



First Poets

Curriculum Unit 24.03.03, published September 2024
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Overview:

This unit is an exploration of the historical development of writing systems as expressed through poetry. This unit will therefore focus on the development of the writing system in ancient Sumer. Here the historical record not only reveals the development of the world's first writing system, cuneiform, but also the world's first poet, Enheduanna. Through the verses of Enheduanna, students will explore significant questions of not only how and why the first writing system developed, but also the ideas and thoughts recorded in the written words of history's first recorded author and poet. Additionally, this unit is designed to align with the seminar theme of "poetry as sound and object". Therefore, this unit will explore cuneiform tablets as objects themselves. In other words, students will explore how cuneiform was etched onto clay tablets, a complicated process that preserved thoughts, ideas, and expressions throughout time and geography, an innovative form of immortalization through writing.

In addition to the writings of Sumer, students will also explore other early developments of writing and poetry through other ancient civilizations, civilizations contemporary with Sumer. Students will also explore the history of the Indus River Valley civilizations and the development of their writing system and their own form of poetry. Here the curriculum will bridge the theme of sound and object. For example, poetry of the Vedic civilization, in contrast with the Sumerians, was an oral artform where poetic verses were memorized, spoken, and preserved from generation to generation, spoken for millennia before the verses were first written. Navaratna and David Frawley (1997) explain that:

Precious stones or durable materials – gold, silver, bronze, marble, onyx or granite – have been used by most ancient people in an attempt to immortalize their achievements. Not so however the Aryans. They turned what may seem the most volatile and insubstantial material of all – the spoken word – and out of this bubble of air fashioned a monument which for more than thirty, perhaps forty centuries later stands untouched by time or elements...the pyramids have been eroded by the desert wind, the marble broken by earthquakes, and the gold stolen by robbers, while the Veda is recited daily by an unbroken chain of generations, traveling like a great wave through the living substance of the mind (Lee Mee 1975: p ix) [194-195]

Therefore, this unit will deliberately focus on how poetry can be represented, expressed, and propagated from generation to generation through both sound and object.

Finally, this unit will also explore similar themes that appear in seemingly independent cultures and civilizations. For example, both the poems of Enheduanna, as well as many of the poetic verses of the Rig Veda, focus on the poet/priest(ess) and the exultation of the Gods. Through this theme, expressed by poets from disparate traditions, students will discover a commonality of humanity, that is, the first writers and poets valued writing as a tool to understand themselves, to articulate and understand the unknown, and to also reimagine the world around them as they wished it to be. This objective is highly theoretical. And this objective is too difficult for elementary students. Therefore, this idea that underpins the curriculum will be differentiated to a 4th-grade learning level. In other words, the objective of the unit is for students to understand that writing is one of the most powerful tools/technologies of humanity. Additionally, the objective of this unit is for students to understand that writing has the power to inspire and even change the world around them.

To provide students a firmer grasp of these concepts, the unit will culminate in students writing their own poetry on a similar theme of the ancient Sumerians and Vedic Aryans. However, instead of exalting the Gods, students will compose a piece of poetry that expresses their love and admiration for someone significant in their life. For example, this person could be their mother, father, grandmother, or grandfather. The aim of this assignment is for students to practice their poetic creativity for the purpose of expressing their love and admiration, and therefore creating a deeper bond of love between them. This idea is similar to the poetry of Enheduanna and the Vedic poets in that these poets used poetry to exalt a particular god in the hopes that such expression would move the god to create a more sympathetic and beautiful world full of justice and love. Though not the entirely the same, students will use their own poetic language to express their love and admiration for the purpose of inspiring more love and beauty in the world with those closest to them.

Briefly Describe Classroom Environment:

I teach at Dorothy I. Height Elementary, a public school in Washington D.C. Our school has a relative diverse student body. More specifically, the most recent demographics of our student body are as follows: 50% Black, 39% Hispanic/Latino, 6% White, 4% Asian, 1% Native/Alaskan, 1% multiple races. Furthermore, with regard to the socio-economic profile of our students, 54% of students are “At Risk”, that is, these are students “who qualify for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), have been identified as homeless during the academic year, who are under the care of Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA or Foster Care)” (Dorothy I. Height Elementary School Profile, 2024). As for my role and responsibilities as a teacher, I am a lead teacher for 4th Grade English Language Arts and Social studies. 4th grade is departmentalized between Mathematics and English, i.e., students rotate between myself and my co-teacher who teaches math and science. As for the ELA curriculum, the curriculum covers several different topics and themes. The scope and sequence of the ELA curriculum include: Early America, My Story (students explore how heritage and identity are formed and shaped through writing), Revolution and Independence, Rocks and Minerals, and Heroic Adventures. As for the Social Study curriculum, the curriculum teaches Early American history beginning with early Native American history and ending with the American Revolution and Independence.

Rationale for Curriculum

There are two main rationales for this curriculum. The first is to address a knowledge gap of students. This knowledge gap became apparent after teaching a mini-lesson two years ago on the history of writing. In this lesson, students explored ancient Sumer and the development of cuneiform. Here a drastic knowledge gap became apparent. For example, to understand students' background knowledge on the topic, I asked them: "How old do you think the invention of writing is?" Common answers were 100, 300, or 500 years old. These answers are understandable and by no means reflect the education of the students as this history is not currently taught at the elementary level in the District of Columbia Elementary Language Arts Curriculum. However, students were astonished to learn that the earliest writing systems developed between 4,000 and 5,000 years ago. These years immediately captivated the attention and curiosity of students. In many regards, it appeared difficult for students to both quantify and conceptualize this time scale. Again, this is understandable as both the 3rd and 4th grade curriculum focus heavily on history, specifically western history, within the last 300 years. Hence the majority of answers from students placed the development of writing at about 200 – 500 years old.

To help students conceptualize and quantify this relatively long time-scale, I demonstrated the length of time visually by drawing a number line on the board. I then counted backwards 4,000 years from the current year. In order to support students' calculation and comprehension, I counted backwards by 100-year increments, e.g.: 2023, 1923, 1823 etc. (I think this also provided a more concrete definition and representation of what a "century" is, a vocabulary word that we studied). Here, it is also worth noting the cross-disciplinary value of number lines between math, English language arts, and history. That is, using the number line to count years (centuries) back in time demonstrated for students an effective application of number lines. In other words, a number line is a mathematical strategy by which they can visualize the historical timeline.

Interestingly, many students discovered peculiar knowledge through this process. Many students discovered that the year 2023 is just that, a number. Students demonstrated this understanding by commenting out, "Oh! You mean each year we count up and, in the past, we count down? When does time begin?" This demonstrated a rather deep realization, i.e., students discovered that the number of the current year is not arbitrary but rather has an origin at the year zero and that the current year is the consequence of civilization (western Judeo-Christian civilization, though this was not mentioned in the lesson) counting year by year until arriving at the current moment. For example, some students were astonished to discover that, yes, there is a year 3 as well as a year 99, and every number (year) in-between. I think it is also worth noting that many students are completely unfamiliar as to why western civilization begins counting years from year zero, not to mention that other cultural traditions around the world begin counting years from other historical markers. In other words, they are unaware that Western Civilization (Judeo-Christian civilization) counts years from the birth of Christ. Notably, students are missing knowledge that is essential to understanding history. They are missing a rather significant perspective on how old the timeline of human civilization actually is.

However, returning to the counting of the timeline, as I counted back each century with the class, the students' curiosity in world history and human civilization was sparked. Students blurted out questions such as: "When were cars invented?", "When were computers invented?", "When were guns invented?", "Who were the first people?" "How old is the Earth?" And this is the significant knowledge gap that this curriculum addresses. The curriculum addresses the immense length of history relative to students' current understanding of the historical continuum. In other words, students' general understanding of the history of

human civilization is more or less limited to the last 300 years at most. Many of them have never engaged in lessons that demonstrate history and human civilization is much, much older than 300 years and that many innovations of civilization are also much older than 300 years. This is arguably an essential concept for students to engage with, and no doubt, a concept that 4th graders are capable of appreciating and valuing.

To take this argument further, the length of the historical continuum with regard to human civilization can be further contextualized in accordance with the development of innovative inventions of humanity. I argue that foremost among these inventions with regard to English language arts is the development of writing systems. This is an essential idea for students to understand as well because it is inarguably among the most formative inventions of human civilization. In other words, development of writing systems fundamentally altered dynamics of culture, civilization, and history. Furthermore, I argue that it is essential that students understand that they themselves are the inheritors, and in English class, the active acquirers of this formative discovery. It is a skill they practice each and every day and one that is accorded the upmost value and importance in any English language arts curriculum throughout the United States. Reading and writing is essentially the foundation of education. Students begin studying the importance of reading and writing when they begin with the alphabet, a skill often times children start learning as soon as they can form vowels and consonants. We can all appreciate the experience of families encouraging their young children to begin learning the alphabet to the melody of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star...How I wonder what you are!”

Why do we do this? Why is this among the first, if not the first, lessons we teach children? The answer we all know and appreciate. Reading and writing is communication. Reading and writing is knowledge. Reading and writing is power. Let’s not forget the proverb: “The Pen is Mightier than the Sword.” Or, to appreciate this idea in the context of world literary tradition, we can turn to the Quran where one will read: “The ink of a scholar is holier than the blood of a martyr.” Or, if we need to find a contemporary expression, one that is perhaps more relatable to our students, we can also turn to, and turn on Kendrick Lamar. In his song “Father Issues”, Kendrick rhymes “your mind is made of gold / and your tongue is made of sword”. Clearly reading, writing, and language is power; it is the agency to know yourself, to know others, and the agency to form and reform the world around you. At bottom, language, reading and writing is *logos*. In other words it is the ability to create words. According to the dictionary, the word logos arrived to the English language via the ancient Greeks, other formative readers and writers like the Sumerians, though the Sumerians predate the Greeks. However, the Greeks defined logos as “word, or reason.” The dictionary now defines logos as “the Word of God, or principle of divine reason and creative order, identified in the Gospel of John with the second person of the Trinity incarnate in Jesus Christ.” The dictionary also defines logos by principles of Jungian psychology, that is, logos is “the principle of reason and judgment, associated with the animus”, animus being the creative spirit from within. Again, reading and writing is to know oneself and to create.

To be clear, I am not arguing that we teach all of these concepts, particularly the deeper concepts to 4th - graders. However, I am arguing that we can begin to introduce these concepts to students at the elementary level. After all, why do we not teach students about the history of writing? Writing is a foundational cornerstone of the monument of human civilization. So, why do we not teach students how it was developed, what it was intended for, and why it was cherished by its creators? Why do we not teach students the answer to their interminable curiosity, their questions: when, where, who, how, and why?

It is also worth noting that in this mini lesson I was also curious as to where students might think the first writing system was developed. So, I asked them: “We have discussed when writing was developed, now, where do you think it was invented?” The first responses were endearing and displayed their enthusiasm for discovery. Students shouted out “London!”, “No! it was invented in New York!” This again, I think, is a

consequence of the current curriculum that focuses heavily on the early colonial era where much attention is focused around the imperial expansion of European powers and England in particular. The latter response I think more reflects students' curiosity and enthusiasm for contemporary popular culture. Many students were puzzled to discover that writing was invented in the world's first empire, a place called ancient Sumer, - but a nation that we now call Iraq. For nearly all students in my 4th -grade class, both Ancient Sumer and Iraq are nations entirely foreign to them. They do not have any general understanding of where Iraq is located on the globe, nor do they have any general understanding of the culture or history of the nation, or the predecessors who inhabited this geographic region.

This gap in knowledge once again raises critical questions. Why do we not discuss with students where the formative invention of writing developed? Why do we not accord the history of these people the admiration it necessarily deserves. And why do we not teach students how this ingenuity formed and reformed the world we know today? Why do we not teach them that that this immense power of language began nearly 5,000 years ago in the Sumerian Empire and that this powerful tradition continues to this day, to this moment, in this classroom? This is an odd circumstance. We teach students the how, but we do not teach them the where, when, and why of the discipline. Again, some may critique that that this is too much for 3rd , 4th , and 5th graders. I respectfully disagree. However, I do agree with the mantra that rings as essential for student learning throughout the district. I agree with the belief of "high expectations" for all students. It is under this expectation that I taught the first mini-lesson on the Sumerian alphabet, cuneiform, and the development of writing in ancient Sumer. And through that lesson I developed new understanding myself. I developed the understanding that, yes, 3rd , 4th , and 5th graders can begin to learn and appreciate the power of the development of writing as well as the first recorded writers in history. Finally, they can begin to learn to appreciate this history and connect it to the power it holds in our contemporary culture and society.

And if educators are still not yet convinced, I'll reframe the argument in the context of the current DCPS curriculum. The current English Language Arts curriculum focuses heavily on the Founding Fathers, the writing of the United States Constitution, and the establishment of the United States government and nation. Along with learning to appreciate the authors of our democracy, students *can* also learn to appreciate the first authors in history and how their words formed the foundation of ethical engagement in these ancient communities and empires. The former we know is essential for students to be engaged citizens in our nation. In other words, students must understand the history of the U.S. Constitution, as well as the text itself as a document that undergirds the laws of our nation and civic engagement. Similarly, it is also my argument that for students to be engaged citizens on a global level, they must also understand the foundational history of writing, a history that developed congruently with the expression of moral and ethical guidance for individuals and their communities. This quality of an engaged citizen on a global scale is something that Choo (2001) refers to as a Global Cosmopolitan citizen. In her book *The Teaching of Ethics Through Literature*, Choo, in defining a global cosmopolitan citizen explains:

What both Socratic and Confucian conceptions of cosmopolitanism share is the idea of ethics exceeding politics just as the individual as a citizen of the universe is more than a citizen of the material world...In this sense, to be cosmopolitan-minded is to participate imaginatively in the creative work of engaging with cultures that pushes towards openness instead of closure and values diversity and ambiguity rather than singularity and purity (Lu, 2000; Mehta, 2000). (44).

In summary, we want our students to be familiar with the foundational texts. We want them to understand

the complex documents that undergird the civic engagement of our country. I then argue it is equally important that they be familiar with the history of writing itself and by consequence develop a broader sense of civic engagement, one with a global perspective. After all, this becomes increasingly important as the timeline of history continues to march on and our world becomes an ever-increasingly connected and integrated global community. Therefore, curriculums should reflect this change as well. Curriculums should reflect influential texts from a both a global and temporal perspective. This curriculum is designed to do just that. It is designed to expose students to texts that were the first texts to espouse an ethical engagement for their communities. With this knowledge, students will have a much broader and much deeper perspective of cultures around the world as well as cultures throughout history. The German philosopher Goethe once commented on the importance of such understanding when he wrote "*He who cannot draw on three thousand years is living from hand to mouth*" (Gaarder, 2015). In other words, if we intend to raise the consciousness of students in the pursuit of enlightenment, we must show them not only how bright, but also how long the literary lights of humanity have burned.

Curriculum Pedagogy

The pedagogy combines three different but complementary elements. The first is *Ethical Criticism* (Choo, 2021). This is a pedagogy that places ethical engagement at the focus of literary study. In other words, Ethical Criticism highlights the idea of how to construct moral principles with the self, as well as others. This is done through the exploration of diverse and influential literature from around the world and throughout history. The second part of the pedagogy focuses on the explicit teaching of *Literary Theory* (Appleman, 2023). The reason for this approach is to both broaden and deepen students' analysis of texts. And although literary criticism has traditionally been taught at the university level, I'm interested in extending Deborah Appleman's argument that this discipline can be differentiated to younger learners. In her book *Critical Encounters in Secondary English*, Appleman argues for the benefits to critical reading and thinking by the explicit teaching of Literary Theory at the secondary level. I am interested in extending this argument to the primary level as well. However, I concede that the language will need to be differentiated quite heavily, e.g., "historical lens", "close reading lens" etc. That being said, I think it is more important that educators themselves keep in mind that texts can be interpreted through many lenses and prepare students for this approach accordingly. Finally, I am interested in integrating both of these former pedagogies with *Philosophy for Children* (P4C) (Lipman, 1977). This is a pedagogy developed by Mathew Lipman in the 1970s. Lipman, a professor at Columbia University at the time, grew concerned about the polarization of philosophical, and rhetorical perspectives among university students concerning the Vietnam War. Lipman argued that the teaching of philosophical principles, i.e., the valuing of complex and diverse perspectives with the intention of arriving at mutual understanding through critical discussions was essential for literary students of all ages. My essential argument is that these three elements (Ethical Criticism, Literary Theory, and Philosophy for Children) complement one another and create a pedagogy that supports students' development of critical reading, writing, thinking, and speaking.

Unit Content

This unit will focus on two poems (hymns) from two distinct and formative civilizations. The first poem will be from ancient Sumer. This poem will be “The Exaltation of Inanna” by Enheduanna. Enheduanna is particularly notable as she is referred to as the first recorded author and poet in history. This is because in the tradition of cuneiform writing, Enheduanna is the first known author to write her name with her works. In *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, Radner et al. explains “Enheduanna’s work as author, or at least as compiler, is accepted by some researchers (Hallow and van Dijk 1968: 2-3, Sjöberg and Bergman 1969: 5; J.G. Westenholz 1989: 548-549), and Aage Westenholz (1999:76) has written that ‘she is in fact the first real author, in the modern sense of that word, known to world history’.” The second poem will be from the Vedic Aryan civilization. More specifically, the second poem is from the Rig Veda. Although the author of this poem is not named like Enheduanna, this poem provides students the opportunity to explore yet another example of the emergence of early poetic tradition. With regards to the early poetic tradition and the Rig Veda, Keay (2011) explains, “Even in excessively literal translations, these pearls of descriptive verse from poetry’s remotest past suggest that there was more to the Arya than the earthly obsessions of the stockman and the swagger of the charioteering oppressor.” These poems also complement one another because along with exemplifying how and why the earliest forms of poetry developed, they both express similar themes. Notably, both the Sumerians and the Vedic Aryans both highly respected poetry and believed language to be a formative technology/tool that could both articulate the complex nature of reality as well as recreate the world anew according to the author’s vision. Bausch (2016) explains this belief in the Aryan tradition writing, “Vedic terms for language went hand in hand with ontological descriptions of what exists, forging an implicit theory about the nature of being that later Vedic explicated in an effort to liberate human beings. [53-54].”

This is arguably a lasting tradition and an ideal that can be found and appreciated today. Today it is easy to find modern-day poets that continue to model this tradition, that is, the belief that poetry as an artistic expression has the power to transform the mind of the author, of readers, and by consequence the world around them. Together, the Sumerian and Vedic Aryan traditions will provide students with a window into the development of literacy and development of poetry. This window will also open for students a perspective onto a millennia long tradition where the power of writing and poetic expression is seen as a powerful tool/expression that can change humanity. I argue that it is significant for students to understand the origin of this tradition as the reverence for reading, writing, and poetic expression is an integral educational philosophy in our own contemporary culture and society. In other words, the belief that reading and writing are essential skills for students to master is a foundational belief that is ubiquitous throughout the modern educational philosophy. Therefore, it is reasonable and arguably essential that students have some familiarity with where, why, and how the history of reading, writing, and poetry began. Consequently, a goal of this unit is to inspire students to see and understand that they themselves are part of the cherished and long tradition that began with the Sumerians and the Vedic Aryans, and that each school day, students themselves continue to carry and pass this tradition along whenever they respect, and feel love for reading, writing, and poetry.

Both these civilizations also exemplify and provide the opportunity to explore key themes of the seminar “Poetry as Sound and Object.” One of the prominent themes of the seminar was to explore different modes of how poetry can be represented so as to lower the threshold of intimidation that the genre of poetry can present to students. More specifically, a goal of the seminar was “to reduce that threshold of intimidation by focusing on poems as an experience of sound and as fascinating material objects with ties to the visual arts.” (Yale National Initiative) Arguably, both poems that I have selected for this unit appear to have a high

threshold of intimidation as they are ancient forms of poetry from civilizations that to a modern and unacquainted perspective may appear remote or even opaque. However, both the Sumerians and the Vedic Aryan civilizations share many commonalities with our own culture and civilization. Foremost among these, and most relevant to this unit, are a deep respect for the power of language, specifically reading, writing, and poetry.

Moreover, the mode by which both the Sumerians and Vedic Aryans communicated their language provides a unique quality that I argue will inspire curiosity of students. More specifically, the Sumerians and Vedic Aryans expressed their language and poetry through both fascinating objects as well as enchanting sonic expressions. For example, through Sumerian cuneiform, students will discover the significant power of written language, that is, they will explore how cuneiform and the process of creating and writing on clay tablets enabled the early Sumerians to communicate across space and time. It is important to note that cuneiform tablets themselves have deeply captivated the attention of my students in the past. In past mini-lessons on cuneiform that I taught, students were enthralled by the strangeness of the tablets and the curious symbols etched on them. Oddly, these fascinating objects appeared at once familiar to students, yet also entirely foreign. In other words, students recognized the characters written on the tablets as something familiar to writing and the clay tablets themselves as something similar to books.

At the same time however, many of my students have never seen anything quite like the cuneiform tablets and are excited to discover what the objects are and what they communicate. To young, curious, and inquisitive 4th-graders, Sumerian cuneiform tablets are a terribly exciting mystery from the past. Adding to the interests of these objects is their sheer age. My students were shocked to discover that cuneiform tablets are approximately 5000 years old. Regarding the age of cuneiform tablets Radner (2011) explains, “Cuneiform writing started around 3200 BC and finally died out in the 1st century AD.” My students’ curiosity only grew as they learned that these clay tablets remained buried under the desert sands of southern Iraq for millennia before being rediscovered and translated for the modern era. This curriculum in turn is designed to build on to this mini-lesson in a few significant ways. First, this unit will provide students with greater background knowledge giving them a broader scope and depth of the Sumerian culture and civilization. Second, this unit is also designed to capitalize on the curiosity of students’ pension for “code-breaking/decipherment”, i.e., translating texts from one language to another language in order to discover meaning.

Consequently, I argue that the seemingly high threshold of comprehending and appreciating ancient Sumerian poetry can be surmounted by painting a vivid picture of the Sumerian cuneiform culture, including their high regard for the written language as revealed in the numerous tablets that have been excavated across southern Iraq. I also argue that the cuneiform text itself entices a deep curiosity that my students have for code-breaking and translating. This lesson will therefore also give students a chance to role play as archeologist. Like the archeologist who have unearthed cuneiform texts and translated them, students will role play by translating cuneiform to discover the meaning of “The Exaltation of Inanna” by Enheduanna. I believe this enthusiasm for ancient tablets, as well as their excitement for code-breaking and discovery, will surmount what on its surface may appear a rather high threshold for the students.

The Vedic Aryans also provide a fascinating window into the very early history of language and poetry. However, unlike the Sumerians, the Vedic Aryan’s poetic tradition can be characterized as one of sonic expression. Instead of dedicating and preserving their poetic verse to symbols on stone tablets, the Vedic Aryans transmitted their language in the memorization and ritual recitation of melodic chants. In other words, early Vedic poets/priests demonstrated a high regard for the phonetic structure of language. More specifically, they believed there was a magic to the sound of language, i.e., the basic components of spoken

language, syllabic structures, had a tremendous power when memorized and spoken with intentional belief in the sound of the language itself. On this tradition, Keay (2011) explains, “As the recited accompaniment to the performance of sacrifices, their actual wording, even their intonation and their pronunciation, had to be perfect for the sacrifice to be effective. Conversely, a mangled syllable or an improvised coda could be fatal. Like the magician who forgets the magic formula, the supplicant could then find the sacrifice rebounding to his disadvantage and condemning him to the very disaster he was trying to avert.”

And so, Vedic poets would memorize poems syllable by syllable and line by line. These memorized verses were then performed and passed along from generation to generation in highly respected rituals of recitation. In this manner the Vedic Aryans preserved their language and poetic tradition and overcame the ephemeral limits of life and the destructive forces of time and space. However, unlike the Sumerians who used stone to overcome these ephemeral limitations, the Vedic Aryans developed an alternative and rather creative solution. They preserved their linguistic and poetic tradition in the minds and hearts of their communities. In fact, these poems were preserved in this manner for generations. It wasn’t until after centuries, or perhaps even millennia of recitation from one generation to the next, that these poems and hymns were written down in the ancient Indo-European language of Sanskrit. These ancient Sanskrit writings compile the Vedic texts we have today. Keay (2011) explains, “In other words, for at least five hundred years the ten thousand verses of the Rig Veda were learned by heart and handed down by word of mouth.”

Consequently, the Vedic tradition provides another unique opportunity to explore the earliest history of language and poetry. Through this history, students will explore how poetry can also be memorized, expressed, shared, and appreciated as sonic expression. This will once again tap into an innate curiosity of my students. For example, in past years, I have challenged students to memorize their favorite poems in our poetry units. Perhaps a bit intimidated at first, students are often enthusiastic to memorized language once they see familiar or inspiring artists perform poetry from memory. For example, in past lessons, I have shown students slam poetry. Slam poets often memorize entire poems and place special emphasis on the sound of the language and poetry. Their performance demonstrates an engaging and passionate poetic reading that has the power to captivate audiences. In turn, these performances have inspired students to commit their own poems to heart. Moreover, I have also brought students favorite musical artists into the classroom when studying poetry. This also inspires students by showing them that musical artists care deeply about their poetry and memorize it so as to captivate the audience with their performance. With these contemporary examples in mind, it is my intention to develop an appreciation for the ancient Vedic tradition through a similar approach. That is, I want to show students that the earliest poets, like slam poets, and like contemporary musicians, memorized their verses by heart and performed them. It is therefore my goal to bring into focus a diverse perspective, i.e., the perspective that the history of language, as well as the history of poetry, has some of its deepest roots in the ancient history of India. There, poets and priest began a long tradition of cherishing language and memorizing poetic hymns from generation to generation as a means to preserve and celebrate the tradition. In studying the Vedic Aryans, I want to connect this tradition to my own students and to our classroom. In other words, I want students to discover that current poets, slam poets and musicians for example, are following in a very old tradition that began in the Indus River Valley. Furthermore, I want students to discover the power of continuing in that tradition by composing and memorizing their own poetry to share with their community. It is my hope that this in turn will illuminate students’ understanding and instill in them an appreciation for the history of poetry with a diverse and global perspective.

Finally, it is important to note that this curriculum unit does not simply focus on poetry. Rather, the unit places both poetry as well as the historical development of literacy, a development that evolved concurrently with early forms of poetry, at the focus. Because this unit focuses on the comprehension and appreciation of

poetry, as well as the development of writing (a key cornerstone of human civilization), this unit integrates both English Language Arts as well as Social Studies standards. For example, the current 4th-Grade Social Studies curriculum focuses on the ancient history of the Americas. In this history, students “Analyze the development of physical documentation in the early Americas, such as the writing and iconographic systems of Indigenous peoples across the Americas to make claims about historic societies (e.g., Cave of the Painted Rock in current-day Brazil, the writing system developed by the Maya, glyphs of the Grand Canyon).” It is my argument that this unit can provide students with a more holistic and global understanding of early writing systems. In addition to exploring how people in the Americas developed writing system, they will also explore where, why, and how the very first writing systems developed. In other words, this unit will extend student inquiry into the development of writing beyond just the Americas to a more global and holistic perspective. This in turn will further contextualize their study of the early civilizations in North America, i.e., this unit will provide students with the beginning of the story of writing, a story that follows human migration out of Africa, across Asia, and into the Americas.

That this unit also integrates social studies standards, I therefore think that it is necessary to explain current understanding of the relationship between the ancient Sumerians and the Vedic Aryans. The Sumerians and the Vedic Aryans did not necessarily develop independently from one another. There is a distinct possibility that is yet to be proven or disproven by contemporary archeologists and linguists that the Sumerians and the Vedic Aryans interacted with one another. Though the Sumerians civilization originated in Mesopotamia (Modern-day southern Iraq) and the Vedic Aryans in the Indus River Valley (an area encompassing the boarder of modern-day Pakistan and India) there is evidence that these cultures perhaps traded with each other, and influenced each other’s culture and civilization. Evidence for this is found in another ancient Indian civilization, the Harrapans. Harrapan cities have been excavated throughout the Indus River Valley. The Harrapan people were a people with advanced understanding of agriculture and city planning. This allowed them to construct large cities throughout the Indus Valley and develop their own writing system. Curiously enough, their writing has been discovered in the excavation of Sumerian cities. In these cities archeologist discovered Harrapan seals that were used as trading receipts and are evidence that the Harappans traveled to the Sumerian empire by overland routes, or by sea along the northern coast of the Indian Ocean and into the Arabian Sea. However, it is necessary to note that there is no consensus, and in many cases a contentious debate continues as to the influence that the Harrapan civilization had on the Vedic Aryan civilization, if any. However, that the Vedic Aryans and the Sumerians definitively interacted with one another is not essential for the curriculum. What is important is to show students that there is a history of trade and cultural exchange between Mesopotamia and the Indus River Valley and that there is a *possibility*, until further evidence is unearthed, that the world’s first poets, i.e., the Sumerians and the Vedic Aryans possibly interacted with one another.

The unit will culminate in a project where students will combine these two traditions. Students will write a poem on a similar theme that is shared by both the Sumerian and the Vedic tradition, and students will express and record their poems by writing their poem on a clay tablet and also memorizing the poem by heart. In this way, students will embody the poetic tradition of both cultures and civilizations and follow in the footsteps of the world’s first poets.

“The Exaltation of Inanna”: Historical Context and Analysis.

“The Exaltation of Inanna” is a unique and significant moment in the history of literacy and poetry. It is the first recorded poem/hymn by the world’s first recorded poet, Enheduanna. Meador (2000) explains of the legacy of Enheduanna’s writing that “The poem allows us a rare glimpse inside the mind and soul of this

brilliant woman who lived at the dawn of western civilization. [116]" Meador goes on to explain the influence that Enheduanna's writing had on other civilizations and their own traditions of writing, "Many concepts expressed in her poetry evolved and were later incorporated into near eastern religions in slightly different forms. Some elements were even incorporated into mystical Judaism and the beliefs of certain sects of Christianity." But who was this first writer in history? Enheduanna was a priestess in ancient Sumer. Her father, Sargon of Akkad, was king of the Sumerian empire which encompassed several cities and provinces between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Mesopotamia. As a priestess, Enheduanna was a person of authority in ancient Sumer. Priestesses were entrusted by ruling monarchs as well as their fellow citizens with significant responsibilities. Foremost among these responsibilities was to communicate with and interpret the will of the God's in the Sumerian pantheon of deities. Like many early civilizations, natural occurrences such as rain, floods, drought, war, and peace were understood to be the machinations of deities. For example, Sumerians believed the rains that either helped their crops flourish, or the droughts that threatened the foundations of their empire, were the consequence of the will of the Gods. Therefore, priests and priestesses assumed a significant role in Sumerian society where they not only interpreted the will of the Gods in an attempt to foresee events, but they also communicated with the Gods in an attempt to appease them in the hopes that they would provide the Sumerians with grace and prosperity. Meador (2000) explains the authority of Enheduanna writing, "As high priestess, Enheduanna held the office that directed rituals pleasing to the gods and therefore kept the people safe within a contained, dependable, orderly, and prosperous universe."

This is the world of Enheduanna. She was a woman of respected authority, a priestess who through her language, specifically her poetic verse, could communicate with the Gods to create a more harmonious world for her city and the Sumerian empire. In addition to communicating with the pantheon of Gods, it was common for Sumerian cities to have a patron deity. This patronage naturally extended to the priests and priestesses of the city. Enheduanna was the priestess for the Sumerian city of Ur. The patron deity of Ur was the Goddess Inanna. Consequently, Enheduanna's patron deity was Inanna. Like many Gods throughout ancient civilization, Sumerian Gods and Goddesses were often associated or embodied in natural phenomena. Inanna was no exception. She was associated with the planet Venus. Associating Gods with planets, specifically Venus, is a mythological and religious tradition that was practiced by many civilizations that would follow in the wake of the Sumerians including the Greek and Roman civilizations.

For many of these early civilizations, Venus was a peculiar object among the many other objects in the night sky. For example, Venus has an orbit closer to the sun than Earth. Consequently, Venus never travels far from the sun relative to other planets and celestial bodies in the night sky. And because of this closer orbit, Venus appears with both the setting and the rising sun. Some of Inanna's key qualities can be drawn from her association with Venus as well as the planet's peculiar movement across the sky. The ancient Sumerians interpreted this motion as Inanna's ability to descend below the horizon and into the Underworld and ascend again into the heavens. The ancient Sumerians believed that Inanna's ability to journey from the underworld and to the heavens was a reflection of her dual nature. In other words, ancient Sumerians believed Inanna to be the Goddess of opposites. She was the Goddess of transformation between chaos and order, heaven and the underworld.

In her book *The Complete Poems of Enheduanna*, Solle (2024) explains that "Inanna is shown changing all that there is to change, reversing genders, turning midday into midnight, razing mountains, empowering the weak and crushing the strong, destroying and creating at will." In other words, Inanna is the representation of the paradoxical nature of reality, that is, the world of the ancient Sumerians was fraught with constant and dramatic change between chaos and order. Their empire was continually expanding and retracting. At times the success of their societies allowed the Sumerians to extend its borders into further territories. At other

times, their borders were threatened by societies from without who were seeking their own territorial expansion and empire. At other times, the Sumerian society was threatened by conflict from within the Empire itself. Apart from threats of other civilizations and people, the Sumerian Empire was at constant struggle with the natural world. Along with writing, Sumerians developed complex agriculture. This agrarian technological advancement was at the foundation of the success of their Empire. However, despite advancement in canal building and irrigation, Sumerian farmers were continually threatened by occurrences of the natural world. Droughts or rains either provided the necessary water, or destroyed crops and fields essential for the survival. In such a world fraught with so much beauty and so much suffering, Inanna was the answer, the Goddess of both sides of the world, of the good and evil. She was the Goddess whom Sumerians, and Enheduanna in particular, placed their faith for salvation. Inanna was “wholeheartedly a goddess of war and destruction, she is equally a goddess of Love. [19]” (Meador 2000).

As goddess of love, as well as war, Inanna was an ideal deity for Enheduanna to turn to. As Sargon of Akkad continued to expand the Empire, the Sumerians inevitably encountered opposition from without as well as within the Empire. In her poem *The Exaltation of Inanna*, Enheduanna recounts such opposition and conflict. In the poem, Enheduanna recounts the struggle between her and a usurper, Lugal-Ane. Lugal-Ane is a fellow Sumerian who came to dethrone, and take her position as priest of the city of Ur. In effort to seek justice for herself as well as her city, Enheduanna writes a poem/hymn to her patron Goddess Inanna. In the poem, Enheduanna wants to exalt Inanna to the top of the Pantheon of deities. In other words, Enheduanna seeks to express her admiration for Inanna and to express the beauty that she sees in Inanna. Importantly, Enheduanna sees her words, her poetic verse, as integral tools. Enheduanna believes that only through elevated language can she elevate Inanna to the top of the Pantheon. Meador (2000) explains:

In both the Hymn and the Exaltation, Enheduanna makes clear that Inanna is not a deity like any other but the ruler of the universe. By designating Inanna as the queen of the gods, Enheduanna makes a statement not just about religion but about reality more broadly: since the gods controlled the cosmos, their position in the pantheon reflects how the universe was organized. In elevating Inanna, Enheduanna shows that the world is ruled not by predictable and everlasting order but by change, conflict, chaos, and contradiction – and not least by a stubborn and defiant female force, to whom even the greatest gods must bow.

Importantly, the belief in exalting Gods through poetic language as a means of creating order is a theme often explored in the poetic tradition of the Vedic Aryans. However, we will take a closer look at that tradition later. First, we will look at how Enheduanna writes to elevate Inanna to the apex within the pantheon of deities so that Inanna can then cast out the usurper and restore order and justice to Enheduanna and the city of Ur. In her poem “*Exaltation of Inanna*”, Enheduanna writes and exalts Inanna and her powers:

My queen, you are
The guardian of the
Gods’ great powers:
You lift them up and
Grasp them in your

Hand, you take them
In and clasp them
To your breast. As if
You were a basilisk,
Your poison
Upon the enemy,
As if you were the
Storm God, grain
Bends before your
Roar.

Here, Enheduanna uses poetic verse to describe the beauty and power of Inanna. This poetry is Enheduanna's attempt to instill the belief in not only herself, but Inanna as well, that Inanna is in fact the most beautiful and the most powerful of Sumerian deities. In elevating Inanna, Enheduanna hopes that Inanna will realize her own beauty and power, and assume the lead of the pantheon. As lead of the Pantheon Inanna can then expel the Usurper and restore justice to Enheduanna, the people city of Ur, and the Empire. However, as many poets often do, Enheduanna questions her own poetic ability and writes in concern:

My honey-mouth
Is full of froth, my
Soothing words are
Turned to dust.

Once again, this questioning of the poet's ability is a theme will appear again in Vedic Aryan poetry. However, in sincere belief and perseverance, the poet can find the expression. Enheduanna continues with her poem and finds her expression. She finds her identity as a named poet and priestess. She writes:

I am Enheduanna. I
will pray to you, holy
Inanna: I will let my
Tears stream free to

Soften your heart, as
If they were beer. I
Will say to you, "The
Decision is yours."

Here Enheduanna, through perseverance of her poetic verse, finds her identity as a poet. She also finds her identity has a high priestess of the temple, and as a woman with the power to sway the heart and mind of Inanna. In the end, Enheduanna's devotion is rewarded.

The light pleased
Her. She spread joy
And beamed with a
Passionate delight,
Like a downpour of
Moonlight, wrapped
In charm. Nanna
Extolled her, Ningal
Blessed her, and the
Temple's thresholds
Welcomed her home.
What she said to her
Holy woman was
Magnificent.

Through her language and devotion, Enheduanna exalts Inanna and succeeds in elevating her to the top of the Pantheon. Inanna then expels the usurper Lugal-Ane and restores Enheduanna to her role as priestess. Love and justice is thus restored to Enheduanna, the city of Ur, and the empire more broadly.

Agni and the Young Poet: Historical Context and Analysis.

"*Agni and the Young Poet*" (RV 6.9) is another poem that provides a fascinating window onto the development of literacy as well as poetry. Additionally, this poem is an ideal text to pair with *The Exaltation of Inanna* for

several reasons. First, RV 6.9, like the poetry of Enheduanna, provides students an intimate glimpse onto the development of poetry with a diverse and global perspective. Additionally, the tradition of why and how Vedic poetry was practiced and preserved provides an alternate perspective with regards to the major themes of the Seminar “Poetry as Sound and Object”. More specifically, while Sumerian poetry was practiced and preserved on distinct and fascinating objects, i.e., cuneiform tablets, the Vedic Aryans practiced and preserved their poetry through sonic expression. In other words, the Vedic poets capitalized on the sound of language itself. They memorized their poetry, placing specific emphasis on the pronunciation as well as expression of the language, even down to individual syllables. In memorizing their poetry, the early Vedic poets passed along their, language, ideas, and philosophies for generations. Finally, many of the poems of the Rig Veda are centered around a very similar theme to that of Enheduanna’s poetry. Like Enheduanna, Vedic poets and priests held the power of language in the highest regards. More specifically, both traditions believed in the idea that language, poetic language specifically, had the power to reform the world according to higher ideals imagined by the poet.

Next, it is necessary to provide some historical background on the Vedic Aryan civilization and their approach to literacy and poetry. It is worth noting again that this unit is designed to integrate Social Studies as well as English Language Arts Standards. This is done by exposing students to poetic language as well as the historical and cultural context in which the poetic tradition developed. Previously we looked at both the poetry of Enheduanna as well as the development of literacy and poetry out of the Sumerian culture and civilization. Now, we will turn our attention and focus on the development of literacy out of the Vedic Aryan civilization.

The heart of the Vedic Aryan culture and civilization lies in the Indus River Valley, a land that now straddles the border between Pakistan and North Western India. It is here in the land of the five rivers where the Aryans established their culture, civilization, and poetic tradition. Important as well, there is still much debate about the exact age of the Vedic Aryans. These dates can fluctuate between 3000 and 1700 BC. Such dates can therefore place Aryans as historical contemporaries with the Sumerians. And as previously noted, the Sumerians did have cross-cultural exchange with the Harappans, another ancient Indian civilization. However, what remains obscured by the epochs of history is the relationship between the Harappans and the Vedic Aryans. For example, there is still fervent debate among archeologist and linguists as to whether the Aryans evolved out of the Harappan culture, or whether they were two distinct cultures who interacted in cross-culture exchange (including trade and warfare), or whether the Aryan culture developed independently following the demise of the Harappans. As Keay (2000) explains, “the possibility of some contact between the Aryans and the Harappans can never, of course, be totally dismissed. As the dates for the Late Harappan phase have been slowly pushed forward to around 1700 BC, the gap, if there is one, between the Harappan and the Aryan has closed to perhaps a couple of centuries. Across such a timespan, some web of collective memory could well have spread. [23]” What is most essential for students from a Social Studies standpoint is not whether the Aryans definitively had a connection with the Harappans and consequently Sumerians, but that there is a distinct possibility that these civilizations did interact with one another and that there is still research continuing to further define the relationship between the Aryans, Harappans, and Sumerians. However, regardless of their historical relationship, the poetic tradition of the Sumerians and the Aryans still holds value. For example, *if* the Aryans did not have any direct cross-cultural interaction with the Sumerians, it is nonetheless fascinating that both civilizations highly regarded poetic language as a means to reform and reimagine the world. For if two distinct civilizations from the ancient past discovered similar ‘*truths*’ of poetry independently from one another, then both civilizations and their poetic tradition, in a sense, corroborates the others regardless of whether they directly interacted with one another.

However, a distinct difference between the poetic tradition of the Sumerians and the Aryans is the mode by which they expressed, celebrated, and preserved their poetry. The Aryan tradition was an oral tradition. Early poets/priests would memorize poems line by line and verse by verse. They even placed special emphasis on the syllables of each word. This was particularly important because the ancient Aryans did not write their poetry. Therefore, to preserve their poetic tradition, it was essential that the poems were practiced in perfect recitation. These ritualistic recitations were then passed along from teacher to student and from one generation to the next. Keay (2000) explains of this tradition that

In other words, for at least five hundred years the ten thousand verses of the Rig Veda were learned by heart and handed down by word of mouth. This, however, does not mean that they underwent significant change. Quite the contrary. As the recited accompaniment to the performance of sacrifices, their actual wording, even their intonation and their pronunciation, had to be perfect for the sacrifice to be effective. Conversely, a mangled syllable or an improvised coda could be fatal. Like the magician who forgets the magic formula, the supplicant could then find the sacrifice rebounding to his disadvantage and condemning him to the very disaster he was trying to avert.

This is the world of the young Vedic poet (sage) who composes the poem *Agni and the Young Poet*. In this poem, we will once again find many parallels to the *Exaltation of Inanna*. Foremost among these parallels is to whom the young poet writes as well as the reason why this young poet writes. In this poem, the young poet appeals to a higher power for guidance. The young poet writes to Agni, the Hindu God of fire. More specifically, Agni is a Hindu deity that exists “at three levels: on earth as fire, in the atmosphere as lightning, and in the sky as the sun.” (Agni). And like Enheduanna, the young poet writes to appeal to a favored deity for help. However, here the young poet appeals to Agni for poetic inspiration. This is significant because in the Vedic tradition, poetry, language, and truth were understood to be one and the same. In other words, truth and understanding, whether of the nature of reality, or of an individual themselves, was seen to originate by divine revelation that manifested in poetic language. Bausch (2024) explains that the hymn speaks of the origin of language: “The main idea of this hymn is that language originated when hidden knowledge became manifest, i.e., when meaning was attached to sound.” In other words, the young poet writes a poem to Agni in a plea to bring divine understanding, understanding that the young poet can express further in their poetry. This idea may seem more familiar in the context of Greek mythology where muses, the Greek goddess, were the source for inspiration for the arts, sciences, and literature. Like Agni, the muses were the divine source whom people could appeal to for truth and understanding. It is through them, that one discovers and expresses truth and understanding. In this context, the truth and understanding the young poet seeks is how to become a better poet so that they might know the world better. Moreover, like Enheduanna, the poet begins with doubt, doubt in his ability to find expression in poetry. The young poet writes:

I do not know how to st

retch the thread, nor weave the cloth, nor what they weave as they enter the contest. Whose son could speak here such words that he would be above his father below.

Like Enheduanna, the poet appeals to the divine nature of the Gods above. The poet in this instance appeals to the inspiration of Agni as the young poet sees Agni as the divine inspiration. The poet then continues on

and writes:

He [Agni] is the one who knows how to stretch the thread and weave the cloth; he will speak the right words. He who understands this is the guardian of immortality.

Here the young poet recognizes that Agni is the source of inspired thought and by consequence inspired language. But more importantly, the poet has discovered a deep truth, that is, language, specifically divine poetic language, can express the nature of reality and truth itself. In this sense, “the right words” are immortal. Therefore, the poet recognizes that poetic language is a means to overcome the chaos and destruction of the natural world and a means by which to live beyond. Finally, the poet appreciates the power of Agni and the power of poetic language in a broader context. The poet pleads not only on behalf of himself but his community as well. The young poet continues to write:

All the gods bowed to you in fear, Agni, when you hid yourself in darkness. May Agni of-all save us with his help; may the immortal save us with his help.

Here we can see that the poet does not exalt Agni for just themselves. Rather, the poet has a broader perspective and seeks enlightenment through poetic language as a means to save not just them, but “us”. The poet in a sense recognized that divine inspiration and poetic language have the power to reform and reimagine the world to one that is closer to the ideals of the poet, an ideal that extends beyond themselves and to the community at large. The poet recognized that elevated language is the pathway forward for themselves, and their community. It is the way to immortality. Immortality through language may seem rather trivial. But, in the historical context of this poem, triviality falls away as this young poet’s poem has lived for millennia. The words of the young poet have lived beyond him and in the hearts and minds of the generations that followed. The poem, the words of the poem, and in a sense the poet themselves therefore live with us here and now today.

Together *The Exaltation of Inanna* and *Agni and the Young Poet* provide a perspective onto some of the earliest forms of literacy and poetry. Both of these poems also give a diverse and global perspective, i.e., they give a perspective where literacy is born and developed in Mesopotamia, within the fertile crescent. The story is then extended by the Vedic Aryans who in their own right developed an early and formative poetic tradition. To which extent these traditions influence another remains buried beneath the sands. But regardless, both the Vedic Aryans and the Sumerians prove to be foundational cultures of literacy and poetry in the long history of humanity. Finally, these traditions demonstrate a similar theme. Both these poems show that the Sumerians and the Vedic Aryans believe that poetry was a powerful tool that they could use to both help them understand the world around them and also to reshape the world to bring it closer to the highest ideals of the poet. This idea is arguably still foundational to modern day poets. For example, there is still a strong belief that poetry has the power to articulate a complex, chaotic and beautiful world. Many poets also still believe that poetry can have the power to change the world, to remake the world according to the highest ideals we can divine. In studying the Sumerians and the Vedic Aryans, it is my intention to bring a diverse and global perspective to the classroom and elevate voices from the past, in this case, the very remote past, and show that we are the inheritors of these traditions and can continue in this wonderful tradition whenever we try to understand and even reimagine the world through poetry.

Classroom Activities

Students will begin discovering the first poet(s) in history through role-play. Students will role play as archeologists looking for records of the first books in history. They will be archeologists at the site of Uruk, modern day Iraq. In this role play, students will unearth (that is, they will dig up a tablet from the school playground). The tablet will have the markings of ancient cuneiform. Students will then create an etching of the tablet so they can more easily transport and translate the writing. Students will then use a cipher, to translate the writing to English. For the purposes of this part of the lesson, students will translate a short but essential passage from *The Exaltation of Enheduanna*.

With regard to the *Angi and the Young Poet*, students will also translate late the text from Sanskrit to English. However, students will also discover that the text is much older and that the poem has been passed down from generation to generation through recitation. Students will then listen to a recording of the Vedic poem to develop and understanding of how Vedic Aryan's practice syllabic chants to preserve their language, poetry, and beliefs for centuries upon centuries.

Reading according to Literary Theory:

As literary theory is a focus of the pedagogy, each reading of each poem will correspond to a lens of literary theory. The lenses for this unit will be: New Criticism, Historicism, and Reader Response. Notably the language of literary theory will be highly differentiated for students. For example, New Criticism corresponds to "Close Reading." Close Reading is a reading strategy students are currently familiar with. That is, students know that in a Close Reading, they are reading to determine the meaning of the text itself. In other words, they are reading to find meaning out of *only* the words on the page. This strategy will be made explicit by explaining to students that there are different ideas (lenses) that we have when reading to find meaning in a text. This can also be made fun for students by comparing it to reading with different pairs of glasses.

The second read will be focused through a historical lens. Here, students will dig deeper beyond the close reading lens and be reading to understand the historical context of the text, i.e., students will use supporting texts to determine when, how, why, and by whom the text was written. This lens will help students build a wider understanding of each poem and in turn deepen students understanding. Finally, students will read each poem a third time. The third read will be through a reader response lens. This again is another reading strategy that students are familiar with as we often encourage students to make "text-to-self" connections. Once again this will be made explicit to students by explaining that the ideas of how to read a text, whether we are reading to understand what the text itself says, the historical context, or how students themselves connect to a text, brings forth meaning that could remain hidden if they only used one lens. Finally, this progression of reading theories is designed to support students in developing their poem. This will be a poem in the Sumerian and Vedic tradition where students write in poetic language to express their admiration as well as an ideal, they see, or wish to see in the world.

Discussing According to Philosophy for Children (P4C)

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is another integral part of the pedagogy. P4C will be practiced after students have completed both readings and their own writing for the unit. The philosophical discussion will be a whole-class discussion where students express ideas and beliefs that they have explored in the unit in a community of collaborative inquiry. In this discussion, students will use information that they have learned to give their

opinions and essential questions. The questions are as follows:

1. What is more lasting, language that is written and preserved in stone, or language that is memorized and passed down from generation to generation?
2. Does poetry have the power to change the hearts and minds of those you care about?
3. Does poetry have the power to change your own heart and mind? Why, or why not?
4. Does poetry have the power to change your city, country, or world? Why, or why not?
5. Does language have the power to remake the world into a better world? Why, or why not?

Other class activities

1. Complete the poem (there are segments of Enheduanna's poem that are missing. During one activity, give students the chance to complete the poem. This could possibly align with a 'historical' lens because ideal students would imagine that they are Enheduanna and be writing it from her perspective. This can also be replicated with *Agni and the Young Poet*

Culminating Activity:

Students can choose from the following writing prompts. Each writing prompt will be both written and recorded on a clay tablet as well as memorized and share with family members.

1. Think of someone you love and care about. Write a poem that explains what qualities you love about them so much. Also be sure to explain how and why they make the world a better place.
2. Write a poem for your school/city/country. Be sure to explain the qualities that you love and also be sure to explain how they make the world a better place.

Appendix

Relevant District of Columbia Standards

Common Core English Language Arts Standards (4th Grade):

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1 Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., Herculean).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.5 Explain major differences between poems, drama, and prose, and refer to the structural elements of poems (e.g., verse, rhythm, meter) and drama (e.g., casts of characters, settings,

descriptions, dialogue, stage directions) when writing or speaking about a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.6 Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrations.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.7 Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.9 Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events (e.g., the quest) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, in the grades 4-5 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

Social Studies Standards (4th Grade)

A note with regards to the social studies standards: 4th grade social studies standards primarily focus on the ancient history of the Americas. While this unit focuses on the ancient history of The Fertile Crescent and the Indus River Valley, these locations and the corresponding civilizations provide the setting for critical historical events that many the following standards address. For example, standard 4.2 asks students to “analyze how physical geography (e.g., natural resources, waterways, landforms)” influenced the choices that people make. The development of agriculture in both Mesopotamia as well as the Punjab heavily influenced the choices people in these regions made. More specifically, the development of agriculture directly influenced the development of writing. In other words, the development of agriculture allowed for the division of labor where early scribes developed the first writing systems. The argumentation of this curriculum is that students can explore this standard in the context of these regions to understand how human civilization first developed writing systems as a consequence of the development of agriculture. This is arguably foundational knowledge for students to understand, and develop that occurred before the development of writing systems in the Americas.

4.1

Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different kinds of evidence (e.g., archeological evidence, artifacts, oral history, secondary sources) to understand events and life in the past.

4.2

Analyze how physical geography (e.g., natural resources, waterways, landforms) influences the choices people make and how people impact the natural environment.

4.4

Compare different theories about how and when people began to migrate around the globe and populate the Americas (e.g., land-bridge theory, Beringia, Yana Rhinoceros Horn Site and evidence of mammoth hunting, coastal-route theory, Clovis sites).

4.5

Compare the development of agricultural practices of Indigenous peoples across the Americas, including the Hohokam cultivation of corn, beans, squash and cotton.

4.7

Analyze the development of physical documentation in the early Americas, such as the writing and iconographic systems of Indigenous peoples across the Americas to make claims about historic societies (e.g., Cave of the Painted Rock in current-day Brazil, the writing system developed by the Maya, glyphs of the Grand Canyon).

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