

## **Examining the Human Condition Through Paired Poems: The Universal & The Particular**

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**Abstract:** This unit makes use of poetry and some visual art to engage students in close reading and analytical thinking and writing. District and State standards concerning critical reading and writing and vocabulary acquisition are covered in this unit. Poems of different eras and authors will be read and discussed and written about. The activities and standards in this unit also lend themselves to the teacher and students substituting poems other than the ones highlighted here. As well as reading some well-known poets of the traditional “canon” (Dickinson, Whitman, Niedecker), additional emphasis will be placed on reading poems written by BIPOC (Black, indigenous, people of color) that comment on societal conditions that are routinely faced by these poets and the groups they belong to. Poems by Langston Hughes, Aracelis Girmay, Claude McKay, Ross Gay, Eve Ewing will be paired with poems of earlier eras. Graphic organizers and vocabulary array will be used to help students practice interpreting and analyzing texts. As students learn and practice close reading these poems they will hone their analytical and writing abilities and their ability to write arguments and participate in academic discussions.

### **Problem Statement:**

In teaching 7<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup> grades students in this standardized test heavy, “data-driven” school district, I have concluded that many students are not given enough opportunity to wrestle with deep complex questions and discuss the ramifications of these questions for their own lives and the life of the world at large. Students are too often left to think that they can only regurgitate phrases and ideas found in a text— I witness students struggle when they are asked to think deeply and critically to analyze and synthesize ideas. Our students have many ideas about their world and the history of the larger world, but this test-heavy emphasis in many schools has left them trepidatious in expressing and articulating their ideas. Our students are certainly capable of this, but they are given scant practice at actually developing and practicing these skills. Even though education “leaders” and reformers of our time pay much lip service to critical thinking, the test-heavy practices they promulgate do little to encourage the development of these skills in our students. As a result, our students lack confidence in their intellectual abilities and often lose heart when they are asked to write or argue about a complex text or issue. A related problem is that students’ vocabulary development can stall because they are not encouraged to play with words and use connotation as well as denotation to communicate their ideas and interpret texts that they read.

It is my goal to encourage my students (currently I teach 9<sup>th</sup> grade) to critically read, think, write about and discuss the human condition (and protest of the conditions humans impose on each other) as it is revealed through paired texts. I find that my students are eager to express their thoughts about what they learn and know, and texts that are relevant to their experience as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) help create the conditions that enable them to grow in their confidence and abilities. Exposure to the materials and methods I have learned in my Modern Poetry Seminar have enabled me to create a unit that will interest and challenge my students to think deeply about how poetry and other texts can examine both the universality and particularity of the human condition throughout history. As students close-read various pairs of texts, they will be guided through the process of reading, discussing, and interpreting the texts and themes. As they then begin to do this work on their own, they will become comfortable with different levels of using and interpreting vocabulary as well as text interpretation. I believe they will also gain practice in forming and defending a thesis or point-of-view statement.

### **Content Objectives**

This unit will give students the opportunity to explore, write about, and discuss the poems of American poets such as Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Langston Hughes, Lorine Niedecker, Aracelis Girmay, Claude McKay, Ross Gay, Eve Ewing and others. Students will also study at least two paintings, *Mr. Prejudice* by Horace Pippin and *She Does Not Know Her Beauty* by Charles White. When students are able to look at visual texts (artwork, photographs, etc...) as well as printed texts, it enables them to engage different ways of thinking and interpreting all kinds of expressive art. Because I teach many students with IEPs, I am mindful of activities and strategies that encourage these students to participate fully in unit activities.

I will first implement this unit in my combined English I/American History course, so the text selections (both written and visual) reveal and discuss the human condition as it has been expressed, rebelled against, and protested in the United States of America. Many of the poem choices will concern marginalized populations and their fight for equal treatment, or, more poignantly, their fight to simply be seen as humans with worthy and valuable experiences and cultural practices. Students will give the paired texts a close reading and discuss both the universal and particular elements and themes they discover. How do themes and concerns change or remain constant in different historical eras and across varying cultures? What does this continuity and change tell us about the human condition? Which themes are universal and which seem particular? Of course, poems are valuable texts and works of art unto themselves--they should not be reduced to simple themes or explanations and interpretations of history. Students can and should appreciate and value both the written and visual texts as entities unto themselves. However, poems

and other works of art can and do reflect the concerns of the poet and the place and time in which they are writing. Artists often choose to use their art in the service of protest, or love, or in extolling the beauty and travails of the human condition, and I believe it is valuable to our students to explore both the simple existence of poems **and** their commentary on our lives in the world.

The close reading strategy we have heard, observed, and learned in our seminar will enable our students to deeply examine language and poetry. Students gain confidence in interpreting and reading poems (and other texts) when they use close reading as practiced in our Mod-Po seminar because they are just responsible for interpreting a few words or a short phrase. This strategy is useful because it both focuses students' thinking and is not overwhelming. It gives students a chance to consider, think, and discuss words, phrases, and the poet's intent as well as their interpretation of it. In addition, these close readings and activities will give students opportunities to play with vocabulary and increase their skills in both interpreting others' writing and writing well themselves. The structure of these activities will take different forms with both individual and group activities required. Some poem pairings will be required, and students will choose others from a set of options.

Pennsylvania and Philadelphia content objectives and standards for our ninth grade ELA students align well with the plan for this curriculum unit. Students are expected to understand and be able to analyze both the connotative and denotative meaning of words in various texts. This standard includes both academic and figurative language. For both reading and writing standards, students are required to use and understand "academic language" -- vocabulary, however cannot be taught well in a simply didactic manner. The old school system of looking up words, recording definitions, and then using the words in sentences does not help students truly learn vocabulary in a deep and abiding way. Students need to explore words and their usage both playfully and deeply in order to become fully versed in their nuance. Having students work with vocabulary arrays and use close reading in their discussion of various poems will give them confidence in learning and interpreting vocabulary.

In this poetry unit students will learn to analyze how the poets use of words create an idea or image for the reader. Why are certain words chosen? How does this choice affect the message of the work and the readers' perceptions and interpretations? If students interpret and close read the paired texts of, for example, Canto 8 of Whitman's *Song of Myself* and Britteney Black Rose Kapri's *We House* they will be able to deeply examine how poets use certain words, phrases, and expressions to represent a vivid sense of place. When students are able to analyze and discuss the poet's word choice, it gives them the confidence to write more intentionally than they have been used to. Discussing and parsing why they think a writer has chosen certain words and phrases helps our students think critically and own their own writing.

Students will also learn to meaningfully discuss how poets play with the form of a poem to contrast it with the subject of the poem. How does Claude McKay's choice of the sonnet form in his poem *If We Must Die* highlight his meaning and contrast the classic poetic form with his subject matter? In the lyric poem, *A Small Needful Fact* how does Ross Gay's subject matter of a violent death in police custody fit in with the form of lyric poetry? What does it mean when painter Charles White quotes Willam Waring Cuney's poem "No Images" directly on the canvass of his painting *She Does Not Know Her Beauty*? How does this artist use the poem to deepen the meaning of his painting?

Determining an author's point-of-view and/or purpose in a text also will be something students deconstruct in this unit. As they close read an author's work, students will analyze how the author communicates their point-of-view and purpose. What does the author want to communicate to the reader? Does this point-of view illustrate only a particular time and place or does it speak to the universality of human experience? For example, as students pair Whitman's *I Heard America Singing* with Langston Hughes' *Let America Be America Again* they can examine how the two men—who lived in different centuries—see their native land. What is to be lauded about America? What is to be criticized? What about these poems clues the reader in to the concerns and perspective of the author? Can these concerns be generalized beyond the poets' particular time, place, and situation? And, are these questions even germane to the appreciation of art forms? Should we always be looking for the undercurrent of meaning in art, or should we just appreciate for its own sake?

Another language-based objective that students will sharpen during this unit is the interpretation and understanding of figurative language—especially allusions. In my experience, allusions are one of the most difficult types of figurative language for my students to understand and analyze. Obviously, authors carefully choose allusions to call up certain experiences and cultural memories in their readers—students will spend some time discussing why they think authors have chosen certain allusions and what type of depth and meaning they add to the poem. In doing this, they will be able to discuss the allusions in light of the theme: what allusions are particular to a time, place, and culture, and which translate across those constructs to reach universality? When we take the time to deconstruct and discuss allusions, students are able to understand the meaning, but—as stated previously—a test heavy curriculum has robbed them of opportunities to gain confidence and facility in this type of close reading and interpreting. These different types of deep discussions about language will enable my students to become more knowledgeable and confident in their interpretation and writing.

As students read, discuss, analyze (and, I hope, enjoy) poetry, they will be formulating ideas and opinions about how poetry can examine both the universality and particularity of the human condition throughout history and across cultures. In their readings can they see universal themes emerge? Are some themes and ideas particular to a certain time or culture? What do those themes say about the human condition? What

do poets and artist choose to comment on or write about? Who is “reporting” on the particular era or culture? Whom are they writing or making art for? With whose gaze are the poems read and interpreted? As they examine these ideas through discussion, reflection, and writing, students will be able to formulate a thesis that answers these questions and will be able to effectively argue their position.

### **Teaching Strategies**

When students are asked to deeply analyze various types of texts, it is necessary to give them a structure in which to do this. Because many students’ elementary grades experience has been test-prep heavy, they often lack confidence when it comes to forming, articulating, and writing about their own ideas. To be clear, our students are fully capable of doing this work and doing it quite well, it just happens that many of them are out of practice in this kind of learning, discussing, and writing.

I will need to first re-teach and refresh students’ memories about the different types of poetic and rhythm devices that appear in poems, students will use a favorite song to identify and analyze figurative language, they will use a graphic organizer to identify and then “pull apart” the poetic device—discussing in a small group what images or associations the device calls up for the reader. These small group discussions will work to give them refreshed knowledge of poetic devices and also increase their confidence in interpretation. Some teachers may not feel this part of the unit is strictly necessary, but I have found that even high school students benefit from a quick refresher in these skills, and it ensures we all have a common language as we move forward in the work. The reality of teaching in our schools is that we have students from numerous educational backgrounds—we need to give all our students the same tools with which to work.

Vocabulary work will play an important role in this unit (as it should in most units). In order to be good and effective writers—whether writing creative or informational pieces—students need to learn to intentionally choose words and think deeply about both their connotation and denotation. In order encourage and practice this, we will use targeted vocabulary instruction with connotation and denotation work as well as vocabulary arrays. These activities work well in groups of two to four students because students get to verbally wrestle with and state justifications for their opinions. This work helps give students the facility and confidence with vocabulary that they need to write and argue well.

When students are assigned certain poems to read, the strategy of close reading as modeled in Mod-Po will be modeled and taught. We will begin by hearing the poem read in person or on a recording and then assigning various parts of the poem to each student. This is an excellent strategy to use because it assigns words (or short phrases) to each

student to interpret. If students are reluctant or struggling readers, they will do this in pairs. This strategy enables students to be successful because they start by only being responsible for interpreting and analyzing a small piece of a larger work. As they work through what it means, they again gain confidence in their ability to interpret literature. Working in pairs or small groups will give them a chance to bounce ideas and theories off each other and gain confidence in their interpretation. Working together on these tasks will also give students practice with their discussion and argumentative skills.

Collaborative discussions will also play an integral part in this unit. As students work on graphic organizers and close readings, they will engage in collaborative, small-group instructions in which they will interpret the poems. Students will engage in a variety of collaborative discussions with (at first) defined and structured roles such as leader, scribe, timekeeper, work-organizer. Roles will rotate between students, and students will eventually be able to engage in productive collaborative discussions without strictly defined roles. The results of some of these discussions will be presented to the whole class. They will also explore our larger theme of the universal and the particular: how is the human condition revealed in the works they are reading? What aspects of life to poets and artist feel it is important to comment on and create art about? Students will present the results and ideas from their small-group discussions to the class.

For some of the presented poem pairs, students will use a specific type of graphic organizer for a visual interpretation task. For example, with the poem pairing of “*I Hear America Singing*” and “*Let America Be America Again*” students will also study and interpret the Horace Pippin painting *Mr. Prejudice* (see materials below). The title of this work will at first be hidden from the students so they can interpret the imagery without a clue to the theme of the painting. They will be asked how this painting presents images to illustrate the point-of-view the artist communicates; they then will be asked if they believe this painting relates to the theme of either poem. A group discussion will again be used to explore the concepts in the painting and poems.

## **Classroom Activities**

### **Shades of Meaning and Vocabulary Array**

**Standard: CC.910.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).

**Objective:** Students will work with the denotation and connotation of words in order to enable them to both read and write effectively—using vocabulary to understand and explain their assigned reading and their own ideas.

Two of the activities that we will work through and engage in during this unit are a connotation and denotation activity called *Shades of Meaning* and having the students work in pairs to construct a vocabulary array. These activities help students think deeply about shades of meaning and the connotation of words. It is great practice for justifying and interpreting language choices.

1. For *Shades Of Meaning*, an activity from *Visual Thesaurus* (see resources), students are asked to look at and sort a list of 24 adjectives into pairs of words that have roughly the same meaning (denotation). Before students are given the list, we have a brief discussion about connotation and denotation. Students usually have an intuitive grasp of this, but often have not had to articulate it. I usually ask students to imagine I am asking them for input on a parent meeting: I ask them if they would prefer I describe them as “energetic” or “hyper” or “curious” or “nosy”. Invariably, students choose the words (energetic and curious) that carry a positive connotation over the words (hyper and nosy) that carry a negative connotation. A brief discussion of why they chose the positive connotation words helps them understand the difference between connotation and denotation and enables them to work through the next task. At this point, students are asked to work in pairs or triads and receive the list of 24 adjectives. Students work together to sort the words into pairs that are roughly synonyms. They then are asked to discuss each pair of words and decide which one has a positive connotation and which one has a negative connotation. During this discussion time, the teacher is circulating and listening and adding to the discussion as needed. When students have created their lists of positive and negative connotation words, each group will share out one or two examples with the class. The assessment for this lesson is simply the teacher observing the participation and discussion that the students engage in. This lesson takes about 30-40 minutes.

2. The next vocabulary exploration for students is the vocabulary array—this activity (discussed in Beck’s *Bringing Words to Life*, see resources)—builds student’s ability to recognize and discuss nuance in the choice and use of words in their writing and discussion. To begin, students are given 10 index cards (have students work in pairs or triads) and two words that could appear at opposite ends of an array or spectrum—for example the words “boiling” and “freezing”. Students are then asked to brainstorm eight more words that would fit on an array **between** the two end words. Students typically come up with words like “warm”, “tepid”, “cool”, “cold”, “lukewarm”, “hot”, etc... Students then write each word on an index card and then try to agree on the order of the array. The point here is the conversation and rationale that students come up with for their ranking and positioning of the words on the array. There is no one correct placement of each word, it is the conversation and arguments that enable students to practice

thinking deeply about words and their layered meanings. After each group has come to some kind of consensus about the order of their array, they present their words and array to the class. This lesson takes about 30-45 minutes, and the assessment is the presentation of the array as well as teacher observation during the group discussion.

a. Another vocabulary array activity deeply engages students is to ask them to think of ten words that are near synonyms for the word “attractive”, then they are asked to rank and make an array of those words from least to most attractive. This activity usually sparks some interesting word choices and some good discussions and arguments about ranking the words. For example, is “striking” better than “pretty”? Where does “gorgeous” fit in the array? Again the learning and practice is engendered by the conversations had and justifications the students give for their end result. As the students get comfortable thinking deeply about word choice they are able to improve both their reading and writing skills.

## Close Reading

**Standards:** **CC.910.6** Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

**CC.910.9** Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

**Objective:** Students will learn to think about and interpret literature by watching close reading modeled and then practicing this discipline in pairs. Students will gain confidence in interpreting literature.

In this lesson students will work with short lyric poems and learn to do closed reading. Students will first listen to Neidecker’s poem *Foreclosure* read aloud several times. At this point, students are just asked to listen (they will also have the text of the poem—see resources). Students will then watch the video of the *Mod-Po* group discussing and enacting a close read of *Foreclosure*. Again, students will be asked to listen and observe closely to the video and take some notes on the process they see. We will then have a class discussion about what we saw and how we can reproduce this method ourselves. The first time students attempt this activity, I want them to work in pairs—both to boost their confidence in interpreting poetry and to support each other. I will then give out another short poem (such as Langston Hughes’ *Color* or *Dream Variations*—there are many choices) and assign each pair a word(s) to interpret and discuss with the class. Students will discuss their interpretations with the class. Once students learn this process and participate in it several times, we will be able to use it for other poems in this unit.

This lesson should take about an hour (times are always variable depending on the composition of the class and the amount of support they need). The formative assessment for this lesson will include teacher observation during the activities and a short (2-4 paragraph) reflective essay on the Close Reading Process and their initial experience with it: What do they think of it? Is it helpful to them as a student? Do they think it helps them get meaning from what they are reading?

### **Comparing and Contrasting Print and Visual Text:**

**Standards: CC.1.5.9-10.C:** Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source

**CC.1.5.9-10.D:** Organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions.

**Objective:** To encourage and enable students to examine and connect visual and print sources in order to understand the artists' points-of-view and how it connects to historical events.

Students will read and interpret *Let America Be America Again* by Langston Hughes and study and analyze the Horace Pippin painting *Mr. Prejudice* (with title hidden at first). Students will be able to discuss, interpret, and write about these creative works both as art and as comments on historical events. This lesson is taught after students have been working with the poems *Let America Be America Again* by Hughes and Whitman's *I Heard America Singing*. Having discussed and written about *Let America Be America Again* in previous work, students will have familiarity with Hughes' theme and point-of-view in his poem. Their next task will be to examine the painting *Mr. Prejudice* by Black American artist and WWI veteran Horace Pippin and deconstruct and interpret the imagery in the artwork. The painting (sans title) will be projected in the front of the room, and each group of 2-4 students will also receive a color reproduction of the painting for closer viewing. Students also will have a graphic organizer from the National Archives that helps them work through looking systematically at a painting. If this the first time students have done this sort of visual analysis work, I work through looking at one quadrant of the painting with them--listing the objects they see. Students will then complete looking at and analyzing the other quadrants of the painting. At first, just recording the objects, symbols, and images in the work—and then moving on to the analysis questions: What is the message and point-of-view of the artwork? After students have wrestled with this and feel they have some ideas to present to the class, we will have a class discussion about their ideas and conclusions. After we have discussed their

interpretations, the title of the painting will be revealed to them—they can then decide if knowing the title changes or refines any of their ideas and conclusions.

Students will then be asked to review their work on the poem “*Let America Be America Again*” in light of their work on “*Mr. Prejudice*”. How do these two works of art relate to each other? What are their common themes? At this point, students will work individually because they will be working on a short essay that will compare the themes in these works of art and how the artists convey their themes to the readers.

This lesson will take two class periods (usually over two days), and additional time for the students to work on their essay. The assessment is the essay. The teacher can decide if they want to make this essay an on-demand writing task (one more class period), or if they want the students to assign the essay as a formal writing task with rough, drafts, edits, and revisions.

## Resources

### Bibliography for teachers:

Acevedo, Elizabeth. *POET X*. Harper Collins, 2019.

\*An award-winning young adult novel written in verse, this novel speaks to youth issues and concerns and has many poems that will engage students.

Beck, et al. *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*, Guilford Press, 2002.

\* This slim yet invaluable book on research-based vocabulary instruction can reinvigorate the way vocabulary is taught. The methods explained within its pages enable students to deeply understand vocabulary.

Close Reading: “Watch Video on Lorine Niedecker's ‘Foreclosure’ - Chapter 1.2 (Week 2)-Whitmanians & Dickinsonians.” *ModPo on Coursera*,  
[www.coursera.org/learn/modpo/lecture/O64xY/watch-video-on-lorine-niedeckers-foreclosure](http://www.coursera.org/learn/modpo/lecture/O64xY/watch-video-on-lorine-niedeckers-foreclosure).

\*This is just one of many close reading videos on the ModPo Coursea site. These are excellent videos to use to model close reading and discussing for students.

Cuney, William Waring. "No Images". *Poetry Foundation*, Poetry Foundation, [www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/53011/no-images](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/53011/no-images).

\*An evocative poem about self-image and representation. It can be paired with the Charles White painting "She Does Not Know Her Beauty" which quotes the poem.

Ewing, Eve L. *Electric Arches*. Haymarket Books, 2017.

\* A contemporary book of poetry that highlights themes of interest to our students: for example, representation, body autonomy, magical realism, and black girlhood.

Ewing, Eve L. *1919*. Haymarket Books, 2019.

\* Poems that bring the events that occurred before, during, and after the Chicago Race Riots during the Red Summer of 1919 to life through the voices of those who lived (and died) in these riots.

Gay, Ross. "A Small Needful Fact" - Poems | Academy of American Poets." *Poets.org*, Academy of American Poets, [poets.org/poem/small-needful-fact](http://poets.org/poem/small-needful-fact).

\* A moving poem that is excellent for close reading, It deals with the murder of Eric Garner in a tangential way that highlights his humanity apart from the way he was killed.

Girmay, Aracelis. "Night, for Henry Dumas." *Fishouse*, 9 July 2018, [www.fishousepoems.org/night-for-henry-dumas/](http://www.fishousepoems.org/night-for-henry-dumas/).

\*Another excellent and topical poem for close reading—this work bends and blends timelines and events to discuss the ongoing issue of state-sponsored murders of Black men.

Harper, Michael S., and Anthony Walton. *The Vintage Book of African American Poetry*: Vintage, 2000.

\* An anthology of African-American poems and poets from Colonial times to the early 2000s.

Lewis, David Levering. *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader*. Penguin Books, 2006.

\* This anthology includes essays from Dubois, Johnson, Garvey and others and poems from writers of the Harlem Renaissance period: Hughes, McKay, Hurston and others.

Lim-Hing, Sharon. *The Very Inside: an Anthology of Writing by Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbian and Bisexual Women*. Sister Vision Press.

\* We need diverse books and points-of view in our class collections. This anthology of essays and poems by LGBTQ women has many beautiful and thoughtful poems that should be read by our students.

“Mod Po” *Coursera*, Rice University, [www.coursera.org/learn/modpo/home/week/3](http://www.coursera.org/learn/modpo/home/week/3).

\*This online course on Modern Poetry is rich with poems, readings, videos of close readings and other resources that are invaluable for this unit (and others).

*National Archives*, [www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/artwork-analysis-worksheet.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/artwork-analysis-worksheet.pdf).

\*The U.S. National archives Education Division has great graphic organizers that assist student in using primary sources, including cartoons, other visual arts, photographs, documents, recordings, posters, and other documents

Pippin, Horace. “Mr Prejudice.”

<https://www.philamuseum.org/Collections/Permanent/76592.Html>.

\*This intense painting by African-American artist Horace Pippin is a part of the Philadelphia Museum Of Art’s permanent collection

Thinkmap, Inc. “Shades of Meaning.” *Shades of Meaning : Lesson Plans : Thinkmap Visual Thesaurus*, ThinkMap, 19 Nov. 2007, [www.visualthesaurus.com/cm/lessons/shades-of-meaning/](http://www.visualthesaurus.com/cm/lessons/shades-of-meaning/).

\*This website contains the “Shades of Meaning” on connotation and denotation as well as other vocabulary activities and lessons to explore.

#### Reading List for Students:

Acevedo, Elizabeth. *POET X*. Harper Collins, 2019.

\*An award-winning young adult novel written in verse, this novel speaks to youth issue and concerns and has many poems that will engage students.

Cuney, William Waring. "No Images". *Poetry Foundation*, Poetry Foundation, [www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/53011/no-images](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/53011/no-images).

\*An evocative poem about self-image and representation. It can be paired with the Charles White painting "She Does Not Know Her Beauty" which quotes the poem.

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Gay, Ross. "A Small Needful Fact" - Poems | Academy of American Poets." *Poets.org*, Academy of American Poets, [poets.org/poem/small-needful-fact](http://poets.org/poem/small-needful-fact).

\* A moving poem that is excellent for close reading, It deals with the murder of Eric Garner in a tangential way that highlights his humanity apart from the way he was killed.

Girmay, Aracelis. "Night, for Henry Dumas." *Fishouse*, 9 July 2018, [www.fishousepoems.org/night-for-henry-dumas/](http://www.fishousepoems.org/night-for-henry-dumas/).

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\* An anthology of African-American poems and poets from Colonial times to the early 2000s.

Lewis, David Levering. *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader*. Penguin Books, 2006.

\* This anthology includes essays from Dubois, Johnson, Garvey and others and poems from writers of the Harlem Renaissance period: Hughes, McKay, Hurston and others.

Niedecker, Lorine. “Foreclosure”. *ModPo*, Coursera.

<https://www.coursera.org/learn/modpo/supplement/Yn9p4/read-lorine-niedeckers-foreclosure>

Whitman, Walt. “Song of Myself”, select cantos. *ModPo*, Coursera.

<https://www.coursera.org/learn/modpo/supplement/mxuIo/read-sections-1-2-3-5-6-8-10-14-47-52-of-walt-whitmans-song-of-myself>

Classroom Resources:

*National Archives*, [www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/artwork-analysis-worksheet.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/artwork-analysis-worksheet.pdf).

\*The U.S. National archives Education Division has great graphic organizers that assist student in using primary sources, including cartoons, other visual arts, photographs, documents, recordings, posters, and other documents

Thinkmap, Inc. “Shades of Meaning.” *Shades of Meaning : Lesson Plans : Thinkmap Visual Thesaurus*, ThinkMap, 19 Nov. 2007, [www.visualthesaurus.com/cm/lessons/shades-of-meaning/](http://www.visualthesaurus.com/cm/lessons/shades-of-meaning/).

\*This website has the graphic organizers and lists of words for the “Shades of Meaning” Lesson

## **Appendix**

### Implementation of Academic Standards

As anyone who teaches English Language Arts know that the national and state required standards are intertwined and recursive. It is impossible to teach standards in isolation, and each activity or lesson includes many standards. This unit implements the state and Philadelphia district standards for 9<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts. The standards require that students read various types of text (including non-print texts), engage with vocabulary study—including types of figurative language, determine point-of-view and main idea, analyze how authors use information, and understand how they use rhetoric to their advantage. In addition, students are expected to be able to write in standard English, organize this writing well, and advance an argument. Although the standards give us

guides and district rules and procedures require that we implement the standards, our first priority should always be that our students learn to think critically and thoughtfully examine and interrogate their world—we can and should teach the standards while encouraging students to do this. This unit enables students to read some wonderful poems and also practice and sharpen their skills in these standards. The vocabulary array activities, close reading, and especially group and whole class discussions all give students practice in the standards, but also allow them the academic space to gain confidence in their own thinking abilities.

#### Standards List:

**CC.910.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).

**CC.910.6** Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

**CC.910.9** Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

**CC.1.5.910.A** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade –level topics, texts, and issues building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**CC.1.5.910.G** Demonstrate command for the conventions of standard English when speaking based on grades 9-10 level and content

**CC.1.5.9-10.C:** Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source

**CC.1.5.9-10.D:** Organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of a text; include formatting when useful to aid comprehension; provide a concluding statement or section

