



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

*to strengthen teaching in public schools®*

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

---

## **A Private Moment in Public View: Analysis of Muslim Poets and Political Activists from the 20th Century to Today**

Curriculum Unit 17.03.07, published September 2017  
by Kathleen Therese Radebaugh

### **Introduction**

---

Readers have instinct and purpose; we read for clarity, sometimes for adventure and romance, and sometimes we read to see ourselves within the lines of the text. Readers have beautiful opportunities to predict the next action of a flawed character or reconcile flaws within themselves. Without those developed connections, without instinct and purpose, the act of reading is worthless.

Throughout the seminar, “Poetry and Public Life” at this year’s Yale National Initiative, our seminar leader, Paul Fry, consistently posed the question whether or not poetry can make something happen. Many of my colleagues extended this essential question to whether or not poetry matters. We studied several poems by Robert Lowell, John Milton, Langston Hughes, and Adrienne Rich about the portrayal of public figures or cultural moments developed through the use of extended metaphors, parallelisms, and the aesthetics of imagery. Through our analysis, we pinpointed stark contradictions felt by the speaker, and this spurred dialogue amongst the fellows as we unpacked the central themes of the poems: race, gender, war, and sexuality. Fry expounded this complication during one of his lectures to all of the fellows in which several poets, including the esteemed Irish poet Seamus Heaney, contradict themselves about the worth and value of poetry: “In one sense the efficacy of poetry is nil—no lyric has ever stopped a tank. In another sense, it is unlimited.”<sup>1</sup> Heaney questions whether or not the effectiveness of poetry can be quantified in the way that physical effects can.

I argue that poetry does make something happen. I am not a poet, and after our seminars I did not chant verses on the corner of Chapel Street and York Street about the need for female equality or better contracts for teachers, but these poems strengthened my aptitude and desire to create an exceptional unit for my students. Poetry can make something happen intrinsically and the analytical depth required to extract meaning and purpose from a poem is tremendous. Forugh Farrokhzad, a Persian poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, said “I believe in being a poet in all moments of life. Being a poet means being human.”<sup>2</sup> Farrokhzad’s thought is the driving force for this unit for my students and myself, because there are many different ways to interpret and express conflict and emotion. My student population is changing, and more students who enroll in our neighborhood school are Muslim. Their families are from several different countries, and every student has a unique story and unique observances of their Islamic customs. Poems and prose by Muslim poets and political

activists will foster conversation we never had before in my classroom. It is the intent of this unit to provide models for self-esteem poems and prose by Islamic authors and leaders from many different communities around the world about migration, assimilation, falling in love, and political unrest. To me, this is poetry making something happen.

This curriculum unit is designed for students in an eighth-grade English Language Arts class. This is an introductory unit on poetry with a focus on the use of figurative language, development of syntax, and author's purpose. Students will analyze a selection of poems by Muslim poets through the use of close reading with very little emphasis on historical and biographical context. These poems will be compared to selected episodes of a podcast series entitled *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* by Tanzila "Taz" Ahmed and Zahra Noorbakhsh. While listening to the podcasts, students will contextualize the biographical and historical significance of several segments of the episodes. The culminating assessment for the students is to write one or two poems for their writing portfolios while selecting a form of social media for recording and presenting their poems to create a digital record and history of this unit.

## Content Objectives

---

This unit is intended to last for three weeks. The ideal time for this unit is second semester due to the selection of standards and the amount of student driven activities. By the end of the first week, students will be able to identify and define examples of figurative language found in poetry. This is an introductory unit to poetry, and my students might struggle with identifying metaphor, similes, personification, imagery, various forms of rhyme, and hyperbole. More importantly, students need to evaluate the use of figurative language and how the poet develops tone, theme, speaker, and purpose. More time will be spent within whole-group instruction and small guided instruction as I model close reading and an inquiry approach to comprehension.<sup>3</sup> My students and I will generate questions based on the development of the line and placement of words for internal and external rhyme, since many of the poems selected for this unit are written in free verse.

Each 90-minute class period will be devoted to one or two of the selected poems depending on the scope of the poem and how much time students need to study and explore the syntax, theme, speaker, and purpose of the poems. Towards the end of the week, I will select students for reciprocal teaching. I suggest avoiding the reciprocal teaching strategy for this unit if it has not been implemented already within your current school year. While students are leading small group discussions, the teacher can work with students who need extra guided reading sessions for fluency and comprehension.

Poems selected for this unit are the following: "Reborn" and "The Wave" by Forough Farrokhzad, "Twigs" by Taha Muhammad Ali, "In that Part of the World" and "The Emerald Mosque on the Hill" by Raza Ali Hasan, "A to Z" by Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac also known as Gaarriye, "Water's Footfall" by Sohrab Sepehri, "A Rhyme for The Odes" by Mahmoud Darwish, "The Postcard" and "I Become Happy" by Shamsur Rahman. There are audio recordings of most of these poems on various websites like *PoemHunter* and I will provide analysis in this unit of two poems, "The Wave" by Forough Farrokhzad and "Twigs" by Taha Muhammad Ali. This group of poems ranges in degree of difficulty owing to the variables of length, vernacular, and sophistication in the use of figurative language[], but this variation allows for the distribution of poems among[] students with varying reading levels. Once the students complete their analytical writings and discourse about these selected poems, they will write one or two poems for their writing portfolios based on the central conflicts of the

selected poems.

For the third week, students will compare the central themes of the poems to several episodes of the very funny and forward-thinking podcast, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* by Tanzila "Taz" Ahmed and Zahra Noorbakhsh. Taz and Zahara discuss what it is like to grow up in a Christian school and not partake in certain holidays like Easter and Christmas. They chit chat about a range of topics from dating, marrying outside the Muslim faith, maintaining their own personal safety, and how Black Lives Matter activists joined Palestinian protests and vice versa. There are several segments in which they explore how their Islamic upbringing is not only a matter for self-scrutiny but also subject to the horrific stereotypes ascribing radical Islamic terrorism or fellow-traveling with it to the 1.5 billion Muslim people who live around the world.<sup>4</sup> Students will bring current events mentioned within the podcast to bear on their enduring understanding of this unit: Muslim poets and activists express private conflicts through lyrical verse for the public to consider.

## Demographics

---

Henry C. Lea Elementary is located in West Philadelphia in Network 2 of the School District of Philadelphia. I teach reading and writing for eighth grade. This unit is designed for a middle year's classroom, in particular, eighth grade. Despite its being a neighborhood school, many of the students do not live within the catchment due to specific services provided by our school. We have a full time nurse, two guidance counselors, a speech therapist, two behavioral health specialists, and two ELL teachers. In the current financial and political climate of Philadelphia, these positions are considered "additional." Therefore, many students who need these services are permitted to come to our school, along with their siblings. Currently, our population is 570 students, with ten percent of our population coming from charter schools after the first quarter. Twenty percent of our entire student population is English Language Learners (ELL). With the growing number of ELL students, we saw a significant growth in number of Muslim families from the Middle East and Africa. I do not know the percentage of our students within the whole school who associate as Muslim, but within my classroom it is 40 percent. That is a significant growth since I started teaching at Lea five years ago. Our school follows the Children's Literacy Initiative for Reading and Writing for grades K-2. Upper grade teachers follow the same literacy block with various modifications which will be outlined in the Strategy section of this unit. Based on my students' DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) results, 45% are on reading level, 30% are one or two grade levels behind, and 25% are multiple grade levels below. Twenty-two percent of my student population has an IEP for reading and writing in which the modifications vary from extended time needed on formal assessments to the use of sentence starters, graphic organizers, and manipulatives to help them complete reading and writing assignments. Our entire student body population matches the criteria for CEP Economically Disadvantaged state funding: free breakfast and lunch and enrollment into an after-school program.

## Rationale

---

### Why Muslim Poets?

Fellows participating in the Yale National Initiative apply to a seminar within their field of study in an effort to develop a curriculum unit that fills a void within their curriculum. Last year, the School District of Philadelphia purchased new English Language Arts curriculum for grades K-8. This curriculum is a significant improvement from prior years, yet there is a lack of diversity among the authors in the textbook. At the time, I was appointed School Based Teacher Leader for Literacy for Lea Elementary. I help teachers implement the new curriculum and develop professional development based on the needs and wants of my colleagues. Several of my colleagues recognized the changing demographics of students, and shared with me their desire to expand the classrooms' reading lists to include more Middle Eastern, Indian, and North African authors.

I want to improve my scope of understanding of Muslim writers, because the population of Muslim students and their families is growing within the school and classroom. I want our classroom to reflect who we are as individuals and build an understanding of the various cultures represented. This unit does not study the conventions of Muslim poetry or how Muslim poetry differs in content and attitude from the tenets of Western thought. Part of the implicit purpose of this unit is to make students notice that free verse written by Muslim poets does not differ greatly from the free verse of many other contemporary poets.

During my teaching career at Lea Elementary, I taught several units through the School District of Philadelphia curriculum and curriculum developed through the Teachers Institute of Philadelphia and Yale National Initiative about the immigration process from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to today. Some of my students are naturalized citizens and some of them are undocumented along with their parents. They reflect all levels of fluency in speaking and writing English. The social and political issues debated during the 2016 Presidential Election and Donald Trump's Executive Order 13769 have evoked conflicting emotions and harsh memories for many of my students, because they are Muslim and left their home countries in order to escape poverty and violence. I remember reading a daily journal entry from one of my eighth grade students who defended her father for several pages, because they left Bangladesh in order to pursue better education in America for the entire family. All of her siblings are sisters, and through her defense of her father, she expressed her fear of how others might view and judge him. Afrin's journal shares private thoughts with the poets and authors under study in this unit.

When students are able to see themselves within the lines of poetry and relate to similar conflicts, students form a critical attitude and reinforce their confidence in their identity. The poets in this unit lived in different places all over the world, and wrote their poems in several different languages. Fifteen students within last year's eighth grade class migrated from different countries within a three-year time span. Twelve of those students were raised in a Muslim home—each unique. Poets like Raza Ali Hasan and Sohrab Sepehri reference several Muslim cultures and traditions within their poems while Forough Farrokhzad and Mahmoud Darwish elaborate central conflicts of regret and man versus country through natural imagery. Taken all in all, these selected poems will spur conversations about Islamic culture and tradition and expunge misconceptions.

### Why Student Portfolios in Digital Form?

One of the essential characteristics of the student portfolio is to show the progression of the writer's style and content. I believe in the necessity of incorporating the rough draft versions of the writing sample with peer

feedback either on the actual student paper on or a rubric sheet. Collaboration within the writing process is vital to the development of the writing standard. Portfolios that contain this correspondence between the writer and editor will show whether or not the student is making the changes needed to exceed the standard or falling behind. This evidence is valuable for determining the student's grade and needed when conferencing with the teacher at the end of an interim report or quarter. Often this collaboration is misplaced or illegible. I want to promote a gradual transference of hard copy to digital portfolios, also known as e-portfolios.

Implementing the use of e-portfolios and the establishment of audio recordings for the writing portfolio addresses many of the shifts within the Common Core State Standards for the use of technology within the classroom. One key shift for English Language Arts is the expectation "of a command of sequence and detail that is essential for effective argumentative and informative writing."<sup>5</sup> A teacher can assess this shift based on the pitch, tone, and enunciation of the student when reading a poem out loud for recording. Poetry can be argumentative, and students who demonstrate an understanding of the intended audience will change inflection and tone. Cadence in speech is the command of the verse and style of the poem. Students can reflect on their command of voice, along with their writing style, through the use of an e-portfolio.<sup>6</sup> I value handwritten essays and feedback to students, but recording students' voices on a reliable and public dashboard is a primary keepsake. It becomes a digital form of history.

### **Why Good Muslim, Bad Muslim?**

If one were to listen to this podcast for a single reason, it would be for Taz's laugh. She has the best laugh! Currently, there are 30 episodes of *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* with approximately 42 million listeners.<sup>7</sup> The location of the podcast varies, but each episode reflects on current issues or personal situations in Tanzila "Taz" Ahmed's and Zahra Noorbakhsh's life as they debate what it means to be a good or bad Muslim. They are funny, charming, sincere, personable, and smart. They share with the public very private moments of what it means to be Muslim, female, and an artist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Students will explore complicated social issues like identity, blending traditions, and family obligations. The majority of my students who are Muslim are female, and I know there is a lot to balance between religious tradition and the ethos of being a teenager with an iPhone. I advise teachers to listen to the entire episode and screen for appropriate age level content. In one episode, Taz and Zahra discuss premarital sex, dating people who drink alcohol and eat pork, and the challenges of growing up in a secular neighborhood school and feeling left out when people celebrate Christian holidays.

In the content section of this curriculum unit, I will summarize some of my favorite segments for my classroom, but several episodes contain interesting and currently engaging approaches to Muslim social issues. Within the past two years, Taz and Zahra discuss the converging of the Black Lives Matter and Palestinian movements and the 2016 Presidential Election; they acknowledge frustrations concerning the slogan 'Je Suis Charlie', and invite many entrepreneurs and journalists like Saqib Keval from Oakland's The People's Kitchen and Neda Ulaby, a reporter for National Public Radion, to join the conversation. One of the highlights of the podcasts is Taz's connection to Muslim poetry. "Ramadan is a time of reflection and prayer and for some of us-poetry. This space is for poets to share their Ramadan poems or prose or paint or music daily for Ramadan."<sup>8</sup> Taz will post poems by contemporary and prestigious Muslim poets and read aloud verses during episodes airing during Ramadan. It is a perfect synergy of free verse presented in a digital platform. If teachers are looking to expand their selection of poems for this unit, I highly suggest this medium.

Teachers using this podcast need to use discretion, especially when sharing the website with students. There are many amazing resources on their website for students to explore for continuous research, but Taz and

Zahra discuss a lot of personal aspects of their lives. I would seek approval from your principal before using the website associated with *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, and I would advise sending home a parental permission letter in order to clarify the purpose of using this podcast. I would emphasize that although Taz and Zahra are satirists with edgy voices, they explore essential conflicts related to assimilation and Muslim identity in Los Angeles and San Francisco from the 1980s to today.

## Content

---

### Analysis of “The Wave” by Forough Farrokhzad

Forough Farrokhzad was one of the premiere Iranian activist poets who shied away from conventional forms like ghazal, a poem with meter, rhyming couplets, and a refrain.<sup>9</sup> Neither God nor the Quran are the subjects of Forough’s poems, an omission that made them very controversial and unique in Tehran in the 1930s. Farrokhzad explored conflicts within marriage leading to divorce, and celebrated women’s creativity while denouncing patriarchal conventions. Several of Farrokhzad’s poems adopt a confrontational and argumentative tone against a male subject. In my analysis of “The Wave,” I will evaluate the use of free verse and how it determines the tone, speaker, theme, and purpose of the poem.

“The Wave” is a 25-line poem with six stanzas, each stanza varying in number of lines. It is a free verse poem, and if the reader turns the paper counter-clockwise, one will see a rendering or formation of waves. This makes it, among other things, a concrete poem which creates a visual image of the symbol or metaphor. The ebb and flow of tense matches the formation of the wave: present, present participle, and future tenses. The very first line of the poem is active voice: “you are a wave” followed by present participles: “Grabbing,” “dragging,” “fleeing,” and “watching.” Towards the end of the poem, the speaker is using future tense: “I will wear a mask” and “And I’ll capture you.” The flow of the poem varies with exclamations, enjambments, and commands. This use of style and syntax shapes the tone of the poem.

The tone of the first stanza is judgmental. The speaker acknowledges the hurt caused by the subject, “to me” and immediately attacks the subject through the use of a metaphor, “you are a wave”. The tide is damaging, “unruly”, and “rebellious.” Right before the list of negative connotations about the subject, the speaker uses a dash to create a dramatic pause, “you’re a rebellious tide/-in an eternal glide.” The use of “glide” could be ironic since it means “coast;” however, the emotional and physical distance of the speaker and subject become greater, and there is a massive “drift” between the present and future relationship between them.

There is a shift in tone in the fourth and remaining stanzas due to the emphasis on first person point of view. The fourth stanza contains the central theme and purpose for the poem, “And I now know, the sea of regret-is your native land.” In our seminar, Paul Fry emphasized the value and integrity of a line within free verse. This is an exceptional example of how one line of poetry can be unpacked into various analytical approaches by students. “And I now know...” is reflective and confessional; time passed and the speaker is hurt, full of sorrow, and a sense of anger. The “sea of regret...” is a metaphor to convey emotional turmoil for the subject. The use of the dash, “-is your native language” is an idiosyncratic and defining characteristic of Farrokhzad. According to Farzaneh Milani, Farrokhzad “is a record of her own strict disbelief in ‘blind obedience’ to the patriarchal codes which used to govern her life before her marriage in the form of her father’s orders and, after her marriage, in the shape of her husband’s self-centered desires.”<sup>10</sup> The purpose of this poem is to



describe the vast emotional complications of divorce and saying goodbye to a partner. In the 1950s, divorce in many cultures around the world was considered taboo, and many people did not discuss this topic. Farrokhzad wanted to convey these conflicts in her poems, and this objective was groundbreaking not only in a religious culture, but as a secular topic as well. As this example shows, the purpose of such Muslim poems is relatable for readers of many different cultures.

### **Analysis of “Twigs” by Taha Muhammad Ali**

Taha Muhammad Ali left his home village of Saffuriya, which is near Lebanon, during the Arab-Israeli War of 1948. After a year in exile, Ali and his family resettled in Nazareth and kept a souvenir shop for more than 50 years. “Twigs” was published in Ali’s collection of poems, *So What: New and Selected Poems, 1971-2005* a couple years before his death in 2011. Many of the poems in this collection describe the trauma and heartache experienced by Ali and his family when forced to flee his home village, Saffuriyya, by the State of Israel. The central conflict of “Twigs” refers to Ali’s departure from Saffuriya and consequent abandonment of a young woman whom he was supposed to wed in an arranged marriage.

Taha Muhammad Ali wrote about his life experiences in free verse. Like Farrokhzad, Ali did not conform to the confining formal traditions of the Muslim poetry that followed much older and equally confining Persian traditions. With an elementary school education, Ali became an avid reader of William Shakespeare and John Steinbeck and saw his poetry as a means to express what he understood and experienced in literature and everyday life. John Palattella, an editor-at-large of *The Nation*, commented “Whereas [Mahmoud] Darwish and [Samih] al-Qasim, like most Palestinian poets, have favored the elevated and ornate rhetoric of *fus’ha*, or classical Arabic, Ali writes nonmaterial, unrhymed poems that blend classical *fus’ha* with colloquial Arabic.”<sup>11</sup> *Fus’ha* is the written and formal language of the Quran and other Islamic religious texts. Ali a middle-class Palestinian poet who was a “Muslim who sells [sold] Christian trinkets to Jews”<sup>12</sup> while alluding to Western thought with Shakespearean references throughout several of his poems. The biographical approach to Ali’s trauma enhances one’s analysis of tone, speaker, theme, and purpose of the poem.

There is an overwhelming tone of sadness and despair in “Twigs.” Life is short, and the speaker is unable to take comfort in “music,” “poetry,” or the entertaining and cerebral Shakespeare play, *King Lear*. The actual poem itself is rather short, five stanzas, forty lines, with several lines consisting of three words or less. The syntax of the lines mirrors the tone, especially in line 18. “Exist” is the sole word in line 18 and presents a paradox for the reader. Prior to line 18, the speaker has divulged the magnitude of an undefined love. Life is short, but the speaker wants to establish a legacy “beyond the realm of women.” “Beyond the realm of women” refers to something transcended, a memory or feeling far removed from native land, territory, or country that once belonged to “ordinary people.” “Women” could be a metaphor for motherland, meaning Ali wrote poetry that would be read beyond Saffuriya, and Ali’s inability to return to his native land resulted in “sixty years” of yearning. Ali’s popularity and legacy as a poet far exceeds the jurisdiction of Gaillee, Israel, and the Middle East.

For most of the poem, the tone is weary, but the speaker acknowledges faith in the fourth stanza, disclosing an inner strength. “Water is the finest drink” refers to Quran (31:30), “God preferred water over any other created thing and it the basis of creation...” Ali linked a core belief of Islam to the central theme of the poem: life is brief, but remembering our faith and what truly nourishes us will heal our “weary heart”; we have the ability to let go of the past, and “hate will be the first thing to turn to dust within us.” Ali became a world renowned poet with limited education, but it took him a long time to reconcile himself to the past. He achieved what the speaker hopes to accomplish by creating “a measure of splendor in people’s hearts” through his

writing and established a legacy through his art. Poetry and faith are synonymous for the speaker, who relinquishes “all of sixty years” of regret, hatred, and “all that we’ve longed for” at the very last moment of life in the hope of eternal peace.

## **Time Segments and Description of Episodes of *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim***

### **Episode 001-How Muslim Are You?**

0:00-16:35 Tanzila "Taz" Ahmed and Zahra Noorbakhsh describe their current jobs as satirical writers and comedians, explaining what they hope to achieve in their conversations through this social medium, and Zahra shares a prime example of how her mother wanted her to assimilate into her new school by not wearing a hijab, but bought her “hammer pants,” which, however, were not fashionable at the time. After 16:35, Taz and Zahra start to discuss another podcast, *Serial*, about a criminal investigation of Adnan Syed, a Muslim teenager accused of murdering his girlfriend.

### **Episode 002-Valentine’s Day is Haram**

0:00-15:30 Taz and Zahra debate right away whether or not Valentine’s Day is forbidden or haram for Muslims. Taz says, “Everyone should love everybody.” Zahra responds with “That is stupid.” Both Taz and Zahra erupt in laughter and share childhood and adolescent memories about Valentine’s Day, and Taz markets her Valentine’s Day card collection as another means “to disrupt the narrative of what it means to be Muslim.” Once Taz and Zahra finish their segment on Valentine’s Day, they debate whether or not pork is haram for religious, health-safety, or economical reasons.

### **Episode 005-Shame on You**

5:16-8:56, 14:00-23:30 This is probably one of my favorite segments from the first year of the podcast. Taz reads a Facebook post from a man who calls the girls “disgusting” and “shameful.” I don’t know if I would have the guts to read this post aloud, but Taz and Zahra created this podcast to interpret and explore this very moment. Taz was upset by the word “shame” because it reinforces a strong patriarchal tone, and she argues women are shamed by men and not the other way around. Zahra agrees, but she sees shame as a physical attribute: a body image problem. Zahra claims there is a lasting traumatic impact that shame has on a woman, because she feels controlled by it. Zahra refers to Brene Brown's Ted Talk on “Listening to Shame”<sup>13</sup> which is a tremendous resource for all educators working with both male and female adolescents, explaining how shame is contextualized by both genders. Zahra describes what it was like for her to admit to her father for the first time she was dating non-Muslim men, and to open lines of communication enough to admit to him what it was like to go on some really horrible and also awesome dates. Her father told her he wants her to be respected and cherished no matter what, and Zahra is grateful she was honest with her father. Taz commented on her lack of dialogue with her parents about dating, but she identifies her dating schema as conservative and looks for someone who “believes in spiritual practice and had faith...” because values need to be shared and will impact a relationship.



## Teaching Strategies

---

As an English teacher within the School District of Philadelphia, I am mandated to follow the Children’s Literacy Initiative Framework for reading and writing in a middle-school classroom. I remember the anxiety I felt my first day of teaching a 90-minute block, and the humbling experience recognizing my lack of practice and skill in managing a classroom with 25 plus students. The framework is based on the gradual release process for student-teacher collaboration: I do, we do, and you do. Like many of my colleagues within my school district and at Yale National Initiative, we struggle to successfully execute all segments of the CLI Framework for reading and writing for each class period. My students will not start to write their poems until after all selected poems for this unit are read. This will allow for a smoother transition into the writing portfolio. They can focus solely on their development of poetic forms based on the central themes identified in our canon of poems through the use of the writing workshop model: brainstorm, draft, review with teacher and peer, revise, self edit, and publication.<sup>14</sup>

One key strategy I will spend more time implementing and refining with my students is reciprocal teaching.<sup>15</sup> Reciprocal teaching is student-led instruction based on the unit’s objectives and standards. A student demonstrates a lesson based on a literary skill for a small group or the whole classroom. I believe students’ ability to direct small group instruction for reading comprehension and editing poetic verse will foster a higher level of interpretation and peer conversation. All of the components mentioned below are part of the Children’s Literacy Framework.

### **Shared Reading: Whole Group Instruction**

The teacher reads aloud and models close reading based on the objectives and standards. Close reading is the process of reading for a direct purpose based on the objectives and standards. Close reading is also known as text rendering: annotating the written material (informational or fictional) based on comprehension and self reflection. Sometimes, the students have the literary work in front of them, and sometimes they do not, depending on the length of the written material. My students will have the poems in front of them while I read out loud. Teachers model for students repeatedly through this shared reading approach, in order to show them how vocal inflection can communicate meaning. Students selected for reciprocal teaching will follow this model during small group instruction.

### **Collaborative Reading: Whole Group Instruction**

One of the many exciting facets of teaching free verse poems is understanding the development of a line by the poet for a specific reason. The style and syntax of the line is heavily scrutinized because placement of words causes internal and end rhyme, enjambments, and shifts in tone. Through whole group instruction and collaboration, teachers can ask students about the structure of the line and what is the intention of the poet. This conversation will fuel analysis and help students with their own analytical renderings of the poem. Students demonstrating proficiency and advancement in analysis will be asked to reciprocal teach a poem from the canon.

### **Cooperative Pairs and Guided Reading: Small-Group Instruction**

Teachers align students in a cooperative pair based on reading level and skill ability. While students are working with their partners, a teacher can have a guided reading section with four to five other students.

Again, this guided reading group combines two cooperative pairs that need additional support with the main idea, vocabulary, or summarization. Our guided reading books are provided by Pearson and Houghton Mifflin, two companies contracted with the School District of Philadelphia. Through guided reading, teachers can assess the level of fluency and comprehension for each student and chart progress. The guided reading books do not contain poems, but I will correlate my selection of guided reading books with informational texts about poets or Muslim and Islamic traditions and culture.

### **Independent Assessment and Independent Reading: Digital Portfolio and Analytical Rendering**

Students selected for reciprocal teaching demonstrated a high level of comprehension and critical acumen during whole group instruction. Once students teach other students within the classroom, they will reflect on their practice. Students leading small group instruction for the first time are often nervous and lack preparation, just like my first time teaching the CLI framework. Students will not be assessed on their reciprocal teaching success, but on how they reflect and plan for their next demonstration.

The CLI Framework for writing follows the exact same form of gradual release. Given the nature of this unit, students will spend more time with their cooperative pairs, so they will revise and edit their poems based on effective feedback. I want students to feel inspired by the universal themes presented in this selection of reading, and develop free verse based on a universal theme rooted in these poems. This is the first time this group of students will have samples of poetry in their writing portfolio, and hopefully select one of their writing sample for digital recording. Students are independently assessed with a final draft based on the writing rubrics of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment.

## **Classroom Activities**

---

The following classroom activities focus on the writing component of this unit. In my content section, I shared my analysis of two poems within the canon. Through the use of close reading, further biographical and historical research about the poets and the time of publication of the poems, I thoroughly enjoyed developing and writing the content section of this unit. I do not want to dwell on close reading in this section, because I truly value the writing portfolio. Some of my favorite classes in high school and college were my writing classes, and I really enjoyed writing prose and poetry. Recently, I read *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red* by Kenneth Koch for additional research for pedagogy, and I truly love this book. Koch's style of writing is very inviting, and he really values the poetry written by his students. He uses the phrase "poetry ideas"<sup>16</sup> in order to explain how he connects the poems read to the development of student writing. Some theme of stylistic element-but mainly theme-is adopted by the student. "When we read Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," I asked them to write a poem in which they talked about the same thing in many different ways."<sup>17</sup> Koch shares these poems in the book, and they are incredible! There are several poems within this unit with very relatable universal themes, and I think my students will be able to write a meaningful poem using Koch's process. "The problem in teaching adult poetry is that for them [students] it often seems difficult and remote; the poetry ideas...brought it closer and made it more accessible to them. The excitement of writing carried over to the reading; and the excitement of the poem they read inspired them in their writing."<sup>18</sup> I see my students as poets, and they will have several opportunities to work with their peers and me to write and digitally record profound poetry.

## Peer editing

Teachers arrange students in a cooperative pair based on reading level and skill ability. After students brainstorm and write the first draft of their poems, their assigned cooperative pair will read the poem two to three times and provide mechanical and content feedback. Peer editing is valuable and fosters a professional tone amongst the students, but a teacher should model the editing process several times and give specific instructions for the peer editor. This classroom activity can last for 15 minutes. In addition, peer editors will use editing conventions outlined in several different templates, APA, MLA, and Chicago Style.<sup>19</sup> These conventions are universal, and students will use these markings while editing their peer's poems. Students can also peruse the Purdue University Online Writing Lab and read through the various resources in the General Writing Resources category<sup>20</sup> as a classroom activity to help them communicate criticism and feedback. Writing is very personal; writing poetry is even more personal. The use of standard correction symbols in editing can eliminate hurt feelings or misunderstandings, and students can revise for a better poem.

## Individual Writing Conferences

When the students are peer editing their cooperative pairs' poems, the teacher can meet one-on-one with a student. This will give the teacher time to check the student's writing progress, review their peer edits, and offer feedback and guidance. Individual conferences are brief, three to four minutes. I often complete my conferences at my guided reading table, which is in the back of the room. I would recommend that teachers randomly select students for conferencing, and use the feedback worksheet in the appendix. All rough drafts with peer edits and feedback worksheets should be collected and placed in the student's writing folder. My eighth grade students keep their folders in a bin in my cabinet for safe keeping.

## Recording poems

At Henry C. Lea Elementary, our students use Google Chromebooks in the classroom. Several teachers, especially the Middle Years teachers, have 15 Chromebooks per classroom. Google Chromebooks are not ideal for recording poems. They are limited in their applications. For this reason, I would need to create a schedule for students to record on a MacBook Pro, which has QuickTime Player. We have a computer lab with 30 MacBook Pro Desktop computers. If our teaching schedules align, I would share this unit with our Technology teacher, Mr. Stephen Mazzeo. He has two microphones for student use. The students could record their poems on the computer, then upload the file to Google Classroom, and this will give us a digital record of their poems. I do not want my students using iMovie or Garage Band for recording, because I want them to concentrate on their voices, diction, and recording proficiency rather than adding other media like images or music. This classroom activity could take a couple days to complete, because I would send only one or two cooperative pairs to the computer lab at a time.

## Bibliography/Teacher and Student Resources

---

Ahmed, Taz, and Zahra Noorbakhsh. "Shame On You." Interview.

*#GoodMuslimBadMuslim* (audio blog), December 30, 2014. Accessed May 8, 2017. I really enjoyed listening to

several of the podcasts by these two amazing and comical women. This podcast in particular was especially moving, because Taz and Zahra share[] stories from women who felt shame or were shamed by their communities. I cried several times throughout this podcast, because I thought about all my students and some of the really tough life experiences they had dealt with at a very young age.

*Listening to Shame.* By Brene Brown. Long Beach Performance Arts Center, Long

Beach, March 2, 2012. This TED talk is a perfect introductory but also probing video for educators, parents, or anyone working with children, especially female adolescents from different countries. I shared this video with our school guidance counselor, and I hope she runs a professional development or a formal discussion about how we can help students who feel shamed or have been shamed by their families for various reasons.

Fisher, Douglas, and Nancy Frey. *Improving adolescent literacy: strategies at work.*

Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merrill/Prentice Hall, 2004. I have had this book since graduate school, and I refer to it frequently for many of my curriculum units. Its strategies align directly to the Children's Literacy Framework for our school district.

Fry, Paul. "Poetry Makes Nothing Happen '(Auden): What Does That Mean, and Why?"

Lecture, Yale National Initiative, Linsly-Chittenden Hall, New Haven, July 14, 2017. One of my favorite components of the Yale National Initiative is the presentations of seminar leaders throughout the Intensive Session. Fry's lecture delved into an imperative theoretical dispute concerning the purpose and place of poetry in our lives.

Garner, Dwight. "A Merchant of Trinkets and Memories." *The New York Times*, May 5, 2017. Accessed July 14, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/06/books/06garn.html>. Students could read this article for homework or within small guided instruction, because Garner outlines Taha Muhammad Ali's displacement and conveys Ali's heartache for homeland and new found identity in Nazareth.

"General Writing Resources." Purdue Online Writing Lab. 1995. Accessed August 01, 2017.

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/> I use Purdue Online Writing Lab with every one of my writing assignments in class.

Heard, Georgia. *Awakening the Heart: Exploring Poetry in Elementary and*

*Middle School.* Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999. This book outlines theory and practice behind writing workshops for poetry within a classroom. The tone and style of this book is more formal and informative than Koch's *Red, Where Did You Get that Red?* Writer's workshops can vary depending on the type of writing assigned, because poetry workshops place heavier emphasis on individual brainstorming and drafting. This is the first time students are writing poetry for their portfolios, and they might be hesitant at first. If you are a teacher in a similar situation I recommend that you allow as much time as possible for the beginning stages of drafting and revising.

"Key Shifts in English Language Arts." Common Core State Standards Initiative.

Accessed July 01, 2017. <http://www.corestandards.org/other-resources/key-shifts-in-english-language-arts/>.

Koch, Kenneth. *Rose, where did you get that red?: teaching great poetry to children.*

New York: Vintage Books, 1990. Koch's book is as rare and wonderful a composition of teacher practices and student writing as I have seen in a long time. I realize this book is close to 30 years old, but teachers still teach several of the poems in Koch's canon.

Mannani, Manijeh. "The Reader's Experience and Forugh Farrokhzad's

Poetry." *Crossing Boundaries - an interdisciplinary journal* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2001). Accessed July 8, 2017.

file:///Users/kathleentradebaugh/Downloads/The\_Reader\_Experience\_and\_Forugh\_Farrokhzad\_Poe%20(1).pdf . This source provided great detail about the life of Forugh Farrokhzad, and her revolutionary artistic works in poetry and film. It was beneficial to me because I wanted to focus on a contemporary Muslim poet who broke away from the obligatory poetic conventions of early Muslim poetry.

Miller, Ross, and Wende Morgaine. "The Benefits of E-portfolios for Students and

Faculty in Their Own Words." *Peer Review* 11, no. 1 (January 2009): 8-12.

Accessed July 9, 2017. [http://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/peerreview/Peer\\_Review\\_Winter\\_2009.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/peerreview/Peer_Review_Winter_2009.pdf).

Poetry A Day for Ramadan. December 5, 2014. Accessed August 03, 2017.

<https://medium.com/poetry-a-day-for-ramadan>.

"Poets of the 20th Century / Forugh Farrokhzad." Poetic Voices. Accessed July 10, 2017.

[http://pvmw.org/?exhibit\\_posts=forugh-farrokhzad-2](http://pvmw.org/?exhibit_posts=forugh-farrokhzad-2).

"Proofreading." The Chicago Manual of Style Online. 2010. Accessed July 24, 2017.

[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_proof.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_proof.html).

Sajoo, Aryn B. *A companion to the Muslim world*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2009. I needed to research the conventions of Muslim poetry starting from the sixth century to Rumi's influence in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, an era when government and culture kept changing in Iran. Sajoo is the editor of this book, and there are 11 different contributors portraying several aspects of Islamic culture along a very expansive timeline. I read chapter 11 about the poetic conventions during the time period of Rumi compared to 20<sup>th</sup> century writing, mostly focusing on Adonis, a Syrian poet.

Shapiro, Alan. "Studying a Poem: Inquiry in an English Class." Morningside Center for

Teaching Social Responsibility. July 23, 2011. Accessed July 10, 2017.

<http://www.morningsidecenter.org/print/211>.

"Taha Muhammad Ali." Poetry Foundation. Accessed August 04, 2017.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/taha-muhammad-ali>.

Ulaby, Neda. "Satire in The Muslim World: A Centuries-Long Tradition." NPR. January 10, 2015. Accessed July 01, 2017.

<http://www.npr.org/2015/01/10/376127650/satire-in-the-muslim-world-a-centuries-long-tradition>.

## Appendix 1: Assessment Worksheets for Students

---

Name:

Date:

Ms. Radebaugh: English

**Objective for Individual Writing Conference: Students will be able to revise and edit their personal draft of the poem based on the teacher's feedback in order to develop a final draft**

Assignment for student:

Student is writing this poem based on the following universal theme:

This theme appears in the following poem(s):

Reason for developing this theme:

Content and style requirements for the student:

1. Use of figurative language:
2. Development of one universal theme:
3. Line and stanza formation:
4. Free verse or rhyme:
5. Speaker:
6. Tone:

Student's strengths evident in this draft:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Improvements/Recommendations for student

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



## Appendix [2]: Common Core State Standards for Pennsylvania

---

Standard - CC.1.2.6.C

Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text.

The key idea and event: Muslim Activism and Protest Movement: Students will read biographical and historical information about cultural references made by Taz and Zahra in *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* for context.

Standard - CC.1.3.7.A

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

Poems selected for this unit are written by Muslim poets from different time periods and locations. Most of these poems do not conform to typical Muslim conventions and are written in free verse.

Craft and Structure: Vocabulary

Standard -CC.1.2.6.F

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in grade level reading and content, including interpretation of figurative language in context.

Students will identify and define examples of figurative language used within poems. Students will develop examples of figurative language within their own poems in order to convey theme and purpose.

Informative/Explanatory Content

1.4.6.C: Develop and analyze the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples; include graphics and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

## Endnotes

---

1. Paul Fry, "Poetry Makes Nothing Happen" (Auden): What Does That Mean, and Why?" (lecture, Yale National Initiative , Linsly-Chittenden Hall, New Haven, July 14, 2017).
2. "Poets of the 20th Century / Forugh Farrokhzad," Poetic Voices, accessed July 10, 2017, [http://pvmw.org/?exhibit\\_posts=forugh-farrokhzad-2](http://pvmw.org/?exhibit_posts=forugh-farrokhzad-2).
3. Alan Shapiro, "Studying a Poem: Inquiry in an English Class," Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, July 23, 2011, accessed July 10, 2017, <http://www.morningsidecenter.org/print/211>.
4. Neda Ulaby, "Satire In The Muslim World: A Centuries-Long Tradition," NPR, January 10, 2015, accessed July 01, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/2015/01/10/376127650/satire-in-the-muslim-world-a-centuries-long-tradition>.
5. "Key Shifts in English Language Arts," Common Core State Standards Initiative, accessed July 01, 2017,

<http://www.corestandards.org/other-resources/key-shifts-in-english-language-arts/>.

6. Ross Miller and Wende Morgaine, "The Benefits of E-portfolios for Students and Faculty in Their Own Words," *Peer Review* 11, no. 1 (January 2009): accessed July 9, 2017, [http://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/peerreview/Peer\\_Review\\_Winter\\_2009.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/peerreview/Peer_Review_Winter_2009.pdf).
7. "Shame On You," interview, #GoodMuslimBadMuslim (audio blog), December 30, 2014, accessed May 8, 2017.
8. Poetry A Day for Ramadan, December 5, 2014, accessed August 03, 2017, <https://medium.com/poetry-a-day-for-ramadan>.
9. Aryn B. Sajoo, *A Companion to the Muslim World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 332
10. Manijeh Mannani, "The Reader's Experience and Forugh Farrokhzad's Poetry," *Crossing Boundaries - an interdisciplinary journal* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2001): 50, accessed July 8, 2017, [file:///Users/kathleentradebaugh/Downloads/The\\_Reader\\_Experience\\_and\\_Forugh\\_Farrokhzad\\_Poe%20\(1\).pdf](file:///Users/kathleentradebaugh/Downloads/The_Reader_Experience_and_Forugh_Farrokhzad_Poe%20(1).pdf).
11. "Taha Muhammad Ali," Poetry Foundation, accessed August 04, 2017, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/taha-muhammad-ali>.
12. Dwight Garner, "A Merchant of Trinkets and Memories," *The New York Times*, May 5, 2009, accessed July 14, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/06/books/06garn.html>.
13. *Listening to Shame*, by Brene Brown, Long Beach Performance Arts Center, Long Beach, March 2, 2012.
14. Georgia Heard, *Awakening the Heart: Exploring Poetry in Elementary and Middle School*, 190.
15. Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey, *Improving adolescent literacy: strategies at work* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merrill/Prentice Hall, 2004), 30.
16. Kenneth Koch, *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?: Teaching Great Poetry to Children* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 60.
17. *Ibid*, 61
18. *Ibid*, 63
19. "Proofreading," The Chicago Manual of Style Online, 2010, accessed July 24, 2017, [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_proof.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_proof.html).
20. "General Writing Resources," Purdue Online Writing Lab, 1995, accessed August 01, 2017, <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/>.

---

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

©2023 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University, All Rights Reserved. Yale National Initiative®, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute®, On Common Ground®, and League of Teachers Institutes® are registered trademarks of Yale University.

For terms of use visit [https://teachers.yale.edu/terms\\_of\\_use](https://teachers.yale.edu/terms_of_use)