

Homage to a Mockingbird: Poetry in Motion

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Overview

This curriculum unit will examine social injustice, social order and social responsibility in the context of Harper Lee's classic novel *To Kill A Mockingbird*, and poetry. During this unit the goal of my teaching is that student's will discover that learning is an active process that integrates many skills. Too often, students come to school to watch their teachers work; instead of vice-versa. However, when student's use what they learn, they remember the information better and understand the usefulness of what is being taught. To dialogue with the text will shed light on the novels historical background, the economic and social climate of the 1930's, and the parallels between Harper Lee's life and the life of Scout, the narrator. Conversely, this illumination will enable students to create meaningful poetry which celebrates conscience, collaboration, and courage as they write odes, haikus, sonnets, and found poems, etc in response to themes and characters embedded in *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Students will learn from this approach that poetry can have a social, cultural and propagandistic function as did their predecessors in The Harlem Renaissance and The Black Arts Movement.

Student will also make use of selected poems from *The Oxford Anthology of African-American Poetry* to understand *The Idea of Ancestry* and how to *Dream a World*, while becoming *Strong Men* who are the antithesis of *We Real Cool*. These selections will connect students with relevant and positive images of themselves and Tom Robinson. Frequently, outside of the classroom, poets and students are barely on speaking terms. Why? Poetry lovers expect poetry to offer instruction and insight; while non poetry readers/writers don't believe that they're the poets' intended audience. Therefore, students often view poetry as non- utilitarian once they're outside of the classroom. This perception must be corrected to make poetry accessible to all. To bridge the gap students will learn to select relevant poetry that appeals to their interest, study poetry that elevates their collective and individual memory, and write poems that reflect social injustice, social order, and social responsibility in "Maycomb" and the 21st century. Students are scarcely aware of the tremendous impact "their voices" can have in their lives and in their communities. Their writing will be compiled into a bound booklet that is arranged thematically for submission to a teen poetry publication and online poetry blogs.

This unit would be incomplete without students studying newspaper coverage from the Scottsboro Case. Articles appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Daily Worker* (a communist New York publication), *The Huntsville Times*, *The Scottsboro Progressive Age*, and *the International Labor Defense* and some contained bias while others contained objectivity in their stories and headlines. A dramatic reading of Langston Hughes, *Scottsboro Limited: Four Poems and a Play in Verse* will awaken students to the turbulent Jim Crow and Segregation - Era South. This activity could be presented to the whole school or selected grades by way of an assembly with student actors to present another opportunity for the poet and students to greet each other outside of the classroom.

Poetry in Motion is primarily designed for secondary students to dialogue with *To Kill A Mockingbird's* characters and themes; however, English classes that explore themes of moral courage, justice, prejudice, segregation, and social justice will also find this unit beneficial. There is a strong emphasis on grounding students with African-American poetry and poets who are familiar with Tom Robinson's plight as an African-American male living in the segregated South during the 1930's. Although the South is often portrayed as an idyllic oasis of close knit communities where children are safe and fishing is a favorite pastime the experience of African-Americans is often unspoken. Klansmen, lynching, racism, and many injustices comprised the fabric of daily living experiences for African-American men, women, and children during the time and place in which the novel was written. Thus, it is necessary to illuminate how a man who symbolizes a harmless mockingbird would be accused, tried, convicted, and eventually murdered for a crime he did not commit. Tom Robinson's crime, being in the company of a white woman who alleged rape, so deeply offended white Southern sensibilities that his life was the only form of retribution that was deemed acceptable for this egregious act. Photographs, film, and technology will be integrated throughout the unit to help students get an actual feel for what life was like in the United States and the fictionalized town of Maycomb, Alabama.

As reported in a recent study conducted by the National Council of Teachers of English, schools and school districts are currently accepting a wider range of interpretations and perspectives in response to literature to make poetry accessible for all. The underlying principle for this trend is to make poetry accessible to all students and enable them to move from recitation in the primary grades to deep examination the secondary grades. This is the desired outcome for this unit as students build a powerful dialogue that unites an American classic novel which represents America's crucible of racism and student responses to this perennial issue over a half of a century later.

By the end of this unit students will be able to record significant insights and reflections from poetry, the novel, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, transparencies and film which primarily addresses the issues of: social order, social injustice, and social responsibility. Students will be able to understand the significance of a white lawyer defending a black man at the expense of endangering himself and his family in the 1930's South. Students will draw parallels between the treatment of Emmett Till and the treatment of Tom Robinson regarding the charges and capture of each man after viewing *Eyes on the Prize 1: The*

Awakening collection. Finally, students will actively synthesize these issues and make connections which deepen their understanding of their role in writing poetry of social protest and triumph for the next generation of *To Kill A Mockingbird* readers.

Rationale

Poetry is very much like music in the way it uses rhythm and sound to capture a mood, convey feelings, and communicate a message. Composers use various musical techniques to create a song; poets use various literary techniques to convey the meaning of the poem. These techniques include choice of speaker, sound, imagery and figurative language. Poets emphasize different techniques in different poems depending on which they feel work best to express the meaning of the poem. Accordingly, students should learn to think about each technique and the author's effective use of the technique; so that when they write about a poem they will be able to show the connection between the techniques of the poem and its meaning. Indeed, students must know that the speaker of the poem is the voice of the poem and sometimes the speaker is the poet himself while other times the speaker is a character or object created by the poet.

Ample consideration must be given to sound devices in poetry used to facilitate creating motion for the reader to hear rhythm and rhyme. Among the sound devices that a poet may also use are onomatopoeia, alliteration, consonance, and assonance. It is only with repeated encouragement for students to write what they see and hear will students be able to write free verse poems that imitate sound. To imitate sight students must use vivid images that appeal to one or more senses, and figurative language such as metaphors, similes, and personification. To seamlessly blend the two senses students can choose a kind of music that they know and like and jot down what sounds and pictures do the associate with that music. This is effortless yet invaluable for a generation that has grown up on music videos, you tube and webcasts. Critically thinking about the language, structure, mood, and tone of a poem employ students to read, remember and understand. This practice is transferable to many forms of literature, particularly a long complex novel with multiple themes, and, of course, poetry!

An analysis of the elements of poetry is often what is required in the conscripted curriculum in many school districts. After analysis is completed a poetry booklet may be assigned which requires each student to write a poem modeled after the type of poem being studied. For example, if the class studied a Shakespearean sonnet; then the assignment would be to write a Shakespearean sonnet using a self selected topic. The problem with teaching poetic form using this approach is that students often don't remember the information after completing the assignment. However, when students are asked to dialogue with characters, symbols, and themes from a novel using poetry they are systematically approaching the structure, content, form, and other literary elements in text that will create long-term understanding. Since poetry does not have to be written down; it can be chanted or sung, spontaneous or memorized students have options for presentation based on their learning style. Ultimately, students will learn and remember that prose differs from poetry in that it compresses more meaning into fewer words and

often uses sound techniques. Poetry is often arranged in lines and stanzas as opposed to sentences and paragraphs, and it can be freer in the ordering of words and the use of punctuation. In the end, one thing that all poems have in common is that they use imaginative language carefully chosen and arranged to communicate experiences, thoughts, or emotions. Poetry will allow students to deftly manipulate their experiences by choosing a particular word or phrase, vivid metaphors, to record their history of social injustice, social order, and social responsibility in the 21st century.

Author's Background

Nelle Harper Lee was born in Monroeville, Alabama on April 28th 1926. She was named after her grandmother, Ellen; her first name is “Ellen” spelled backwards. The youngest of four children, Lee grew up in Monroeville with her two brothers and one sister.

Monroeville has around 7,000 people living there today, but in the late '20s and early '30s, it was a very small town. It is located in southwest Alabama.

Lee's father, Amasa Coleman Lee, was a lawyer, newspaper editor, and legislator. He was born and raised in Florida. He started off as a bookkeeper but later moved to Monroe County to work at the Flat Creek Mill Company in Finchburg. He married Lee's mother, Frances Finch, in 1912. (Notice the name Finch is also used in *To Kill A Mockingbird*). For a brief time, Frances and Amasa lived in Florida, but by 1913 they had returned to Monroe County. In 1915 Amasa was admitted to the Alabama bar. The couple settled in Monroeville, Alabama, where Amasa practiced law. He was a member of the state legislature from 1926 to 1938. He was also the editor of *The Monroe Journal* from 1929 to 1947.

As a child, Harper Lee was a tomboy who fought on the playground and talked back to her teachers. She was bored with school but loved to read. In fact, she learned to read before she started school and was a very precocious child. There are many parallels between Harper Lee and Scout as children. She was perceptive about the events and people around her, which is probably why she decided to have Scout narrate the story. Her childhood friend and neighbor was Truman Capote, who went on to be a popular writer as well. Capote is often thought to be the real life version of Scout's friend and neighbor, Dill, in the novel.

Lee's father had hoped she would settle down in Monroeville and practice law with him, but even though she went to law school, her passion was writing. Amasa Lee was a friendly man about whom actor Gregory Peck said, “Mr. Lee is a beautiful man—and I am very proud to have known him.” Peck met Amasa in 1962 after the filming of *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

Historical Influences

Lee grew up during the struggles of the Great Depression. Consider these vital statistics of the country in the 1930s. The United States population was 123,188,000 in 48 states. Hawaii and Alaska were not yet states. The average man lived to be 58 years and 1 month

and the average woman lived 61 years and 6 months. The average salary was a little more than \$1,300 per year and unemployment rose to 25%. Some people were not financially devastated by the Great Depression, and more than two million cars were sold in the 1930s. Sadly, twenty one lynchings were reported. A lynching is murder for an alleged crime, without trial, and usually by hanging. The majority of lynching victims were black men.

The college educated citizens were at the top of the social ladder in the South. Working-class whites who had blue collar jobs were allocated social status one rung below those with advanced degrees within the educated class. Next on the ladder were farmers with very little education but who understood the value of self-sufficiency to provide food for their families. Then, nonworking whites and those who depended on the charity of others were given the lowest status within society. Sadly, African- Americans were viewed as the lowest on the social ladder and had very little rights under Jim Crow laws.

Jim Crow was more than a series of rigid anti-black laws. It was a way of life. Jim Crow was the name of the racial caste system that operated primarily, but not exclusively, in southern and border states between 1877 and the mid-1960s. Under Jim Crow, African Americans were relegated to the status of second-class citizens. Jim Crow represented the legitimization of racism. Many Christian ministers and theologians taught that whites were the “chosen” people,” blacks were cursed to be servants, and God and the Christian scriptures supported racial segregation.

When Lee was growing up, a strict social order from pre-Civil War years of slave labor was in place in the South. Laws were set up in southern states that promoted segregation of blacks and whites and also perpetuated racism throughout the South. The “Jim Crow” figure was a fixture of the minstrel shows that toured the South; a white man costumed as a stereotype of a “black” man and using “blackface” makeup sang and mimicked stereotypical behavior in the name of comedy. Southern towns like Monroeville and hundreds of others had a mixture of people from all social strata. However, the main source of work for most people in the South was farming, and industries related to farming.

The “Deep South” of the 1930s, the area and time of Lee’s childhood, included the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and Florida.

Scottsboro Trials Background

On March 25, 1931, a freight train was stopped in Paint Rock, a small town in Alabama. Nine young African American men who had been riding the rails from Tennessee to Alabama were arrested. Two white women, one underage, accused the men of raping them while on the train. A series of sensational trials—The Scottsboro Trials—followed based on the testimony of the older woman, a known prostitute. The prostitute was attempting to avoid prosecution under the Mann Act, which prohibited taking a minor across state lines for immoral purposes, such as prostitution. On April 9, 1931, after 4 separate trials conducted over a four-day period before four different all white juries in the mountain town of Scottsboro, all nine men were found guilty and eight of them were

sentenced to death. Although none of the men were executed, a number of them remained on death row for many years. The last defendant was released in 1950.

The Scottsboro Trial and the Tom Robinson trial depicted in Lee's novel share many similarities. Both events take place in the 1930s with the accusers being poor, white southern women.

Both trials had heroic figures. In the real trial, Judge James Horton overturned the guilty verdict of the first trial. Atticus, the lawyer for Tom Robinson, is also a hero pleading for a non-guilty verdict for Tom. Both juries are all white and they ignore the lack of credible evidence to convict the accused.

From the time Lee was a little girl, she was very aware of the inequality of the society in which she lived and aware of the Jim Crow laws and ordinances that promoted racism and injustice toward Black Americans. She decided to expose this knowledge through writing *To Kill A Mockingbird* rather than in a courtroom. She wrote the novel in the middle of the Civil Rights Movement, which was sweeping the country after originating in the South. Alabama was prominent in the news at this time due to the Montgomery bus boycott, Martin Luther King's rise to leadership primarily through his stirring public speaking, and Autherine Lucy's attempt to attend graduate school at the University of Alabama.

Literary Elements:

a. Themes

The dominant theme is the moral nature of human beings. Is man essentially good or evil? Interestingly enough, by the end of the novel, Scout sees the positive effects of trying to make a difference in society through her father's defense of Tom Robinson; however, Jem is left disillusioned. The moral voice in the novel is Atticus Finch's. He has experienced and understood evil without losing faith in the human capacity for goodness. The novel explores Scout's transition from innocence to experience as she becomes further aware of the social attitudes and caste system of the South. More importantly, the author explores how children learn these social values, how prejudice, racism and hatred are perpetuated from generation to generation.

b. Point-of-View

The novel is written in the first person narrative through the voice and perspective of the character Scout. It is important that a child tells the story so that people can understand the way experiences in society affect and mold the opinions of children. It also gives the story its autobiographical quality. The events of Scout's childhood are meant to be seen through the eyes of a child to contribute to one of the overall themes—how children learn prejudice, hatred, and racism. Atticus then becomes the model father who teaches his children understanding not only through his words but also through his actions. However, it is important to note that it is the “grown up” Scout who is talking nostalgically about her past.

c. Characters

Lee's novel includes all the major social classes: the upper-middle-class whites, who are educated and have "white-collar" jobs, such as Atticus Finch; the working-class or "blue collar" whites who, although very poor in the Depression years, do work and are aware of the courtesies of society; the lower-class poor who neither want to work nor have the desire to be educated or to extend courtesies to others; and the African American community, viewed by whites as the lowest class in society. This hierarchy is representative of the social class/caste system in many southern towns before the Civil Rights Era of the 1950s through the 1960s. Atticus Finch understands the social and political status of African Americans. Calpurnia works for him as a cook and housekeeper, but she is paid and treated with respect. The Cunningham family is a poor farming family. They understand that they are living in hard times, but that they still must try to find work or at least live off what little money they do manage to make. When Atticus Finch performs a service for Mr. Cunningham, Atticus understands that he will not be paid in dollars, and the Cunninghams know that it is good manners to offer some kind of compensation for his legal services. They do not expect something for nothing and know the value of hard work and the opportunity that comes from having an education. The Ewell family has a bad reputation in town. Whites and African Americans view the Ewells as lazy, ignorant and abusive. Unlike the poor Cunninghams, the Ewells expect handouts and "respect" simply because they are white. They abuse the very system that supports them. African Americans are depicted in the novel as being respectful of "their place" and hardworking. They also represent the most vulnerable members of society.

d. Conflicts

The main conflicts of the novel involve person versus society, person versus person, and person versus self.

Tom Robinson is a victim of the society in which he lives. He is an African American in the 1930s South and has very few rights. Bob Ewell is in conflict with the society in which he lives. He is a victim of his own ignorance and his belief that he gains power and respect by hurting others around him either physically or mentally. Along with the struggles that Bob Ewell and Tom Robinson face within the social caste of the South, they are also pitted against each other because Bob Ewell falsely accuses Tom Robinson of raping his daughter. Atticus Finch faces internal conflict when he must decide whether to actually defend Tom Robinson. He knows that it will be hard to get an acquittal because Tom is black, but his moral code compels him to do his best for Tom. Mayella Ewell has doubts on the witness stand about whether she should tell the truth.

e. Allusions

Allusions are references to literary or historical people, places or events. There are numerous allusions to both history and literature in Lee's novel. One reason Lee may have chosen to have her protagonist and narrator use allusions was to show to the reader how well-read Scout is in a family that prized reading and an education. Another reason may have been to give the story a universal appeal. Remember that the story is told by Scout, but we know that Scout is recounting the story as an adult. These are just a few of the abundant allusions in the novel.

Allusions: Ivanhoe, Andrew Jackson, nothing to fear but fear itself, let the cup pass from you, Indian head penny, Stonewall Jackson, Dracula, Battle of Hastings, etc

f. Idioms

An idiom is two or more words used together to make a different meaning than the words have when used by themselves. Idioms are closely associated with a given language. For example, in colloquial English the construction “how come” can be used instead of “why” to introduce a question. Similarly, “a piece of cake” is sometimes used to describe a task that is easily done.

Idioms: get Miss Maudie’s goat, walked on eggs, break camp, when the chips are down, blue in the face, into the limelight, he had seen the light

g. Symbolism

In a broad sense, the term “symbolism” refers to the use of one object to represent another. Examples of the concept of symbolism include a flag that stands for a nation or movement, or an empty cupboard used to suggest hopelessness, poverty, and despair. Examine these examples. Scout thinks that hurting Boo Radley is like “shootin’ a mockingbird.” What does the mockingbird come to represent in the novel? Miss Maudie explains to Scout, “Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but...sing their hearts out for us. That’s why it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.” There are many references to the mockingbird in the novel. The most obvious is the title of the book. Boo Radley comes to represent that which is innocent. As the story unfolds, Scout learns that Boo is also innocent—like the mockingbird—and has a more mature understanding of his place in society. Tom Robinson is the innocent that becomes the sacrificial lamb. He pays the ultimate price for Mayella’s abuse and ignorance. He represents all those who are falsely accused and suffer the same fate.

h. Colloquial Language

A word, phrase, or form of pronunciation that is acceptable in casual conversation but not in formal, written communication is colloquialism. Read the examples from the novel:

“Hush your mouth! Don’t matter who they are, anybody sets foot in this house’s yo’ comp’ny, and don’t you let me catch you remarkin’ on their ways like you was so high and mighty!” -- Calpurnia

“I scurried to my room and went to bed. Uncle Jack was a prince of a fellow not to let me down. But I never figured out how Atticus knew I was listening, and it was not until many years later that I realized he wanted me to hear every word he said.” -- Jem

How does the use of colloquialism make the story more believable? How does this type of writing follow our own patterns of speech? Try rewriting these phrases in more formal English to see how the use of colloquial language helps convey the tone of a story as well.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Create a town poem from their observations of photographs from distinct historical photographs
- Learn about the history of African Americans in the South through analysis of historical and literary primary source photographs and documents
- Demonstrate visual literacy skills
- Distinguish point-of view in novel and poetry
- Identify literary and sound devices in poetry and use figurative language in writing poetry and personal narratives
- To understand the historical background of the novel and the economic and social climate of the 1930's
- Reflect on symbolism in the novel and uncover its deeper meaning through writing
- Discover and analyze themes in the novel and poetry
- Interpret meaning in poetry
- Understand poetry as a medium of written and spoken expression
- Analyze and evaluate the significance of specific themes that manifest themselves in the writings of poets during a specific era
- Draw parallels between the themes addressed in selected poems and literature
- Correctly use the rules and conventions of poetry, including figurative language, metaphor, simile, symbolism, and point-of-view
- Discuss how poets write about critical social issues of the time and how these issues impact political, economic, and social systems
- Identify parallels between how authors express themes in a novel and how poets express themes in their poems
- Conduct research to write essays and poems
- Vocalize their experiences in original poetry such as a found poem, ballad, sonnet, ode, and elegy
- Explore a poem as a historical document and discover how the messages of a poem are rooted in a particular time and place
- Examine issues that were critical to African-Americans during the 1930's and the 21st century

- Understand the concept of social protest and political change over time
- Create a classroom anthology that will represent the “voice” of the youth in the twenty first century.

Strategies

RAFT: Role, Audience, Format, Topic

This strategy integrates reading and writing in a nontraditional way. It asks students to take what they have read and create a new product that illustrates the depth of their understanding; it may be used with fiction and nonfiction texts. The format is very flexible and offers limitless opportunities for creativity for both teachers and students. When using RAFT with your students, you will develop the specifics for each element in the acronym; they are as follows:

Role: In developing the product what role will the students need to “assume?” Writer, artist, juror, historian, journalist, scientist, inventor, character (in the novel)

Audience: Who should the students consider as the audience for the product? Self, Other students, committee, jury, parents, activists, principal, school board

Format: What is the best product that will demonstrate the student’s in depth understanding of their interactions with the text? Art work, action plan, editorial, board game, podcast, imovie, interview, poem, children’s book, biographical sketch, critique

Topic: This is the when, who, or what that will be the focus/subject of the final product. Will it take place in the same time period as the novel, poem, or documentary? Who will be the main focus of the product? What event will constitute the centerpiece of the action? Topic: issue relevant to the text or time period, topic of personal interest or concern for the role or audience, topic related to an essential question or thesis statement

The following chart has a few examples designed to spark new ideas and possibilities for building RAFT’s:

ROLE	AUDIENCE	FORMAT	TOPIC
Writer	Self	journal	Issue relevant to the text or time period
Artist	Peer group	Editorial	Topic of personal interest or concern for the role or audience
Character	Government	Brochure/booklet	Topic related to an essential question or thesis statement
Scientist	Parents	Interview	

Adventurer	Committee	Video	
Broadcast Journalist	Jury	Song lyric	
Inventor	Judge	Poem	
Juror	Economists	Board game	
Judge	Author	Primary document	
Historian	Music Producer	Critique	
College Professor	Panel of Judges	Newspaper article	

Double and Triple Entry Journals

A double and triple entry journal is a strategy that invites students to record significant pieces of text from their reading, discussion, listening, or viewing: then, connect, respond to, and reflect on those excerpts. Most double entry journals use a two column format in which students note the significant text in the first column and their response/reflection to the text in the second column. A triple entry journal adds a third column so students can revisit their thinking and note further reflections. The primary purpose of this strategy is to invite students to read carefully, think critically, and learn through writing.

Teachers use this strategy to improve students' thinking, comprehension, reflection, vocabulary and retention of content. There is sufficient flexibility with double/triple entry journals to present students with quotes or visuals to respond to; or have students use journaling through independent reading and viewing. These journals focus attention on significant aspects of content and assists students to pay closer attention to their reading. In addition, the journal is an excellent assessment tool, providing teachers with information about misperceptions, confusions, or questions and showing how well they understood the content.

In the example shown here, the traditional double entry journal is expanded to a triple entry journal to give students the opportunity to revisit quotes and their thinking about the quotes after more reading and discussion. For this journal students were reading, *We Real Cool*, by Gwendolyn Brooks and the student has listed words, phrases, or lines that help determine when the poem was written and a description of the age, appearance, and genders of the speakers. As students read and discussed this poem, they were also reading *To Kill A Mockingbird* and discussing supplemental texts: poetry, photographs, film, etc. Each day after the read aloud, students had the opportunity to revisit their journals to add new thoughts, questions, or quotes. Those questions then guided our research, reading, and discussion.

Triple Entry Journal

Significant lines, words, or phrases	Made me wonder about the age, appearance, and gender of the speaker	After more reading and talking, I now think about...
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We	What group is represented by we	Teenagers do not think its cool to skip school; just class on occasion
Real cool	What does “cool” look like, walk like, and talk like	Cool has changed a lot from the time this poem was written, in fact, I’m cool but I do not skip school

PQR4

PQR4 is an acronym for Preview, Question, Read, Reflect, Recite, and Review that increases student comprehension. The cognitive stages in PQR4 are: preview, question, read, reflect, recite, and review. These areas provide a strategy for students to approach, organize, read, evaluate, and remember information. PQR4 enhances learners’ ability to think deeply about content. Before reading, students actively preview the material and from this generate questions they have about content. Thus, they establish their own purposes for reading (teacher guided), which leads to higher levels of comprehension. As they look for answers to their questions during reading, PQR4 helps them focus and monitor their reading. The cognitive stages of reflecting, reciting, and reviewing after reading afford students an opportunity to make deeper connections and broader applications to other texts. Students also anticipate the big ideas that are significant enough to crystallize in their long tem memories. This strategy equips students to move into college settings where they will encounter large volumes of reading and information.

PQR4

Preview	Preview the text by looking at the title, visuals, headings, and subheadings. Look at how the material is organized or arranged to get a general idea of the content
Question	Form some questions you have about the content based on the information you gained during your preview
Read	Read the text and answer the question you generated prior to reading. Remember to cite evidence from the text
Reflect	Think about what you just read and make connections to self, text, and world where applicable. How does this information reflect other information you have on this topic? What are the “big ideas?”
Recite	Commit the information to memory by stating the main points aloud. You can use

	headings, phrases, symbols, quotes, etc
Review	Review the material by generating and answering questions about the material you have read. Don't forget to anticipate questions you might be asked when you are being assessed on your understanding of the material

Classroom Activity #1

Suggested Poetry Timetable

Day 1	Day 2	Day3	Day4	Day5
Choosing a favorite poem(from the assigned list)	Choral Dramatization	Illustrating Snippets	Writing a Poem # 1	Writing a poem #2
Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
Written response to a poem	Talking about poems	Investigating Free Verse	Writing a poem # 3	Publishing our poems

Day One: Students read and select a favorite poem from the *Oxford Anthology of African-American Poetry* and provide several reasons for their choice. Poems are copied to chart paper and displayed around the room

Day Two: Choral Dramatization

Working together in groups of three or four; each group is challenged to read it together in a manner of their choice. Consider the following: pitch, pace, echo reading, hand clapping, and alternate line reading

- Which lines will be read in unison?
- How will lines be divided among group members?
- What voice will be used to bring meaning to the presentation?
- What gestures, sounds, rhythms can be added to the presentation?
- How will you begin and end your presentation?

Day Three: Illustrating

Carefully examine two or three lines from the poem in isolation as snippets, and linger over the words that you think “taste or feel” good.

First pay attention to the meaning of the entire poem, then inspect bits of language and determine how words are arranged in patterns to enlighten our imaginations and feelings.

- Display words throughout the classroom for others to ponder
- Use snippets as a source for illustration, using an art medium of choice
- Write two to four lines from a poem as a piece of graffiti to create a display for others to examine and comment on
- Hide snippet lines inside a poem and remember to add a thought before and after the poem to create a new poem. Poems can rhyme; however, the result may be more carefree if written in free-verse.
- Consider visual images created by the poet as well as the message or mood the poet is trying to convey, in order to illustrate one or two stanzas.

Day Four: Writing a Poem #1

Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching. The five senses are the secret to excellence in writing authentic poetry. As prompts are given, complete each phrase by writing a response in the time allotted. A few sensory prompts are:

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| • As red as... | As soft as... |
| • As dark as... | As slippery as... |
| • As cold as... | As hot as... |
| • As blue as... | As sour as... |
| • As hard as... | As sweet as... |

Once the list has been completed ask students to read their responses and make note of how many wrote “as dark as night,” “as blue as the sky,” “as red as blood.” You will find a lot of similar responses. You want to discourage students from these generic responses.

Discuss speed of writing and thinking to highlight that when forced to write to quickly many writers fall back on the easiest and most common idea. Time is needed to reach deeper and original way of seeing.

Have students return to their common responses and try to create something surprising and uniquely theirs. Inform students that this exercise sharpens sensory awareness in any writer. Writers learn originality requires time, focus, and sustained concentration to see the uniqueness of his/her own voice, vision, and perception.

Day Five: Writing a Poem #2

Provide a model of poetry writing for the students to practice writing (e.g. haiku, ode, couplet, sonnet).

Haiku

- Contains three unrhymed lines
- Usually consists of 17 syllables
- Lines arranged in pattern of 5, 7, 5 syllables
- Often describes scene in nature (summer in Maycomb)

Day Six: Written response to a poem.

Choose a displayed poem for students to respond to. A few questions to ask students to consider are:

1. Describe in one sentence what the poem is about
2. What did you like or dislike about the poem?
3. What lines, words, or phrases did you see, hear, feel, or taste?
4. What are some questions or puzzles you have about this poem?
5. What would you tell or ask the poet about this poem?

Day Seven: Talking about Poems

Arrange students in groups of four. Assign one poem to each group (focus can be theme or poet) Students discuss the poem by focusing on words and images, form, personal connections, historical ties, or comparing poems. As new insights and observations are recorded new groups are formed to further discuss those ideas. Each group will **jigsaw** their findings as they report out to the class.

Day Eight: Investigating Free Verse

Students write a paragraph on the topic of his or her choice. The paragraph helps the writer organize all thoughts on the chosen topic. It need not be long; however, a clever writer will include some poetic expressions in that paragraph. The next step is to take that paragraph and begin molding it into poetic form. It may contain shortened sentences to make lines. The writer will form the lines into stanzas. The writer may choose to cut, add, or change words. The writer may choose to misspell certain words and play with punctuation. The final step is to polish the free verse poem. Look at it with an eye for poetry. Does it flow smoothly? Is it shaped like a poem? Does it contain at least three poetic devices, such as a simile, metaphor, and alliteration? Do not forget to give your poem a title. Make sure that it does not rhyme. Make the final changes and you have written an original free verse poem.

Day Nine: Writing a poem #3 Write a found poem. Found poetry transforms words that have not been written as poems into poems. To create a found poem

students select words, phrases, sentences from the text and rearrange them in poetic form. Here’s an example of a student’s found poem on the theme moral courage from *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

What is courage?
 It’s when you know
 You’re licked before you
 Begin
 but you begin anyway
 and you see it through no matter what.
 Conscious and cantankerous
 Instead of gun in hand.

Day Ten: Publishing Our Poems

Each student will choose four poems to be included in the class anthology. The first poem will be a **free verse** or **blank verse** poem that addresses the theme of social injustice. The second poem will be an **ode** to Tom Robinson. The third poem will feature illustrations to accompany a poem from the Oxford Anthology. The fourth poem will be a **sonnet** that addresses the theme of social responsibility and the lessons they learned about this important issue.

Classroom Activity #2

Changing Genres: Memoir to Poem

Students will begin this activity by creating a memory catalog to think about some of the experiences that most influenced who they are today. Particular attention should be given to a time when they experienced an injustice outside of school or home. By reflecting on those experiences they are thinking about “stepping backward” in time of their most meaningful experiences. This catalog serves as a record of vivid moments, descriptions, and images they will use to write about an autobiographical incident or memoir.

Memory Catalog

A time I felt happy...	A time I felt scared...	A time I felt proud...	A time I felt upset...
An experience that taught me about myself...			

Next, students will read from *In Search of Our Mother's Garden* by Alice Walker. After reading students will create a poem (from this excerpt and their own memoir) from selected words, phrases or lines. While reading students will notice phrases that are poetic and record them in their notes. This random writing of words, phrases, and lines can be connected to form a new statement about the event or subject of the memoir. Finally, students will add words of their own as needed to make the poem flow.

When students have finished, they should meet in pairs or groups to test the effectiveness of their poem. In the group the students are deciding if their images communicate powerful ideas and if the title matches the poem. Students will make revisions as necessary to strengthen their poems and make a final draft as part of their portfolio.

Classroom Activity #3

In the previous activity students wrote and selected words from a memoir to construct a poem. In this activity students will read a poem and construct a short story from it. Students may read either *Southern Cop*, by Sterling Brown or *O Daedalus, Fly Away Home*, by Robert Hayden to write a back story that informs the reader of what happened immediately before these authors penned their poems.

As students read the poems they should take notes on the following elements:

- Who is the speaker?
- What are some situations that could have inspired this poem?
- What is the setting? Include a possible time and place.
- How would they describe the central figure in the poem?
- What did the poem remind you of?
- Did this poem give you any special feelings?
- How is this poem different from/the same as other poems you have read?

Writing a strong short story depends on strong character development and in this case, staying true to the poem. Students can create any characters they like as long as they do not change information in the poem. Here are some guidelines:

Describe the speaker. Some elements to be considered are name, male or female, age, physical description, relationship to others, does the character stay the same or change from the beginning to the end of the story.

Triggering Events Be as precise as possible; give specifics. Details can include social, political, and economic conditions that are reflected in society. What happened as a result of the triggering event? Be precise; use concrete imagery.

Students are now ready to write their first draft. When they have finished they should conference with their peers to examine the following elements in each other's stories.

- Is the situation believable?
- Do the events follow naturally from the triggering event?
- What does the story reveal about the relationship between the speaker and the central message?
- Are there enough concrete details so that the reader can visualize what happens?
- Is the story consistent with the poem?
- How does your story relate to the Icarus story or police brutality?

Revise the back story as needed to make it more powerful and place in students portfolio.

Annotated Bibliography

Student Resource (www.poemhunter.com) This website is annotated and provides background information on poems and poets in student friendly language.

Teacher Resources

Rampersad, Arnold, Ed. The Oxford Anthology of African American Poetry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2006. An extensive collection of African American poetry, divided into fifteen themed sections.

Lee, Harper, To Kill A Mockingbird, Harper & Row, Perennial Classics, 2002. A bildungsroman that follows the Finch children, Jem and Scout's, loss of innocence as they witness and become involved in a racially charged courtroom drama. To Kill A Mockingbird, 1926, film version starring Gregory Peck, VHS tape.

Amiri Baraka, "Staging Langston Hughes's *Scottsboro Limited: An Interview with Amiri Baraka*," interview by Vevie Clark, *Black Scholar* 10 (1979): pp. 62–69

Hughes Langston, Scottsboro Limited: Four Poems and a Play in Verse. Illustrated by Prentiss Taylor, New York, Golden Stair Press (1932). In 1931, nine African American youths were taken off a train in Alabama, jailed in Scottsboro, and accused of raping two white women on the train. A tense and controversial trial resulted in a life sentence for one, and death sentences for eight others. Hughes' publication reflects the outrage felt by many, and anguish over this outcome.

Goodman, James, Stories of Scottsboro. New York: Vintage Books, 1994. Told from different points of view in each chapter, this history conveys the conflicting perceptions of a complex situation.

PBS series, film Scottsboro: An American Tragedy, American Experience, 1999-2000. This film on DVD and this companion Web site (www.pbs.org) offer insights into topics in American history including race relations, civil rights, the Depression, the Communist

<p>It was unfortunate.</p> <p>Let us pity Ty Kendricks. He has been through enough, Standing there, his big gun smoking, Rabbit scared, alone, Having to hear the wenches wail And the dying Negro moan.</p> <p>-Sterling A. Brown</p>	<p>In a great need.</p> <p>I live here, too. I want freedom Just as you. Langston Hughes</p>
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Standards

Learn to Read Independently

- ☐ Establish a reading vocabulary; understand the meaning of and apply key vocabulary across content areas.
- ☐ Use knowledge of root words and words from literary works to recognize and understand the meaning of new words during reading with the intent of adopting these words into the vocabulary of use.
- ☐ Identify, describe, evaluate, and synthesize the essential ideas in text with an increased awareness of the effectiveness of specific reading strategies when learning from a variety of texts.
- ☐ After reading, demonstrate an understanding and interpretation of both fiction and nonfiction texts (including public documents).

Read Critically in All Content Areas

- ☐ Read and understand essential content in informational texts and documents in all academic areas.
- ☐ Use and understand a variety of media and evaluate the quality of material produced.
- ☐ Produce work in at least one literary genre that follows the conventions of the genre.

Read, Analyze, and Interpret Literature

- ☐ Read, understand, and respond to works of literature (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama).
- ☐ Analyze the relationships, uses, and effectiveness of literary elements used by one or more authors in similar genres (characterization, setting, plot, theme, point of view, tone, and style).
- ☐ Analyze the effectiveness, in terms of literary quality, of the author's use of literary devices (e.g., sound techniques, figurative language, and literary structures).
- ☐ Analyze and evaluate in poetry the appropriateness of diction and figurative language (e.g., irony, understatement, overstatement, paradox).

- Analyze how a scriptwriter's use of words creates tone and mood, and how choice of words advances the theme or purpose of the work.

Writing

- Write persuasive pieces that include a clearly stated position or opinion, carefully integrating elaborated and properly cited evidence.
- Write complex informational pieces, poetry, short stories, newspaper articles (e.g., research papers, essays comparing media genres, speeches and literary responses) using primary and secondary sources.

Research

- Select and refine an African-American poet for research.
- Locate information using appropriate sources and strategies
- Organize, summarize, and present the main ideas from research