

Title: Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets

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This unit uses a creative writing workshop model to examine elements of poetic form. Students will understand the language choices and literary moves poets make through their analysis and writing of poetry. Students will use the poetry of Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets as models for their own writing. Using this poetry as shared texts for analysis and models for student writing allows students to recognize these exemplary creations as canonical, and the content of the unit serves to situate the readings within the larger conversation of poetry curriculum selections for educators. Students will examine how form and function influence the content of poetry; furthermore, an examination of context produces spaces for students to understand how a poet's time, place, and experiences inform the poet's art. These understandings of the interrelated nature of form function, content, and context—centering Black female poets—will assist students in identifying who they are in their current contexts while making active decisions about the form their poetry will take through their literary choices; moreover, students are afforded writing opportunities where they connect their identities to the content they create and how the forms they select will affect their writing's purpose.

Content Objectives

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Students' exposure to poetry study is often limited. Classroom time and work often tends

toward novels and prose. My guesses as to why this is are anecdotal: 1) teachers often did not have substantial poetry study from their high school educations and the reliance upon well known novels and short stories are selected for their own merits, as well as for the teacher's comfort level with analyzing the known texts and forms; 2) poetry is often characterized as confusing, not relatable, and obfuscating in its nature. In the case of contemporary poetry, these two reasons are often more pronounced. Teachers and students often just do not know of the resources available to them from contemporary poets. Selecting and studying the poetry of Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets provides many teachers with new content while also providing students with opportunities to read poetry that they relate to their lives; poetry that is purposeful; poetry that inspires; poetry that speaks to individuality within community; poetry that examines the self; poetry that challenges society.

Working with poetry provides students opportunities to engage with shorter texts. Close reading skills become honed as students consider the language of the poems they encounter—unified diction, strong verbs, consideration of words one breaks her lines on, meter and rhyming dictates, and syntax—and assists students in understanding how the employment of literary techniques and devices affects meaning and poetic purpose(s). Attention to these nuances in form through identification, examination, analysis, and eventually students' own writing, presents students with agency in deciphering all poetry while being able to imagine being the poets themselves.

Setting a poetry unit around a time (context) and geographical region (context) provides critical launching points for students and teachers to consider. Poets are writers of their context, which shapes their identity and the lenses through which poets write about existence. One need only consider W.B. Yeats. It would be a challenge to separate this poet from his time and place, colonial British rule of Ireland, and the production of such great poems as "Easter 1916" or the most alluded to work of all literature "The Second Coming." Continuing to think of Yeats and his Ireland, readers are also introduced to place and its impact upon poetry—"The Lake Isle of Innisfree"; Yeats also uses mythology, allusions, flora, animals, and fauna available to his observing eye, cultural study, and attuned ear; consider Yeats's use of cultural allusions in "Who Goes With Fergus" or the metaphorical use of Ireland as the raped swan suffering violence of the highest order from English colonial power in his sonnet "Leda and the Swan." Finally, Yeats, like all great poets, examines the human condition: for instance, love in "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven" or aging, loss, and wisdom in "Sailing to Byzantium." These last two examples illustrate that poets also transcend their contexts, to a certain extent, and respond to the universal experiences of everyone.

So, why is Yeats a relevant comparison to a unit on Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets? I make the connections to illustrate how understanding where the poet is writing from—figuratively and literally—assists

one in understanding what the poet is telling the reader or listener. Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets situate the reader in their America, through their specific concerns, and with the specific experiences that are unique to Black women in America. The poetry presented in this unit succeeds in literary ways because of its reliance upon the poet mastering form to create content with specific purposes that respond to its context. Essentially, context shapes content, and through an examination of form and poetic function, students will be able to see the ways in which poetry—when good—can speak to unique, select experiences that are personal and also relate to the universal.

There is also, still, a need to center Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets. One only need to recall Garrison Keillor's 2006 poetry collection *Good Poems* and its absence of selections from this group to remember that Black women writers in America are over looked, marginalized, and not given their due worth in curriculums, anthologies, and classrooms. Rita Dove, rightfully critiquing Keillor's anthology, highlights why we need to center Modern and Contemporary African American Poets in our classrooms. It is well worth reading her essay, and the essay works as a text to open the unit. Where are these poets in our anthologies? Missing is the answer. (A link to Dove's essay is in the appendix of this unit)

A pedagogical strength of creating a poetry unit centered on Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets resides in deepening the current curriculum offerings available to students in the School District of Philadelphia. Tenth graders, across the School District, take African American History their sophomore year. This poetry unit complements the students' study, and the unit creates opportunities for students to make connections across the humanities, an interdisciplinary approach that is due more attention, especially as most cross study is often focused on STEM initiatives. This unit centers the modern and contemporary Black female experience in America, and establishes spaces for students to explore, create, understand and discuss poetry. Furthermore, this unit presents poetry being created now or close to the present, reflecting the students' own context or recent historical past.

Rationale

One would think, given the rather Golden Age of Poetry happening thanks to Contemporary African American Women Poets, that more time would be spent reading their poetry; alas, the time is not widely spent; moreover, students are often exposed to the "regular hits of the curriculum": England's Romantic Poets, Robert Frost and Walt Whitman, England's Modern Poets, and other well established poets who have become accepted, rightfully so and at times de facto, as exemplar and canonical. I certainly believe these poets to be exemplary, and I also believe their work is deeply relevant to the poetry of Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets—poets do not write in a vacuum; moreover, poets are often in conversation with one another. Poets rely upon established forms—sonnet, haiku, villanelle, ballad, and more—to present content relevant to their purposes. Poets

also directly respond to one another across time and space; consider Langston Hughes's "I, Too" in conversation with Whitman's "I Hear America Singing", or Gwendolyn Brooks's meditations on Frost in "Of Robert Frost." So, in teaching a unit centered on Black Women Poets, students are also engaged in understanding how poetry is an extended discourse across time and space with many different poets chiming into a chorus of presenting and understanding the human condition.

There exists an abundance of Modern and Contemporary African American Poetry work to choose from when creating or developing this unit further. The teacher is provided with a multitude of entry points to consider for her student: form analysis, thematic considerations, poetic technique, contextual realities, and poetic tradition to name some. Creating this poetry unit provides a template for the interested teacher, as well as providing a launching point for teachers of lower grade levels to adjust and develop developmentally appropriate lessons for younger students.

Another important element in selecting this unit is in response to the times we are currently a part of in the United States of America. While the far and not-so-far right political groups of the country push to eliminate and erase the African American experience from humanities curriculums it is of the utmost importance for educators to center Black voices, experiences, and creations in direct opposition to the racist endeavors being attempted by such disingenuous and intellectually feeble catch all critiques of an undefined far right "understanding" of Critical Race Theory. There is no real answer, other than racism, to explain the right's push to censor and ban discussions that challenge white dominant power structures. One need only be reasonable to accept that America is built on an imbalance of power that exploited Black people and their labor for the benefit of the white majority. When the facts become contested because someone is fearful or racist, it is the job of educators to counter the lies being spread with curriculum that exposes the truth. In this case, a creative writing unit that centers Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets as models for excellence and in conversation with canonical excellence, the racist is challenged.

Unit Outline

This unit will ask students to use an analytical tool I learned from my mentor, Lee Siegel, while studying Sanskrit Literature in graduate school. It is an incredibly portable skill one can use and shape to varying grade levels; moreover, the model speaks across disciplines and resonates with students, as it is manageable. The form, function, content, and context(s) (FFCC) tool will be taught before this unit. A quick snapshot might be useful, and most educators will find that they utilize all of these ways into a text; so using known classroom nomenclatures is certainly easily interchanged. As with all pedagogical units, teachers should use what works for their students and modify what is presented if need be. In my mind, a good teacher is fluid and flexible: able to adjust to the needs of the classroom she is in rather than follow the script of a prescribed unit. It is my hope this unit will provide many

opportunities for teachers to use ideas here while also feeling quite free to change, elaborate, and improve upon the ideas I have.

Form, Function, Content, Context(s) Analysis: FFCC: Imagine each topic as a quadrant on a notebook page: four blocks for taking notes

Form: Genre; Type

For example Poetry; Free Verse

*Now, depending upon grade level and desired content objectives, teachers can go as close in as they would like on examining elements of the form (an Italian sonnet has x amount of lines with such and such rhyming pattern or keep it larger with notations between the differences between verse and prose while maybe never even spending too much time on specifics of a Shakespearean versus Petrarchan sonnet)

*Form Analysis: an examination of the elements that are expected and presented in a given form

Function: Purpose

For example: Poetry's function might be to delight, evoke emotions of sadness, challenge societal norms, etc.

*Again, depending on the teacher's objectives for the unit, function analysis can provide discussions and work that leads to Socratic seminar discussions, text-based evidence debate, compare and contrast or persuasive writing, etc.

*Function Analysis: an examination of the purposes of the text, which may or may not be directly tied to authorial intent

Content: What is there: Summary

*For Example: In Nikki Giovanni's poem "Just a New York Poem" there are two stanzas written in free verse employing no capitalization other than in a title being quoted by the speaker of the poem. The speaker of the poem describes a day and evening remembered. The events of the poem are things we all do—eat, drink, walk around town—but the loving and longing way in which the speaker describes a now-gone romantic partner creates a cadence that moves swiftly. This fast-paced descriptive poem is sped along with Giovanni's short lines and enjambed stanzas. Finally, the entire poem appears to be one interrogative sentence ending with a one-word line of "yes?"

*Now, the above sample context analysis requires students to understand **form**. It is also important to say that form and content are pretty interchangeable. Form study and analysis is used to discuss elements of form more broadly, while content analysis is used to examine the elements of a specific work within a form. In this way, a student can recognize a given poem to be free verse (form). The student might then be able to note how enjambment affects cadence (content). Then, a

student could examine how two different poets write free verse using enjambment to influence the pacing of the poem across two poems while realizing how Giovanni's moves could be quite different from Morgan Parker; however, because the student understands the broader form category, the student can meaningfully analyze different poets' work in sophisticated ways through content analysis.

Context (1, 2, 3)

Context 1: Creator/Poet's Time and Place

Context 2: Creation/Poem's Time and Place

Context 3: Reader/Your Time and Place

*Example One: Patricia Smith's poetry collection *Blood Dazzler*

Context 1: Patricia Smith: Contemporary Poet writing about Hurricane Katrina

Context 2: Smith was alive when Hurricane Katrina happened. (There is much more to go into about how Smith is tied to the content of the collection, and this would be an opportunity for a student or group to use vetted research practices to present more about context 1 and 2 to the class). Students would also use a context 2 analysis to deeply explore the event of Hurricane Katrina outside of Smith's poetry in order to better understand *Blood Dazzler*.

Context 3: The students (and it is well worth the teacher always considering how his/her/their identity and context shape his/her/their understandings and readings of a poem) tie aspects of who they and what they have experienced to their analysis and reactions to the poem being studied.

*Example Two: June Jordan's poem "Something Like a Sonnet/for Phillis Miracle Wheatley"

Context 1: June Jordan poet-teacher; lived 1936-2002 (Again a chance for research work for students)

Context 2: The speaker of the poem is in the undefined present writing to the poet Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784). Wheatley was a famous poet of her time, and is notable as the first published African American poet in the States. Her work and history has a special and important connection to the poet June Jordan.

Context 3: Reader response considerations for each reader's understandings, questions, and analysis of Jordan's poem and why Wheatley is alluded to in the title and work while also considering what "Something Like a Sonnet..." the student might write a poem for/about/to based on the function/purpose of their writing.

*Hopefully these two terse examples show the outline of how context(s) analysis work is complex, engaging, and revealing. It is of note and with no flippancy that the FFCC model can be used for children's poetry and texts as early as kindergarten. I have provided a brief overview of the analytical and reflective tool students will employ in their work for this unit. This FFCC model also lends itself to individual analytical choices for students. Some students (or groups) might be more intrigued by understanding form in a broader sense, while other students might be interested

in connecting the links of context to poet's purpose. Essentially, the FFCC model leaves room for both teacher and students to make choices about what will be studied and pursued further.

Writing Workshop Model

After students have completed FFCC analysis of poems from Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets, students will use these poems as models for their own writing. Here students are in positions to highlight their understandings of the elements of form through adhering to the demands of say free verse versus a sestina. Students also, through considering how form shapes function, will make selections in their work to match their intended outcomes to specific poetic forms and the conventions of that form. If a student is going to model a poem after Lucille Clifton's "homage to my hips" that student-poet would need to consider how they use repetition, capitalization, line breaks, punctuation, and a single short stanza to create a poem celebrating something that the student has been made to feel was less than—as Clifton does in her poem in regards to societal pressures about what a woman's body should look like.

The writing workshop model I use is based upon various workshops I have participated in through Brooklyn Poets with Jason Koo, Joshua Mehigan, and Joanne Valente, as well as through writing workshops I have been a part of at the Bread Loaf School of English, notably with Ruth Forman, a contemporary African American Woman poet, and Susan Choi, a National Book Award Winning novelist. The workshop model I use is also heavily influenced by the work of June Jordan, a poet-teacher of the highest order, whose positioning of the students' need to be involved with meaningful work that engages their lives with all of its pain and joy in order to create community...matters a lot to me as a teacher. Her work is deeply influenced by bell hooks' notions of seeing teaching as a political act that is meant to transform our lives. Using a creative writing workshop model as a way to understand and connect to Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets is essential to the work hooks requires educators to consider: how do you assist your students in becoming agents of positive change in their personal lives and worlds? Finally, the rigor that an FFCC analysis study requires of students speaks to a salient point Lisa Delpit reminds educators of in her work *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (2006): educators must select texts relevant to their student populations while also creating rigor that is akin to the work demanded of students in our country's most elite institutions. So, in using a creative writing workshop model centered on an FFCC analysis of the poetry of Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets, students are positioned to critically think on deep levels while connecting to exemplar, canonical texts that speak to where they are from, who they are, and what experiences they have had/are having and write about that.

The Workshop Model has key components:

- 1) Students should have direction of no more than two to three items to track in one another's work;
- 2) When a student-poet is receiving feedback, they do not speak; they take notes while the group provides feedback on the criteria established for the workshop that session;
- 3) After the group has provided feedback to the student-poet, the student-poet has time to ask clarifying questions or solicit more specific feedback if needed.
- 4) Move to the next student-poet to receive feedback.
- 5) Workshop groups report out to the whole class on salient points, important feedback, trends, and questions of clarification for the teacher.
- 6) One member from each group shares a before and after editing move that was done after group feedback. The class notes editing changes and how the samples might influence their own work.
- 7) Reflective timed writing for three to five minutes at the end of each session.

June Jordan's *Poetry for the People* provides wonderful examples of what criteria could be used, as well as how to conduct meaningful creative writing workshops. Her book is listed in the unit's resources.

Major Unit Objectives

Students will be able to understand the interrelations between form, function, content, and context.

Students will deepen their understandings of the specific literary moves and techniques Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets employ in their writing.

Students will understand their connections to Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets and create their own poetry.

Students will understand that poets are writers in conversation with other poets; students will enter that conversation with their own writing.

Teaching Strategies

1. Form, Function, Content, and Context(s) Analysis (FFCC Quick Notes): This is an analytical tool that offers students broad categories to consider. Embedded within this tool are entry points into studying specialized vocabulary, research topics, various writing modes, and reader response theory.

2. Writing Workshop: Students will work in small groups with specific feedback guidelines to workshop each other's poetry. The workshop model will follow specific structures, routines, and tasks for all participants in the workshops.
3. Close Reading: Students will work to hone their close reading skills with emphasis placed on understanding unified diction and situating their understandings and arguments substantiated through textual evidence. This work will have specific annotation skills relevant to poetry study embedded within directives of each close reading.
4. Group Annotations: Students will work together to annotate poems in order to understand form, function, content, and context.
5. Research: Students will learn to use vetted sources and the Free Library of Philadelphia's databases to conduct research on self-selected topics to enhance the community's understandings of the Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets we are studying.
6. Mini-Lessons: Short, instructive lessons modeling how to read and write poetry will be conducted. Similarly, model mini-lessons on group work and elements of how to conduct meaningful writing workshop groups will be led by the teacher.
7. Presentation: Students will memorize and recite a poem for the Poetry Out loud National Competition led by the National Endowment for the Arts.
8. Tone-Mapping and Vocabulary Building: Students will learn how to tone map poems using the tone word vocabulary list from the National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Out loud lesson suggestions.
9. Presentation and Recitation: Students will regularly present findings to the whole class in small groups. Students will regularly recite their poetry after workshops and editing. Students will complete a formal recitation of a memorized poem for the Poetry Out Loud national contest.
10. Gallery Walks: Gallery walks will occur after group FFCC annotation work. Gallery walks, incorporating Modern and Contemporary African American Visual Artists' work will also be used for an ekphrastic poetry lesson.
11. Socratic Seminar/Fishbowls/Partner Shares/Circle Share/Four Corners: Various discussion strategies will be used to enhance classroom discourse.

Classroom Activities

Pre-Unit Activities:

Students can easily be introduced to the need for studying Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets in Rita Dove's essay critiquing Garrison Keillor's selections (or lack thereof) in his 2006 *Good Poems*, an anthology he frames to be representative of American poetry, and he claims the text is for English teachers to use. Rita Dove rightly calls him to task in her essay, and it is well worth reviewing this essay as a class before, during, or after the unit.

Essay: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/60352/letter-to-the-editor-56d23f69afc41>

Another important aspect to any quality unit that requires critical thinking and student engagement with challenging texts needs to center *how* the classroom will handle difficult topics when they arise. It is well worth a teacher's time to embed these discourse practices early in the year, and the work should be done before this unit commences. For a great resource on how to have difficult conversations Facing History & Ourselves offers several techniques teachers can employ.

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library?search=having%20difficult%20conversations>

Lesson 1-3: Elements of Poetry: Identifying Key Concepts for Poetry Analysis (Form and Content)

Lesson One & Two: Teacher begins the lesson modeling how to annotate a poem while considering elements and techniques of poetry: spacing, punctuation, line breaks, allusions, and/or other aspects the teacher would like the students to understand. Students then use one poem, assigned by the teacher, to practice selected skill.

An example: Teacher models a close read of Morgan Parker's "The Gospel According to Her" with an eye to identifying repetition and its affect on cadence; punctuation and its affect on cadence and reading; line breaks and their affects on cadence. Teacher then thinks-aloud and writes a short paragraph explaining the affects repetition, punctuation, and line breaks have on cadence. This paragraph will be built upon in future lessons when the teacher models how to tie elements and techniques to thematic properties of poems and their function/purpose.

Next, students all work on a poem annotating what the teacher modeled. Consider Nikki Giovanni's "The Rosa Park (A Song in Rhythm)." After students have had independent work time to analyze the poem with the criteria set out for them based on the model lesson, students should work in partner or small groups to compare their findings before opening the discussion to the whole class. There should be directed discussion initiated by the teacher that begins with closed-ended questions for formative assessment of student understandings. After a whole class discussion, have students provide feedback with exit slips. The students should note two things they might be unsure of still; also, the students should note a hypothesis as to how the elements and/or techniques reviewed might contribute to the meaning of the poem.

This work is challenging and the work should be repeated the next day with the same elements and different poems. Again, the teacher should model annotating out loud while following that up with a think-aloud writing product synthesizing the work of annotating. Teacher can use Pauli Murray's "Dark Testament" to model the work again. Students can work individually to analyze Julia Fields' "No Time for Poetry." Continue with the same discussion routine and exit slip questions.

Day Three: Students move to work in groups to practice the skills and writing taught independently. The teacher should provide each group with a different poem. Use chart paper so students can all annotate the poem. Students could each look for specific elements and techniques using different colored markers or pens. After groups have completed a close read annotation; students will create a mini-presentation for sharing out to the entire class. Students will take a gallery tour of the annotated poems before the mini-presentations.

Teacher ends lesson addressing exit ticket slips as well as summarizing understandings of form from the first three lessons.

Lessons 4-7: The Power of Allusions: Understanding Function/Poetic Purpose in Poetry

Students will build upon their understanding of poetic form through consideration of poetic purpose and how poets use allusions, specifically allusions to African American history and culture.

Lessons Four and Five: Introduce allusions having students consider pop allusions. These student-generated allusions should come from music, television, social media, and contemporary popular allusions the students know and are even authors of. Following this exercise, have students complete a timed free write on the topic of "Historical Events That Have Influenced and/or Affected Me."

Teacher models a close read of Gwendolyn Brooks' "The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till." In this reading, it is important to highlight how allusions works right away (in the title) to immediately establish a tone while also addressing larger issues: racism, violence, history, and sorrow. Also, this is another opportunity to illustrate more aspects of form: quatrain, couplets, spacing, and punctuation. This poem also serves well for a context analysis: poet's context; the poem's historical context; our response in our context. A short whole class discussion can follow before students are assigned to complete analysis of a poem in a group.

Students should be given vetted resources to assist them in understanding the historical allusions presented in each poem, and the students should have time to read more about the poet's life, interests, and poetic purposes.

Quality vetted sources for this work:

https://www.poetryfoundation.org/?gclid=Cj0KCQjw2MWVBhCQARIsAljbwoN1r-Dv RFhfD9GAb9MZUIjw9gXLzfeOabQSGhOiA6O23g2H51B6UaAoISeALw_wcB

<https://poets.org/>

<https://www.loc.gov/>

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/>

Each group completes an analysis to understand: 1) the poet; 2) the allusion; 3) the group members' connections to the poem. Each group will create a mini-slide show to share their findings with the rest of the class. This work requires at least two days, and the teacher is monitoring and assisting small groups while also checking for student understandings, as well as what learning objectives need to be iterated in upcoming mini-lessons.

Some poems for groups to consider and analyze:

Lucille Clifton: "jasper texas 1998"

Nikki Giovanni: "On Hearing 'The Girl With the Flaxen Hair'"

Morgan Parker: "Slouching Toward Beyoncé"

*Almost any selection from M. Nzadi Keita's work *Brief Evidence of Heaven: Poems from the life of Anna Murray Douglass*

Lesson Six: Based on formative assessments during teacher small group instruction, a mini-lecture on form, allusions, and practices of research should be done. After the mini-lecture, student groups work on their Power of Allusions slideshow. This work will also center the essential question: What are we learning from Modern and Contemporary African American Women Poets? What specific thematic concerns and issues are being raised and addressed by the poets we are reading?

Students complete gallery tours of one another's slideshows with guided questions from the group, as well as guidance from the teacher around the essential questions.

Class ends with a whole class debrief discussion of understandings. Students complete an exit ticket sharing salient understandings they have so far in the unit.

Lesson Seven: Students will practice writing an expository essay, using close reading skills and annotations from analysis thus far in the unit. Textual evidence to substantiate claims will be reinforced. Tying the elements of poetry and poetic choices to themes of the work and the poem's function will also be emphasized. Teacher will model an essay from the work that was introduced in Lesson One. Students will have time to outline and produce a draft of an essay. Peer editing will

occur with checklists, and this serves as a preview to writing workshop practices that will be utilized in creative writing assignments.

Lessons 8-10: Celebrating Poet Laureates: Amanda Gorman and Tracy K. Smith (I would also consider Rita Dove as an entire lesson too).

The following lesson on Amanda Gorman is taken from the School District of Philadelphia's Oratorical Contest 2022; I have included the lesson here. Of note, in 2022, four of the five finalists were my students!

1) Read this article about Amanda Gorman and her inspirations:

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/books/story/2021-01-17/amanda-gorman-biden-inauguration-poet>

2) Note three things that strike you about what inspires Gorman. Reconsider the three topics you have considered to inspire your speech/spoken word/poem. Write a paragraph explaining your inspirations.

3) Watch Gorman's inaugural poem recitation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZ055illiN4>

4) Imagine you are going to select two lines from Gorman's poem to post on your social media account of choice. Which lines would you post and why? Explain in a short answer. Be sure to include the quoted lines.

5) Rewatch the video at moment 3:40. What catastrophes might Gorman be referencing? What catastrophes have you, your family, your city, your county faced? How have these hard times shaped you, your loved ones, and larger communities around you?

6) Rewatch the inaugural poem recitation noticing when Gorman switches to "We." What is the impact of the repetition of the "we"?

How do you see yourself or not see yourself as part of the "we"?

7) Consider these lines from the poem: "So let us leave behind a country/ better than the one we are left with."

What would it look like if this line were to come to fruition? Describe your vision.

What specific actions can you take to be part of Gorman's call to action?

8) Consider the ending lines of the poem:

"For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it,
if only we're brave enough to be it."

When your light shines brightest, what are you brave enough to see, and what are you brave enough to be?

*Respond to this question. Then, consider your topics for the oratorical contest again. Which topic really resonates with you and ties to the theme of the contest? How will you use the reflective and analytical writing you did above to shape your oratorical writing?

Tracy K. Smith: Students will view excerpts of her Poet Laureate acceptance speech.

<https://loc.gov/item/webcast-8113>

Journal responses and reactions and small group discussions. Assessment: students select a poem by Tracy K. Smith to complete an FFCC analysis of for feedback from the teacher.

https://poets.org/poet/tracy-k-smith?gclid=Cj0KCQjw2MWVBhCQARIsAIjbwoNjx7h6OspukOf5N9V0Ctovab09wIWA0irGzEvAAUTC57MD6_86vhMaAgR7EALw_wcB#poet_works

Further Lessons:

Lucille Clifton: homage, blessings, and imagery: celebrating Black Women

June Jordan: Writing for Resistance, Change, and Community: Resistance Poetry

Patricia Smith: Poetry of Place: Using Persona Poems to Understand History

Claudia Rankine: Prose Poetry and Ekphrastic Inspirations: Politics and Culture

Natasha Trethewey: Poetic Form and Southern Roots: Poems of Place

Final Assessments:

Teachers could choose any of the following activities, projects, and writing products for final assessment: 1) Poetry chapbook from student based on model poems from the unit; 2) Memorization and recitation of a poem using the Poetry Out Loud contest; 3) Essays: close read analysis; argumentative; compare and contrast; 4) Poetry Café celebration and recitation; 5) Exam on key terms, influences, and elements from the unit's study.

Poets not mentioned specifically in the unit but the teacher should consider incorporating into lessons and/or using for student choice in analysis and as models for student writing:

Elizabeth Alexander, Maya Angelou, Wanda Coleman, Mari Evans, Nikki Grimes, Audre Lorde, Sonia Sanchez, Ntozake Shange, Evie Shockley, Alice Walker, Margaret Walker, Shirley Anne Williams, Jacqueline Woodson

Resources

Bontemps, Arna. *American Negro Poetry*. New York, N.Y: Hill and Wang, 2000. Print.

Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Selected Poems*. New York: Perennial Classics, 1999. Print.

Clifton, Lucille. *Blessing the Boats: New and Selected Poems, 1988-2000*. Rochester, NY: BOA Editions, 2008. Print.

Clifton, Lucille. *Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir, 1969 - 1980*. Rochester, NY: BOA Ed, 2006. Print.

Dove, Rita. *Collected Poems: 1974-2004.* , 2017. Print.

Dungy, Camille T. *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009. Print.

Giovanni, Nikki, and Nikki Giovanni. *Nikki Giovanni: Acolytes*. Philadelphia, Pa: Free Library of Philadelphia, 2007. Internet resource.

Giovanni, Nikki. *Black Feeling, Black Talk, Black Judgment*. New York: Morrow, 1972. Print.

Gorman, Amanda. *Purchase Candidate: Call Us What We Carry*. Place of publication not identified: Viking Books, 2021. Print.

HOOKS, BELL. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. Place of publication not identified: DEV Publishers & DISTRIBU, 2018. Print.

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Poetry Out Loud: Lesson Plans, Contest Information, Learning Objectives and Common Core Standards, Handouts, and Audio Recordings

<https://www.poetryoutloud.org/>

<https://www.poetryoutloud.org/teachers-organizers/ncte-and-common-core-standards/>

Appendix

This appendix provides NCTE Objectives and Common Core Standards from these lessons, as well as links to poems and poets that the unit mentions.

Objectives and Standards

National Council for Teachers of English Objectives

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the

workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language.
10. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

Common Core Standards

Key Ideas and Details

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. 3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Craft and Structure

4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. 5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole. 6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. 9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Anchor Standards for Language (L.9-10, L.11-12)

Knowledge of Language

3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate. 5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

See original source for objectives and standards here:

<https://www.poetryoutloud.org/teachers-organizers/ncte-and-common-core-standards/>

Poets and Poems

Gwendolyn Brooks: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/gwendolyn-brooks>

Lucille Clifton: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/lucille-clifton>

Rita Dove: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/rita-dove>

Julia Fields:

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095816977>

Nikki Giovanni: <https://poets.org/poet/nikki-giovanni>

Amanda Gorman: <https://poets.org/poet/amanda-gorman>

bell hooks: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/bell-hooks>

M. Nzadi Keita: <https://www.pewcenterarts.org/people/m-nzadi-keita>

June Jordan: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/june-jordan>

Pauli Marshall: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/pauli-murray>

Morgan Parker: <https://poets.org/poet/morgan-parker>

Claudia Rankine: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/claudia-rankine>

Patricia Smith: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/patricia-smith>

Tracy K. Smith: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/tracy-k-smith>

Natasha Trethewey: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/natasha-trethewey>

Resources for vetted sources for student research:

https://www.poetryfoundation.org/?gclid=Cj0KCQjw2MWVBhCQARIsAljbwoN1r-Dv_RFhFD9GAb9MZUIjw9gXLzfe0abQSGhOiA6O23g2H51B6UaAolSEALw_wcB

<https://poets.org/>

<https://www.loc.gov/>

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/>

Rubric from SDP for their Oratorical Contest:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qR19Hf3ON0YKI8D7ZNw8UzqsjuZ0-VFkeXshQpjN2H4/edit> This can be used for students' recitations if you would like them to work on that in this unit with their own poems.

Great Resource for Discourse in Classrooms

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library?search=having%20difficult%20conversations>