

Gathering Clay: Community Poetry, Individual Grace, and the Limitations of Language

Indigenous Studies for the Neindigenous Classroom

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Abstract

This curriculum unit is designed for upper-level high school English Language Arts students but can be modified for lower-level high school students. The curriculum can be as long as four weeks and as short as two weeks. In this unit, students will look through a window into the art and culture of Native Americans while simultaneously examining a mirror reflection of their own communities and personal identities. Students will be tasked with analyzing poetry, culture, and identity as they engage in critical discussions about language and the individual in society as well as writing poetry that challenges the limits of language.

Keywords

Native American, art, culture, Navajo, Pueblo, English language arts, poetry, high school, creative writing, southwestern, individuality, society, community, artifacts, neindigenous, indigenous, South Philadelphia, Philly, Louise Erdrich

Unit Content

Core standards of the English Language Arts often require that the student look closely to find deeper meaning. When students are tasked with analyzing language, evaluating structure, or determining themes and central ideas, they are asked to find the big in the small - the implicit meaning in the author's syntax or diction. It is through this close attention to detail that we find the infinite methods of expression inherent in the English language. During the Fall 2021 Southwest Native American Art and Culture seminar, fellows were routinely asked to "look closely" at various Pueblo and Navajo artifacts. Combined with a deep dive into the history, culture, and contemporary artwork of Southwest Native Americans, we were able to find deeper significance in a world that has been unfairly marginalized by the English language. By looking closely through a window into Native American culture as well as into a mirror of personal and community identity, the students of high school English will identify, analyze, evaluate, and create meaning in art.

The urban classroom faces a crisis of cultural relevancy. Students belonging to marginalized demographics struggle to find authentic personal connections with the

predominantly Anglo texts assigned to them. The traditional doctrinaire approach to an English education can be particularly alienating to students who in some cases not only fail to see authentic representations of their lives and experiences but also feel oppressed by the assimilation to conventional English writing and speaking. The legacy of forced assimilation found in Pennsylvania's Carlisle Indian Industrial School is still felt in the urban public school system, where educational goals often suppress or exclude the culture and identities of students. "Kill the Indian, Save the Man," said Carlisle's figurehead Lt. Col. Richard Henry Pratt and this haunting refrain is still symbolic of an educational system that believes a student's success, his or her "survival" in America, hinges on the ability to "shed culture and customs and assimilate fully in white American culture" (Carlisle Project). The skepticism families hold towards public schools, given the dark history of integrating marginalized peoples, must be addressed and corrected in today's classrooms. Through a transparent exploration of the strengths and limitations of language, this unit will work to celebrate and incorporate the lives of marginalized students into the classroom in an authentic way.

In referencing the Carlisle School in *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood ...and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education*, Christopher Emdin makes a direct connection between the American school system's failure to educate indigenous and what he terms "neoindigenous" students, or marginalized students in urban settings. Emdin asserts that neoindigenous students "often look, act, and engage in the classroom in ways that are inconsistent with traditional school norms. Like the indigenous, they are viewed as intellectually and academically deficient to their counterparts from other racial and socioeconomic backgrounds" (9). The poet Adrienne Rich affirms this sense of negation, observing "when someone with the authority of a teacher...describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing" (Emdin 17). Classrooms must cease to see cultural diversity through a deficiency lens and begin to incorporate the assets of the student's community into the curriculum, an example of which can be found in the collaboration seen in art teacher Bruce Hucko's book *Where There Is No Name for Art: The Art of Tewa Pueblo Children*. Hucko was able to provide rigorous academic instruction to indigenous students while also "celebrat[ing] the creative spirit and human wealth" of the Tewa Pueblo community (4). "In the Tewa language, there is no equivalent for the word 'art,'" yet, as one of Hucko's young students puts it, "If there was no art, there would be nothing on earth" (Cover copy). Just as Hucko was able to provide a window into English academia while still holding up a mirror to the community of his indigenous students, this unit hopes to provide the same culturally relevant and academically rigorous instruction to neoindigenous students.

By studying pottery and carpet weaving in Pueblo and Navajo communities as well as the poetry of contemporary Native American writers, students will understand how society impacts the individual, that Native American art celebrates the community through symbolism, iconography, and imaginative storytelling, and that though language can be

limited, poetry is supercharged language allowing individual expression. Following in the footsteps of Native American artists will allow our neoindigenous students an opportunity to explore not only their community - seeking the clay in the ground beneath us - but also their own identities. As Chris Bursk writes in his essay “Be yourself even if it kills you? Imagination as Immersion: An Exploration of Contemporary American Indian Poets,” “Identity has always been a theme in Native poetry,” and the same is true for much of the high school writer’s work (4). Ask a high school student to write about a topic of their choosing and often times you will see a theme of identity, the searching for meaning in the present as well as in their future. This search for identity is complicated further for the minority person, who must not only find themselves but honor their culture. The Indian writer, and the neoindigenous too, must ask, “How can I be part of a community and still be uniquely me, and how do I express this longing to honor my individuality without feeling as I am betraying my people?” (Bursk 4). Therefore a study into a culture where individual and community identity are so intertwined, combined with the freedom to explore one’s own identity and community, allows a rich and authentic learning experience for the neoindigenous student in the high school ELA curriculum.

The individual in society is a theme that is encountered throughout the ELA curriculum. In my 11th grade English course, an entire unit of the class textbook *Collections* is dedicated to Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and a personal essay by Kesaya E. Noda, all highlighting the difficulties of being an individual—that “pursuit of happiness” we are all promised—in American society. When studying Native American culture, there is a reminder that the artwork and the individual are always in service to the community. This concept goes against so much of American philosophy which emphasizes rugged individualism and selfish pursuits. Yet, when reading contemporary American Indian poetry, Bursk reminds us that these writers are able to “test the limits of language in ways that their predecessors could not,” and maybe can explore individual identity in ways their ancestors could not (5). When we are tasked with keeping our cultures alive, being credits to our race, or representatives of the whole, we are allowed to be uniquely individual—and it is perhaps this freedom to be an individual that is the most elusive of the half-fulfilled promises America has offered. What Bursk’s essay provides the student of poetry and of Native American art is an essential question of individual transcendence, “how, when you are writing a poem about your intense and intimate experience, can you immerse yourself so thoroughly in this act of imagination the poem becomes about so much more than your experience” (Bursk 14). This will be a primary objective for this unit—to allow the student poet to engage so intensely in their own experiences that they transcend personal narrative so that what they’re communicating is about so much more while respecting deeply the student’s identity.

Looking closely at Native American artwork instantly reveals a style connected to symbols and iconography to tell stories. To connect the student’s life to the artwork of Pueblo potters, students will be asked to take a field trip into their neighborhoods,

community landmarks, and homes to find the symbols that tell their stories. Stephen Trimble, author of *Talking with the Clay: The Art of Pueblo Pottery*, says, “Every modern pueblo has a set of stories about how it’s clans gathered from many places to come to the one place they should live and where they live today, the ‘center of the universe’ for each people” (6-7). Students will explore the stories of their own pueblos and recognize how their neighborhoods are the “center of the universe” for their lives. By bringing these stories, symbols, and artifacts into the classroom we will work to “create classrooms that students are connected to in the same way that they are connected to their block or street corner” (Emdin 138). Just as President Barack Obama brushed dirt off his shoulder to cue neoinigenous peoples of their shared cultural capital, the classroom will find symbols to combat “the difference between the context of the classroom and that of the world outside of school” so that students feel more engaged with the content they encounter in schools (Emdin 131).

A bit of metacognitive thinking is essential to a unit toeing the line of the colonized and colonizers such as this, where poetry, arguably a decidedly European form, is the primary tool in which to express the experiences of indigenous and marginalized communities. Thus, students will be asked to explore the ways that language itself is oppressive. How is the study of the English language oppressive to Native Americans, who have had to adopt the language of the oppressor at the expense of their own speech? How is the study of English oppressive to the neoinigenous student in today’s classrooms, who must code-switch constantly between home speak and school speak if they hope to succeed academically and professionally? This kind of critical thinking can be fostered through independent writing, small group collaborative discussion, or whole-class discussion. In fact, questions of this nature should be given shorter time frames *and* extended time frames using all forms of reflection. To provide an answer to an unanswerable question, poetry can step in for the student as a way to challenge the limits of language. By reading the poetry of Native Americans, African Americans, Latin Americans, and more, students will see how the English language has been reconstituted to express themes and ideas of peoples once excluded by the language itself.

Teaching Strategies

To demonstrate understanding of the concepts of this unit, students will have to create. To learn about art, students will create art. Students will hone close reading skills to look closely at information and learning objectives in metacognitive ways as they analyze language, evaluate art, and write poetry. The unit will be broken down into three primary learning objectives. Students will be able to:

- read and analyze poetry in order to evaluate themes through discussion, academic writing, and creative writing.

- analyze how the community culture impacts the individual in both Native American cultures as well as personal neighborhoods in order to critically evaluate notions of society and individuality.
- analyze symbolism, iconography, and storytelling in Native American art in order to create their own works of art about their own communities.

Poetry is often a struggle for students to engage with. Demystifying poetry is imperative to a proper analysis of language. Poetry is supercharged language that is not meant to be fully interpreted in an initial reading, therefore students should be given strategies for reading poetry along with specific instruction on multiple draft reading, as discussed in Kelly Gallagher's *Deeper Reading*. Students should treat the first reading of a poem as a "down-draft" in which the goal is to get the poem "down" in their brains. They should underline a line that is particularly luminous to them for whatever reason and not worry about fully comprehending the poem. The second draft, the "up draft," is where students will fix up their understanding of the poem by tracking literary elements that suggest a theme for the poem. When preparing to write a response to the poem, whether academic or creative, students should conduct a third draft reading in which they polish their understanding of the poem's major themes. Considering the shorter length of poetry, it is imperative that key poems be read aloud and independently multiple times. It is also suggested that students be given a variety of ways to analyze language including whole-class discussion, small group work, and independent writing.

Students will be asked to look through a window and into a mirror simultaneously as they research Native American culture and their own community. Readings and presentations on Pueblo and Navajo history, culture, and contemporary societies will be provided to students as they create their own written reflections and presentations about their own history, culture, and community. Students will gather artifacts from the community in the form of photos, ekphrastic poems, sketches, and beyond that can be brought into the classroom as an extension of the outside world. A Socratic Seminar may be used as a culmination of this objective in which students discuss how society impacts the individual. Students should reference both Native American cultures and their own communities in the discussion.

The most unique product that students will create is also the most authentic form of assessment. Students will create a poetry chapbook of no fewer than five poems in response to a variety of invitations (poetry prompts) throughout the course of the unit. These invitations will ask students to write poems in response to Native American art, community landmarks, themes present in poetry and art, society, and individuality. The chapbook will be an authentic assessment of the student's understanding of Native American art and culture, the community's impact on the individual, and poetry. Once the chapbooks have been submitted, a class anthology will be collected with an option to publish in the form of a literary magazine for the school.

Classroom Activities

This unit is intended to be taught in an 11th grade ELA classroom where school district requirements are closely aligned with the *Collections Grade 11* textbook. The unit can be placed within the Collection 1 unit to be aligned with a study of theme in Joy Harjo's poem "New Orleans" (Beers 97-102) or within Collection 3 The Individual and Society.

There is a great amount of flexibility and differentiation built into the unit. Students can spend two weeks or more completing the learning objectives. Additionally, the final assessment pieces may be differentiated for various grade, skill, and language levels. The essential components of the unit ask students to be able to read and analyze poetry, to understand the individual's role in different societies, and to write poetry in response to art and community. The ways in which they demonstrate these understandings can be modified accordingly.

Sample Lesson 1: Cochiti Storytellers

Objectives:

Students will be able to define spirit breaks, Cochiti Storytellers, and the 1680 Pueblo Revolt in order to write original poems inspired by the resilience and traditions of the Pueblo people.

Common Core State Standards Addressed:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7: 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.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10: 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 tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Materials:

- A [slide deck](#) to act as a visual queue throughout the lesson.

- A photograph example of the use of a “spirit break” in Pueblo pottery. The image can be displayed for the classroom and/or uploaded to Google Classroom.
- Printer paper, pencils, crayons, or any other tools for drawing. Students will be asked to “look closely” at the Pueblo pottery in order to draw a copy of the design.
- A copy of the Mustafic [article](#) on Cochiti Storytellers and the [guiding questions](#). These can be printed and/or posted in Google Classroom.
- Students will explore [Virgil Ortiz’s internet gallery](#) in order to explore contemporary Native American art and respond to the final question on the guiding questions worksheet.
- Exit Ticket: Poetry response to an image.

Procedures:

Essential Questions: In what ways does our community shape the people we are? How have Native peoples expressed this community identity in art? What role does art play in the Native American community? Remind the student that throughout this unit we will be asked to look through windows into Native American culture while also looking into a mirror of our own community and identity.

Do Now - Look Closely: Display the Pueblo plate with a “spirit break” design. Students should use their sketchbooks or grab materials from the art supply bin. Draw a picture of the Pueblo pottery. Be as detailed as possible.

Share Out: What do you notice about the design? What do you wonder? The teacher should connect the discussion to the idea of “spirit breaks” in Pueblo pottery. The spirit break is to keep the spirit of the potter alive and moving. Free and unrestricted. Flowing.

Response Poem: Inspired by the “spirit break” in Pueblo pottery, write a poem where you choose one meaningful line break to act as a spirit break keeping the spirit of the poet alive and moving. Free and unrestricted. Flowing. (This activity can be differentiated to include a drawing exercise.)

Turn and Talk: Display a variety of Cochiti Storyteller pottery images. What do you notice or wonder about these figures?

Read and Respond: Pass out the printed copy of the article and guided questions worksheet. It is recommended that students have access to the internet via Chromebook in order to view the gallery of Virgil Ortiz linked in the worksheet. If this is not possible, the teacher may also display the gallery for the class in order to respond to this question.

Students can work together or individually to read the article by Mustafic and respond to the guiding questions. The whole class can also perform a read-aloud of the article instead of reading independently.

Small-Group Review and Poetry Invitation: Review the guiding questions as a whole class or have students work in a group of four to discuss their responses. The final question of the worksheet asks students to respond to the following poetry invitation: “Inspired by the Cochiti storyteller figurines, write a poem about the kind of storytelling passed down in your home.” This allows students to immerse themselves in similar storytelling techniques as the Pueblo people of study. This could also be an interesting group poem assignment where groups of students are asked to identify a common story passed down in the community and work together to tell this story via poetry.

Exit Ticket: Display an image of Ivan Lewis’ imaginative Cochiti Mermaid figure along with his quote about the mythological creature. The following quote from Trimble’s *Talking with the Clay* should be displayed:

Ivan Lewis “has also revived some of the historic figurines of the railroad era—cowboys and caricatures. ‘The old ones just give you an idea, you can’t really copy. It always develops and comes out your own way.’ He also makes mermaids. ‘Cochiti mermaids? Sure, they live up in Cochiti Lake!’” (Trimble 59).

Display the poetry response prompt: “INVITATION: Inspired by Ivan Lewis’s Cochiti mermaids, write a poem about the Philly Mermaid, or the Philly X Mythological Creature. Where does it roam? Describe this creature using imagery and resonant particular details.” Students may write this poem independently or collaboratively.

Students should be routinely asked to engage in deep immersion with the imagination. Native artwork is rich with imagination and should be encouraged in the student artist.

Sample Lesson 2: Gathering Clay: Community Symbols and Iconography

Objectives:

Students will be able to make connections between Native artistic representations of stories, symbols, and artifacts and artifacts from their own neighborhoods in order to create a radial design. NOTE: Before this lesson, students should have been able to analyze designs in Native American pottery, weaving, and jewelry, including contemporary artists’ inclusion of video games, anime, and comic books into their designs.

They should also have gathered designs, symbols, and artifacts from their own communities via field trip exploration into the neighborhood.

Common Core State Standards Addressed:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10: 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 tasks, purposes, and audiences.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Materials:

- A [slide deck](#) to act as a visual queue throughout the lesson.
- Student-created field guide project for their neighborhood complete with photos, sketches, and response poems.
- Gallery walk slide deck of student-generated symbols and landmarks in the neighborhood. Ideally, this will have been compiled before the start of the lesson, but students may also add their photos and symbols to the slide deck as a Do Now.
- Radial design assignment complete with a graphic organizer. Students will be asked to draw or design a radial design like the example shown on this [slide](#). Provide a digital and printed graphic organizer for students who might struggle to create their own design.
- Print out of the section “What does it mean to Pueblo?” from Bruce Hucko’s book.
- Poster paper, pencils, crayons, or any other tools for drawing.
- Chromebooks.

Procedures:

Stephen Trimble, author of *Talking with the Clay: The Art of Pueblo Pottery*, says, “Every modern pueblo has a set of stories about how its clans gathered from many places to come to the one place they should live and where they live today, the ‘center of the universe’ for each people” (6-7). Students will explore the stories of their own pueblos and recognize how their neighborhoods are the “center of the universe” for their communities. By bringing these stories, symbols, and artifacts into the classroom we will work to “create classrooms that students are connected to in the same way that they are connected to their block or street corner” (Emdin 138).

Prior to Class: Students will have completed the field guide assignment in which they gathered artifacts from the community and responded via ekphrastic poetry. Another prompt in which they respond would be the following invitation: “Write a poem that is a map to your home. Focus on the landmarks that distinguish your neighborhood. Be as specific as possible. I’d recommend writing this as you traverse the route to get all of the details.”

Do Now - Gallery Walk: Explore the Google Slide deck showing the artifacts and iconography students discovered during the Field Guide neighborhood field trip assignment. Post one notice or wonder to at least three peer posts. What do these images say about our community?

Radial Designs: Review the radial design assignment from Hucko’s book:

Do you ever have so many design ideas that you can’t squeeze them into one drawing? Mauricia does. She studies and collects Indian designs and patterns by riding her bike through the pueblo.

Radial designs are found in cultures around the world and range from Tibetan mandalas to Navajo sandpaintings. The format provides children with a comfortable structure. The repetition of imagery creates a sense of motion and has plenty of diverse options so that no two designs will be the same. The radial design form provided Mauricia with a wonderful new way to express her creativity.

“There’s no top or bottom to it,” she says. “It just keeps moving around and around.”

The trickiest part of creating a radial design is constructing the basic framework of lines. Find the center of a square piece of paper by drawing diagonal lines lightly from corner to opposite corner. Next, using a ruler, find the halfway points of each side and connect them with lines that go through the center of the paper. These lines will serve as your guide to

making your own design. You can divide the paper further by drawing lines to make geometric or other shapes.

Radial designs are meant to repeat. Every time you draw something in one section of your paper, be sure to draw it in the opposite section. It is usually good to draw two or four of everything. You can simply use line designs or draw your favorite objects, or combine the two. And what if you don't know what to draw? All good artists draw from their experiences and immediate environments. Look around you! Toys, cars, dolls, tools, food, and nature are all good sources of inspiration. (Hucko 77)

Students will use the arts and crafts tools to create a radial design on the poster board. They may also use their Chromebooks to design a digital radial design. This project can be done independently or collaboratively.

Circle Discussion: Students will gather into a circle for a final discussion. First, read the section "What does it mean to be Pueblo?" (Hucko). Next, explain to students that we will create a group poem that answers the question "What does it mean to be from South Philly?" Then, students will present their radial designs and explain how these symbols represent the community. After each student or group presents, they will write one line of the group poem. Finally, we will read the class-created poem.

Sample Lesson 3: The Individual and Society: Transcendence

Objectives:

Students will be able to support character inferences with text evidence in order to immerse themselves in writing a poem about a significant real or imagined character from their community.

This lesson should be situated towards the end of the entire unit on Native American art, culture, and poetry. Students will have come to this lesson having read and annotated selected poems from *Original Fire* by Louise Erdrich. Students will explore how Erdrich uses characterization in her poetry in order to convey themes relating to two of the unit's essential questions:

- The Indian writer, and the neoindigenous too, must ask, "How can I be part of a community and still be uniquely me, and how do I express this longing to honor my individuality without feeling as I am betraying my people?" (Bursk 4).

- “How, when you are writing a poem about your intense and intimate experience, can you immerse yourself so thoroughly in this act of imagination the poem becomes about so much more than your experience” (Bursk 14).

Common Core State Standards Addressed:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3: Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.A: Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

Materials:

- A [slide deck](#) to act as a visual queue throughout the lesson.
- An annotated reading of “The Butcher’s Wife” section of [Original Fire by Louise Erdrich](#).
- Shared Google Doc [Character Inference Graphic Organizer](#) where all students can add to one document for their assigned character.
- “That Pull from the Left” [poem and guiding questions](#).
- ReadWriteThink Defining Characterization [PDF](#).

Procedures:

Do Now: As students arrive, direct them to have their annotated copies of “The Butcher’s Wife” poems out. They should join the whole-class shared Character Inference Graphic Organizer doc. Assign each student one of the characters mentioned in the poems. They

should read over their assigned poem and make inferences about their assigned character supported by text evidence.

Share-Out: Students should present their inferences about Mary Kröger, Otto Kröger, Butch, Hilda, Step-and-a-Half Waleski, Town Leonard, and Rudy J.V. Jacklitch. Are any of the characters described differently in different poems? What do we make of the speaker of the poems (and our guide to understanding the other characters) Mary Kröger?

Close-Read: Distribute paper copies of Louise Erdrich's poem "That Pull from the Left" with guiding questions. Students will read the poem multiple times and respond to the following questions on characterization and theme:

1. Vocabulary: Define *sinister*, *strict*, *dray*, *echt*, *deft*.
2. Describe the speaker in the poem. How do other characters in the poem describe the speaker? How does the speaker describe herself?
3. We are introduced to three other characters during this poem. Who are those characters and what is their relationship to the speaker? How does the speaker feel about each of these characters and how do you know?
4. The line "Something queer happens when the heart is delivered" is repeated twice, once during the final line of the poem. What significance does this line have to the theme of the poem?
5. In a well-considered paragraph, how does Erdrich use characterization to convey the theme of her poem?

Students can also respond to the poetry invitation: Inspired by "That Pull from the Left," write a poem in which you "lunge toward [your] darkness" - meaning a moment where you embrace the hardships this life offers.

NOTE: This reading, the guiding questions, and the poetry response can be rearranged according to the unit time constraints. For example, students may have already completed a close reading of the poem in the previous class and finished annotating the rest of the section for homework. The creative poetry response can be swapped in or out for the critical analysis paragraph if needed.

Review student responses.

As we come to a close of our unit on poetry and Native American studies, we should remind our students of Dr. Chris Bursk's essential question about the power of transcending our personal experiences through immersion in the details of poetry - "how, when you are writing a poem about your intense and intimate experience, can you immerse yourself so thoroughly in this act of imagination the poem becomes about so much more than your experience" (Bursk 14). How do these Native poets write so deeply

about their communities that the themes become so much more universal - universal for even a student living in South Philly?

Chapbook Creation Project: Inspired by the section “The Butcher’s Wife,” we will create a class poetry chapbook about the characters in our community. Think of the people in your life—your own Mary Kröger, Otto, Butch, Hilda, Step-and-a-Half Waleski, Town Leonard, Rudy J.V. Jacklitch—and try to find the extraordinary in the people you see every day. “Immerse yourself so thoroughly in this act of imagination” that your poem becomes about more than just this person you know. Choose a character from your world that is significant, worth documenting on paper, to be introduced and remembered by readers, and write a poem, short story, letter, or nonfiction essay about him or her.

- You must name this person so that the readers recognize him or her, but you can disguise this person by using a fictitious name, just a first name, or simply a nickname.
- You must reveal details about this person so that the reader “gets to know them” through your description. Use the ReadWriteThink mnemonic device of STEAL to remember the five types of indirect characterization.

NOTE: The amount of time spent on this project can be anywhere from a day to a week. Students can simply write their poems and share out in class or time can be spent editing, revising, arranging, and compiling the poems into a bound chapbook. The final result should be a creative record of the people in our own shared community that hopefully, like all great poetry, transcends our own experiences.

Future lessons might feature a “book launch” and/or a Socratic seminar responding to the unit essential questions “In what ways does our community shape the people we are? How have Native peoples expressed this community identity in art?” as well as “How can I be part of a community and still be uniquely me, and how do I express this longing to honor my individuality without feeling as I am betraying my people?” (Bursk 4).

Resources

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Appendix 1: Standards

Common Core State Reading Standards Addressed:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2: Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3: Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Common Core State Writing Standards Addressed:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.A: Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.D: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.E: Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5: 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. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 11-12 here.)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10: 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 tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Common Core State Speaking Standards Addressed:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.A: Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B: Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C: Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D: Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

Appendix 2: Storytellers of Cochiti, Then and Now

Storytellers of Cochiti, Then and Now

By Amber Mustafic

Directions: Read the article found [HERE](#) and answer the following questions.

1. Define the following vocabulary words: language isolate, kiva.
2. How would you describe the Cochiti storytelling tradition? What is the significance of storytelling in Cochiti communities?
3. Describe the Cochiti Storyteller in pottery. What do these figures represent for Puebloans?
4. What caused the gap in the ceramic record of Cochiti figurative pottery? When did Puebloans return to making ceramics?
5. Describe the 1680 Pueblo Revolt.
6. Analyze the work of Virgil Ortiz found [HERE](#). The article states, “Like his ancestors who never ceased to create their pottery, Virgil not only carries on his cultural traditions, but also sends a clear message that Cochiti, and the Pueblos, will never surrender their culture.” In what ways do you see the theme of “resilience” in his work?

7. Read the following story, the best-known tale of the first Pueblo potters.

“Long ago, Clay Old Woman and Clay Old Man came to visit the Cochitis. Clay Old Woman mixed clay with sand and began to coil a pot while Clay Old Man danced beside her. All the people watched. When the pot was some eighteen inches high, Clay Old Man danced too close and kicked it over. He took the broken pot, rolled the clay in a ball, and gave a piece to all the women in the village, telling them never to forget to make pottery. Ever since, when the Cochitis do not make pottery, Clay Old Woman and Clay Old Man come to the village and dance to remind the people of their gift of clay” (Trimble 56).

INVITATION: Inspired by the Cochiti storyteller figurines, write a poem about the kind of storytelling passed down in your home.

Appendix 3: “That Pull from the Left”

That Pull from the Left

BY LOUISE ERDRICH

Butch once remarked to me how sinister it was
alone, after hours, in the dark of the shop
to find me there hunched over two weeks' accounts
probably smoked like a bacon from all those Pall-Malls.

Odd comfort when the light goes, the case lights left on
and the rings of baloney, the herring, the parsley,
arranged in the strict, familiar ways.

Whatever intactness holds animals up
has been carefully taken, what's left are the parts.
Just look in the cases, all counted and stacked.

Step-and-a-Half Waleski used to come to the shop
and ask for the cheap cut, she would thump, sniff, and finger.
This one too old. This one here for my supper.
Two days and you do notice change in the texture.

I have seen them the day before slaughter.
Knowing the outcome from the moment they enter
the chute, the eye rolls, blood is smeared on the lintel.
Mallet or bullet they lunge toward their darkness.

But something queer happens when the heart is delivered.
When a child is born, sometimes the left hand is stronger.
You can train it to fail, still the knowledge is there.
That is the knowledge in the hand of a butcher

that adds to its weight. Otto Kröger could fell
a dray horse with one well-placed punch to the jaw,
and yet it is well known how thorough he was.

He never sat down without washing his hands,
and he was a maker, his sausage was *echt*
so that even Waleski had little complaint.
Butch once remarked there was no one so deft
as my Otto. So true, there is great tact involved
in parting the flesh from the bones that it loves.

How we cling to the bones. Each joint is a web
of small tendons and fibers. He knew what I meant
when I told him I felt something pull from the left,
and how often it clouded the day before slaughter.

Something queer happens when the heart is delivered.

INVITATION: Inspired by “That Pull from the Left,” write a poem in which you “lunge toward [your] darkness” - meaning a moment where you embrace the hardships this life offers.

Guiding Questions

Cite text evidence to support each of your answers.

1. Vocabulary: Define *sinister*, *strict*, *dray*, *echt*, *deft*
2. Describe the speaker in the poem. How do other characters in the poem describe the speaker? How does the speaker describe herself?
3. We are introduced to three other characters during this poem. Who are those characters and what is their relationship to the speaker? How does the speaker feel about each of these characters and how do you know?
4. The line “Something queer happens when the heart is delivered” is repeated twice, once during the final line of the poem. What significance does this line have to the theme of the poem?
5. In a well-considered paragraph, how does Erdrich use characterization to convey the theme of her poem?

Appendix 4: Defining Characterization

Defining Characterization

Characterization is the process by which the writer reveals the personality of a character. Characterization is revealed through **direct characterization** and **indirect characterization**.

Direct Characterization tells the audience what the personality of the character is.

Example: "The patient boy and quiet girl were both well mannered and did not disobey their mother."
Explanation: The author is directly telling the audience the personality of these two children. The boy is "patient" and the girl is "quiet."

Indirect Characterization shows things that reveal the personality of a character. There are five different methods of indirect characterization:

S peech	What does the character say? How does the character speak?
T houghts	What is revealed through the character's private thoughts and feelings?
E ffect on others toward the character.	What is revealed through the character's effect on other people? How do other characters feel or behave in reaction to the character?
A ctions	What does the character do? How does the character behave?
L ooks	What does the character look like? How does the character dress?

TIP #1: Use the mnemonic device of STEAL to remember the five types of indirect characterization

TIP #2: Use indirect characterization to analyze visual media:

Film: Look at how the character dresses and moves. Note the facial expressions when the director moves in for a close-up shot.

Drama: Pay attention to the way that the characters reveal their thoughts during a soliloquy.