

Using Poetry to Confront Neighborhood Representation and Gentrification

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Seminar: Cities through the Lens of Race, Class, and Gender

Abstract:

This curriculum unit is designed for upper-level high school students, as part of a year-long poetry elective. In the unit, students will make a comprehensive study of gentrification. First, they will learn to “read” the neighborhood landscape by examining a variety of images of the neighborhood and practicing looking for signifiers. They will begin to consider how their intersecting identities of race, class, and gender affect the way they see and interpret the world around them, and then apply those same lenses to the texts we read. They will then become familiar with the complex causes and processes of gentrification. After that, they will learn to analyze media depictions of their neighborhood and generate their own media analysis of a news story related to neighborhood gentrification. Along the way, they will read, discuss, and analyze a wide variety of mentor poems and prose reflections dealing with gentrification. The ultimate goal of the unit is for students to generate a portfolio of poetry and prose, examining and creatively processing their experience growing up in a gentrifying neighborhood of Philadelphia. The unit is designed to last for ten weeks, with four different modular components that build on one another.

Keywords:

poetry, high school, landscape literacy, gentrification, media analysis, place-based learning, race, gender, class, intersectionality, metaphor

Content Objectives:

Problem Statement:

I teach at a small neighborhood high school in Kensington, Philadelphia. The neighborhood where my school is located, and where most of my students live, is caught between two competing narratives. On the one hand, Kensington is well known as an epicenter of opioid

addiction. Over the last few years, the media has paid significant attention to stories related to this issue: encampments of homeless people; the debate around the opening of a safe injection site; and, most recently, the closure of the Somerset el stop due to safety and equipment issues associated with drug activity. On the other hand, however, the eastern section of the neighborhood is also experiencing rapid gentrification. So much new luxury housing has been built around my school that my walk from the train is almost unrecognizable to what it was in 2012, when I started working there. Housing prices are skyrocketing in Fishtown and East Kensington; the effects are beginning to bleed over into neighborhoods to the north and west, where many of my students live. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are amplifying and complicating both of these sets of pressures.

A city dweller's experience of place is also inseparably linked to their own race, class, and gender. We also experience these aspects of our identity differently depending on where we are. We may find that we are particularly conscious of our race, gender, or class in some environments, and not in others. Two people of different races, genders, and classes can experience the same place very differently, and may look to radically different signifiers in the urban landscape to determine whether a given place is welcoming or hostile. The conditions my students find themselves in did not arise out of nothing. Particular factors have shaped both the growth of the illicit opioid market, and the boom in construction of new luxury housing. As Kathryn Wilson points out in "Building El Barrio," one reason why Puerto Ricans settled along the 5th St. corridor in the second half of the 20th century is because they had been pushed north as the Spring Garden neighborhood, closer to the city center, began to gentrify. The explosion of the illicit opioid market in Kensington, similarly, cannot be disentangled from race and class. Deindustrialization and white flight created the conditions favorable to the illicit drug economy. As Friedman et al. put it, "Quite literally in the shadow of abandoned factories, the narcotics economy rose up to fill the employment vacuum" (7). As Friedman et al. point out, the drug market "needs to be understood in the context of a deeply racially divided city with long standing tensions between black and white communities... In this context of extreme racial tension, Puerto Rican neighborhoods have served as a neutral meeting ground where white clients could more comfortably navigate through the inner-city to procure heroin" (16). In sum, in order to understand the processes of change happening around them, my students must become aware of how race, gender, and capital or class have shaped, and continue to shape, their community.

There is little space in the high school curriculum to give students the tools to make sense of what is happening around them in their neighborhoods, even though they face these realities constantly as they go about their daily business or commute to school. In addition, we need to give students the tools to critically evaluate the way their community is represented in the media. The conversations about the opioid crisis on the one hand, and real estate development on the other hand, loom large in the public imagination. Media narratives play an important role in building up a neighborhood's reputation as "up and coming," or as "blighted" and ripe for

renewal. I worry that the voices of my students, who grew up and live in this neighborhood, are getting drowned out. I want to make space for them to explore what they value in a community, what changes they welcome, and what changes make them apprehensive.

Why use a poetry unit to explore this material, when arguably it might be better suited for an interdisciplinary social studies class? One reason is the way poetry helps elevate student voice. I have found, over many years teaching poetry, that it works better than anything else to help less confident writers produce work they are proud of, that represents something important about themselves. I think because poetry can be short, and does not have to adhere to conventions of linear narrative, students feel more comfortable using poems to grapple with unfamiliar ideas. Furthermore, poetry allows for ambiguity, which I think is particularly valuable in examining a process as complex as gentrification. Poetry makes room for questions with no answers, and multiple competing realities and perspectives, in a way that traditional linear narrative writing, or argumentative writing, do not. Reading and writing poetry also requires us to consider the speaker, which will support the larger goal of considering how race, gender, and class affect the way we interact with the urban environment. In my senior Poetry class, I have significant flexibility to address the gaps in student understanding outlined above, while also helping students nurture and gain confidence in their own voices and tell their own stories.

Impact of Seminar Content on Learning

During the first session of the Cities through the Lens of Race, Class, and Gender seminar, our seminar leader, Dr. Sanders, introduced us to the way geography, as a discipline, attempts to make sense of the world. To the geographer, the central organizing principles to consider are location (both relative and absolute), region (considering how to divide space up, which places “belong” together, and why), distance, scale, and space and place (and what gives a place its unique personality). Using these concepts as a lens to make sense of the world intuitively resonated with me. I have found that my students often tend to gravitate towards writing about their neighborhood when they write about themselves, and I was intrigued by the idea of doing some specific place-based work in my poetry classes. Dr. Sanders also introduced us to her list of metaphors to describe and analyze a city. Consciously or unconsciously, when we talk about the city, we are subscribing to one or another particular metaphor to organize the complexity of the urban experience. Mapmakers must constantly make decisions about which details of a landscape to omit, which to include, and how to represent a place; so, too, do poets, songwriters, and anyone else who writes or create art about cities. The list of metaphors helps make this thought process visible and explicit.

In subsequent weeks, we delved into the concepts of race, class, and gender, considering each of these three concepts through the geographer’s lens of place. Dr. Sanders invited each of us to consider when we first realized we were raced (i.e. belonging to a marked racial category),

and not only when that happened, but where we were. We also discussed, among other readings, excerpts from *The Color of Law* by Richard Rothstein, which examines the role of government policy in creating residential segregation. After reading Rothstein, I realized that it is impossible to see a place as race-neutral. Kensington, and other majority-Black and Brown inner-city neighborhoods, did not get that way by accident. We also considered gender, and the performance of gender. Our discussion of the work of Irazabal and Huerta was particularly salient for me. Irazabal and Huerta discuss the work of FIERCE, an advocacy organization in the West Village centered around LGBTQ youth of color in New York. The authors analyze a tour of the neighborhood given by members of FIERCE, which in their view “facilitated for its participants processes of ‘performative reflexivity,’ defined by Turner (1986, 24) as a condition by which people ‘turn, bend, or reflect back upon themselves, upon their relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other socio-cultural components which make up their public selves” (724). I realized that I wanted to facilitate that same process for my students, in their own writing and thinking about the urban spaces they inhabit. Finally, in the fifth week, we discussed class, focusing on capitalism and dialectical materialism. Thinking of capitalism as a system that works to preserve its own equilibrium was a new concept for me, and helped me analyze things like housing policy and gentrification in new ways.

Another key influence on the development of this unit was the work of Stuart Hall in media studies, which we discussed in week 8. Hall’s ideas of encoding and decoding, which were groundbreaking at the time, ended up forming the basis for the media analysis component of the unit. Hall theorized that ideology is hidden, or “encoded” in mass media, and then received, or “decoded” in ways that differ according to the audience’s race, class, and gender. During this week, Dr. Sanders had us do an activity in class examining photos of city spaces, reading signs in the landscape, and imagining how we might see those signs differently if we occupied different identities. This activity, and the larger concept that we must teach students to “read” the landscape, also became a foundational component of my unit.

In the 10th week of the seminar, we discussed gentrification explicitly. Beauregard’s examination of four Philadelphia neighborhoods in “The Trajectory of Neighborhood Change” helped me clarify something I had suspected but wasn’t sure how to articulate, namely that there is no single explanation for why or how gentrification happens. The forces that drive gentrification in West Philadelphia are not exactly the same as the forces driving gentrification in East Kensington. This also helped reaffirm my instinct to examine gentrification through poetry. When I read poems with my students, I encourage them to hold multiple contradictory interpretations in their minds at once; in examining gentrification, I want students to be able to do the same thing.

Unit Content Objectives:

By the end of this unit of study, students will be able to:

1. Understand gentrification as a complex process with multiple causes and effects, in order to apply that understanding to the texts we will examine together

The goal of this unit is to use poetry to respond to gentrification and neighborhood change. In order to do that, my students first must have a solid understanding of what gentrification means and how it happens. It is important, when giving students an understanding of gentrification, to avoid oversimplifying how it happens. As Beauregard points out, “there can be no single theory of an invariant gentrification process. Rather, there are theoretical interpretations of how the “gentry” are created and located in the cities, how “gentrifiable” housing is produced, how those to be displaced originally came to live in inner-city neighborhoods, and finally how the various processes of gentrification unfold given the establishment of these three basic conditions” (“Chaos and Complexity,” 11). By examining each of these elements separately, students can arrive at a deeper understanding of how the process of gentrification might be working in their neighborhood or the neighborhood around the school. Often, when we speak about gentrification, we speak as if individual consumer decisions are the primary driver of the phenomenon (i.e. the choices of “gentrifiers” around housing, reproduction and lifestyle). As Beauregard points out, this is an important part of the truth, but we must also consider other structural factors including the role of government and the role of development capital. “The diversity of gentrification must be recognized, rather than conflating diverse aspects into a single phenomenon” (“Chaos and Complexity,” 14).

2. Use the lenses of race, gender, and class to consider how these aspects of identity affect the way people experience urban spaces

It is impossible to discuss gentrification seriously and thoroughly without also thinking critically about intersections of race, class, and gender. As Melissa Archer Alvaré points out, dominant narratives about gentrification often ignore the role of race in creating conditions of urban divestment, then, in turn, developers play on racist tropes about run-down urban neighborhoods to cast themselves in a positive light. “The dominant discourse ignores the roots of structural deprivation and places culpability on Black individuals’ assumed cultural deficiencies for the state of dilapidated innercity neighborhoods. In so doing, these portrayals bolster beliefs that through their renewal projects, real estate developers are rescuing neighborhoods from disorderly, careless, and criminal residents” (Alvaré, 116). Alvaré goes on to explain how racist narratives about Black urban residents work in service of capital: “Attending to gentrification as a racial project illuminates how negative, racialized representations of urban communities facilitate capital accumulation for the elite at the expense of the most marginalized residents” (117). This inevitably leads to a discussion of class and capital; after all, what is “gentrification”

without “gentry”? Who are the “gentry,” where did they get their money, and who stands to profit when they move into a neighborhood? As Beauregard points out, the answers to these questions are also gendered; as young professionals postpone or sidestep marriage and childbearing, they develop a new set of needs and priorities around how to spend their money and their time. This in turn contributes to gentrification: “Both the need to consume outside of the home and the desire to make friends and meet sexual partners, either during the now-extended period of “search” before marriage or a lifetime of fluid personal relationships, encourage the identification with and migration to certain areas of the city” (“Chaos and Complexity,” 16). Furthermore, the narrative Alvare identifies, portraying poor urban residents of color as responsible for neighborhood decay, is also gendered. Caitlin Cahill examines this at length in her report on a participatory action research project with a group of young women from New York’s gentrifying Lower East Side, called the Fed Up Honeys. Cahill writes, “The Fed Up Honeys first identified stereotypes of young women of color such as “burden to society” or “likely to be teen moms” and then worked to untangle the connections between representations that serve to “fix” young women of color in the “ghetto” or “inner city” and the gentrification of their community” (301). Gender is also a factor in which families are most vulnerable to displacement through gentrification. As Beauregard points out, “Many of these households, additionally, are characterized by large numbers of children, or are female-headed and poor...The hypothetical gap between what they demand in governmental services and what they pay in taxes and contribute to the circulation of capital through consumer expenditures combines with their inability to afford decent housing to make them relatively undesirable to local-government officials” (“Chaos and Complexity,” 19). Race, gender, and class overlap, both in determining who are the potential gentrifiers, and who are the potential gentrified. Students must learn to consider them intersectionally.

3. Critically evaluate media narratives about their neighborhood, considering audience, purpose, and bias, in order to examine the media’s role in the construction of place.

Media narratives play a key role, both in the commodification of the gentrified urban lifestyle, and in portraying gentrifying neighborhoods as attractive. Beauregard identifies local news as part of a larger pro-gentrification PR machine, a group that also includes “redevelopment bodies, local newspapers, “city” magazines, mayors’ offices, real-estate organizations, financial institutions, historic preservationists and neighborhood organizations comprised of middle-class homeowners” (“Chaos and Complexity,” 11). Says Beauregard, “Each has an interest in increased economic activity within the city and an affinity for the middle class who function as gentrifiers...The image of the city and its neighborhoods is manipulated in order to reduce the perceived risk and to encourage investment” (“Chaos and Complexity,” 11-12). In order to figure out the real causes and effects of gentrification, it is necessary to penetrate through what Beauregard describes as “journalistic and public-relations hyperbole” and see what else is going on. Furthermore, as Rucks-Ahidiana points out, “Media representations are not just descriptions

of the real world, but depictions of the world that reflect and reinforce assumptions, perceptions, and stereotypes through journalists and their sources. These representations inform, reinforce, and influence public opinion” (28). Whether the public views gentrification as a positive force for change in a neighborhood, or a process that leaves long-term residents vulnerable to displacement, depends in large part on how they interpret messages in the media. This in turn can affect which policies and projects the public is more likely to support. Rucks-Ahidian found, in her own analysis of news coverage about gentrification in San Francisco, that there were strong patterns in media narratives along race and class lines. “Significantly, whether the change brought about by gentrification was presented as positive or negative depended upon the race and class of the stakeholders and neighborhoods being described. Articles presented gentrification as less negative when it occurred in poor or black neighborhoods than when it occurred in working-class or Latino neighborhoods” (26). By understanding the complexity of gentrification as a process, and by applying their knowledge of race, class, and gender, students can more effectively “decode” the encoded messages present in news coverage of gentrification.

4. Use metaphor and imagery to creatively depict their own experience of the changing landscape of their neighborhood.

The first three content objectives give students the tools to analyze and understand the landscape around them. This objective specifies how students will communicate their learning. Metaphor and imagery are natural fits for a poetry unit. However, I believe they are also natural fits for the other content we will be discussing. By talking about which metaphors for the city are present in different media narratives, students will start to think in metaphor. Gentrification is, in the words of Beauregard, chaotic and complex; metaphor provides a tool to make this complexity intelligible. Imagery, moreover, allows students to translate their “reading” of the landscape onto the page, and to communicate their experience of the neighborhood in a way that is not necessarily simple or linear.

Teaching Strategies:

One major strategy I will be employing in this unit will be what Anne Whiston Spirn describes as “landscape literacy”: having students “read” and analyze signifiers in urban spaces. Spirn uses the term in her discussion of a long-term project she undertook with middle schoolers in the Mill Creek neighborhood of West Philly. Her students “learned to read the neighbourhood’s landscape; they traced its past, deciphered its stories and told their stories about its future, some of which were built. The tools they used were their own eyes and imagination, the place itself, and historical documents such as maps, photographs, newspaper articles, census tables and redevelopment plans” (Spirn, p. 403). While an extensive examination of primary source documents like redevelopment plans is beyond the scope of this unit, my students will be doing significant work with their own eyes, the place itself, newspaper articles, and photographs. If

possible, some of this work will be done on neighborhood walks; if this proves impossible due to pandemic-related restrictions, we will substitute “virtual walks” on Google Street View and collective discussion of photographs of urban space. Students will be challenged to describe their impressions of the space both from their own perspective and from the perspective of others who might interpret those same signifiers differently.

The practice of landscape literacy can be transformative for students. Spirn discovered that many of her students in West Philly had internalized a great deal of shame about the condition of their neighborhood. “Before the students at Sulzberger Middle School learned to read their landscape more fully, they read it partially. Without an understanding of how the neighbourhood came to be, many believed that the poor conditions were the fault of those who lived there, a product of either incompetence or lack of care. Learning that there were other reasons sparked a sense of relief. Once they had the skill to read the landscape’s history, they began to see their home in a more positive light” (Spirn, p. 409). I worry that my students may be laboring under similar misconceptions about the conditions of Kensington. By learning about some of the history of Kensington, and understanding the larger structural factors that lead to both divestment and gentrification in city neighborhoods, I hope my students, like Spirn’s, can begin to see their community, and imagine its future, differently.

Another major strategy of the unit will be media analysis. For this component, I plan to rely heavily on a list of questions framing audience, production, and messages, created by California NPR affiliate KQED. The list offers a helpful and user-friendly framework for how to figure out the intended audience and some of the hidden coding in a news story. Furthermore, as Rucks-Ahidiana observes, the media “informs and reinforces assumptions about who is affected by gentrification.” Media narratives influence what people believe gentrification is, and whether people tend to view it as an overall positive or a negative force. Rucks-Ahidiana, in her analysis of race and class in news stories about gentrification in the Bay Area, also offers a potential framework for how to approach this work with students. She examines how various parties are described in terms of race and class: whose race and class is explicitly identified? whose is not? how are long-term residents, new residents, and business owners portrayed in terms of race and class, and how are these portrayals likely to influence the audience’s view of gentrification?

The third major component will be reading and discussing mentor texts—poems, images, and personal essays—relating to experiences of gentrification and neighborhood change. I intend to focus particularly on metaphor, as metaphor is a powerful tool for constructing how we think about a city. We will use Sanders’ list of “Metaphors to Describe A City” as a jumping-off point and add to it. As students discuss these texts, connect them to their own experiences, and draft their own poems and reflections, I will invite them to consider the following questions: How do race, class, and gender, and our intersecting identities, affect what spaces feel safe or unsafe, inviting or uninviting, in a changing neighborhood? What images do the writers use to

signify safety, danger, welcome or warning to stay away? What metaphors and images can we use in turn to best describe different places in our own community landscape?

The culminating activity for the unit will be a portfolio of original writing (poetry and prose). One of the prose pieces will be an analysis of a news story about Kensington, incorporating the tools we use in class for media analysis, with an additional reflection component where students are asked to evaluate the news story based on their own experiences. Another prose piece will be a short personal essay, modeled after one of the essays in “If These Streets Could Talk.” One or more of the poems will be an ekphrastic, based on one of the images we have discussed together in class; others will be written “after” specific mentor texts. The portfolio is intended for students to demonstrate mastery of all of the objectives described above.

Unit Outline:

Note on Classroom Context

I designed this unit for my 12th-grade poetry class, which meets for 90 minutes on an alternating A/B day schedule. This means that some weeks, I see a particular group twice, and some weeks I see them three times. At my school, teachers are encouraged to plan units that span the entire ten-week grading cycle. However, I recognize that implementing a ten-week unit may not be practical in all school contexts. Accordingly, I have divided up the unit into four two-week modules, with the final two weeks of the unit devoted to workshopping, sharing work, revising and polishing the final portfolio, and debriefing. I expect each two-week module to comprise about five class periods’ worth of instruction. Although the modules do build on one another, and the sequence is intentional, I think each could also be implemented as a stand-alone shorter unit, for teachers who may not have room in their curriculum for ten weeks’ worth of material.

My school’s population is majority-Latinx, mostly Puerto Rican and Dominican, with smaller numbers of Black, white, Southeast Asian, and Arab students. Where possible, I have tried to select poems and nonfiction texts by authors who look like my students. In my senior poetry classes, I usually have a number of students who are still learning English and who have learning disabilities, or may not be strong readers. I have tried wherever possible to select resources that will be accessible to all my students. Another important piece of context to be aware of is where this unit fits into my existing curriculum. By the time we implement this unit, students will have already spent a number of weeks considering how different poets depict the experience of city life, and writing original poems in response. Teachers considering adapting a portion of this unit for their own classrooms may wish to do some preliminary exercises to help students get comfortable writing poetry.

Week One and Week Two: Reading Signifiers in an Urban Landscape

We will start off the unit by developing our landscape literacy skills, and practicing considering race, class, and gender as we “read” a landscape. This module will also introduce students to the list of “Metaphors to Describe A City;” part of our work “reading” landscapes will be thinking about which metaphor most accurately describes a particular scene, and how someone of a different race, gender, and/or class might choose differently. During the first week of the module, students will analyze images of the neighborhood, considering what they notice about the image, what indicates that a space is safe or unsafe, welcoming or unwelcoming. I will then ask them to consider how different people might view the same scene. They will practice doing the same kind of activity working with the list of “Metaphors to Describe A City”. If possible, students will use the same image analysis skills on the living landscape on a neighborhood walk. They will read “Placa/Rollcall,” by Brenda Cardenas, as a model for how to write an ekphrastic poem, then write an ekphrastic poem based on one of the images we analyzed together, a photo they took themselves, or a piece of public art in the neighborhood. During the second week, students will read several poems where the speakers remark on signifiers of gentrification in their own city, and write their own poem exploring their own identity and their response to some of these same signifiers in Kensington. The poems will include “New Brooklyn” by Elisabet Velasquez, “Nashville,” by Tiana Clark, and “Ode to Gentrification” by Samantha Thornhill.

Week Three and Week Four: Grappling with Gentrification

In the second module, students will take a deep dive into the process of gentrification, the role of race, gender, and class, and the history of Kensington and the Riverwards that has created the conditions we see today. Unlike the other modules, this module will necessarily include some lecture-based instruction to familiarize students with various theories and definitions of gentrification. In the third week, we will consider gentrification both as an economic phenomenon (paying attention to the movement and accumulation of capital) and as a cultural and social phenomenon (paying particular attention to associated cultural signifiers). “When ‘Gentrification’ Isn’t About Housing” by Willy Staley will provide a student-friendly overview of these concepts. We will then learn about the history of the neighborhood, by exploring the interactive timeline in “When Brotherly Love Fails” by Drummond et al, and reading “How Kensington Became an Island,” by Bill McKinney, director of the New Kensington CDC. If time and schedules permit, we may also have Dr. McKinney join class as a guest speaker during this module. (I encourage teachers elsewhere to reach out and make connections to community activists working on issues of development and gentrification in their own neighborhoods.) In the fourth week, students will also revisit the image analysis activity from the first week of the unit, considering the following questions: what details do you notice that indicate someone is investing in a place? what details indicate disinvestment? Students will also read “Displacement: A Hypothetical” by Tochi Onyebuchi, one of the essays “If These Streets Could Talk,” and will be invited to draft their own short prose piece, examining how some of the patterns and systems

we have learned about in this section of the unit might play out in the life of an imagined character.

Week Five and Week Six: Media Analysis

We will spend the fifth week of the unit focused on media analysis, using the framework from KQED (in the “Materials for Teaching” section of the bibliography). Students will practice using these framing questions to analyze a number of news stories about their neighborhood. (An extensive selection of news stories is included in the section of the bibliography titled “Media Depictions of Kensington.”) As part of our analysis, we will also revisit the list of “Metaphors to Describe a City,” and think about which metaphors each article seems to be subscribing to. We will begin in the fifth week by reading “Trapped in the Walmart of Heroin,” by Jennifer Percy, together as a class and answering these questions collaboratively. As an extension activity, students can read Jordan Holycross’ critique of the article, to reinforce how media narratives can mischaracterize a neighborhood. After that, students will work in pairs or small groups to draft their own short analyses of other articles that paint Kensington in different lights. In the sixth week, students will choose an article of their own from the bibliography and write their own short prose analysis. They will be expected to use both the KQED framing questions and the list of metaphors to structure their response. They will also be asked to add on a short personal reflection to the end, evaluating whether the depiction in the article squares with their own experiences, and exploring why or why not.

Week Seven and Week Eight: Generative Prompts and Mentor Texts

The seventh and eighth week of the unit will be focused primarily on close reading of mentor texts, both poetry and prose, and generating original creative writing inspired by those texts. During this portion of the unit, I expect to make frequent use of the collaborative close reading protocol included in the “Resources for Teachers” section of the bibliography. We will look at “Gentrification,” by Sherman Alexie, and discuss how Alexie builds the extended metaphor of the beehive, and what that metaphor seems to be saying about gentrification. Then, students will write their own poems using extended metaphor, drawing on the list of metaphors we have been working with throughout the unit. We will also look at “A Whole Foods In Hawai’i” by Craig Santos Perez, as a model of how to write a poem “after” another artist’s work (in this case, Perez is writing “after” “A Supermarket in California,” by Allen Ginsberg). Students will practice writing their own “after” poem, using the same structure that Perez cribbs from Ginsberg, about an imagined encounter, substituting in their own local and cultural references. We will close-read “Gentefication,” by Jose Olivarez, which imagines a joyful reversal of gentrification in Olivarez’ Mexican neighborhood in Chicago; afterwards, students will write their own versions of the poem, using the same pattern of anaphora Olivarez uses: “The good news is... The bad news is...” We will also read some short narrative prose pieces from “If These Streets Could Talk,”

including “On Public Space, Race, and Belonging” by Kaila Philo, and “Southern Colonization And Why My Mama And A Few People Ain’t Got No Peace of Mind.” Both of these pieces are noteworthy for how the narrator foregrounds their own race, class, and gender, and for the level of careful detail with which they observe signifiers of gentrification in their neighborhood. After reading these pieces, students will write a short prose vignette talking about a specific place or places in their neighborhood, one they like to frequent and/or one they perceive as unwelcoming; they will be encouraged to discuss explicitly how their own intersectional identities affect their experience of that place. Finally, students will read “d i s p l a c e d,” a poem by Jasmin Velez, a poet and activist local to the neighborhood. In the poem, the speaker addresses and confronts a “you” who has enabled and encouraged gentrification. Students will draw on their knowledge of gentrification as a process and the history of the neighborhood to pick a person or entity they would like to talk back to, and write their own poem addressing that “you” directly, as Velez does.

Week Nine and Week Ten: Workshopping, Revision, Final Share, and Debrief

The last two weeks of the unit will be devoted to workshopping and revising pieces that students drafted over the course of the unit. In my experience teaching poetry, there are often some prompts that really work for a particular student, and some that fall flat. Using a portfolio as a final assessment, and allowing students to choose which pieces they want to include, helps make this process less stressful, especially for students who are not as confident in their writing. For this unit, I would expect the portfolio to include three or so poems, one narrative prose piece (either the one from Week 4 about the imagined character, or the short prose vignette from Week 8), and the individual media analysis piece from Week Six, since students could choose which news article they wanted to write about for that assignment.

I have found that, in order to get students comfortable sharing work with one another, I often need to be creative and flexible in determining protocols for workshopping poems and creative pieces. The traditional workshop model, where the student writer shares their own work and then yields the floor to peers who offer critique, can be incredibly intimidating for students who have never written poetry before. One strategy that has worked well for me in the past is gathering students into a circle, reading a piece out loud a couple of times, and allowing students to respond in writing on a post-it note, commenting on what they see as the piece’s particular strengths. Students who are more confident can read their work themselves; students who would still like feedback but are shy about sharing can ask the teacher to read anonymously. Similar effects can be achieved with digital tools like the comment feature on Google Docs.

I also wanted to leave space at the end of the unit for some kind of culminating activity or final share. This could take several forms, depending on the preferences of the group. Students may want to hold a reading, and invite members of the school and wider community to hear their

work aloud. They may want to collect their work into a digital or printed mini-anthology, and share their pieces that way. They may want to do something else more creative, like make a class Instagram page, or create posters with their work and hang them up around the school or even around the neighborhood. Finally, I also think it is important to build in time for debriefing and reflection in the last day or two of the unit. Students should have the opportunity to think back on what they have learned about gentrification, about their neighborhood, and about themselves, and consider what they may want to do with that knowledge moving forward.

Classroom Activities

Note: All the activities in this section assume access to a smartboard / projector, student journals or notebooks, and student laptops, Chromebooks, or other similar devices. Additionally, while my poetry class period is a 90 minute block, students spend the first 15-20 minutes of the period journaling according to an established protocol that stays the same all year round. I have planned these lessons to last about an hour each.

Sample Lesson 1: Image Analysis (Week 1)

Objectives:

Students will be able to “read” images of the neighborhood, and consider how a hypothetical viewer of a different race, gender, or class might view those images differently. Students will be able to choose which of a list of metaphors for a city fits best with a particular image, and consider how intersectional identity affects which metaphor seems most accurate. Students will be able to use evidence to explain their responses.

PA Core Standards Addressed:

Standard - CC.1.2.11–12.G: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Standard - CC.1.2.11–12.B: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences and conclusions based on and related to an author’s implicit and explicit assumptions and beliefs.

Materials:

- Digital or printed copy of “Metaphors to Describe and Analyze a City.” Since students will be expected to annotate this, print copy might be helpful, but distributing it digitally (e.g. through Google Classroom) so each student can annotate their own copy of the document could also work.
- A selection of 10-12 photographs taken around the neighborhood. A note on this: For this activity, I plan to use both photos from some of the news stories included in the “Media Depictions” part of the bibliography, and photos I take myself. The activity works best if the photos are of buildings or zoomed-out city scenes, rather than centering on people. I intend to include photos of new construction, photos of abandoned buildings, photos of signs and businesses that cater to longtime neighborhood residents and those targeting newer residents, and also photos of signs and details that indicate the level of drug activity in an area.
- A list of two or three alternate perspectives with which to view each image, differentiated by the viewer’s identity. These should be determined by the teacher after selecting the images. For example, one of the images could be the safe syringe disposal box installed by the city near the Huntingdon elevated train station (a short walk from my school). Students would be asked to respond to that image from their own perspective, and then from the perspective of two or three other hypothetical viewers: a SEPTA janitor who is

responsible for cleaning the station; a Puerto Rican grandmother who has raised children and grandchildren in the neighborhood; and a white college student from the Philly suburbs visiting the area for a class project.

Procedures:

Do Now: Imagine that you are the passenger in someone's car, and you fall asleep on the way to your destination. You wake up and look around. What are some details you might notice that would immediately tell you that the area around you is familiar and welcoming? What details might tell you that you are in an unfamiliar or unwelcoming area?

Share out from Do Now question, and discuss student responses, taking notes on the board of both sets of details. Make note of any patterns in the responses.

Explain to students that we are about to do the same activity with some photos of the neighborhood. They already know how to do this, because they are used to noticing signs, symbols, and visual codes in the city environment and reacting accordingly.

Project one of the images on the board / smartboard, and ask students what they notice. What can they tell about this place from looking at it? What details in the image do they notice first? What details tell them how they should feel in this place? As a bystander, does this place make you feel welcome or unwelcome, safe or unsafe, and why? Once the discussion winds down, ask students to respond to the same question, this time imagining they are viewing from one of the pre-selected alternate perspectives. Observe how the responses change, and ask students why they think that might be.

Next, divide students into groups of three or four. Explain that we will be repeating this same procedure with a different image. Assign each group one of the other images in the collection, and give each group the two or three alternate perspectives they are required to consider. Give groups about 10-15 minutes to discuss the images and the alternate perspectives, then come back together and have each group share out both what they noticed as themselves, and what they think the alternate perspectives might have noticed.

Then, distribute the list of "Metaphors to Describe A City." Give students 2-3 minutes to read and annotate the list silently, and clarify any unfamiliar terms or vocabulary. Give students 10 minutes to respond to the following question, either digitally or in their notebooks: Which metaphor would you pick to go with the image your group worked with? Would the alternate perspectives pick the same metaphor? If so, why? If not, what metaphor might they pick instead?

Exit Ticket: Project the image we discussed together at the beginning of class. What metaphor from the list do you think goes best with this image and why?

Sample Lesson 2: Media Analysis (Week Five)

Objectives:

Students will be able to critically analyze the framing, messages, and production of a given news story.

Students will be able to use these insights to evaluate the potential impact of the news story on the community.

PA Core Standards Addressed:

Standard - CC.1.3.11–12.E: Evaluate the structure of texts including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the texts relate to each other and the whole.

Standard - CC.1.3.11–12.F: Evaluate how words and phrases shape meaning and tone in texts.

Standard - CC.1.2.11–12.B: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences and conclusions based on and related to an author’s implicit and explicit assumptions and beliefs.

Standard - CC.1.2.11–12.G: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Standard - CC.1.2.11–12.D: Evaluate how an author’s point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Materials:

Copies of “Trapped by the ‘Walmart of Heroin’” by Jennifer Percy. Since we will be asking students to annotate, printed copies would be ideal, but digital copies in a format that students can manipulate would also work. The article is ~6,000 words long, so if students are not strong readers, the teacher should consider excerpting the article or dividing it into sections so that the class can focus on one section rather than being overwhelmed by the entire text. If students are strong readers, it might make more sense to distribute the article ahead of time and have students read for homework in advance of today’s class.

Printed or digital copies of KQED’s Media Analysis questions.

Chart paper and markers (optional).

Procedures:

Do Now: What kinds of stories do people generally hear about Kensington in the news? Do you think that there is bias in which stories about Kensington make it to the news? Why or why not?

Share out from Do Now. Note any patterns in student responses.

Distribute KQED’s Media Analysis questions. Give students 2-3 minutes to read the questions over and annotate anything they find unclear or confusing. Then, go over the questions together, and clarify any points of difficulty. Explain that we are going to be using these questions over the next two weeks to break down a number of different news stories about Kensington.

Then, distribute (or ask students to take out, if distributed ahead of time) copies of “Trapped by the Walmart of Heroin.” Explain to students that this story presents one perspective on the neighborhood, but it was very controversial when it came out because many people in the neighborhood felt as though it was not a complete or accurate portrayal of the neighborhood. Divide students into 3 large groups, and assign one group to answer the questions about the

article's audience, one group to answer the questions about its message, and one group to answer questions about its production. (Make sure the third group has digital access to the article so they can see the photos in full size and in color. Consider adding multilingual students or struggling readers to this group, so they can contribute meaningfully to the discussion of the images and production even if the reading is a lot for them to handle.) Distribute chart paper and markers to each group, if using them.

Give the groups 20-30 minutes to read the article and answer their assigned questions together. Emphasize that it is okay if they are not able to read the entire story, as long as they read enough to answer all of the questions.

Then, come back together and ask each of the 3 groups to present their responses. Once all 3 groups have shared, ask students what stood out to them, or what patterns they notice in the response. Remark upon what patterns you noticed as the teacher.

Exit Ticket (Respond in approximately one paragraph) How do you think this article affected people in Kensington when it came out? How do you think it affected how people outside Kensington view our neighborhood?

Sample Lesson 3: Working with a Mentor Text

Objectives:

Students will be able to identify and evaluate how an author's choices in language and structure contribute to the overall theme or message of a poem.

Students will be able to apply this awareness of style to the composition of an original poem in response to "Gentefication" by Jose Olivarez.

PA Core Standards Addressed:

Standard - CC.1.4.11–12.Q: Write with an awareness of the stylistic aspects of writing.

- Use parallel structure.

- Use various types of phrases

and clauses to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest.

- Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.

Standard - CC.1.4.9-10.O: Use narrative techniques such as dialogue, description, reflection, multiple plot lines, and pacing, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters; use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, settings, and/or characters.

Materials:

Printed copies of "Gentefication"

Printed or digital copies of this writing prompt: "In 'Gentefication,' José Olivarez creates a wild, joyful vision of what might happen if his people (gente) were driving the process of change in his neighborhood. Try to imagine the same kind of vision for Kensington: what do you think it would look like for Kensington to get "gentefied" instead of gentrified or ignored? If you are

having trouble starting, you can repeat the phrase “The bad news is…” to talk about how other people might react to your dream vision of change, and then answer it with “The good news is…” to talk about what you would be most happy about (just like Olivarez does in his poem). Think about what people you want to show up in your poem, who is coming to join the party, what they are eating and drinking, what music they might play, etc.

Procedures:

Do Now: We’ve spent a lot of time over the past few weeks talking about changes that have happened in Kensington in the past, changes that are happening right now, and changes that might happen in the future. Imagine you have unlimited power and resources. What is the #1 change you would make in the community, to make it as awesome as possible for you and the people you love?

Share out from Do Now.

Arrange student desks or chairs in a large circle (or as close an approximation as possible). Distribute copies of “Gentefication”, and explain that we will be collaboratively close-reading the poem together. (My students will be familiar with this protocol, which I introduce early in the year. To see an example of it in action with high schoolers, see the video from Ware County AP Lit in the Works Cited section of the bibliography.) Read the poem out loud at least twice, read by someone different each time. Then, on the spot, divide up the poem into short sections, so that each person in the circle is responsible for one or two lines. Depending on students’ comfort levels and the number of people in the class, the teacher may choose to assign a given chunk of the poem to a pair of students instead. Remind students that when we get to their part of the poem, they can say what that line means to them or reminds them of, make a connection to another part of the poem or something else, and/or ask a question to the group to clarify what is going on in that part. Go around the circle, discussing each segment of the poem in turn, and asking questions to encourage students to make meaning from the text and build on each other’s responses. Expect this process to take about a half-hour.

Once the discussion of the poem winds to a close, have students return to their original seats. Distribute the writing prompt and give students ten minutes or so to start brainstorming and drafting their poems; encourage them to finish for homework, or to come back to these notes later when we revise and work on our portfolios.

Exit Ticket: What was line from “Gentefication” do you think was the funniest or most joyful? Explain your answer.

Bibliography/Resources:

Note: The bibliography is broken down into three sections: a bibliography for teachers comprising scholarly work that has informed the development of the unit; readings for students, including poetry, nonfiction, and a separate list of media depictions of Kensington; and material for classroom use.

Bibliography for Teachers and Works Cited

Alvaré, Melissa Archer. "Gentrification and Resistance: Racial Projects in the Neoliberal Order." *Social Justice*, vol. 44, no. 2-3 (148), 2017, pp. 113–36.

In this piece, Alvaré argues that gentrification (defined as "redevelopment in pursuit of capital") is an example of how neoliberalism traps marginalized people and causes them suffering. I particularly appreciated how the author breaks down the role of race and of capital in driving gentrification.

Beauregard, Robert A. "The Chaos and Complexity of Gentrification." *The Gentrification Reader*, edited by Loretta Lees et al., Routledge, 2010, pp. 12–22.

This piece by Beauregard forms the primary grounding for how I plan to explain gentrification for students. He points out issues with many prevailing narratives about why gentrification happens, and creates a more comprehensive framework within which to situate what he describes as the "chaotic" phenomenon of gentrification.

Beauregard, Robert A. "Trajectories of Neighborhood Change: The Case of Gentrification." *Environment and Planning*, vol. 22, 1990, pp. 855–74.

This piece, which we also discussed explicitly in seminar, examines several Philadelphia neighborhoods as case studies, and reaches the ultimate conclusion that there is no single paradigm for how a neighborhood gentrifies. Although much has changed in the intervening 30 years (Fishtown, named by Beauregard in this piece as resistant to gentrification, has gentrified rapidly) Beauregard's basic reasoning is sound, and has informed my own thinking on gentrification in Philadelphia and how to explain it to my students.

Cahill, Caitlin. "Negotiating Grit and Glamour: Young Women and the Gentrification of the Lower East Side." *The Gentrification Reader*, edited by Loretta Lees et al., Routledge, 2010, pp. 299–314.

This piece reports on the results of a participatory action research project conducted by Cahill with a group of young women in New York's gentrifying Lower East Side. It is valuable for this project in several respects. First, it examines in detail how gender, and gendered, racialized stereotypes, contribute to gentrification. It also centers the voices of the young women involved in the study. Since my students, for the most part, occupy a similar position vis-a-vis gentrification in their neighborhood, I think Cahill's work serves as an excellent model for how to center and elevate the voices of my own students.

Friedman, Joseph, et al. "Structural Vulnerability to Narcotics-Driven Firearm Violence: An Ethnographic and Epidemiological Study of Philadelphia's Puerto Rican Inner-City." *PLOS ONE*, edited by Cecilia Benoit, vol. 14, no. 11, Nov. 2019, p. e0225376. DOI.org (Crossref), doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0225376.
<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0225376>

This study attempts to answer why the majority Puerto Rican neighborhoods in Kensington and North Philadelphia have become so vulnerable to gun violence associated with the narcotics market. It provides a comprehensive overview of the current situation in the neighborhood along with significant insight into how race and class have shaped the growth of the drug market and proliferation of associated violence.

Hermesen, Terry. *Poetry of Place: Helping Students Write Their Worlds*. National Council of Teachers of English, 2009.

This volume, by poet and experienced teaching artist Terry Hermesen, offers a number of potential ways to combine landscape literacy with poetry in the classroom. Though I have not cited this work directly in my unit, I include it here as a supplemental resource for teachers who may have less experience teaching poetry.

Irazábal, Clara, and Claudia Huerta. "Intersectionality and Planning at the Margins: LGBTQ Youth of Color in New York." *Gender, Place & Culture*, vol. 23, no. 5, Routledge, May 2016, pp. 714–32. Taylor and Francis+NEJM, doi:10.1080/0966369X.2015.1058755.

This article examines the experiences of a group of queer youth of color in New York City, through an intersectional lens. I was particularly influenced by the way the authors link the young people's performance and experience of racial, gender, and queer identities to place.

Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. First edition, Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W. W. Norton & Company, 2017.

This book is an examination of how U.S. government housing policy (including exclusionary zoning and redlining) resulted in residential segregation. Of particular interest are chapter 4, which details how racially discriminatory policies kept Black families from becoming homeowners, and chapter 11, which discusses implications of this history, examining why housing segregation has proved so difficult to undo.

Rucks-Ahidiana, Zawadi. "Race and Class in the News: How the Media Portrays Gentrification." Apr. 2018. *UC Berkeley: Institute for the Study of Societal Issues*, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7038t2gc>.

In this piece, the author makes a detailed analysis of how the news media in San Francisco talks about gentrification. She considers both the tone of the news articles, whose race is marked, or mentioned explicitly, and what patterns appear when looking at both these sets of data side by side. She concludes that news stories about Black neighborhoods gentrifying tend to take a much more positive view of gentrification, whereas stories about gentrifying white or Latinx neighborhoods are more likely to discuss the negative impact of gentrification on long-term residents.

Wilson, Kathryn E. "Building El Barrio: Latinos Transform Postwar Philadelphia." *Pennsylvania Legacies*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2003, pp. 17–21. https://drexel.edu/greatworks/Theme/Spring/~media/Files/greatworks/SP11/WK9_1_Wilson_2003.ashx

This piece is a history of the Latinx community in Philadelphia, focusing particularly on the influx of Puerto Rican migrants after World War II, and the community they formed along and around the 5th St. corridor ("El Centro de Oro.") It provides additional context for the contemporary situation in the neighborhood which I discuss at length elsewhere.

Ware County AP Lit. "Swamp-Po." 12 Dec. 2018. *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjj3gBdX53Q>.

This video shows collaborative close reading, the protocol I use in one of my lesson plans, in action in a high school AP Lit class. I originally learned this protocol in a previous TIP seminar, and it has become one of my go-to approaches to reading and analyzing poetry with students. I have found that with appropriate scaffolding, and a willingness on my part to prompt students with some questioning, it is a highly effective way to invite all students into the discussion of a particular poem.

Readings for Students

The readings in this section are the primary texts that students will be reading and discussing in this unit.

Poetry and Nonfiction

Alexie, Sherman. "Gentrification." *American Poetry Review*, vol. 38, no. 2, Apr. 2009, <http://aprweb.org/poems/gentrification>.

This poem's central metaphor is a nest of wasps, found in the house of a deceased neighbor and his displaced son. The only indication that the poem is dealing with gentrification is the title. The poem is a good example for students of how to develop an extended metaphor and how to use a concrete image to examine something complicated and abstract.

Cardenas, Brenda. "Placa/Rollcall." *Poetry*, Mar. 2016, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/58863/placa-rollcall> .

I love this poem for two reasons: first, it's a great mentor text for how to write an ekphrastic poem. The art work it is based on is an abstract graffiti-style painting and the poem takes the image and brings it to life in the form of a city block. In addition, the poem is written in Spanglish, which will make it accessible in a special way to my many bilingual or emergent multilingual students.

Clark, Tiana. "'Nashville.'" *The New Yorker*, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/10/09/nashville>. Accessed 20 May 2021.

In this poem, the speaker frames an incident of racist harassment with a meditation on the history of her city and her family that led up to that point. I intend to use this poem with students as an example both of how a poem can incorporate history and place, and also how a person's experience of their own race and gender is often intimately linked with place.

Drummond, Abigail, et al. "When Brotherly Love Fails: A History of Structural Violence in Kensington, Philadelphia." *Medical Anthropology in the Time of Covid-19*, <https://commons.princeton.edu/ant240-s20/service-focus-initiative-projects/kensingtons-counter-histories/>. 2020.

This visually appealing and exhaustively researched timeline, created by Princeton undergraduate students in spring 2020, provides an in-depth examination of various structural factors that have created current conditions in Kensington, starting with the 18th century through the present day. I plan to use it alongside McKinney's article to provide additional context and visuals.

McKinney, Bill. "How Kensington Became an Island." WHYY, 19 Mar. 2021, <https://whyy.org/articles/how-kensington-became-an-island/>.

This op-ed, by the director of the New Kensington CDC, discusses how capital (in extracting wealth from the neighborhood during the heyday of manufacturing, and the subsequent divestment) has created the conditions in Kensington that led to the closure of the Somerset el stop in 2021. It provides crucial and hyper-local background to students in understanding the mechanisms of capital in their neighborhood-- including real estate speculation.

Olivarez, José. "Gentefication." *Citizen Illegal*, Haymarket Books, 2018.

In this poem, the speaker discusses an imagined barrio where gentrification is happening in reverse. Although, in the poem, "the property value is going down again," the tone is exuberant, and the speaker invites us to "rejoice in the good news" as the people in the poem create a community outside the demands of capital, where "we trade tortillas for haircuts, nopales for healthcare, poems for groceries."

Perez, Craig Santos. "A Whole Foods in Hawai'i by Craig Santos Perez." *Poetry*, July 2017, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/142859/a-whole-foods-in-hawaii>.

This poem, closely patterned after "A Supermarket in California" by Allen Ginsberg, touches on gentrification and displacement in Hawaii as the speaker pays tribute to an unsung literary ancestor, Hawaiian poet Wayne Kaumualii Westlake. I want to include it as a model for how to write an "after" poem and plan to provide a student-facing poetry prompt modeled after it as well.

Staley, Willy. "When 'Gentrification' Isn't About Housing." *The New York Times*, 23 Jan. 2018. NYTimes.com, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/23/magazine/when-gentrification-isnt-about-housing.html>.

This piece provides a concise, student-friendly overview of the history of the term "gentrification;" various theories of stages of gentrification; and how the term's usage has evolved and expanded to apply to cultural phenomena, which actually obscures the role of capital and class in driving gentrification.

Thornhill, Samantha. "Ode to Gentrification." *The Brooklyn Rail*, 2 Apr. 2015, <https://brooklynrail.org/2015/04/criticspage/samantha-thornhill-ode-to-gentrification>.

In this poem, the speaker addresses gentrification directly and ambivalently, acknowledging the pain it has caused through displacement and also acknowledging the way she benefits from it.

Velasquez, Elisabet. "New Brooklyn." Brooklyn Poets, 11 June 2016,
<https://brooklynpoets.org/poet/elisabet-velasquez/>.

In this poem, the speaker elegizes her Brooklyn neighborhood of Bushwick, which has been rendered unfamiliar by gentrification since her last visit. Like most of my students, the poet is Puerto Rican, and I think the cultural references in the poem will make it especially engaging for them.

Velez, Jasmin. "This Kensington Resident Is Responding to Gentrification in Her Neighborhood through Poetry." Kensington Voice, 11 Mar. 2021,
<https://kensingtonvoice.com/en/jasmin-velez-displaced-poetry-kensington-voices/>.

This article from Kensington Voice features a poem from Kensington native and community activist Jasmin Velez. I plan on using it as a mentor text in week 7 and 8 of the unit; I think because the piece is rooted in students' own neighborhood, it will be accessible in ways some of the other texts may not. Like every article in Kensington Voice, it is also available in Spanish translation.

Willoughby, Vanessa, editor. "If These Streets Could Talk." *Winter Tangerine*,
<http://www.wintertangerine.com/if-these-streets-could-talk> . Accessed 18 Mar. 2021.

This is a collection of short essays by contemporary writers of color, examining the complexities and the human stories of people of color impacted by gentrification. There are several that would lend themselves well to classroom use, particularly "On Public Space, Race, and Belonging" by Kaila Philo; "Displacement: A Hypothetical" by Tochi Onyebuchi; "Southern Colonization and Why My Mama and a Few People Ain't Got No Peace of Mind" by Kariyana Calloway, and "Gently-Fied," by Liz Huerta. I plan to use these texts as models for how to write creative, personal prose about something as complex as gentrification.

Media Depictions of Kensington

A note on this section: I am aware that this unit is designed not only for my students but for an audience of teachers across the district and the country. The sources in this section are, by necessity, hyper-local, focusing on places and stories that are specific to the neighborhoods of Kensington and, to a lesser extent, Fishtown. Some of these stories are from the national media; some are from city news outlets like the Inquirer and WHYY; and some are from community

news sources Kensington Voice, a community newspaper begun in partnership with some Temple journalism professors in part to give Kensington a chance to tell its own stories. It would probably not make sense for this material to be used as-is in a different neighborhood or classroom context. Rather, I offer this section of the bibliography as a model for how other teachers, in other neighborhoods, can compile a variety of hyper-local news stories and media depictions for their own students to work with. Furthermore, gentrification by its very nature involves change, sometimes very rapid change. I envision that, over time, I will continue to update and modify this bibliography based on current events in the neighborhood.

Cardona, Daisie, and Neyda Rios. "Let's Beautify Kensington through Respectful Language." *Kensington Voice*, 28 Mar. 2019, <https://kensingtonvoice.com/en/lets-beautify-kensington-respectful-language/>.

Kensington Voice is a community news site that invites significant participation from Kensington community members. This article features Daisie Cardona, a former student of mine, and talks about how the language we use to talk about a place can affect people's experience of it.

Correa, Jesenia De Moya. "Iglesias Garden Becomes a Safe Space for Residents Seeking 'Sovereignty' in North Philly." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, <https://www.inquirer.com/news/north-philadelphia-west-kensington-iglesias-garden-20210528.html>. Accessed 13 June 2021.

This piece from the *Inquirer* profiles the Cesar Andreu Iglesias Community Garden in West Kensington. The article describes how the garden has become a community gathering space for Latinx Philly residents, and how the people involved in the garden have worked to protect it from development, as the neighborhood gentrifies and demand for vacant land increases.

Correa, Jesenia De Moya, and Jason Laughlin. "In Fast-Developing Corner of North Philly, Vacant Lots Become Priceless." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 Sept. 2020, <https://www.inquirer.com/real-estate/gardening/garden-north-philadelphia-gentrification-side-lot-vacant-20200902.html>.

This piece tells the story of several long-term residents of West Kensington who have been cultivating gardens in the vacant lots near their homes, in some cases for decades. As the neighborhood gentrifies, pressure builds from multiple directions to develop the vacant land: from community development organizations who want to build affordable housing to ensure a mixed-income community, and also from private developers who are looking to build market rate units to maximize their profits.

Fitzgerald, Thomas. "SEPTA Is Closing El Station in Kensington to Fix Elevators Damaged by Urine, Trash." The Philadelphia Inquirer, 15 Mar. 2021, <https://www.inquirer.com/transportation/transportation-septa-somerset-station-kensington-closed-homelessness-drug-use-opioids-20210315.html>.

This story, from the local paper of record, covers the closure of the Somerset el stop, a notorious center for opioid activity (dealing and use). The station was closed with only a week's notice due to ongoing safety issues and elevators rendered inoperable by urine and needles, leaving community members without a crucial transit link to the rest of the city. There was significant community outcry against the closure and SEPTA reopened the station shortly afterward, with an ongoing plan to ensure safety at the station.

Gutman, Abraham. "Philadelphia's Racist Past and Bad Policy Made Kensington's Puerto Rican Community Extra Vulnerable to Violence." The Philadelphia Inquirer, <https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/commentary/kensington-drug-market-gun-violence-homicide-racial-segregation-opioid-crack-20191207.html>. Accessed 13 June 2021.

This article from the Inquirer discusses a recent piece of scholarship published by Philippe Bourgois, an anthropologist who has done extensive work with groups of opioid users and dealers in Kensington. Bourgois discusses the racial and economic factors that led to the influx of Puerto Rican residents into what had previously been a white working-class neighborhood, and also allowed the illegal narcotics trade to flourish to such an extraordinary degree.

Holycross, Jordan. "New York Times' Trauma Tourism." FAIR, 26 Oct. 2018, <https://fair.org/home/new-york-times-trauma-tourism/>.

This blog post, from FAIR, a media bias watchdog group, offers a point-by-point critique of Percy's "Walmart of Heroin" article. The author addresses the piece's biased framing, problematic language, and many omissions.

Jaramillo, Catalina. "As Norris Square Changes, Las Parcelas Puts down New Roots." WHYY, 2 June 2017, <https://whyy.org/articles/as-norris-square-changes-las-parcelas-puts-down-new-roots/>.

This article, from local public news outlet WHYY, traces the history of Las Parcelas, a community garden founded decades ago by Puerto Rican residents in Norris Square. The article discusses how the garden has become a site of community empowerment, and a place to celebrate and share cultural traditions. It also talks about how, now that real estate prices are

rising and land is in higher demand, the community that created the garden must use a different set of strategies to secure the garden's future.

Mayers, Dave. "Video: Urban Grit in Philly's Fishtown." The New York Times, 21 Jan. 2014. NYTimes.com, <https://www.nytimes.com/video/fashion/100000002661311/urban-grit-fashion-in-philadelphia-fishtown-intersection.html>.

This video feature from the NY Times Style section stands in marked contrast to the coverage of the opioid crisis from 2018. In the video, various residents and business owners from the Frankford and Girard corridor talk about their style inspirations. This story, and others like it, is one reason why Fishtown and East Kensington began to be heralded as the "Williamsburg" or "Bushwick" of Philadelphia (two "hip" gentrifying neighborhoods in Brooklyn).

Newall, Mike. "In Philadelphia's Kensington Neighborhood, Heroin Is a Thriving Illicit Economy." The Philadelphia Inquirer, 21 May 2021, <https://www.inquirer.com/zzz-systest/a/heroin-effects-kensington-philadelphia-dealers-violence-20210520.html>.

This feature from the Inquirer incorporates interviews with several individuals involved in the illicit narcotics trade. It details the incredibly lucrative nature of the Kensington heroin market, and then discusses some of the challenges law enforcement faces in attempting to get the drug trade and associated violence under control.

Percy, Jennifer. "Trapped by the 'Walmart of Heroin.'" The New York Times, 10 Oct. 2018. NYTimes.com, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/10/magazine/kensington-heroin-opioid-philadelphia.html>.

This famous (or infamous) piece, featuring photos by Jeffrey Stockbridge and focusing on the opioid crisis and encampments, is an important example for students to analyze media depictions of their neighborhood. It brought the neighborhood national attention, but also faced significant criticism locally for only telling part of the story.

Rinde, Meir. "After House Collapses in Fishtown, Residents Organize to Fight Bad Contractors." WHYY, 6 Nov. 2019, <https://whyy.org/articles/fishtowners-band-together-to-fight-construction-destruction-work-with-li/>.

This piece was written in the aftermath of a rowhome collapse, caused by improperly done construction in the adjoining lot. It touches on some of the problems the Fishtown/East Kensington construction boom can pose for neighborhood residents-- a negative side effect of the influx of development capital into the neighborhood.

Saffron, Inga. “Kensington Faces a New Challenge: Luxury Development. Can a Woke Developer Mitigate Gentrification?” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 Feb. 2021, <https://www.inquirer.com/real-estate/inga-saffron/kensington-gentrification-shift-capital-drugs-opioids-impact-services-neighborhood-development-housing-maken-fels-fund-inga-saffron-20210210.html>.

This article discusses the work of Shift Capital, a development organization working in Kensington which bills itself as socially conscious, and wants to “create inclusive, equitable communities.” Saffron gives an overview of the gentrification of Kensington and examines whether Shift, and its stated commitment to social justice, can in fact live up to its mission, or whether the social-impact aspect of its mission will ultimately be subsumed by the profit motive.

Stockbridge, Jeffrey. *KENSINGTON BLUES*, <https://kensingtonblues.com/about/>.

Stockbridge’s photos, which have also been collected in a book titled *Kensington Blues*, were featured in Percy’s article on Kensington for the NY Times. *Kensington Blues* is a portrait photography project, focused primarily on Kensington residents affected by the opioid crisis, particularly people in addiction.

Materials for Teaching / Classroom Use

KQED. “Media Analysis - Questions Framing Audience, Production, and Messages.” Google Docs, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BrfHv7TFbj-J7OXS3JJ6fwb4RqkBoF1AK-geJPIuTYy/edit>. Accessed 22 Apr. 2021.

This straightforward, thorough, and student-friendly set of questions will be an anchor of the media analysis we do in the unit. The questions are organized around analyzing the role of audience, the messages in popular media, and the role of production and distribution.

Sanders, Rickie. *Metaphors to Describe a City*. https://templeu.instructure.com/courses/93061/pages/metaphors-to-describe-a-city?module_item_id=2956178.

I intend to return to this list as a frame for students’ thinking several times throughout this unit, and to continue adding to it collaboratively as students read more texts (poetry, essays, and journalism) and come up with more potential metaphors to describe their city. It is included in its entirety in Appendix 2.

Appendix 1: Standards

A note about standards: The PA State Standards do not explicitly address either the reading or writing of poetry; they focus largely on informational and narrative literary texts, with occasional references to plays or drama. However, this unit will take an interdisciplinary approach; students will be reading informational texts alongside literary texts and multimedia materials. As a result of this approach, a wide variety of key literacy standards will be addressed over the course of the unit.

PA State Reading Standards addressed:

Standard - CC.1.3.11–12.E

Evaluate the structure of texts including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the texts relate to each other and the whole.

This standard will be addressed multiple times in the unit, both in the close analysis of news media, and particularly in the close reading of poems, where students will be required to consider and discuss the impact of phrases and text structure on the overall meaning of the text.

Standard - CC.1.3.11–12.F

Evaluate how words and phrases shape meaning and tone in texts.

Similarly, as students close-read both news stories and poems, they will be required to consider the impact of word choice, and its connection to meaning and tone.

Standard - CC.1.2.11–12.B

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences and conclusions based on and related to an author's implicit and explicit assumptions and beliefs.

Students will be asked to work to this standard both in class discussions and in their written work, particularly the short news analysis they will be required to generate independently. Though much of the work they are required to produce in this unit is creative, that piece contains an explicitly analytical element, where students will be required to cite strong and thorough textual evidence, and make inferences about the author's implicit and explicit assumptions and beliefs.

Standard - CC.1.2.11–12.G

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Students will be required to work to this standard both in their work with images in the first week and in the media analysis component (when they will be required to consider presentation, including the photos that accompany a story).

Standard - CC.1.2.11–12.D

Evaluate how an author's point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

In all the reading we do, students will be asked to consider an author's point of view, and how that point of view affects the details the author notices, and the story they choose to tell. This is true for the poems, the narrative prose, and the journalism we will be reading together.

PA State Writing Standards addressed:

Standard - CC.1.4.9-10.N

Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple points of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters.

Students will be asked to work to this standards in their poems, and especially in the short narrative prose pieces included in their portfolio. It is impossible to write well about place without engaging and orienting the reader, both in the character's inner world as well as the physical space the student is writing about.

Standard - CC.1.4.11–12.Q

Write with an awareness of the stylistic aspects of writing.

- *Use parallel structure.*
- *Use various types of phrases and clauses to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest.*
- *Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.*

Metaphor, simile, and analogy are central to the work of the unit. In multiple creative pieces, as well as in their analytical work and discussions, students will be asked to use a variety of metaphors to manage the complexity of the topic of gentrification.

Standard - CC.1.4.9-10.O

Use narrative techniques such as dialogue, description, reflection, multiple plot lines, and pacing, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters; use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, settings, and/or characters.

In the narrative writing, students will be expected to use appropriate techniques such as dialogue, reflection, and pacing to make their stories come to life. Similarly, in their poems, they will be expected to use precise language and sensory detail to depict their neighborhoods.

Standard - CC.1.4.11–12.T

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

The culminating assessment for this unit is a portfolio of student writing. The development of the portfolio, by its very nature, involves planning, revising, and editing, with attention to purpose and audience.

Appendix 2: Metaphors to Describe A City

METAPHORS USED TO DESCRIBE AND ANALYZE THE CITY

By Rickie Sanders. Used with permission.

Arena: a place of contest

Babel: a cacophony of discordant, non-communicating voices (biblical)

Babylon: a place of luxury and affluence but also vice, corruption, and tyranny

Body: a living organism with circulation through arteries, limbs, bowels

Bohemia: a place where people defy social convention

Cesspool: a dirty unsanitary place of physical/moral decay, squalor

Circuit: a place where money, people, goods, etc continuously circulate

Forum: a democratic place where people express diverse opinions

Fragments: randomly placed and disconnected spaces (post modern cities)

Game: a place where economic and social development is like a lottery, casino

Hell: a nightmarish place

Jungle: a threatening/dangerous place where some may not survive

Labyrinth/maze: a confusing place from which there is no escape

Machine: a set of interrelated parts that can be analyzed/controlled

Market: a place where goods and services are exchanged, mysterious

Melting pot: a place where groups mix together and produce new cultures

Network: overlapping webs of social and economic interaction

Nightmare: a mix of surreal images and experiences

Text: landscapes and images that can be 'read' for meaning

Theater: sets and backdrops where people play out different roles

Theme park: fantasy, spectacle and excitement

Urban village: many small communities where people have close contact