie and James Welch are part of a renaissance of American Indian writers whose work Adrienne Rich describes as, “a new, written, poetic literature expressive of indigenous people who, in the words of the poet Chrystos, are ‘Not Vanishing’”.[24] Harjo’s poetry tells stories of American Indian history, and witnesses a struggle against those who have profited from their misery and loss. Harjo’s poems, such as “For Anna Marie Pictou Aquash, Whose Spirit is Present Here and in the Dappled Stars”, which tells the story of a young, active member of the American Indian Movement who was brutally murdered in 1976, work to “strengthen a sense of group, communal or collective identity and commitment”, according to poet Alicia Ostriker. She notes that Harjo does this through “breaking silence”[25] about a history of violence and oppression. These writers build community through illuminating communal history - making it visible. In this way, poetry “comes out of silence, seeking connection with unseen others”.[26]

Strategies

Since each of the poems is relatively brief, the majority of reading will take place in the classroom. We have fifty-minute class periods, and this is approximately a four to six- week unit, so there will be adequate time to read most of the poems and complete the activities in class. I will provide photocopies of the texts, or they will be posted online in Google Classroom. During reading, I will stop frequently to check for understanding, provide clarification and introduce and guide close reading activities.

The desks in my classroom are arranged in groups of three, so students can easily work together. They will use the classroom sets of marker boards to answer some questions as a group (brainstorming observations about structure, or how the poems relate to each other, for example) and hold them up, so I can easily check for understanding. This emphasis on group work will be especially helpful for my ELL students, those new to the AP English program, and my struggling readers. Students will annotate while reading, using specific symbols to chart their observations and questions; this will help my struggling readers by facilitating self-monitoring. They will also identify and chart text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-word connections on post it notes, to increase their engagement with the reading by drawing connections between the poems and their lives and experiences, as well as the world around them. Activities with vocabulary in context will be incorporated periodically to assist with vocabulary development.

Students will engage in writing activities in the form of informal written responses to the poems in their poetry

journals, as well as writing their own poetry, allowing them to reflect as we discuss issues of culture and identity. The use of models for writing and multimedia clips helps students who are more visual and auditory. Similarly, the use of advance organizers helps them organize their thoughts (Venn diagrams, for example). We will use the rhetorical triangle (visualizing the inter-relationship between speaker, audience, subject, purpose and context) to frame our analysis of each poem, so that construct will be central to our discussions. Speaker, audience and topic are the three points of the triangle; purpose is written in the middle, and the historical context is written in a circle going around the triangle.

I will use formative and summative assessments, allowing students to demonstrate their learning throughout the unit, including the photo poem. There will be small assessments throughout that utilize digital technology, such as Kahoot, and allow me to quickly poll students to check students' understanding of ideas in the poems.

Classroom Activities

First Activity: "Images of East Tulsa"

This activity allows students to think and write about place by creating a fourteen to twenty-line poem based on their own new observations of familiar surroundings. Exploring and looking more intently at the area around a familiar place (their school) will help students develop a new appreciation for unique aspects of their daily surroundings, while facilitating metaphorical thinking. Since this poetry writing activity incorporates certain aspects of randomness, it also helps students view language as playful material. Writing about these experiences in poetic form and sharing their observations can also build a sense of community in the classroom.

The Process

Students will need their poetry notebooks, a pen or pencil, and a dice cube. Take them outside the classroom to a place that is familiar to them, but also allows for exploration. This could be a field outside the building, a nearby strip mall or neighborhood (this activity could also be done inside the school building). Give each student a copy of the following directions, so they can complete the process individually.

Directions: For each spot, follow the directions, then write two lines or so as part of a poem you are writing.

1. Start somewhere at least three feet away from anyone else.

-Jot down 10 nouns from what you see

-Write two lines of poetry, using two of those words in each line, paying attention to how your second line plays against your first – extending or contrasting it.

2. Find a new place to sit.

-Jot down four unusual pairs of opposites you see.

- Write two lines using those opposites.

3. From that same spot, pick someone you can see (not a fellow student) or imagine someone – even someone in a car.

-Write two to three lines that begin “All day he…” or “All day she…”

4. Stay in that spot, or find somewhere no more than 10 steps away. Find something small around you (smaller than a breadbox, or your hand).

-Look at it for at least two minutes, noticing little things about it.

-Write two to four impossible questions about it-thinking of it as if it were human, or had a point of view. Make your questions create interesting pictures and possibilities, even if they don’t make sense.

5. Walk no more than half a block in either direction. Stop and look around. Throw the die you were given, looking in the direction the number indicates:

1=up/2=down/3=in front of you/4=behind you/5=to the left/6=to the right

-Take something you see and write two lines that begin “Everybody knows…” (You don’t have to stay in the realm of reality. Invent. Be playful).

6. Take two lines you wrote already and say the opposite of what they say.

7. Write two lines that are a “creative lie”.

8. Without turning your head, from your peripheral vision find a source of light. Turn and look at it. Write two to four lines that begin “The light is like…”

9. Sit down nearby and combine your various lines into a single poem, adding, subtracting and recombining as needed.

Second Activity: Poetry interpretation process with Juan Felipe Herrera’s “Almost Livin’ Almost Dyin’”

This activity, which will be introduced from the beginning of the unit, illustrates a process my students will go through to interpret much of the poetry we read. It will increase their attention to close reading, and give them a sense of the context of each poem and the rhetorical strategies at work, as well as the musicality of the language and use of metaphoric expression.

The Process

To gather their impressions of the overall structure of a piece, hand each student an individual copy of the Juan Felipe Herrera’s poem “Almost Livin’ Almost Dyin’. Give them about five minutes to read silently, and annotate things that interest them, use of devices they notice, etc., as well as questions they have about the poem (students at each set of desks can assemble a "group list" of questions, as many of them are wondering the same things, so no one will be reluctant to ask a question). After discussing overall impressions and addressing questions, cut up the poem into numbered sections of four lines each, and hand the sections to students in different groups. Have the students read their sections aloud, in order, and then ask students to share their background knowledge of any of the people alluded to in the poem. Ask students to share any

knowledge they have of national incidents of police-related violence over the last few years and explain how this poem is a response to such incidents. Give students two different colored highlighters and have them use phones or laptops to complete the following process, working in groups of three. This gives them an opportunity to read the poem a third or fourth time, and collaborate as they work to interpret it.

1.Look up the following people; who were they and how and when did they die?

a.Eric Garner -

b.Michael Brown –

c.Officers Liu and Ramos -

How are their deaths connected?

d.Highlight all the words that repeat in one color.

e.Highlight all the words that rhyme in another color.

f.Circle the first letter of all the words that employ alliteration.

g.Circle at least three phrases or lines that stand out to you. Why do they appeal to you?

Juan Felipe Herrera says, “A poet must be free with the poem—every line and sound-angle of each letter must be released with abandon. Yet, we must also think hard on the gestures of the poem, how it presents its materials.”

h.How would you say the material is presented in this poem (given what you notice above)?

i.In your group, take turns reading at least five lines from the poem at different speeds. The first person reads the lines very slowly, then the next person reads them more quickly. Then the third person reads them even more quickly. What difference does the pacing make? Why?

j.How could you describe the pace? Do you think that could relate to the message of the poem?

Re-read the following lines: “they were just burnin’ like me like/ we are all still burnin' can you hear me/can you can you feel me swaggin' tall & driving low &/

talkin' fine & hollerin' from my corner crime”

k.Who is the speaker in these lines?

l.Who are “we”?

m.Draw a rhetorical triangle on your whiteboard that identifies the five elements (speaker, audience, topic, purpose/message and context)

n.What are the problems Juan Felipe Herrera is addressing through this poem? What do you think he is imploring us to do about this problem?

Each group will have a marker board to draw a triangle with the rhetorical elements, which can be held up to

check their understanding before beginning discussion of their responses. The ultimate goal is for students to have an understanding of how the speaker is a young person like themselves, and how Herrera's use of pacing and language connects to the message he is trying to convey about how these problems affect all of us.

End by showing a You Tube video of Herrera's reading of this poem.

Third Activity: Photo Poem

A photo poem is a kind of ekphrastic poem in which students write a poem in a small group, about themselves and their community, that responds to and incorporates a photograph they have taken related to that particular community (home, school, work, etc.). This activity, completed near the end of the unit, allows students to reflect on the communities that they are a part of, and what is distinctive and special about one of those communities, while putting some of the literary devices we've studied into practice in their own writing. This is also intended to help them build pride in that community, and help them celebrate its uniqueness.

The Process

Assign students to heterogeneous groups of three. Each group's final product will be a photo poem about their community, following the "I Am…We Are" format and created in Storybird, Canva, or another digital format of their choice that combines visuals and text.

To begin, give each student a notecard and ask them to brainstorm the following about one community they identify with (church, school, neighborhood):

List three scents you smell consistently in your community.

List your favorite food to eat in the community.

List three sounds you hear regularly (music, etc.)

List your favorite place to go in the community.

Name a local character. Who does everyone know?

List one thing you would like to change about your community.

List one thing you would never change.

Next, have students compare their brainstorming lists and create a Venn diagram that visualizes the similarities and differences in the images, sounds, etc. that they listed. They will then use this visual to decide on the image(s) they want to photograph (with their cameras) to bring to class the next day. They will also interview a parent, grandparent, or other family member older than them, and ask them the same questions they answered, as well as the following:

Where did you meet (parents or grandparents)?

What is a story about something significant that happened to you in our community?

What is a story you can tell about moving to our neighborhood?

Where is our family from?

What is something you liked to do when you were my age that I also like to do?

What music do we both like to listen to?

The next day, have groups bring their images (on their phones) and select one image that they can all relate to that represents a common sense of community identity for them. Have each group create a quick10-15-line list poem that includes details, metaphors and possibilities, based on the photograph they chose. During the next two class periods, groups will use the photograph, and their list poem to write an eight stanza "I Am…We Are" poem that connects to their chosen photograph and reflects the elements of their brainstorming and interviews, outlining commonalities, as well as individual elements. If a line can apply to more than one person, it becomes a "We" statement; if it only applies to one person, it is an "I" statement. For example, "I am Vietnam/I am Africa/We are Mexico/ We are East Tulsa". Each stanza should end with a "We" statement that relates to a specific aspect of the community that applies to everyone in the group. There should be three to five lines in each stanza, with a refrain in-between each.

Groups spend the next three days in the classroom, combining their "I Am…We Are" poems with the photo image they wrote about, in a digital format. Take students through the process of creating a photo poem in Canva and Storybird, using a teacher created poem as an example (groups may also choose a different program for their final product). When everyone finishes, arrange desks in a circle, and have groups take turns projecting their photo poems for the class, and reading them. As each group is presenting, students make note of their favorite images and lines. Conclude with a discussion that enhances everyone's understanding of the commonalities and differences that make up our communities, and share students' favorite images and lines that illuminate the small beauties in our communities.

Appendix

Standards

This unit is aligned with the Oklahoma Department of Education's Oklahoma Academic Standards for 11th Grade English Language Arts, with which my district's Learning Expectations for Tulsa Students are aligned. This unit meets the following OAS standards: Writing - 11.2.W.1(writing narratives embedded in other modes, through writing an "I Am…We Are" poem); Critical Reading – 11.3.R.6 (comparatively analyze texts, through connecting themes and issues addressed in poems and providing evidence for interpretations and connections) and 11.3.R.1 (analyze how historical perspectives affect the authors' stylistic and organizational choices in the poems) Multimodal Literacies – 11.7.W.2 (constructing visual or multimedia presentations to enhance understanding, through designing a photo poem) Research – 11.6.R.2 (synthesize information from primary and secondary sources, through conducting research to learn more about the historical context of the poems); Speaking and Listening – 11.1.R.3 (engage in collaborative discussion about appropriate topics by discussing the poems in pair, group and whole class situations) and 11.1.W.1 (give formal and informal presentations , using textual and visual evidence, through presenting their photo poems) and 11.1.W.2 (work effectively within diverse groups, share responsibility and value individual contributions, though working in pairs and groups of three to discuss, problem solve and complete various assignments; Vocabulary – 11.4.R.5

(use dictionaries, thesauruses and other references as needed to determine the meaning of unknown vocabulary encountered in the poems); Language – 11.5.W.3 (demonstrate command of standard grammar, mechanics and usage through writing and presentations).

Resources

Bibliography

Aragon, Francisco. "And Here He Comes Smiling Intending No Harm: A Poetics of Invisible." In *The Racial Imaginary*, edited by Claudia Rankine and Beth Loffreda. Albany, NY: Fence Books, 2016: 185-195.

Baraka, Amiri. "Protest Poetry." In *Of Poetryand Protest*, edited by Philip Cushway, 22-23. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2016.

Bradley, Adam. *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop*. New York, NY: Basic Civitas, 2009.

Carter, Shawn. *Jay-Z Decoded.* New York, MY: Penguin Random House, 2010.

This resource contains insightful commentary on the connections between poetry and Hip Hop.

Finney, Nikky. "Left." In *Of Poetry and Protest*, edited by Philip Cushway, 70-73. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2016.

"Natasha Trethewey". In *Of Poetry and Protest*, edited by Philip Cushway, 188-191. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2016.

Ostriker, Alicia. "Dancing at the Devil's Party." In *Politics and Poetic Value*, edited by Robert von Hallberg, 207-224. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

This resource contains information about the importance of community in the writing of contemporary American Indian poet Joy Harjo.

Popoff, Georgia A. and Quraysh Ali Lansana. *Our Difficult Sunlight: A Guide to Poetry, Literacy and Social Justice in Classroom & Community*. New York, NY: Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 2010.

An excellent resource for theory and activities for introducing students to social justice issues through the study of poetry.

Rodriguez, Andres. "Contemporary Chicano Poetry: The Work of Michael Sierra, Juan Felipe Herrera and Luis J. Rodriguez." *Bilingual Review*. 21.3 (September-December 1996): 203-218.

Schaub, Michael. "Juan Felipe Herrera, U.S. Poet Laureate, responds to gun violene with a new poem." *Los Angeles Times*: July 11, 2016. Accessed July 3, 2017. http://www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-et-jc-poet-laureate-violence-20160711-snap-story.html

Somers-Willett, Susan. *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009.

Classroom Resources

Alexander, Elizabeth. "Narrative: Ali, a poem in twelve rounds." In *Of Poetry and Protest*, edited by Philip Cushway, 24-29. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2016.

Alexie, Sherman. *The Business of Fancydancing*. Brooklyn, NY: Hanging Loose Press, 1992.

Alexie, Sherman. *War Dances*. New York, NY: Grove Press, 2009.

Alurista. *Floricanto en Aztlan*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2011.

Burciaga, Jose Antonio. *Undocumented Love*. San Jose, CA: Chusma House Publications, 1992.

"Canva." Accessed July 21, 2017. http://www.canva.com

Collom, Jack and Sheryl Noethe. *Poetry Everywhere*. New York, NY: T & W Books, 2005.

Contains descriptions of writing process poems and lunes poems.

Harjo, Joy. *How We Became Human*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2002.

Hermsen, Terry. *Poetry of Place: Helping Students Write Their Worlds*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2009.

The "Images of East Tulsa" activity was adapted from this resource.

Herrera, Juan Felipe. *187 Reasons Mexicanos Can't Cross the Border*. San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2007.

Herrera, Juan Felipe. *Notes On the Assemblage*. San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2015.

Herrera, Juan Felipe. "Almost Livin' Almost Dyin'." YouTube. 2017. Accessed August 01. 2017.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a50Ry1ZCmZ4

Kleon, Austin. *Newspaper Blackout*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2010.

Guide to helping students write blackout poems.

Letters to America: Contemporary American Poetry On Race, edited by Jim Daniels.

Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1995.

Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook*. New York, NY: Harcourt, 1984.

Poetry of Resistance: Voices for Social Justice, edited by Francisco X. Alarcon and Odilia Galvan Rodriguez. Tuscon, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2016.

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Minneapolis, MN: Grey Wolf Press, 2015.

Rhythm and Resistance: Teaching Poetry for Social Justice, edited by Linda Christensen and Dyan Watson. Miluakee, WI: Rethinking Schools, 2015.

"Storybird." Accessed July 21, 2017. http://storybird.com

Endnotes

1. Rich, Adrienne. *What Is Found There: Notebooks On Poetry and Politics, xv.*
2. Carter, Sean. *Decoded, 315.*
3. Rich, 242.
4. Carter, 345.
5. "Natasha Trethewey". In *Of Poetry and Protest*, 189.
6. Popoff, Georgia A. and Quraysh Ali Lansana. *Our Difficult Sunlight: A Guide to Poetry, Literacy and Social Justice in Classroom & Community*, 58-59.
7. Finney, Nikky. In *Of Poetry and Protest, 71.*
8. Carter, 315.
9. Rich, 86.
10. Somers-Willett, Susan. *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry*, 58.
11. Ibid., 62.
12. Ibid, 62.
13. Bradley, Adam. *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop*, 181.
14. Somers-Willett, 41.
15. Carter, 56, 243.
16. Ibid., 21.
17. Ibid, 225.
18. Schaub, Michael. "Juan Felipe Herrera, U.S. Poet Laureate, responds to gun violence with a new Poem." *Los Angeles Times*.
19. Rodriguez, Andres. "Contemporary Chicano Poetry: The Work of Michael Sierra, Juan Felipe Herrera and Luis J. Rodriguez." *Bilingual Review*, 213.
20. Rich, 242.
21. Aragon, Francisco. "And Here He Comes Smiling Intending No Harm: A Poetics of Invisible." In *The Racial Imaginary*, 187.
22. Baraka, Amiri. "Protest Poetry." In *Of Poetry and Protest*, 22.
23. Bradley, 127.
24. Rich, 130.
25. Ostriker, Alicia. "Dancing at the Devil's Party." In *Politics and Poetic Value*, 221.
26. Rich, 57.