

# Poetry Out Loud: Reading, Reciting, and Responding to Poetry

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*How do poems grow? They grow out of your life.” Robert Penn Warren*

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## **Rationale**

In many secondary English classrooms students are often asked to read and mine poems for sound devices, images, rhymes, rhyme schemes, and rhythms. In fact, major emphasis is often placed on interpreting and analyzing “the poem” for the author’s meaning. In other words, writing about a poem to determine meaning takes precedence over reading and reciting poems to determine meaning. Inherent in this didactic approach to teaching poetry is the tacit belief that poetry analysis is the primary determinant to communicate the poems meaning. This limited and counterintuitive methodology deprives students of their unique ability to hear the poets’ images and see their words. Words that are rife with breathlessness, subjectivity, emotions, and personality! Words that capture everyday life, during lunchtime, such as, *The Day Lady Died*, by Frank O’Hara<sup>i</sup>. O’Hara elegantly captures a day, time stood still, to honor, the life of legendary blues singer Billie Holliday. How did he communicate this momentous occasion? He simply used his---- voice!

In poetry, voice refers to a poets distinctive qualities and style. Voice includes sensibility and attitude as well as writing techniques. Voice expresses a persona; the idea that the author is present in the poem as a speaker, narrator, or even a character. A poets voice may be sincere and direct, or it could be an imaginative creation to complement the text. Poets also differentiate scenes, human frailties, and “sounds on the street” by giving them each an identifiable voice. Diction, line, stanza, verse structure, and theme all contribute to a recognizable voice. Yet, Al Filreis<sup>ii</sup>, predicts, that so often the sound and voice of a poem are overlooked or ignored in pedagogical approaches to teaching in poetry instruction. This critical oversight is demonstrated in the following example.

A typical high-school essay question will read like the following:

*Directions: Select a poem that you have read. What is the meaning of the poem? What techniques does the poet use to reveal this meaning? Techniques include the selection of the speaker, sound devices, imagery, and the use of figurative language. Remember to*

*show the connection between the techniques of the poem and its meaning. Also, cite evidence from the text to support your answer.*

Where is inclusion of the poem's voice and distinctive sound(s)? It's noticeably absent from the assignment---why---perhaps, because teaching close collaborative readings of a poem have not been modeled in the above classroom. Thus, it's important to note that an essay question from a classroom, which utilizes close collaborative readings of poems, would read like the following example:

*Directions: Select a poem that we have completed a close collaborative read on. Consider the poem's voice. Who is the poem's speaker? How would you characterize the poem's tone? Listen to the sound of the poem. Does the poem use alliteration? Assonance? Rhyme? How do these elements enhance the poem's form? Consider what the connotations of the words reveal about the poem? Remember to use the guidelines for annotating a poem to support your answer.*

The second question is reflective of a more comprehensive approach that is designed to teach students poetry in a fun, exciting, and memorable way.

The central element here is that the information is discovered through having each student take a line, verse, chorus (including punctuation marks) and elaborate on what they hear, see, or feel in response. Initially, students will not be comfortable with multiple readings and constant dissection of text but they will grow comfortable as they are guided to attend their remarks to what's "inside of the poem." This method of teaching poems enables many students to participate in the poem as opposed to a select few.

This curriculum unit will survey an eclectic collection of poems and poets clustered around voice, place, freedom, historical poets, as well as famous women poets. The selection of poets and poems are designed to introduce students to a diverse group of poets, poems, and poetic forms. In particular this collection will increase their poetic vocabulary and their poetic interpretation through a series of learning activities that include close collaborative readings, critical writing assignments, recitation, and personal reflection. Furthermore, a portion of this unit employs interconnectivity to illuminate connections between the poems used that dovetail with texts being read by students throughout the year.

Another component of this unit reflects poems thematically grouped (why do we celebrate place) as in the lesson *Whose Singing America*, which focuses on "songs" about the American experience by poets Walt Whitman, *I Hear America Singing*<sup>iii</sup>, Langston Hughes, *I, Too, Sing America*<sup>iv</sup>, Elizabeth Alexander, *Praise Song for the Day*<sup>v</sup>, and James Weldon Johnson, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*<sup>vi</sup>. Yet, another lesson, *Letters to a Young Poet*, ask students to select a favorite poem from a historical poet whose "poetic" voice speaks to them. In this lesson students write letters to a **young** Emily Dickinson, to a **young** William Carlos Williams, to a **young** Gwendolyn Brooks, to a **young** Robert Frost, or to a **young** Walt Whitman--- asking questions about a poem, how it was written, and if, there were any societal or personal circumstances which influenced the construction of the poem.

The capstone project for this unit is a spoken word poetry café. This is an opportunity for students to perform for a live audience as part of a competition. This form of poetry heightens students' sustained interest in poetry while empowering them to express themselves on social issues that deeply impact their lives. *Poetry Out Loud* is primarily designed for students in 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade and its lessons can be taught daily or weekly at the teachers' discretion. By the end of the unit students will be able to independently and in small groups perform close readings of many different types of poems with annotations. Moreover, students will be able to develop a thesis statement for a written analysis of a poem and write their own poetry. Finally, students will share personal responses and interpretations, while enjoying the power of creative thinking that poetry encourages and demands.

The Common Core Standards<sup>vii</sup> are very explicit about what the 21<sup>st</sup> century student needs to know and be able to do to **thrive** in post-secondary education and the workplace. The focus is on results-rather than how students arrived at their destination. Thus, the Common Core allows for a variety of teaching methods and many different classroom approaches. Yet, the challenge for teachers is how to engage students in complex literary and informational texts without a significant amount of help from the teacher. Teaching poetry as a complex text more than aptly meets this challenging requirement. Furthermore, teaching poetry through close readings with collaborative strategies teaches students to form habits of mind to achieve literacies outside of the English curriculum.

In particular, teaching poetry affords students valuable opportunities for honing reading comprehension skills, writing skills, speaking, listening, and language skills. Many times to understand a poem completely, the reader must understand every word in that poem, which means that as students study poetry they are constantly enriching and expanding their vocabulary. Plus understanding grammar is often essential in unlocking the structures of a poem; so, students learn to recognize various types of unforgettable sentences and phrases and the varied uses of punctuation. Next, through poetry students also learn to recognize language patterns and to identify and interpret the function of similes and metaphors and other poetic devices.

Poetry also teaches students that language is holistic---that how something is said ---is only a part of what is being said; because, the literal meaning of words, along with *voice, inflection, and rhythm* are another part of the whole meaning. Likewise, poetry lets us see the world through the eyes of "others" while equipping us to imaginatively and resiliently face the joys and challenges of our lives.

To achieve these results a Participatory Literacy Community<sup>viii</sup> will be established to integrate students out of school literacy practices such as spoken word, rap battles, and poetry club writing into the classroom. According to Fisher, participatory literacy communities are organized around aspects of literacy such as spoken word poetry, open mic events, writers' collectives, and book clubs. Fisher further asserts that these chosen literacy spaces are grounded in the philosophy "that everyone has something important to say."

Indeed, in the culture of many urban educational settings a lot of poetry writing and performance of poetry frequently center on identity, voice, and empowerment. This triumvirate is usually rooted in students yearning to tell their individual stories of destruction, desire, and interpersonal dynamics brings great joy or deep sorrow. Whatever the outcome may be for the student personally, noted social change activist, Shor,<sup>ix</sup> asserts that academic skills are always at the core of these communities. As proof she states that not only are participants aware of the importance of acquiring the language and skills needed to communicate with a wider audience (outside of the classroom) but they are also committed to pushing the boundaries of literacy. Overall, the speaking aspect of (PLC's) gives writers, readers and speakers a platform to expose and access multiple experiences while developing a particular kind of hearing.

Indeed, those that have an ear to hear will know recitation is about conveying a poem's essence primarily with one's voice. In this way, recitation is closer to the art of oral interpretation versus dramatic performance of monologues. Since students normally find it challenging to convey the meaning of a poem without acting it out, learning how to develop a strong recitation will position them to powerfully internalize poetry as a means of comprehending these rich, complex informational texts.

## **Objectives**

- Students will read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of different cultures of the United States and the world.
- Students will read a wide range of poems from many periods to build an understanding of the many dimensions that shape the human experience.
- Students will apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate and appreciate poems.
- Students will adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g. sentence structure, context, graphics, rhyme) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences for different purposes.
- Students will develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
- Students will participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
- Students will use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (learning, persuasion, argument, reflection, exchange of information)

## **Strategies**

### **TPSFASTT (Analyzing a Poem)**

**Title:** Examine the title before reading the poem. Sometimes the title will give you a clue about the content of the poem. In some cases, the title will give you crucial information that will help you understand a major idea within the poem. What questions do you have about the poem?

**Paraphrase:** Paraphrase the literal action within the poem. At this point, resist the urge to jump to interpretation. A failure to understand what happens literally leads to an interpretive misreading. What is the “on the line” meaning of the poem?

**Speaker:** Who is the speaker in this poem? Remember to always distinguish the speaker from the poet. In some cases they might be the same, but the speaker and the poet can be entirely different.

**Figurative Language:** Examine the poem for language that is not used literally. This would include, but is not limited to, literary devices such as imagery, symbolism, metaphor, allusion, and sound devices (alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, consonance, rhyme). What is the meaning “between the lines” and “beyond the lines?” How does this information add to the poems meaning?

**Attitude:** Observe both the speaker’s and the poet’s attitude (**TONE**)  
Tone means the speaker’s attitude towards the subject of the poem. This means that you must discern the subject of the poem. Also keep in mind the speaker’s attitude toward self and other characters, as well as other character’s attitudes.

**Shifts:** Note *shifts* in speaker and attitude. Shifts can be indicated in a number of ways including the occasion of the poem (time and place), key turn words, punctuation, stanza divisions, changes in line of stanza length, and anything else that indicates that something has changed or a question is being answered.

**Title:** Examine the title again, this time on an interpretive level. How does the title relate to the meaning of the poem? Does your understanding of the title change? How?

**Theme:** determine what the poet is saying about life and the human experience. Next, list what the poem is about (subject); then determine what the poet is saying about each of those subjects (theme). Remember, theme must be expressed as a complete sentence. What is the poet’s overall message?

### **Annotating a Poem**

Annotating is the act of marking up a text to bring attention to words, phrases, and structure that have impact on the overall mood and meaning of a poem.

### **Steps to Annotate a Poem**

1. Initial reading of the poem. Write any questions that pop into your head while doing the initial reading. Read the poem again and listen for natural breaks in the poem---mark them in the text.
2. Identify any words that you do not understand and look them up. Paraphrase the definitions of the words.

3. Discover and mark rhyme scheme using a new letter for each end rhyme within the poem.
4. Count the amount of syllables in each line and mark the number at the end of the line.
5. Identify figurative language used within the poem. Think about the literal meaning of each figurative device and why the poet used it.
6. Identify sound devices such as alliteration, assonance, and consonance. How does they impact the text?
7. Identify text that is repeated. Is there any reason the author would repeat the text?
8. Look closely at punctuation. Does it reveal anything about the speaker of the poem? (Example: Does it make them seem rambling, confident, or nervous?)
9. Circle any words that are impactful or interesting. Determine connotative meaning. Are there any patterns? What does the pattern reveal about the speaker's attitude towards the topic?
10. Reread the poem. You must take time to seriously consider each word and its place within the poem as a whole,
11. If you are still having a hard time understanding the poem, repeat the annotation process!
12. Consider the natural progression of the poem. What is its purpose? What is the tone and style of the poem?

**Questions you should be able to answer after annotating a poem:**

1. What is the theme of the poem?
2. What kind of strategies does the author use to point out the theme?
3. What is the mood of the poem?
4. What kind of strategies does the author use to make the mood clear?
5. How does figurative language impact the poem as a whole?
6. How does the punctuation/number of syllables/ rhyme scheme impact the poem as a whole?

As you research, poems and poets, you will discover that particular poets are known for certain techniques or styles. If a poem follows that trend or veers from it is important to your understanding of the poem. An example of an annotated poem, *Digging*<sup>x</sup>, Seamus Henry, is below, so please consider it a model<sup>xi</sup> for your annotative work.

Tone: Celebratory  
Admiration

Form: Heistorm  
Broken down resembles sonnet  
manual labor digging with the mind?

Digging = extended metaphor of digging and roots.  
Heaney digs into his roots, his heritage

Language: technical  
colloquial  
conversational  
monosyllables

### Digging

Pen fat with what? Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests; as snug as a gun.

home  
Power  
Violence?  
Protection  
A natural extension?  
rasping connotes a living thing

Speaker - male  
patriarchal traditions  
reverent attitude

### Memory #1

his window - ownership threshold to his heritage  
Under my window a clean rasping sound  
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:  
My father, digging. I look down

remembering / to look down on has negative con. but the poem is positive + celebratory

In rhythm =  
In touch with  
In agreement with

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds  
Bends low, comes up twenty years away  
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills  
Where he was digging.

Connections with the past, former generations, traditions survival nourishment

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft  
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.  
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep  
To scatter new potatoes that we picked  
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

homely  
- in control, precise  
Skill, pride, dignity  
- bragging rights

Symbol: peat  
living roots  
digging  
squat pen  
Why squat?  
crouching ownership

Admiration  
colloquial language

### Transition

By God, the old man could handle a spade,  
Just like his old man.

### Memory #2

My grandfather could cut more turf in a day  
Than any other man on Toner's bog.  
Once I carried him milk in a bottle  
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up  
To drink it, then fell to right away  
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods  
Over his shoulder, digging down and down  
For the good turf. Digging.

worked hard - work ethics  
strength - technique

### Turning Point heritage

The cold smell of potato mold, the squelch and slap  
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge  
Through living roots awaken in my head.  
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

- negative images traditions / livelihoods destroyed  
NO longer available  
an awakening of what? Follow in what way?

### Closure - Acceptance

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests.  
I'll dig with it.

- weapon - tool

Seamus Heaney

Follows tradition of fathers using the tools available to him.

Reminders of home + hearth  
rests, snug, nestled

### 2 separate memories:

Father digging potatoes  
Grand father digging turf - peat bogs

The pen is mightier than the sword.

Onomatopoeia  
rasping gravelly  
squelch slap

## Close Reading of a Poem

What is a close reading? A close reading is an oral method where students and the teacher engage in a sustained analysis of poetry that focuses on significant details or patterns, which examine some aspect of the poem's form or meaning.

By learning how to close read a poem you can significantly increase both your understanding and enjoyment of the poem. You may also increase your ability to write convincingly about the poem.

The following exemplar uses one of William Shakespeare's sonnets (#116) as an example. The close read method might be used on many different poetic forms. This exemplar first presents the entire sonnet and then presents a close reading of the poem. Read the sonnet a few times to get a feel for it and then move down to the close reading.

### CXVI

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove;  
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth unknown, although his height be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come:  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
If this be error and upon me proved,  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

## Performing the close read

CXVI.

The number indicates the sonnet's place in a cycle or sequence of sonnets. Although you may examine the poem on its own terms, realize that it is connected to the other poems in the cycle.

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds*

*Admit impediments.*

**Form** is one of the first things you should note about a poem. Here it is easy to see that the poem is fourteen lines long and follows a rhyme scheme. The rhyming of words makes a connection. The first rhyme combination is "minds/finds." What do you make of this pairing of words?

The first phrase of the poem flows into the next line of the poem. This is called enjambment, and though it is often made necessary by the form of the verse, it also serves to break up the reader's expectations. In this case, the word "impediments" is placed directly before the confusing phrase "love is not love," itself an enjambment (v an end-stopped lines). How does this disconnection between phrase and line affect the reader? How does it emphasize or change the lines around it?

*Love is not love*

*Which alters when its alteration finds;*

*Or bends with the remover to remove;*

Notice all of the **repetition** or use of similar words in the last two and a half lines. When **close reading** a poem, especially a fixed verse form like the sonnet, remember the budget of the poem: there's only so much space at the poet's disposal. This makes repetition very important, because it places even more emphasis on the repeated word than does prose. What does the repetition in these lines suggest? Also, note that we've come to the end of our first quatrain (four-line stanza): usually the first stanza of a sonnet proposes the problem for the poem. What is this problem?

*O no! it is an ever-fixed mark*

*That looks on tempest and is never shaken;*

*It is the star to every wandering bark,*

*Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.*

The next quatrain gives a pair of metaphors for the “thesis” argued in the first stanza. Look carefully at these images as they relate to the subject of the poem. What actual objects do they describe? Do they bear any similarity to each other? Is there a connection between the use of “ever-” in line 5 and “every” in line seven?

The **image** in lines 5-6 is complex: What is the “mark” Shakespeare is talking about and how does it “look?” A peek in the Oxford English Dictionary can help.

*Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks*

*Within his bending sickle’s compass come:*

*Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,*

*But bears it out even to the edge of doom.*

The third and final quatrain uses all of its four lines to expand a single metaphor. Consider how this metaphor relates to the previous ones, and why so much space in the poem is devoted to it, especially as it relates to the poem’s argument. Also, look at similarity of phrasing between line 9’s “rosy lips and cheeks” and line 11’s “brief hours and weeks.” They certainly rhyme, but how does the similar construction affect the reading?

*If this be error and upon me proved,*

*I never writ, nor no man ever loved.*

This is the closing couplet (two-line stanza), meant to “resolve” the problem addressed in the poem. Look carefully at the way the couplet starts. Does it provide resolution or not? Note that the first person (“me/I”) has returned (last seen in the first line of the poem). Consider also the contradictions in the final statement. Have we seen something similar in the poem before? Where and why are the connections made?

Overall, the goals of performing a close reading are: to learn about language and rhetorical techniques, gain a deeper understanding of the poem, and understand how a writer crafts their work. The above close read has achieved all three goals.

## Classroom Activities

### Lesson #1: What is Poetry

**Overview:** Students often question what poetry is and why it's important. So, the poets included in this lesson address these questions from their perspectives as poets. Each poet has a different take on what makes poetry; therefore, students will learn from what each poet has written, debate the various perspectives, and create their own personal definitions. To solidify their understanding of why they think poetry is important students will write an opinion piece for the student newspaper defending their views.

**Objective:** SWBAT analyze and synthesize multiple perspectives to develop a definition of poetry and why it's important to study

**Anticipatory Set:** Quick Write: Where do you find poetry? How do you know that it's poetry? Write a brief description of poetry to an elementary school student.

**Poems:** *Ars Poetica* by Archibald MacLeish, *Poetry* by Marianne Moore, *Kidnap Poem*, by Nikki Giovanni, *Poetry*, by Pablo Neruda

**Modeling:** Teacher will model the process of close reading by having half of the class divide up one poem by lines, stanza, or phrases while the other half takes notes on the process they are observing. Then the other half of the class will perform a close reading while the first half takes notes.

**Guided Practice:** Divide class into groups of 4 students each, give each group a copy of one of the four poems, ask each group to identify a recorder, reporter, and facilitator to make sure each group member speaks up. The facilitator asks:

- One person to read the poem out loud to the group
- Another person to read specific stanzas of the poem out loud
- What strikes you in the poem?
- What does the poet think is important in poetry?
- Is there anything that's not important? Why?
- What images does the poet use to make his/her point? Give examples.
- How do these images add to your understanding? How do they make you feel?
- How does the poet feel about poetry? How do you know?

The recorder takes notes on what the group says and the reporter shares with the class to check for accuracy and understanding of the groups' ideas.

**Check for Understanding:** Summary Writing- Write a précis that states what poetry is and why it's important, and how you arrived at your definition.

**Independent Practice:** Divide students into 4 groups with each group representing a poet. Each group will construct a well-developed argument to represent the ideas of their

poet around the following questions: What is poetry? Why is it important? What do you need to know to write poetry? Student teams will debate representing their poet's point-of-view.

**Homework:** Write an opinion piece talking about why poetry is important. Use evidence from the four poems read earlier. Remember the opinion piece will be published in the student newspaper.

## **Lesson #2: Who's Singing America**

**Overview:** Place is a dimension that is often written about in poetry to draw the reader into a shared experience. The poems in this lesson offer snapshots of daily life at a time when they were written. Each poem creates a sense of place in "America," a landscape of the consciousness of diverse Americans. As students closely read, have them consider the ways in which poets give shape and color to a place, real or imaginary, and in the process provide a map of their own consciousness. This lesson asks students to look deeply at life around them and use rich language to describe what they see and feel, while collaboratively reading the four poems.

**Objective:** SWBAT increase their skills of observation and perception to write precisely about their surroundings.

**Anticipatory Set:** Think –Pair-Share with a partner to answer and discuss the following questions:

- How would you define the concept of place?
- What kinds of places are there?
- What is the importance of place in human experience?
- How do history and geography influence our relationship to place?
- How does the human relationship to place affect one's moods, feelings, or identities?

**Poems:** *I hear America Singing* by Walt Whitman, *I, Too, Sing America* by Langston Hughes, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, by James Weldon Johnson, *Praise Song for the Day*, by Elizabeth Alexander

**Modeling:** Teacher will model the process of close reading by having half of the class divide up one poem by lines, stanza, or phrases while the other half takes notes on the student responses to the teachers guiding questions. Then the other half of the class will perform a close reading while the first half takes notes on student responses.

**Guided Practice:** Divide class into groups of 4 students each, give each group a copy of one of the four poems, ask each group to identify a recorder, reporter, and facilitator to make sure each group member speaks up. The facilitator asks:

- One person to read the poem out loud to the group

- Another person to read specific stanzas of the poem out loud
- What strikes you in the poem?
- Who is “singing” in the poem?
- What does the poet mean by singing/lifting every voice? Why?
- What do you think the poem is about? Give examples.
- Create two questions about the poem that you would like to pose to other members of the class.

The recorder takes notes on what the group says and the reporter shares with the class (via chart paper) to check for accuracy and understanding of the groups’ ideas.

**Check for Understanding:** Students will their responses to the questions in the anticipatory set using information gleaned from the close readings of the poems.

**Independent Practice:** Divide class into groups of 4 students each, give each group an opportunity to look around the room and describe the classroom in detail, ask each group to identify a recorder, reporter, and facilitator to make sure each group member speaks up. The facilitator then asks:

- Each student to look out of a window and watch a person, or people carefully and write descriptive notes about what they see them doing.
- The students should capture the following levels of what they see from the ground level, foot level, waist level, eye level, top of the person’s head, above the person’s head.
- How do they think that person feels about what he is doing? What in their description contributes to that feeling?
- Write in detail about what you see and your overall reaction.
- Once each group member is finished a pair-share can happen in the group.

**Homework:** Write a short poem describing the poet including how and why they sing about “America.” Poems can be about a song or singing and should include how the poet feels about their people.

### **Lesson #3: Letters to a Young Poet**

**Overview:** Often students do not consider the fact that many poets they study were once young just like they are now. In fact, many of the poets did not become famous or a part of history until after their death. From their youth onward these poets were developing their writers voice through diction (word choice), style, (word order) and subject. Thus, this lesson aims to teach students the importance of listening for a poets “voice” while reading their poems. If a poem remains with us it is often because what has made the poem significant and memorable is we are recalling the poets “voice.”

**Objective:** SWBAT identify poets who poetic voices speak deeply to him.

**Anticipatory Set:** Turn and Talk: Write some quick associations you have with the word “voice.” Turn and talk to your neighbor about your associations. Next, make a sound, without using words, to express how you are feeling at the moment. Your neighbor must describe the sound in writing and tell the “voicer” what they just heard. Repeat the process.

**Poems:** *Miracles* by Walt Whitman, *Dream Variations* by Langston Hughes, *It’s all I have to bring today* by Emily Dickinson, *Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening* by Robert Frost, *The Red Wheelbarrow* by William Carlos Williams, *The Bean Eaters/We Real Cool* by Gwendolyn Brooks

**Modeling:** Teacher will model the process of close reading using the Gwendolyn Brooks poems. Next, teacher will conduct a whole class discussion about what a person’s voice can tell us with and without words. Characteristics of each are recorded during this discussion.

**Guided Practice:** Students are divided into groups of four each and they have recorded the characteristics of voice (on the board) before they close read the remaining poems. The recorder will complete a T-Chart for each poem that is labeled (on the right) what jumps out at you/(on the left) why they think its important to the poets voice/why its important to them as a reader.

**Check for Understanding:** Whip Around. Using the following prompts:

- Right now I feel.... using only a hand gesture
- Right now I feel... using only their voice with no words
- Right now I feel ...using their gesture, voice, and descriptive words

**Independent Practice:** Students will remain in their groups and share their choices on the T-Chart with the rest of their group.

- Students will explain why they relate to this poets voice by giving examples from the text of the poems.
- Provide constructive comments and questions to the presenters
- Students will create a series of questions to ask the poet about the poem and how it was written

**Homework:** Use your notes to write a letter to the young poet from the grouping and explain why the poet spoke to you. Also, ask the poet questions about the voice or voices of the poem and how they wrote it.

#### **Lesson #4: The Tone Map**

**Overview:** Many assert that you can paint a picture with a thousand words; but I would say that many of the words used to paint a picture are related to tone. The rich imagery, which often accompanies a narrative of emotions, is usually communicated through a

series of moods and tones of voice. This lesson is designed to teach students to learn to name the tones of voice that a poem moves through. Subsequently, they will learn to describe mixed emotions, such as sweet sorrow” and to distinguish subtle shifts in tone and mood. The greatest benefit to students is when they perform spoken word, recitations, or in general they will speak more accurately and confidently about any piece of writing.

**Objective:** SWBAT mark visually where and when shifts of tone occur as they listen to poems being recited. SWBAT accurately map a poem independently using precision.

**Anticipatory Set:** Quick Write In 2 minutes write down every phrase or word you know that uses the word tone. If you have a definition, write that down, too. Now, scan your tone list (appendix) and circle ten words you don’t know to look up the meaning on a laptop or cellphone.

**Poems:** *Jenny Kissed Me* by James Henry Lehigh Hunt, *The World Is Too Much with Us* by William Wordsworth, *To Be or not to be*, Hamlet’s speech, William Shakespeare

**Modeling:** Teacher will introduce the idea that many poems “tell a story of emotions” and spoken word poetry and recitations, rise and fall on tonal shifts. Next, an audio of *Jenny Kissed Me* will be played three times asking students to mark (words or phrases) where they hear mood or shifts in tone of voice. Afterward, teacher will help students brainstorm names from the tone map for each tone they heard.

**Guided Practice:** Students will combine terms if needed, like stunned disbelief, horrified disbelief, to understand that emotions always blend and run into each other like the lines in a poem. Next, students will complete the tone map for *Jenny Kissed Me* using their notes.

**Check for Understanding:** Compare your tone map to the following and note differences. Discuss tones in the map with students.

Section	Tone
Jenny kissed me when we met,	Fondness
Jumping from the chair she sat in	Amused, affectionate
Time, you thief, who love to get Sweets into your list	Still amused by time, not Jenny, growing weary....
<b>Put that in!</b>	Disdainful
<b>Say I'm weary</b>	Shrugging, indifferent
<b>Say I'm sad</b>	Candid sadness
<b>Say that health and wealth have missed me</b>	Light, regretful
<b>Say I'm growing old</b>	Deep regret

**Independent Practice:** Teacher will provide three different audio recordings of Hamlet's, to be or not to be speech. Students will note the contrasting tones they hear in the different readings. Which reading speaks to you personally? Why?

**Homework:** Use the copy of *The World Is Too Much With Us* to mark where the tonal shifts occur and then draft a tone map of the poem using the tone list.

### Lesson #5: Spoken Word Poetry

**Overview:** Spoken word poetry is a performance-based poetry. It allows teachers to offer students a wide enough selection of poetry for each student to find something that personally connects to his experience. Rather than the teacher explaining a poem to the whole class that speaks to a "few;" students who choose and perform a poem are immersed in an art form that can speak to others. This type of poetry is an excellent tool to help a students better say what he feels, thinks, or has lived through.

**Objective:** SWBAT embrace the power of poetry that is written to be spoken and apply various literary techniques in their performance.

**Anticipatory Set:** Create a word web with the term spoken word poetry in the center and jot down what immediately comes to mind on the spikes of the web. As you watch the performances of spoken word artists see if your associations ring true.

**Spoken Word Poets (You-Tube):** Daniel Beaty, *Knock-Knock*, Jamaica Osorio, *Equilibrium Spoken Word at the Loft*, Erykah Badu, *Friends, Fans and Artists*, *Poems: Still I Rise/Equality*, Maya Angelou, *Always There Are the Children*, by Nikki Giovanni

**Modeling:** Teacher will model the process of close reading by having half of the class read *Still I Rise*, and dividing it by lines, stanza, or phrases while the other half reads, *Equality*, each group will annotate the poems and take notes on the student responses to

the teachers guiding questions. Class will draw connections between poetry that is written to be spoken and poetry that is written to be read.

**Guided Practice:** Students will watch the performances of spoken word artists Beaty, Osorio, and Badu and pay attention to words, phrases, and gestures that stand out when they hear the poem/performance. During the second viewing, students will listen for visual images they see in the poem and draw the images. During the third viewing students will create a mini tone map and notes on the poets pitch, volume, and rate of speech. Class will discuss student findings.

**Check for Understanding:** Make connections between the spoken word poems and other works of literature we have read or are reading.

**Independent Practice:** With a partner read *Always there are the Children*, and annotate the poem after performing a close reading. Be ready to present your findings to the class.

**Homework:** Practice your recitation of Nikki Giovanni's, *Ego Tripping*, as preparation for writing a spoken word version of your own.

### **Annotated Bibliography**

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<sup>i</sup> O'Hara Frank. *The Day Lady Died, The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, 1995

A great collection of poems by an author who recorded the sights and sounds

<sup>ii</sup> Filreis, Al. Professor of English, Kelly Writers House, University of Pennsylvania, 2013.

Filreis is a treasure-trove of knowledge, humor, and lover of literature and poetry that he generously shares with students.

<sup>iii</sup> Whitman, Walt. *I hear America Singing, Literature: Reading Reacting, Writing*, Fifth Edition, Kirsznner and Mandell, 2004.

Stories, poems, and plays that represent a balance of old and new as well as a wide variety of nations, cultures, and writing styles.

<sup>iv</sup> Hughes, Langston. *I too Sing America, Literature: Reading Reacting, Writing*, Fifth Edition, Kirsznner and Mandell, 2004.

Stories, poems, and plays that represent a balance of old and new as well as a wide variety of nations, cultures, and writing styles.

<sup>v</sup> Alexander, Elizabeth. *Praise Song for the Day, Literature: Reading Reacting, Writing*, Fifth Edition, Kirsznner and Mandell, 2004.

Stories, poems, and plays that represent a balance of old and new as well as a wide variety of nations, cultures, and writing styles.

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<sup>vi</sup> Johnson-Weldon, James. *Lift Every Voice and Sing, Literature: Reading Reacting, Writing*, Fifth Edition, Kirszner and Mandell, 2004.

Stories, poems, and plays that represent a balance of old and new as well as a wide variety of nations, cultures, and writing styles.

<sup>vii</sup> Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. 2010, [corestandards.org](http://corestandards.org)

<sup>viii</sup> Fisher, Maisha.T. (2003) Open mics and open minds: Spoken Word Poetry in African Diaspora Participatory Literacy Communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 73 (3), 362-389

A journal article that provides an in-depth look at the skills and teacher pedagogy used to teach spoken word poetry.

<sup>ix</sup> Shor, I. *Empowering Education: Critical teaching for social change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

<sup>x</sup> Henry, Seamus. *Digging, Literature: Reading Reacting, Writing*, Fifth Edition, Kirszner and Mandell, 2004.

Stories, poems, and plays that represent a balance of old and new as well as a wide variety of nations, cultures, and writing styles

<sup>xi</sup> Online Writing Lab, Perdue University, 2008.

This online writing lab is a great site that models various types of writing and has tutorials for all types of writing.

## Appendix

### The Tone List

Here is a list of tones that students may find in poems. It is not comprehensive, and students should be encouraged to add to it as needed; as the teacher, you should also feel free to trim it to suit your students and class level. Keep in mind that the longer the list is, the more nuanced and powerful your students' vocabulary will be.

Abashed	Bantering	Calm	Dreamy	Excited	Happy
Abrasive	Benevolent	Candid	Dramatic	Entranced	Harsh
Abusive	Bitter	Childish	Detached	Fanciful	Ironic
Accepting	Bored	Cold	Defamatory	Flippant	Joking
Adoring	Brisk	Critical	Disdainful	Fond	Joyful
Admiring	Bored	Clipped	Dramatic	Forceful	Respectful
Aghast	Boastful	Curt	Dry	Frightened	Sarcastic
Awe-struck	Bantering	Coy	Doubtful	Giddy	Zealous

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## Common Core Standards

The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers.

### Reading Standards for *Literature* grades 9-10 (Key Ideas and Details)

1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text

### Reading Standards for Literature grades 9-10 (Craft and Structure)

1. Determine the meanings of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g. how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone)
2. Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it and manipulate time (e.g. pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

### Reading Standards for Literature grades 9-10 (Integration of Knowledge and Ideas)

1. Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g. recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text.

### Reading Standards for *Informational* Text grades 9-10 (Key Ideas and Details)

1. Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

### Reading Standards for *Informational* Text grades 9-10 (Craft and Structure)

1. Analyze in detail how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text (e.g., a section or chapter)
2. Determine and author's point-of-view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric that point of view or purpose.

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Writing Standards grades 9-10 (Text types and Purposes)

1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
  - a. Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s), from alternate or opposing claim(s), and create an organization that establishes clear relationship among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons and evidence
  - b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaim(s) fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations for both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns.
  - c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and counterclaims.
  - d. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing
  - e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows form and supports the argument presented.

Speaking and Listening Standards grades 9-10 (Comprehension and Collaboration)

1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
  - a. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful well-reasoned exchange of ideas.
  - b. Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g. informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines and individual roles as needed.
  - c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.
  - d. Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.
2. Evaluate a speaker's point-of-view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

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Speaking and Listening Standards grades 9-10 (Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas)

1. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate purpose, audience, and task.
2. Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Language Standards grade 9-10 (Knowledge of Language)

1. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or writing.
  - a. Write and edit work so that it conforms to the guidelines in a style manual (e.g. MLA Handbook, Turabian's Manual for Writers) appropriate for the discipline and writing type.