

# I Am UnBroken:

## Deconstructing Modern American Poetry to Promote Self-Actualization

For English Language Learners

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### **Introduction/Abstract:**

The roots of American modern and contemporary poetry can be traced back to two radically different camps: **Emily Dickinson’s short poems** full of big ideas carefully compressed into a small reclusive world with few words, and **Walt Whitman’s long poems** full of free verses celebrating “blah of the pave” street noises of a democratic ideal world to include everyone. With this curriculum unit, my goal is to use modern poems from both ends of the spectrum to teach English to English Language Learners (ELL) and struggling readers as well as the native English speakers and advanced readers with effective innovations. Students are challenged to be open-minded, modern, risk-taking, and focused-while-playful as they work, break apart a poem, resemble it back together into its original form, or create a new poem out of the old form.

Imagine learning English for the first time as a child or an adult. Imagine how broken you would feel when every time you try... you are interrupted with how your English (a new part of you) is wrong and incorrect. Classmates and teachers don’t understand you and vice versa. All school assignments are difficult, overwhelming and confusing. Likewise, modern poetry also suffers this stigma of being incomprehensible and unapproachable. For most ELL, learning English means “follow the rules” and don’t ask questions as to “why” and “what if.” Incongruously, there are exceptions to every rule in the English language; most of these rules make little sense, even to native speakers. Modern poets are unafraid to challenge the language norm, ask why and propose something new: make new “what is old” and make new “what is new just a moment ago.” I have designed my curriculum unit to promote self-actualization of all students -- especially struggling ELL -- as they deconstruct and reconstruct their worlds through reading and writing of modern poetry. My unit is organized in the following scope and sequence:

<b>Lesson</b>	<b>Poetry Forms</b>	<b>Focused Strategies</b>
Series A	Short Poems	Deconstructing and Reconstructing to Build Vocabulary
Series B	Long Prose-Poems	Experimental Hyper-Narrative Writing
Series C	The New Sentence	Sentence Structure, Grammar and Semantic
Series D	Chance Poems	Experimental Chance-based Writing
Series E	Letter-Poems	Dear America Persuasion, Opinion v. Fact
Series F	A Wall of Poetry	Collective Writing to Define American Identity

## **ModPo on University of Pennsylvania and Coursea**

If you feel like you know nothing or you think you know everything about modern poetry and want an enjoyable, easy and fast-paced way to learn more, join Coursea ([www.coursea.org](http://www.coursea.org)) and sign up for a FREE online course called *Modern & Contemporary American Poetry* (“ModPo”) organized by Professor Al Filreis at the Kelly Writers House (3805 Locust Walk) on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania. What is ModPo? ModPo is a 10-week introduction (Yes, a FREE online course!) to modern and contemporary U.S. poetry with an emphasis on close reading and video discussion, from Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman to today’s contemporary poets. The course studies one poem at a time through close reading; it’s supported with a wealth of video discussion, a weekly live webcast, and even on-site study groups.<sup>1</sup>

## **Content Objectives**

**Problem Statement:** Teaching urban 5th-grade students how to read and write, in a large city like Philadelphia, comes with a unique set of challenges as well as rare opportunities for personal and professional growth. My school demographics are highly diverse in their ethnic, cultural and language backgrounds. The languages spoken by this diverse group of multi-lingual teachers, administrators, parents, students and other community members had included: Arabic, Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), French, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Khmer, Korean, Japanese, Laos, Nepali, Spanish, Swahili, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. **Demographics (ELL as Struggling Readers):** About 45% of our student body (244 students out of a total of 542) are currently classified as English Language Learners (ELL), about 20% had been existed out of ELL service, and another 20% are children of immigrants who were born in the United States (never received ELL service, even though a language other than English is primarily spoken at home). That’s a total of 85% (460 students) who are recent immigrants or children of immigrants. I feel that I’ve a huge responsibility to teach my students in a culturally responsive way that is compatible as well challenging to how their brains function in a language other than English. This past school year I had 28 fifth graders. The breakdown is 17 current ELL, 10 former ELL, and 1 native speaker. 44% (12 students) did not score proficient or advanced on their most recent 2018 PSSA ELA score when they were in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. It’s a disturbing but not uncommon fact that these 12 students are ALL English Language Learners. How can modern poetry help the struggling readers who are also ELL to become better readers and writers?

## **Why teach Modern American Poetry?**

One big reason is student engagement. Here is a real-life argument from my class: On the last days before the end of the 2018-2019 school year, I asked my 5th grade students to write a series of letters: one to their 6th teachers, one to a classmate who had improved significantly, one to me, and one to their future 21-year-old self. These letters were basically essays-in-disguise. One of my students (a native English speaker) sighed and said: “Poems are easier to write [than essays],” and my other students chanted in with agreement. From my own teaching experience, I notice how much children love to write poems. I believe it is because poetry encourages free thinking and imagination. Students know they don’t have to worry too much about grammar rules. Therefore, they are more engaged and less likely to censor ideas before putting them on paper. Even though most students like **writing** poetry, most students find the **reading** of poetry difficult, boring and irrelevant. Poetry in general suffers the stigma of elitism (only a few gets it). I want to change these old attitudes by teaching a new generation of readers to make their own

personal meanings as they read and write poems. I believe modern poetry welcomes digression and transgression from its readers, values compression as well as expansion of ideas, encourages new interpretations, and demands a razor focus on each word and its meaning beyond the literal and obvious. While there's a beautiful logic to the mantra KiSS (Keep it Simple, Stupid) and I do use it on occasions, I feel the next generation of learners is not being challenged but often they are excessively cuddled by parents and teachers to do less "doing and thinking" on their own. So, there are more times when I feel it's necessary to use the mantra KiDS (Keep it Difficult, Scholar) to raise the bar as high as possible. The sky is not the limit. Space is limitless.

In addition, I am convinced that Modern American Poetry can be a great resource to teach ELL, not only English, but also as a way to gain self-actualization through creative reading and writing. My curriculum unit "I Am UnBroken: De-constructing Modern American Poetry to Promote Self-Actualization for English Language Learners" uses modern poetry as a way to bridge the gap for ELL students who are struggling to conceptualize their worlds using two or more languages. Professor Filreis had described his course by stating: "poetry as a gateway to explore how to 'become ourselves' as well as how to be co-creators of what is significant, meaningful and aesthetically beautiful about this art form."<sup>2</sup> This philosophy of teaching means all sorts of possibilities for me as a teacher. By studying modern poets such as Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, Kenneth Koch, Frank O'Hara, Bernadette Mayer, Jack Kerouac, Ron Silliman, John Cage, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, Rosmarie Waldrop, Robert Frost, John Ashbery, Barbara Guest and Jackson Mac Low, my students can learn English in a new and modern way with the benefits of increasing their vocabulary acquisition, sharpening their analytic reading skills, and also hone their writer's craft to create poems, essays or any type of writing meaningfully.

Self-actualization, according to American psychologist Abraham Maslow, is the state of being our "real" ideal self with creative growth potential that will fulfill our highest needs, i.e., those of having life meanings. In a linear hierarchy of a growth model, Maslow identified the order of ascension as: 1) physiological needs, 2) safety needs, 3) needs for belonging/love, 4) needs for positive self-esteem and 5) needs of self-actualization.<sup>3</sup> As a teacher, I can give a hungry child a snack to meet a morsel of their physiological needs or make them feel safe under my care, but each child spent the majority of time outside of my control. As a teacher, I am only able to focus my main effort on the needs of belonging/love, self-esteem and self-actualization. Poetry may be able to help students to gain self-actualization and opens the door of possibility: What is broken can be un-broken! Problem don't have to have a solution, but maybe just a "different" outlook.

**Why Poetry is Important to Me as an English Language Learner?** When I first arrived to the United States from Hong Kong, China at the age of eleven, it was difficult to learn how to listen, speak, read and write in English. One survival strategy I had invented was to use the sounds of Chinese characters to read English, a kind of reversal of "pinyin." For instance, the word "father" sounds almost like 花朵 in Cantonese and comes close to mean "flowers" in Chinese. But in Chinese it should be written with a number such as 一朵花 to indicate "one ear" of flower. To complicate it further, there are English sounds that don't exist in Chinese, and vice versa. That was how I made sense of both languages.

As young as 6-year-old, I remembered reciting Chinese classical poems without ever knowing what they mean. I still remember the basic structure of a ten-character poem like a jingle that had been infiltrated into my memory and will remain there forever, sometimes surfaces out of nowhere. The recitation may be a meaningless task then, but now, as an adult, some of these poems had imprinted in my mind so deeply that I can appreciate the complexity of meanings so much more. For me, one forgettable poem is 静夜思 (Jìng Yè Sī), translated literally as Silent Night Thoughts. The poem was written by the famous Tang Dynasty poet 李白 (Lǐbái) and the speaker expresses thoughts of loneliness as he wonders about the snow on the ground and gazes up at the bright moon feeling homesick. Below is the poem in Chinese with pinyin (the official romanization system for Mandarin Chinese). I translated the poem 静夜思 (Jìng Yè Sī) into English word by word using an online translator (5 Chinese characters per line):

床前明月光 (Chuáng qián míng yuè guāng,)	Bed front bright moon shines
疑是地上霜 (yí shì dì shàng shuāng.)	Doubt is ground above snow
□ □ 望明月 (Jǔ tóu wàng míng yuè,)	Raise head full bright moon
低□ 思故□ (dī tóu sī gù xiāng.) <sup>4</sup>	Lower head think home land.

Chinese is an extremely contextual language where one word can stand for a multitude of meanings; a Chinese character, arguably, is more complex from an English morpheme. Hence Chinese acts like poetry -- depending on how one character is juxtaposed to another character, meanings can change and the two characters can represent a new concept or a more complex entity of the first concept. Like LEGO bricks, Chinese language allows the readers to break apart words, reassemble the order of words and connect a series of words more flexibly than English. Even though my Cantonese speaking self lacks the vocabulary to talk about complex concepts, to this day I think “my speaking of English” has so much to do with “how Chinese I was taught” to think. For instance, the character 天 (tiān) has a small icon which represents a person with extended arms upholding the sky (two horizontal strokes) on top of its head. With some imagination, 天 (tiān) makes sense as “sky” and “day.”<sup>5</sup> These abstract pictures and arrangements are comparable to how modern poets are stepping out and breaking out of the traditional frame of reference for poetry.

### **How to teach modern American poetry in a culturally responsive classroom?**

I want to teach modern American poetry to my students in an innovative way with a “working framework” to allow my students ample opportunity to interact with each poem. My method will allow students to construct their own interpretation of a poem rather than waiting for me, the teacher, to explain the meanings. Students will gain greater enjoyment, engagement and confidence through the learning process of close readings and other creative activities. My poetry unit is intended for fifth grade students but it can be modified to address the ELA and Social Studies standards for sixth to eighth grade students. The unit is organized into six series (A, B, C, D, E and F) of lessons from the most traditional to the most experimental modern poetry. Each series can be taught in isolation, but it makes better sense to teach them in the sequential order I had organized.



## TEACHING STRATEGIES

1) **Close Reading Method from ModPo:** a. Read the poem aloud at least 3 times. b. Assign a word or a phrase to each student to report out their interruptions. c. Identify the sound devices, rhyme scheme, figurative language, and determine the purpose of each word or phrase. Ask why the poet chose each word and what effects did the poem achieved. Extensions: Close read a short biography of the poet to build background knowledge. Encourage students to do further research online. Use the SMILE strategy to discuss Structure, Meaning, Imagery, Language & Effect.<sup>6</sup>

2) **Close Reading Strategies from Poetry Inside Out for Reading Biographies**  
Organize students into pairs or a small group of 4 or 6: **1st Read (Vocabulary Development and Geography):** Circle unfamiliar words and use contextual clues to figure out its meaning. Assign one word per table group for discussion; **2nd Read (Geography and Text Structures):** Use a United States map and ask students to identify locations and places relating to the poet's life. Read each sentence or paragraph to discuss the text structure. **Prerequisites:** Students can identify some basic text structures such as description, chronological order, cause & effect, compare & contrast, and problem & solution. **3rd Read (Theme):** On a chart paper, write down key topics that the poem is mainly about. **Prerequisites:** Students understand a theme statement is not a topic, but a message about that topic; it is more an opinion based on text evidence.

3) **De-construct original poems to create “personal original” poems.**

**Method 1:** Cut out words of a poem and put them in a plastic bag. Shake the bag to take and paste them back into the original form. **Method 2:** Provide a blank template of the original poem and a list of English words borrowed from another language. Students select words based on number of syllables, number of letters and/or number of words to write a new poem.

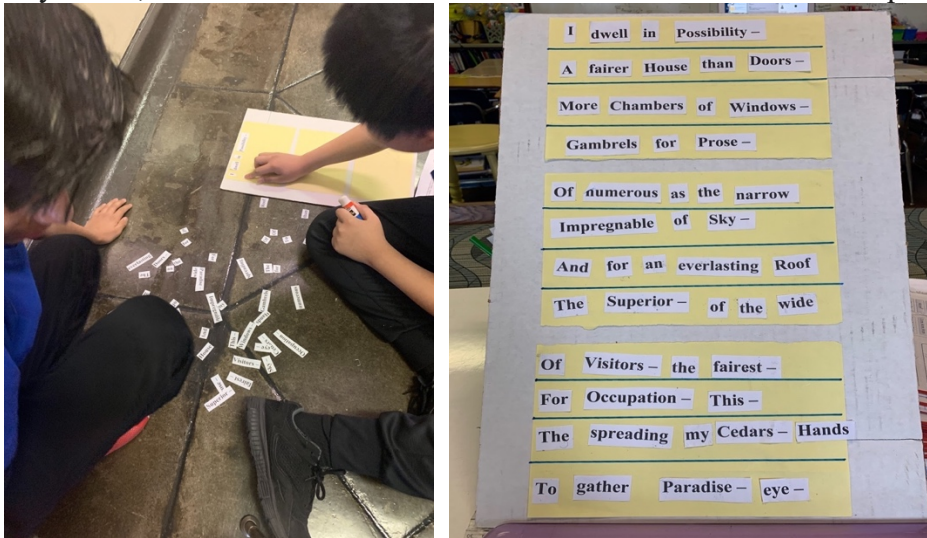


Photo (Left): My students working to re-construct Emily Dickinson's poem "*I dwell in Possibility*" Photo (Right): Student's final product.

4) **Use experimental writing methodologies to write personal narratives and poems**

- Provide students a list of constraints with steps of instructions that they have to work with to write a new poem or narrative.
- Invite students to create their own constraints.
- Let students to choose the experimental writing assignments from the poet Bernedette Mayer

**5) Rewrite primary sources and documents. Ex.: Preamble of the U.S. Constitution**

a. Provide students with primary documents to read and analyze. b. Read a short informational text about the primary source. c. Challenge students to rewrite a poem that align or diverge from the original purpose of the original written document.

**6) Publish a class book of poetry.** Each anthology of student poems can make a classroom collection for the classroom library. List of Websites for Book Publication: [tikatok.com](http://tikatok.com), [studenttreasures.com](http://studenttreasures.com), [www.schoolmatepublishing.com](http://www.schoolmatepublishing.com), [www.nanoteacher.org](http://www.nanoteacher.org)

**Online Publishing Journals and Magazines:** Stone Soup, Highlights Magazine, The Caterpillar, Ember Journal, Cicada Magazine



**Photo (Left):** Cover of a published book of poems written by all of my students on the theme of combating depression as part of a service-learning project with the Need in Deed, a non-profit organization located in Philadelphia. The book is titled “Demystifying Depression: 29 Voices to normalize ‘Crazy Goodness’” Published in May 2019 through Studenttreasures. To order a copy, visit [studenttreasures.com/ordercopies](http://studenttreasures.com/ordercopies) and use the pin #7318368. Enter Buy2G1 to take advantage of the “buy 2 get 1 free” offer. **Photo (Right):** Poem by Candy Yang.

**7) Set up a Poetry Slam** to use spoken words, music, etc. to perform students’ poems and invite community members as judges and audience. Students will be judged on the following categories: 1) Eye contact; 2) Verbal cues; 3) Non-verbal cues; 4) Enthusiasm; 5) Planning and Preparation 6) Poetry Elements (sensory details, images, etc.); 7) Poetry Elements: Diction and word choice; 8) Grammar, usage and mechanics; 9) Overall Effect/Impact; 10) Critical Thinking through Q&A by Judges and student audience.

**8) Poetry Contests:** April is poetry month and most schools celebrate it with displays and contests; contests can help increase engagement, relevance, acknowledgment and excitement. **A short list of local, national and international poetry contests:** PoeticPower.com (K to 12th Grades), Rattle Young Poets Anthology (age 15 or younger), Sarah Mook Poetry Contest (K upwards), Philadelphia Stories, Sandy Crimmins National Prize for Poetry (Adult Contest), Barbara Mandigo Kelly Peace Poetry Award (Ages 12 and under, ages 13 to 18), Princeton University Poetry Contest for High School Students (11th Grade).



## Table of Content of Poems and Prose

### Lesson A Series

- Poem A1: *I dwell in Possibility* by **Emily Dickinson**  
Poem A2: *Water Raining* by **Gertrude Stein**, from *Tender Buttons*  
Poem A3: *The Red Wheelbarrow* by **William Carlos Williams**  
Poem A4: *This Is Just to Say* by **William Carlos Williams**  
Poem A5: *Variations on a Theme* by *William Carlos Williams* by **Kenneth Koch**

### Lesson B Series

- Poem B-1 *Song of Myself* by **Walt Whitman**, Canto 1 or 6 from *Leaves of Grass*  
Poem B-2 *A Step Away from Them* by **Frank O'Hara** (Lunch Poems)  
Poem B-3 *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* by **Bernadette Mayer**  
Prose B-4 **Bernadette Mayer's** Writing Experiments

### Lesson C Series

- Poem C-1 *If I Told Him, A Completed Portrait of Picasso* by **Gertrude Stein**  
Poem C-2 *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* by **Jack Kerouac**  
Poem C-3 An example of **Jack Kerouac's** babble flow  
Prose C-4 *The New Sentence (an essay)* by **Ron Silliman**

### Lesson D Series

- Poem D-1 *Dropping Leaflets* by **Jena Osman**  
Poem D-2 *Chapter E of Eunoia* by **Christian Bok**  
Poem D-3 *Act I of Soliloquy* by **Kenneth Goldsmith** (Recording, Concept Writing)  
Poem D-4 **Michael Magee's** "Flarf" poetry for Charles Bernstein (Google search)

### Lesson E Series

- Poem E-1 *Will V-Day be Me-Day* by **Langston Hughes**  
Poem E-2 *Boy Breaking Glass* by **Gwendolyn Brooks**  
Poem E-3 *We Real Cool* by **Gwendolyn Brooks**  
Poem E-4 *Pledge* by **Michael Magee**  
Poem E-5 *Shorter American Memory of the Declaration of Independence*  
by **Rosmarie Waldrop**

### Lesson F Series

- Prose F-1 Article about Chinese Poems from Angel Island's Detention Center  
Poem F-2 *Mending Wall* by **Robert Frost**  
Poem F-3 *Some Tree* by **John Ashbery**  
Poem F-4 *20* by **Barbara Guest**  
Poem F-5 *A Vocabulary for Peter Innisfree Moore* by **Jackson Mac Low**  
(Score of 960 words, all comprised of letters from Peter Innisfree Moore's name)



## CONTENT BACKGROUND

**Lesson Series A** will focus on short poems by Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams and Kenneth Kohn and the influences of the Dada avant-garde movement and the concepts of pastiche, parody and mentor text. Here is a good place to discuss plagiarism. **Emily Dickinson** (December 10, 1830 - May 15, 1886) was born in Amherst, Massachusetts.<sup>7</sup> Her poetry was discovered after her death by her sister Lavinia and published posthumously. She lived a reclusive life and wrote bundles of poems and letters on the family homestead. She is now considered as one of the most influential figures and innovative poets of modern American literature. Dickinson's paternal grandfather, Samuel, was the founder of Amherst College. Her father, Edward, worked as a state legislator at Amherst, and married Emily Norcross. The couple had three children: William Austin, Lavinia Norcross and middle child Emily Elizabeth. Dickinson was educated at Amherst Academy (now Amherst College) for seven years and then attended Mount Holyoke Female Seminary for a year. Dickinson's fragile mental and emotional state may be why her father decided to pull her from finishing school.<sup>8</sup> "*I dwell in Possibility --*" is a great starter poem to introduce students to the power of poetry, how being a poet is a profession, and compare poetry to prose. Dickinson sees poetry as "Possibility" with "an Everlasting Roof"; she argues that poetry is more beautiful and open, as opposed to prose which has more limitations.<sup>8</sup> This poem shows how poetry has the freedom to use unusual dashes, no comma, no period and capitalization of concepts like "Paradise" to add importance. It sets the stage for students to analyze why modern poets break rules and the convention of language; it will also give students the license to make up their own rules as they write their own poems.

As students study the poem "*I dwell in Possibility*," introduce them to **Dada**, an avant-garde art movement that rejected the logic and aesthetic in preference for nonsense, irrationality and anti-bourgeois protests. This art movement included collage, sound poetry, cut-up writing, sculpture and performance art. Tristan Tzara had written the following steps and called it *To Make a Dadaist Poem*: "Take a newspaper. Take a pair of scissors. Choose an article as long as you are planning to make your poem. Cut out the article. Then cut out each of the words that make up this article. Put them in a bag. Shake it gently. Take out the scraps one by one in the order in which they left the bag. Copy conscientiously. The poem will be like you. You are a writer, infinitely original and endowed with a sensibility that is charming though beyond the understanding of the vulgar."<sup>9</sup> For visual learners, show the video: "How to Make a Dadaist Poem by Tristan Tzara"<sup>10</sup>

It is also important to hold a discussion about plagiarism and how it is different from pastiche, parody and mentor text. Distinguish **pastiche** as an artwork that imitates that of another artist's work or an art time period with respect from **parody** like the song "Eat it" by "Weird Al" Yankovic that satirizes Michael Jackson's "Beat It". Both can be considered as legit art forms. Great writings like the poetry of Dickinson can serve as **mentor text** for students to study and imitate in order for them to read and write better as they try new strategies and formats. Many modern poets use the activities of **deconstructing** and **reconstructing** to break an artwork into essential smaller part in order to understand how it is constructed; it is a different way to make something "new again" out of the remnants of the old parts.

**For the Lesson A Series**, I want to flip the process of close reading with “reading by writing.” For example, students will be deconstructing modern poems such as Emily Dickinson’s “I dwell in Possibility” from a blank slate. Students will be given a page with a short biography of the poet, the title of a poem, and the poem’s structure of stanzas with clues based on the number of letters in each word to decipher. Students in pairs may choose from a list of English words borrowed from Arabic to “totally” reinvent the original poem with unexpected word to word arrangement. The lists of English words borrowed from a language will include languages spoken by one of their classmates, parents and/or teachers: Arabic, Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), French, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Khmer, Korean, Japanese, Laos, Nepali, Spanish, Swahili, Vietnamese. This process will allow students time to investigate the form, semantic and meaning of both languages using a modern poem. Students in pairs or groups of 4 or 6 will be given words from the original poem in random order, and challenge to reconstruct/reassemble these words back to what they think the original poem should look and sound like. After the reconstructing, students compare their own poems with the original. Teacher will conduct a close reading of the original poem for a whole group discussion

Another great starter is Gertrude Stein’s *Water Raining* which has only 12 words: “Water is astonishing and difficult altogether makes a meadow and a stroke.”<sup>11</sup> This poem is from *Tender Buttons*, a radical book of poetry published in 1914. The book is divided into three sections: “Objects”, “Food” and “Rooms” about mundane everyday subjects, but written in a provocative fashion to connect words to what the object stands for. The book has been praised as a masterpiece of cubist literature and criticized as a collection of gibberish making no sense. Stein wrote most of these poems like prose. Modern poets like Stein had given birth to the concept of prose poem, a piece of writing in prose (not broken into verses and stanzas) that has poetic qualities such as imagery, metaphor, symbols, rhyme, etc. Thus, the poem *Water Raining* is a great example to discuss what is poetry and what is prose. Can a piece of writing be both? As students deconstruct and reconstruct the words of the poem, they can discover the word relationship in the title *Water Raining*, why “water is astonishing and difficult”, how water makes “a meadow and a stroke.”

**William Carlos Williams** (September 17, 1883 – March 4, 1963) was an American poet whose writing was closely associated with modernism and imagism. He was a physician with a long career in pediatrics and general medicine. The poem *The Red Wheelbarrow* is a prime example of imagism, a reactionary art movement against romanticism and Victorian poetry.<sup>12</sup> The poem is about mundane objects; it’s short and concise. The opening line “so much depends/upon” is broken into 2 lines. The image of “a red wheel/barrow” is stark against “the white chickens.” The colors red and white paint a still life of contrasting objects. Here poetry is not flowery, not wordy, no complicate vocabulary, it’s a clear idea and plausibly a child could have written it. The readers can imagine the red wheelbarrow and other images, and arguably the words represent exactly what the words stand for.<sup>13</sup>

**Kenneth Koch** (February 27, 1925 – July 6, 2002) was an American poet, playwright, and professor with a career spanning 5 decades from the 1950s to the 2000s. He was a prominent poet of the New York School, a group of poets including Frank O’Hara and John Ashbery. *Newsweek* writer David Lehman called Koch “the funniest serious poet we have.”<sup>14</sup> Koch’s poem *Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams* imitates Williams’ famous poem *This*

*Is Just to Say*. In 3 stanzas of 4 lines (a total of 12 short lines), Williams wrote his wife a quick note and posted it on the refrigerator to apologize for eating a plum that belongs to her; the note turned out to have poetic elements.<sup>15</sup> Kohn's poem is made up of 4 stanzas and each stanza is a different version of Williams' *This Is Just to Say*. In the 1st version, Kohn's speaker said to someone that he "chopped down" their house, he is sorry, he "had nothing to do" and "its wooden beams were so inviting." 2nd version: the speaker said he sprayed the hollyhocks with lye, asked for forgiveness and gave the excuse that he did not know what he is doing. 3rd version: the speaker said he gave away all of her saving to a "shabby" man who asked for it. 4th version: the speaker why he broke her leg while dancing; his reason was because he was clumsy and he wanted her in the hospital where he is the doctor! Kohn is definitely making fun of Williams who had a long career as a physician. After comparing the different content, students can easily imitate the basic idea, tone, style, structure, theme and effect of both poems.<sup>16</sup>

**Lesson Series B** teaches students to write long(er) poems while studying the works of Walt Whitman, Frank O'Hara and Bernadette Mayer. Students will be writing long poems that relate to the concepts of hyper-narrative, "blab of the pave", catalogue listing, lunch poems, and "I do this I do that" poetry. With **hyper-narrative**, readers-writers make choices between sequential plot lines within a branching structure, i.e. this causes that and so on. Ironically, the result may turn into a non-linear, non-sequential network of multiple narratives. **Walt Whitman** (May 31, 1819 – March 26, 1892) was an American poet, essayist, and journalist, often labelled as the father of free verse. Modernist poet Ezra Pound called Whitman "America's poet ... He is America."<sup>17</sup> During his lifetime, Whitman's poetry was very controversial, partly due to its overt sensuality and obscene descriptions. Whitman's personal life was under scrutiny for his presumed homosexuality. Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, later published as *Song of Myself*, was a controversial book of poetry that has become an American classic. Professor Al Filreis describes how **Walt Whitman** thought of **blab of the pave**: "Walt thought of 'blab of the pave' as the most democratic and American of music. He thought of the ideal poem as ambient noise, in effect. **Social noise**. The noise of a city, of a winter evening, with all the bustle and shouts and imprecations and loud bus drivers and snowball fights and horse hooves on cobble. He loved to listen to the urban American blab. He loved the sound and he "recorded" it in his poem. Song us all of us, jabbering together."<sup>18</sup>

**New York School of Poetry** (1950s and 1960s) is a loose group of poets including Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch and Barbara Guest that eschewed introspective poetry in favor of an animated style that drew major inspiration from daily lives, travel as well as jazz, surrealism, abstract expressionism, and action painting. **Frank O'Hara** (March 27, 1926 – July 25, 1966) was an American writer, poet, art critic and curator of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. **Lunch Poems** by Frank O'Hara is a book of poems he wrote while sitting in Times Square during his lunch hour. "**I do this I do that**" poetry acts like a diary entry with non-sequential flow recording "this and that" on an ordinary day of activities. **Bernadette Mayer** (born May 12, 1945) is an American poet, teacher, editor and visual artist associated with the New York School and Language poets. Her influence in the contemporary avant-garde is trademarked with stream of consciousness and journal ideas such a journal of dreams, food, love, etc. Mayer created a list of writing experiments with directives such as "Systematically derange the language: write a work consisting only of prepositional phrases..."<sup>19</sup> Many of Mayer's poetry such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* speaks poignantly about motherhood.

**Lesson Series C** will focus on the idea of “the New Sentence” in prose poems by reading experimental poems by Gertrude Stein and Jack Kerouac, and an excerpt of the essay, *The New Sentence* by **Ron Silliman**. The essay “The New Sentence” is a great example explaining how **Language Poets** (1960s and 1970s) challenge the readers to find new ways to approach the text by breaking up the poetic language and sometimes intertwined it with prose to make prose-poems. **Ron Silliman** (August 5, 1946 --) is an American poet and influential figure in the West Coast literary movement known as “Language poetry” during the 1960s and 1970s. Between 1979 and 2004 (25 years), Silliman wrote *The Alphabet*, a long poem focuses on a different letter of the alphabet. According to Poetry Foundation, “Silliman described the “new sentence” as one that controlled or minimized the “syllogistic” meaning expected from prose by altering the structure, length and placement of the sentence to increase its ambiguity or polysemy.”<sup>20</sup> He further described how the new sentence uses the structure, length and placement to increase its ambiguity, comparable to what is expected from a poem. During the Lesson C Series, students will practice the following poetry techniques: 1) **parataxis** (in contrast to syntaxis and hypotaxis) that juxtaposed two usually dissimilar images or fragments without clear connection, demanding readers to make their own connections; 2) Stein’s style of writing **repetition** and the modern dance “Shutters Shut”; 3) Kerouac’s **spontaneous prose** v. his **babble flow**. **Al Filreis’ 16 Generalizations about the Language Poets** that he was reluctant to assume:

1. The self is a construction
2. Parataxis. [Brief Definition: short sentences/thoughts, no conjunctions?]
3. The self is nomadic. “That’s a version of 1 [the self is a construction], but whatever.”
4. Not depth, but surface. Language is a surface. It’s not deep, can’t go below it.
5. High culture/low culture distinction is false or useless
6. Anything can be the subject matter for poetry
7. Subject/ object relations are really subject/ subject relations
8. No natural speech, only artificiality posing as natural. Robert Grenier: “I hate speech.”  
William Carlos Williams said: “A poem is a machine, a machine made out of words.”
9. The medium is the message and poetry must be about that
10. The serial poem; series not essence; the new sentence
11. Experience is not un-contradictory
12. “Cause and effect” is created, not natural
13. Down with intellectual property
14. Down with beginnings, middles, and ends; rejection of closure
15. Let’s try to separate authorship from authority<sup>21</sup>

**Gertrude Stein** (February 3, 1874 – July 27, 1946) was an American avant-garde writer born in Pittsburgh, PA. At age 29, she moved to Paris, France and started her own art salon. Stein was a pioneer of modernism through her writings and patronage of artists including Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and Ezra Pound. She wrote the modernist literary landmark *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, a fictional biography of herself through the eyes of her partner. Two of her famous quotes include: “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose,” and “there is no there there.”<sup>22</sup>

**Repetition and Composition:** Stein’s poem *If I Told Him, A Completed Portrait of Picasso* and other works, at first may be inaccessible, use the technique “composition as explanation” by putting multiple thoughts into one sentence and emphasizing these thoughts by repeating the same sentence, phrase or word. Example: Stein uses the word “he” 12 times continuously in *If I Told Him, A Completed Portrait of Picasso*, then repeats a similar sentence with “he” 12 more

times. In her writing *Poetry and Grammar* (1935), Stein describes the sentence: “As I say a noun is a name of a thing, and therefore slowly if you feel what is inside that thing you do not call it by the name by which it is known.”<sup>23</sup> In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein is self-aware in noticing that “*My sentences do get under their skin. . .*”<sup>24</sup> **Pablo Picasso (Cubism):** Stein’s writings in *Tender Buttons* bear a close relationship to Picasso’s cubist paintings. Both have abstraction, generalization and the start of a thought. **Netherlands Dans Theater, *Shutters Shut* (2003)** is a modern dance (recorded on Nov. 12, 2016) set to Stein's voice reciting her poem “*If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso*,” presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Humor and Fantasy—The Berggruen Paul Klee Collection*, at The Met Breuer.<sup>25</sup>

**Jack Kerouac** (March 12, 1922 – October 21, 1969) was an American novelist, poet, literary icon, underground celebrity of the Beat Generation and one of the forefathers of the hippie movement. Kerouac’s writing included themes of Catholic spirituality, jazz, promiscuity, Buddhism, drugs, fast cars, poverty, and pursuit of kicks. His heavy drinking caused him to have an abdominal hemorrhage and he died at age 47. Some of his notable books include: *The Town and the City*, *On the Road*, and *Big Sur*. **Al Filreis’** description of Kerouac: “Time being of the essence in the purity of speech, sketching language is undisturbed flow from the mind of personal secret idea-words, blowing (as per jazz musician) on subject of image. That’s Jack Kerouac.”<sup>26</sup> **Time Magazine** describes Kerouac as “a ‘shaman’ of the Beat Generation who sounded his ‘barbaric yawp...’”<sup>27</sup> **Kerouac’s “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose”** lists the following requirements: 1) set-up; 2) procedure; 3) method; 4) scoping; 5) lag in procedure; 6) timing; 7) center of interest; 8) structure of work; 9) mental state.<sup>28</sup> In an ironic fashion, Kerouac had set a list of rules to instruct us to write freely and different from the norm. Writing spontaneous prose is a great way to get students to write without self-censorship. The **babble flow** technique goes even further because making sense is not the point, the act of writing without editing creates writings that may be unreadable and strange, in the inevitable failed attempt to capture one’s stream of consciousness. Here is an excerpt: “Aw rust rust rust rust die die pipe pipe ash ash die die ding dong ding ding ding...”<sup>29</sup>

**Lesson Series D** teaches students how to use chance to write experimental poetry. **Chance-based (aleatory) poetry** is made by setting rigid procedure, rules or constraint with a heavy dependence on chance. **John Cage** (September 5, 1912-August 12, 1992) was a prolific avant-garde composer, writer, and artist who introduced chance to generate mesostic poems, sometimes layered with the sounds. A **mesostic** is a poem arranged so that a vertical phrase intersects lines of horizontal text. It is similar to an acrostic, but with the vertical phrase intersecting somewhere in the midst of the line, as opposed to the beginning of each line. Cage famously said: “I have nothing to say/and I am saying it/and that is poetry/as I needed it.”<sup>30</sup> Critics have lauded him as one of the most influential composers of the 20th century and instrumental in developing modern dance. Cage’s 1952 composition “4’33”” was deliberately performed in the absence of music; musicians do nothing aside from being present for the duration of 4 minutes and 33 seconds. The work challenges our assumed definition about music. Students can use a website called Mesostic Poem Generator to generate chance poems to challenge the definition of poetry.<sup>31</sup> After entering a spine word and source text, the computer program will randomly generate the poem in an instant.

Another modern poetry movement is **conceptual poetry**; it focuses on the concept rather than the final product, sometimes refer as an act of “uncreative writing” and “unoriginality.” **Jena Osman** is an American poet, author and professor. Her poem *Dropping Leaflets* was written after September 11, 2001 attacks as a reaction to the meaningless statements made by government officials during press conferences and quoted in newspapers. She printed the transcripts, tore them into pieces, stood on a chair and “bombed” her office floor with them as if they were leaflets. Essentially *Dropping Leaflets* is a randomly assembled collage poem.<sup>32</sup> **Christian Bök** (August 10, 1966 - ) is an conceptual Canadian poet, author, professor, most famous for *Eunoia* (2001), an experimental book that took 7 years to complete. The book uses only one vowel in each of its five chapters producing sentences such as: “Enfettered, these sentences repress free speech.”<sup>33</sup> **Kenneth Goldsmith** (1961 - ) is avant-garde poet, writer, conceptual artist who claimed to be the most boring writer that has ever lived because of the unreadability of his work. In the poem *Day* (2003), he retypes the Friday, September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000 issue of the New York Times, from left to right, ignoring distinctions between articles and advertisements, stock quotes and editorials. In *Soliloquy* (2001), Goldsmith recorded his every utterance over an entire week, transforming spoken language into physical material, designed to investigate how much a person speaks in an average week and his answer turned out to be about 500 pages or 5 pounds. Goldsmith said: “I don’t have a readership, I have a thinkership. I copy pre-existing texts and move information from one place to another. A child could do what I do, but wouldn’t dare to for fear of being called stupid.”<sup>34</sup> **Flarf poetry** started as a joke by Gary Sullivan; it used the results of Google search to create “bad” or “inappropriate” poems. **Michael Magee** is a poet, writer and author of *Morning Constitutional* (2001), *MS* (2003), and *My Angie Dickinson* (2007). Magee participated in a collage-based collaborative movement that creates poems by pulling texts from the Internet. Magee called the method "collaborative texture" tended to get rid of the notion of authorship. Flarf was a good thing, essentially saying don’t take yourself too seriously. Flarf did raise important question such as: Can poetry be open-source? Can the politics of authorship and proprietary ownership be challenged? But, in its own way, Flarf later took itself too seriously as a movement and became a closed system, a literary clique, and betrayed the very spirit in which it was founded.<sup>35</sup>

**Lesson Series E** focus on the study of poems with a social justice bend about the American principles about race equality, gender equality, freedom, and democracy. The summative assessment will base on the performance of spoken words from student’s individual, pair or group letter-poem with the address “Dear Fellow Americans:” Students will read poems by Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, Michael Magee and Rosmarie Waldrop, speeches by Abraham Lincoln’s *Gettysburg Address*, Sojourner Truth’s *Ain’t I a Woman?*, Dr. Martin Luther King’s *I Have a Dream*, Hilary Clinton’s *Women’s Rights Are Human Rights*, and Maya Angelou’s *In the Pulse of Morning*, along with primary documents: Preamble of the *Declaration of Independence* (1776), *Pledge of Allegiance* (1954) and Preamble of U.S. Constitution (Signed September 17, 1787 and ratified June 21, 1788).

Over a span of 6 to 10 weeks (about one report card period) teacher will choose and conduct close readings and discussions of the above poems, speeches and written documents. In this process, students will cement a social issue they are passionate about and a public holiday that they identify with to begin the writing of their letter-poems. Students are encouraged to express their feelings and opinions, identify the serious problem and make suggestions to solve it. The

letter-poem should follow the format of **Langston Hughes'** poem titled *Will V-Day be Me-Day?* and sign off as themselves or as an influential person of U.S. history. V-Day (Victory Day) refers to the day after the Allied victories in World War II. Discuss how V-Day used to be a national holiday, but it has been removed due to how WWII ended with the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan. **Langston Hughes** (February 1, 1901 – May 22, 1967) was an American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist from Joplin, Missouri. He moved to New York City as a young man, where he made his career as one of the earliest innovators of the then-new art form called **jazz poetry**. Hughes is best known as a leader of the Harlem Renaissance, an intellectual, social and artistic movement from 1918 until the mid-1930s.

**Gwendolyn Brooks** (June 7, 1917 – December 3, 2000) was an American poet, prolific author, and teacher. Her work often dealt with the personal celebrations and struggles of ordinary people in her community. She was the first African-American woman inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Her poem *Boy Breaking Glass* speaks about inequity and “the cry of art” of a boy’s attempt of self-expression by breaking windows. Another poem *We Real Cool* was written from the perspective of seven pool players who skipped school, living a fast life.

**Rosmarie Waldrop** (August 24, 1935), née Sebald, was an American poet, translator and publisher. Waldrop wrote poetry in German before her immigration to the United States in 1958. She uses the language discrepancies between German and English as a force (rather than an obstacle) to generate her poetry.<sup>36</sup> In her poem *Shorter American Memory of the Declaration of Independence*, she kept the same structure of the Preamble of the Declaration of Independence and re-wrote it by substitute words of her choice making her poem a commentary of American beliefs and ideology. In a similar way, **Michael Magee's** *Pledge* uses homophonic wordplay to renew our understanding of the Pledge of Allegiance. Most American children have the Pledge memorized, but most don't really understand what each word stands for. By having students imitate the process of Waldrop or Magee, students are forced to critically question what American values our country was founded on, and how these values had changed over time.

**Lesson Series F** is a collaborative poetry writing project designed to build a community of individual learners focused on how the class collectively identified themselves as a part of American history and culture. Students will create a class spoken words performance along with a public collage the size (average 96” x 48”) of a Bulletin Board or an outdoor wall. If the process proves successfully, the class may want to launch a campaign to make an outdoor mural with a public art program such as the Mural Arts Philadelphia. **Bulletin Board Collaborative Activities.** After an in-depth discussion on what is American, America and American history, the class will begin a collection of abstract concepts such as Love, Liberty, Dream as well as controversial topics such as border walls, undocumented immigrants, migrant workers, DREAMers, asylum seekers, same-sex marriage, religious freedom, universal healthcare, fake news, gun controls, conservatives v. progressives, . Students will handwrite or stencil the texts of these concepts. First, each student will strategically cut their concept words and paste them on an individual 8 “x 11” paper, and then collectively the class will rearrange the individual student collages onto the Bulletin Board. Student leaders will organize a performance of the collage with accompanied music. Students will videotape the performance for future screening.



**Poetry Inspiration and Connection:** For inspiration, students will “close read” Robert Frost’s *Mending Wall*, John Ashbery’s *Some Trees* and Barbara Guest’s *20*, and use Jackson Mac Low’s *A Vocabulary for Peter Innisfree Moore*, an artwork (poem/song/dance) as a pastiche to imitate with respect. **Robert Frost** (March 26, 1874 – January 29, 1963) was an American poet and icon. His work often depicts the rural life of New England in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and uses colloquial speech to explore complex themes such as why good fences makes good neighbors. **John Ashbery** (July 28, 1927 – September 3, 2017) was an American poet who published more than 40 collections of poetry. His poetry was renowned for its complexity, opacity, resistance to reductive meanings, often controversial because some critics think of his poems as influential and other critics think his poems make no sense. Reminder of plagiarism: In 1945, one of Ashbery high school classmates took Ashbery’s poems and submitted them as his own. *Some Trees* is a complex poem that demands reader interruptions. Instead having students focus on interruption about some trees, use the following phrases from the poem to start an open discussion as to how to define us: “joining a neighbor”, “a still performance”, “arranging by chance”, “you and I/Are suddenly what the trees try//To tell us we are:” “A silence already filled with noises,” “A canvas on which emerges/A chorus of smiles,” “Our days put on such reticence/These accents seem their own defense”<sup>37</sup> **Barbara Guest** (September 6, 1920 – February 15, 2006) was an American poet, collage artist, playwright, and member of the first generation New York School of poetry. Guest wrote more than 15 books of poetry spanning sixty years, best-known for her biography *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and Her World* (1984). Use Guest’s poem *20* to ask students to explain which numbers mean something important to them. Present the phrase “20 is sleep” and ask why it needs reader interruption? Ask can “We the People” be defined with a number. If yes, how? “What [is] an idiotic number!” **Jackson Mac Low** (September 12, 1922 – December 8, 2004) was an American poet, performance artist, composer and playwright, known to use systematic chance operations and other non-intentional compositional methods in his work.<sup>38</sup> **Peter Innisfree Moore** was an American photographer and documentarian of Fluxus movement from the 1960s on. Low’s poem *A Vocabulary for Peter Innisfree Moore* was created in the memory of his friend Peter Innisfree Moore. The poem is a black and white collage of 960 words, all comprised of letters from Moore’s full name, arranged with erratic dispersion on a white paper and on the reverse are instructions for the performance of the work. Using chance operations to draw from the list and to place them on the drawing or musical score, and then people on the stage work freely from these materials, but always either saying the words or playing notes that correspond to the letters of these words.

**Articles on “Wall” as an Art of Expression and/or Political Symbol of Protest:** Explain **Angel Island Detention Center:** From January 21, 1910 to November 5, 1940, immigrants (the majority from China, Japan, India, Mexico and the Philippines) entered the United States through the Angel Island Immigration Station, in San Francisco, CA were detained and interrogated. Major traits of classical Chinese poetry: 1) deceptive simple; 2) usually composed of lines of 4 characters; 3) often related closely to the art of Chinese calligraphy and paintings. **Border Disputes:** The Mexico–United States border wall, is a series of vertical barriers intended to reduce illegal immigration to the United States from Mexico. Such barriers are typically constructed for border control purposes such as curbing illegal immigration, human trafficking, and smuggling. The barrier is not a continuous structure, but a series of obstructions classified as “fences” or “walls”. Compare “virtual fence” of sensors, cameras, and other surveillance equipment to the ancient Great Wall of China.

## UNIT OBJECTIVES

### **Lesson A Series: Dada & Pastiche (De-constructing and Re-constructing of Short Poems)**

#### **Objectives/Standards for Lesson A1, A2 and A3:**

SWBAT deconstruct a short poem(s) by a modern poet such as Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein and William Carlos Williams by substituting it with English words borrowed from another language such as Arabic, Chinese, French, etc. IOT (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4: Craft and Structure) determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the poem, including discussion of figurative language such as metaphors and similes. SWBAT reconstruct a modern poem with its original words and interpret a modern poem through close reading IOT (RL.5.5 ) explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem, and (RL.5.1 Key Ideas and Details) quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

**Objectives/Standards for Lesson 4:** SWBAT read the poems *This Is Just to Say* by William Carlos Williams and *Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams* Kenneth Koch, then write their own version following the similar poetic text structure IOT 1) **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas** (RL.5.9): compare these 2 original poems with their own versions on the approaches to similar themes and topics. 2) **Craft & Structure: Overall Structure & Point of View** (RL.5.5 and RL.5.6.3) compare how a series of stanzas fit together to give the overall structure of a poem and describe how the speaker’s POV influence how events are described.

### **Lesson B: List & Lunch Poems and “I do this, I do that” Style (Write Long Poems)**

**Objectives/Standards for Lesson B Series:** SWBAT to use mentor texts of poetry modelling the concepts of “blab of the pave, catalogue listing, lunch poems, “I do this I do that” poetry, and hype-narrative IOT (RL.5.4)\_write narrative poems to include meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text such as metaphors and similes.

### **Lesson C: The New Sentence (Structure, Grammar and Semantic)**

**Objective/Standards for Lesson C Series:** SWBAT use mentor texts from Gertrude Stein and Jack Kerouac IOT to write what Ron Silliman called “the new sentence” using the technique of parataxis to juxtapose two or more fragments (word phrases) IOT challenge students’ assumptions about language and allow them to create their own “unnatural” connections

### **Lesson D: Chance-based Poetry (Experimental and Chance-based Writing)**

**Objective/Standards for Lesson Series D:** SWBAT follow a set of rigid procedures and/or constraints to write chance-based poems IOT (RI.5.10) write, read & comprehend complex texts.

### **Lesson E: Dear Fellow Americans Poem-Letter Writing (U.S. History and Social Issues)**

**Objectives/Standards for Lesson E Series:** SWBAT read and analyze the poem “Will V-Day Be Me-Day Too?” by Langston Hughes IOT create a letter addressed: “Dear Fellow Americans,”

### **Lesson F Series: Building a Wall of a 1,000 Words as a Collaborative American Identity**

**Objectives/Standards for Lesson F Series:** SWBAT create a collaborative Bulletin Board Wall Exhibit to define their collective American identity based on a chosen historical theme IOT (Social Studies 5.1.5.C) describe the principles and ideals shaping local state, and national government: Liberty, Democracy, Justice, Equality.

## LESSION PROCEDURES

### Lesson A Series Procedures: Short Poems

**For the Lesson A Series,** I want to flip the process of close reading with “reading by writing.” Students will be deconstructing modern poems such as Emily Dickinson’s “I dwell in Possibility” from a blank slate. Students will be given a page with a short biography of the poet, the title of a poem, and the poem’s structure of stanzas with clues based on the number of letters in each word to decipher. Students in pairs may choose from a list of English words borrowed from Arabic to “totally” reinvent the original poem with unexpected word to word arrangement. The lists of English words borrowed from a language will include languages spoken by one of their classmates, parents and/or teachers: Arabic, Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), French, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Khmer, Korean, Japanese, Laos, Nepali, Spanish, Swahili, Vietnamese. This process will allow students time to investigate the form, semantic and meaning of both languages using a modern poem. Students in pairs or groups of 4 or 6 will be given words from the original poem in random order, and challenge to reconstruct/reassemble these words back to what they think the original poem should look and sound like. After the reconstructing, students compare their own poems with the original. Teacher will conduct a close reading of the original poem for a whole group discussion

1. Introduce the poem’s title “I dwell in Possibility.” Ask students to think, pair and share. Identify the title’s part of speech: pronoun, verb, preposition and (concept) noun. Ask students what these four words mean to them. Record students’ answers on chart paper and post for future reference.
2. Deconstruct the poem: Distribute **Appendix B** for “I dwell in Possibility” in the original poem format with number of syllables as clues (Articles and prepositions are provided as additional clues) and a list of English words borrowed from Arabic. You may also want to use a vocabulary list based on other mentor texts the class had read.
3. Reconstruct as close as possible the original poem with cut-out words from the original poem. Distribute **Appendix C**.
4. Perform a close reading of the poem in whole group. Distribute **Dickinson’s Original Poem and Teacher’s Sample (Appendix D)**. Give students a brief biography for background knowledge. Read the poem loud at least three times by different students. Assign a word or a phrase of the original poem to individual, student-pairs or small groups (set a support system for ESOL and struggling readers) to look up synonyms online. In small groups, give each group a stanza to discuss.

### Lesson A-2 Procedures:

#### ***Water Raining from Tender Buttons by Gertrude Stein:***

“Water is astonishing and difficult altogether makes a meadow and a stroke.” (1914)

1. On index separate cards, write one word from the short poem “Water Raining” by Gertrude Stein and randomly put the index cards in ziplock bags.
2. Divide students into pairs, or groups of 4 or 6. Prepare the number of bags to match the number of groups
3. Keep the poem’s title a secret. Challenge each group to reconstruct the poem and make sure to use two words as its title.
4. Students type the different versions on a shared Google document. In a whole group, discuss the word “syntax” and the basic structure of a complete sentence.

5. Write the original poem “Water is astonishing and difficult altogether makes a meadow and a stroke.” on a chart paper. Compare and contrast the original poem’s meanings to each student group’s creations. You may want to read a short written biography of Stein and conduct a close reading before or after discussing the original poem.

### Lesson A-3 Procedures:

1. Write the poem’s title “The Red Wheelbarrow” on the board.
2. Project an online image(s) of a red wheelbarrow for discussion. Ask what is an image. Why is imagery important in poetry?
3. Explain and discuss poetry terms: a line, a stanza, a couplet, a meter, a blank/free verse and other poetry terms.
4. Distribute **Activity Sheet E (Blank Slate for The Red Wheelbarrow)** and ask students to cut out the list of words and paste them into the poetry form provided.
5. Perform a close reading (phrase by phrase) of the poem with the whole class.

### Lesson A-4 Procedures (Compare Two Original Poems, Then Write):

1. Ask for volunteer readers. Read a biography of William Carlos Williams and discuss the purpose of the poem *This Is Just to Say*, a refrigerator notes of apology Williams wrote to his wife. Read out loud the poem at least 3 times by different students.
2. Read a biography of Kenneth Koch and his poem *Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams*. Look for similarities and differences between the two texts.
3. Ask students to choose a person whom they would like to write to. Have students write a poem in the similar structure as Williams’ original poem. Challenge students to stick with the number of words in each line and vary the length only if they can justify it.

**Assessment for Lesson A Series:** Distribute a short poem as an exit ticket for each student to summarize concisely (in less than 10 words) the main idea of the selected short poem. You may want to introduce the basic structure of a haiku. Below is a list of short poems:

1. William Carlos Williams’ *Between Wall (10 lines)*: the back wings/of the//hospital where/nothing//will grow lie/cinders//in which shine/the broken//pieces of a green/bottle
2. Ezra Pound’s *In a Station of the Metro (2 lines)*: The apparition of these faces in the crowd;/ Petals on a wet, black bough.
3. Jack Kerouac’s haiku (3 lines) The low yellow/ moon above the/ Quiet lamplit house.
4. Matsuo Basho’s Japanese haiku (3 lines). Translation: The beginning of autumn:/ Sea and emerald paddy/ Both the same green
5. Masacki Shiki’s haiku (3 lines). Translation: In the coolness/of the empty sixth-month sky.../the cuckoo's cry.
6. Stein’s *A Long Dress (3 lines)*: That is the current that makes machinery, that makes it/What is the wind, what is it./Where is the serene length, it is there and a dark place.
7. Emily Dickinson’s *I’m nobody! Who are you? (8 lines)*: I'm nobody! Who are you?/Are you nobody, too?/Then there's a pair of us - don't tell!/They'd banish us, you know./How dreary to be somebody!/ How public, like a frog/To tell your name the livelong day/To an admiring bog!
8. Langston Hughes’s *Harlem (10 lines)*: What happens to a dream deferred?//Does it dry up/like a raisin in the sun?/Or fester like a sore—/And then run?/Does it stink like rotten

meat?/Or crust and sugar over—/like a syrupy sweet?//Maybe it just sags/like a heavy load.//Or does it explode?

9. Gwendolyn Brooks' *We Real Cool*: The Pool Players/Seven at the Golden Shovel.// We real cool. We/Left school. We//Lurk late. We/Strike straight. We//Sing sin. We/Thin gin. We//Jazz June. We/Die soon.
10. Robert Frost's *The Dust of Snow* (8 lines): The way a crow/ Shook down on me/ The dust of snow/From a hemlock tree//Has given my heart/A change of mood/And saved some part/Of a day I had rued.

### Lesson Series B Procedures:

#### List & Lunch Poems, "I do this I do that" Style

1. **Writing Activity B-1 (Imagery and Lunch Poems):** Ask students (in pairs or small group) to draw a map of a recent walk from home to school using images, icons, symbols to denote points of interest. You may conduct a walking trip around the school neighborhood with students taking notes, photos and/or video-recording before this activity. Using their drawn map, ask students to pick an (random or purposeful) image as the starting point of their narrative prose-poem. Possible constraints: 1) use the semicolon to connect each line of the poem; 2) write without action verbs; 3) write using conjunctions (after, before, and, or, either/or, neither/nor...) to link their image-ideas. Conduct a close reading of Whitman's Canto 1 or 8 from *Song of Myself*
2. **Writing Activity B-2 (Catalogue Listing):** Set a timer for 10 minutes and instruct students to write non-stop without censoring any of their thoughts. Write a 1st person prose-poem with the "I do this I do that" format to record their thinking in the present tense. Reference the poetry styles of Walt Whitman's *blab of the pave* (social noise), Frank O'Hara's lunch poems such as *A Step Away from Them*, Bernadette Mayer's poem *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and her list of writing experiments. Extension activity: Once students are comfortable writing this way, stop every five minutes or so and instruct them to exchange their notebooks with any classmates of their choice. Set 10 seconds to get students to do this exchange. With another classmate's notebook, students continue to write their prose-poem for 10 minutes. Repeat this "Stop-and-Go" exchange 3 times.
3. **Writing Activity B-3 (Compare two texts):** Close Read both Frank O'Hara's poem *A Step Away from Them* and Bernadette Mayer's poem *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Compare SMILE (Structure, Meaning, Imagery, Language and Effect).

**Assessment Rubrics:** Ask students to choose a stanza (at least 3 lines) from Whitman's or their own "blab of pave" poem and rewrite it as one or more complete sentences with grammar correction. Challenge: avoid ambiguous meanings as much as possible. Be precise and concise.

**Example from Canto 1:** I celebrate myself, and sing myself,/And what I assume you shall assume,/For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. **Rewrite:** I celebrate and sing who I am. What I think, you shall think. Every atom that belongs to me, also belong to you.

### Lesson C Series Procedures:

1. Write the words "Experimental Writing" on the board and ask students to come up with "essentials" of an experimental writing. Dovetail to Mayer's Experiment Writing of hypertext and journal writing.
2. Show examples of cubism paintings by Picasso and his portrait painting of Gertrude Stein. Ask students why the paintings from this art movement is labelled as cubism.

3. Play Gertrude Stein's reading of her poem *If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso* with the dance performance of Netherlands Dans Theater, *Shutters Shut* (2003)
4. Discussion: Define "spontaneous prose" and "babble flow" by reading Kerouac's works
5. **Writing Activity:** Allow students to choose their own subject and write a poem using Stein's technique of repetition, Kerouac's spontaneous prose **or** his babble flow. Give students a time constraint of 15 minutes per seating to write to record whatever thoughts come to mind without self-censorship. Allow students to use this time constraint format until they have at least 100 words on the subject.
6. Ask students what is the definition of a sentence. Introduce students to Ron Silliman's idea of "the new sentence" (Wittgenstein's model). Example: Can "Bring me sugar" and "Bring me milk" can turn into "Milk me sugar" and still make sense. Ask students to write two sentence and then rewrite them as a new sentence with clever juxtapositions.

**Assessment Rubric:** Ask students what is their definition of a sentence. Show quotes from Stein's difficult writing *Poetry and Grammar* (1935) about noun, grammar (diagramming sentences), adjectives, verbs and adverbs, prepositions, articles. In *Poetry and Grammar*, Stein makes a specific differentiation between sentences and paragraphs: "Sentences are not emotional but paragraphs are". Use the part of speech and grammar rules to analyze sentences in the poem *If I Told Him, A Completed Portrait of Picasso*. After reading analysis, pair students to use Stein's form and voice to write a poem about someone of their choice.

#### **Lesson D Series Procedures:**

1. **Revisit and discuss** Bernadette Mayer's writing experiments  
[http://www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Mayer-Bernadette\\_Experiments.html](http://www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Mayer-Bernadette_Experiments.html)
2. **Writing Activity:** Ask students to choose one experiment they like from Bernadette Mayer's' writing experiments **OR** use the Mesostic Poem Generator **OR** use Google search (Flarf method) **OR** the dictionary to randomly write a poem with made-up rules.

**Speaking & Listening Assessment:** After students wrote a mesostic poem using the computer program, copy the poem on paper, and make revision for improvement. Pair students to practice reading their poems out loud to continue the writing process. Hold a Poetry SLAM competition by inviting guest judges to rate their performance with a standardized writing rubric.

#### **Lesson E Procedures (Dear Fellow Americans Letter-Poem):**

**Writing Activity 1:** Students will write "Dear Fellow Americans" poems using the structure of Langston Hughes' *Will V-Day be Me-Day?* Give students a list of important American (?) holidays and celebration months: Presidents Day, Veterans Day, Memorial Day, Election Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Independence Day, Black History Month, Women History Month, etc. In addition, students must choose a social and political American issue such as immigration, racism, "Me Too" Movement, etc. as their inspirational topic.

**Writing Activity 2:** Ask students what is racism. Close read Gwendolyn Brooks' poems *Boy Breaking Glass* and *We Real Cool*. Ask whose POV? Who is the speaker? Why are these boys skipping school and breaking glass?

**Writing Activity 3:** Use Rosmarie Waldrop's method with her poem "Shorter American Memory of the Declaration of Independence" to rewrite important primary written documents.

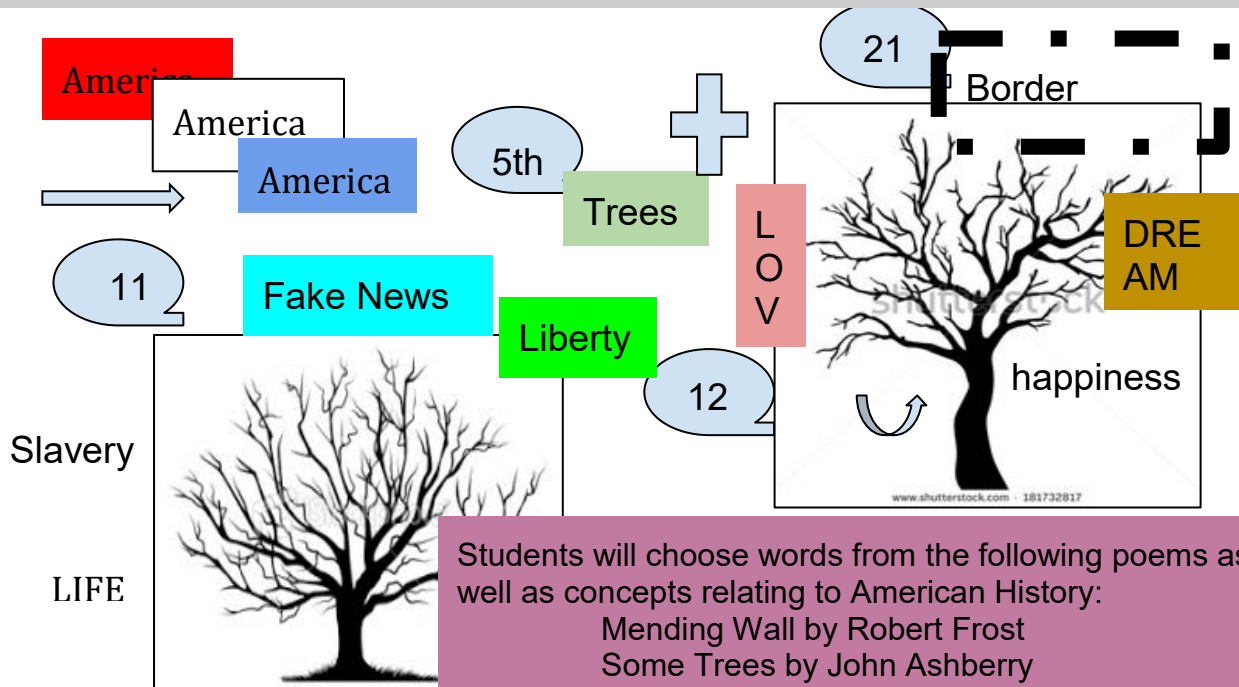
**Assessment:** Use a writing rubric that based on the followings: "Focus, Organization, Content, Style and Convention of Language."



## Lesson F Series Procedures

- 1. Collaborative Writing Activity (Product: Bulletin Board based on a theme such America is un-American):** Ask students do they agree or disagree with this line from Robert Frost's poem *Mending Wall*: "Good fences make good neighbors." If yes, why does good fences make good neighbors. If not, why not?
- Have students write, stencil, or cut out words from printed sources to start a collection of text that define what it means to live in the United States, what is America, who are Americans or who are not Americans.
- Read an article about Chinese Poems from Angel Island's Detention Center and an article on the recent border wall debate. Use close reading strategies to identify text structures, main ideas and themes. Continue to collect words for the bulletin board.
- Close read *Some Tree* by John Ashberry and *20* by Barbara Guest. Ask students to choose an object, an age or a number that is meaningful in their life. Ex: 5th grade class of 28 students ages range from 10 to 12 in Room 312. The numbers 5, 28, 10, 11 and 312 will serves as the links between concept for the wall poem.
- Show and discuss the poem *A Vocabulary for Peter Innisfree Moore* by Jackson Mac Low as an example to start the class collaborative writing. Ask students how would they make a dance or SLAM performance out of their Bulletin Board collaboration. Ask students to choose a name of an important American person from one of the following lists: African Americans, Women, Scientists, Poets, Authors, etc. and copy what Jackson Mac Low did in the poem *A Vocabulary for Peter Innisfree Moore*. Students may also want to make new words out of their own full names.

Mockup of a Sample Bulletin Board using the collage and conceptual poetry. Visual Reference: *A Vocabulary for Peter Innisfree Moore* by Jackson Mac Low





## Appendix A: Overall Aligned Standards

### ELA Common Core Standards

**Craft and Structure (Reading Literature):** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5 Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6 Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

**Craft and Structure (Reading Informational Text):** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.4 Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 5 topic or subject area. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.5 Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.6 Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

### Writing Standards

**Text Types and Purposes:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

**Production and Distribution of Writing:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.5 With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grade 5 here.) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.6 With some guidance and support from adults, use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of two pages in a single sitting.

**Research to Build and Present Knowledge:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.7 Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.8 Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, and provide a list of sources. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. **Range of Writing:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

## Language Standards

**Conventions of Standard English:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.2 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing. **Knowledge of Language:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.3 Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening. **Vocabulary Acquisition and Use:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 5 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

## Speaking/Listening Standards

**Comprehension and Collaboration:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.2 Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.3 Summarize the points a speaker makes and explain how each claim is supported by reasons and evidence.

**Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.4 Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.5 Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, sound) and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, using formal English when appropriate to task and situation. (See grade 5 Language standards 1 and 3 [here](#) for specific expectations.)

## Social Studies Standards

**Civic and Government: Principles and Documents of Government** Standard - 5.1.5.A Understand the rule of law in protecting property rights, individual rights and the common good. Standard - 5.1.5.B Describe the basic purposes of government in the classroom, school, community, state, and nation. Standard - 5.1.5.C Describe the principles and ideals shaping local state, and national government: Liberty / Freedom, Democracy, Justice, Equality. Standard - 5.1.5.D Interpret key ideas about government found in significant documents: Declaration of Independence United States Constitution Bill of Rights.

**Civic and Government: Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship** Standard - 5.2.5.A Identify individual rights and needs and the rights and needs of others in the classroom, school, community, state, and nation. Standard - 5.2.5.B Identify behaviors that promote cooperation among individuals. Standard - 5.2.5.C Explain why individuals become involved in leadership and public service.

**U.S. History:** Standard - 8.3.5.D Examine patterns of conflict and cooperation among groups and organizations that impacted the history and development of the United States. Ethnicity and race, Working conditions, Immigration, Military conflict, Economic stability

## Appendix B

### Encrypted by the number of letters in each word

#### *I dwell in Possibility* – (466)

by Emily Dickinson

I \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ –  
A \_\_\_\_\_ than \_\_\_\_\_ –  
More \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ –  
\_\_\_\_\_ – for \_\_\_\_\_ –

Of \_\_\_\_\_ as the \_\_\_\_\_ –  
\_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ –  
\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ –  
The \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ –

Of \_\_\_\_\_ – the \_\_\_\_\_ –  
For \_\_\_\_\_ – \_\_\_\_\_ –  
The \_\_\_\_\_ my \_\_\_\_\_ –  
To \_\_\_\_\_ –

#### List of English words borrowed from Arabic:

admiral, adobe, alchemy, alcohol, alcove, alfalfa, algebra, algorithm, alkali, almanac, altar, amber, apricot, Arab, artichoke, assassin, average, azure, bean, bezoar, bled, borax, caliber, café, candy, carat, caravan, carafe, check, checkmate, chemistry chess, cipher, coffer, cork, cotton, crimson, decipher, dhow, dirham, elixir, emir, Farsi, fanfare, fatwa, falafel, fellah, garbage, garble, gazelle, genie, gerbil, ghou, giraffe, guitar, haj, halal, harem, hazard, henna, hookah, hummus, imam, Islam, jar, jasmine, jinn, julep, kabob, kaffir, kismet, kohl, Koran, lacquer, lemon, lilac, lime, loofah, lute, mafia, magazine, mask, massage, mattress, mecca, mica, monsoon, mosque, typhoon, mummy, Muslim, nadir, nadir, orange, ottoman, pia mater, popinjay, racquet/racket, ream (of paper), rebec, roc, rook, safari, saffron, Sahara, salaam, sash, satin, scarlet, sequin, serendipity, sherbet, sine, soda, sodium, sofa, sorbet, spinach, sugar, Sunni, Swahili, syrup, tabby, talc, talisman, tamarind, tandoori, tangerine, tariff, tarragon, tell, traffic, tuna, Vega, vizier, wisdom tooth, zenith, zero.

### Appendix C Directions:

- 1) Form a group of two or four students.
- 2) Cut out words of the poem *I dwell in Possibility* listed below.
- 3) Paste these words back to its original poem. Remember the overall poem is comprised of 3 stanzas of 4 lines.
- 3) Close reading: compare student-versions with the original poem.

<b>I</b>	<b>Dwell</b>	<b>For</b>	<b>House</b>	<b>Possibility --</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>Fairer</b>	<b>The</b>	<b>than</b>	<b>Prose –</b>
<b>Of</b>	<b>More</b>	<b>For</b>	<b>eye –</b>	<b>Numerous</b>
<b>As</b>	<b>And</b>	<b>The</b>	<b>Roof</b>	<b>Windows –</b>
<b>Of</b>	<b>The</b>	<b>The</b>	<b>Sky –</b>	<b>Superior –</b>
<b>An</b>	<b>For</b>		<b>This –</b>	<b>Occupation–</b>
<b>Of</b>	<b>The</b>	<b>Doors –</b>		<b>Chambers</b>
<b>Of</b>	<b>Hands</b>	<b>fairest –</b>		<b>Cedars –</b>
<b>My</b>	<b>Wide</b>	<b>spreading</b>		<b>Impregnable</b>
<b>To</b>		<b>Narrow</b>		<b>Everlasting</b>
<b>In</b>		<b>Gather</b>		<b>Gambrels</b>
<b>Of</b>	<b>Paradise –</b>			<b>Visitors –</b>

## Appendix D

### Teacher's Example

Deconstructing the poem *I dwell in Possibility*  
by selecting English words borrowed from Arabic

I mecca in serendipity –  
A hummus carat than chess –  
Zero magazine of caravan –  
Tarragon– for adobe –

Of artichoke as the elixir –  
Serendipity of jar –  
And for an alchemy-café sash  
The jasmines of the roc –

Of fanfares – the algebra –  
For algorithms – This –  
The tangerine mask my safari sugar  
To sequin monsoons –

\*\*\*\*\*

### Original Poem

*I dwell in Possibility* – (466)  
By Emily Dickinson

I dwell in Possibility –  
A fairer House than Prose –  
More numerous of Windows –  
Superior – for Doors –

Of Chambers as the Cedars –  
Impregnable of eye –  
And for an everlasting Roof  
The Gambrels of the Sky –

Of Visitors – the fairest –  
For Occupation – This –  
The spreading wide my narrow Hands  
To gather Paradise –

## Appendix E

### The Red Wheelbarrow by [William Carlos Williams](#)

\_\_\_\_\_ (line 1, three words)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (line 2, one word)

\_\_\_\_\_ (line 3, three words)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (line 4, one word)

\_\_\_\_\_ (line 5, three words)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (line 6, one word)

\_\_\_\_\_ (line 7, three words)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (line 8, one word)

---

**Directions:** Cut out the following words and paste each word onto the above template.

<b>NOUN</b>	rain	chickens	water	barrow	Wheel
<b>VERB</b>	glazed	depends			
<b>ADJECTIVE</b>	Red	Much	so	white	
<b>ARTICLE</b>	The	A			
<b>PREPOSITION</b>	with	Beside	Upon		

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