

Let's Talk Poetry With Me (Amber McBride)

Developed by Amber McBride

This lesson serves as a brief introduction to creative writing, poetry and analyzing poetry. It focuses on the act and joy of reading, writing and experiencing poetry in its many forms. Hip Hop, spoken word, poetry on the page and music are all topics discussed in this lesson.

The following material will likely take four days to complete. **Day 1:** Introducing poetry and spoken word. **Day 2:** Poems on the page, novels in verse and literary devices to help students write poetry. **Day 3:** Writing prompts 1 and 2. **Day 4:** Editing poems and sharing work with the class.

The goal of this lesson is to encourage students to look at poetry more broadly—are song lyrics poetry, what about hip hop song? What makes a poem a poem? What about prose poems? In breaking down the stereotypes of what “poetry” is it becomes more accessible to more students and readers.

This lesson also includes a slide show with suggested poems, YouTube videos and writing prompts for students.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will come to understand that there are many types of poetry that range from poetry on the page, prose poems, form poems, hip hop, song lyrics, spoken word and much more.
- Students learn to look critically at poems and their meanings. They will start to formulate an idea of what poetry is to them as they engage with the material.
- Students will brainstorm literary devices to help them write poems.
- Students will write two original poems.
- Students will practice reading their poems to an audience.

**This lesson keeps in mind NCTE Standards and encourages students to read widely from a diverse group of poets, expand their vocabulary, look closely at figurative language and critically think about poetry and performance.

Slide 1 What is poetry:

Poetry is a form that utilizes line breaks, rhythm and poetic devices to evoke a meaningful experience for the reader.

That is just a fancy way of saying that defining poetry is just about as hard as deciding what is and isn't poetry. Are song lyrics poetry? Are rap lyrics poetry? What about poems with line breaks that don't rhyme? What about prose poems? What about a "poem" written on twitter (as seen to the right)? Twitter isn't for poetry is it?

Poetry is vast. Poetry can be many things to many people and trying to put it in one box is like trying to distil our own identities down to one quality.

Poetry is more than Shakespeare or Robert Frost. There are poets around the globe who all view poetry through different lenses. The beauty of poetry is in its diversity, just like the world we live in. So, don't get too hung up on defining poetry and don't get too intimidated about reading, writing and analyzing poetry.

If you like a certain poem, great! If you don't like a certain poem, that's also great! What is important is that we learn to articulate why we like a poem. Perhaps a poem has line breaks help move it along or the metaphors resonate with you. Maybe a poem falls flat for you because you don't vibe with the truth the poet is trying to explain. Or maybe you don't like poems that rhyme. All of that is ok, as long as you can explain why you don't enjoy a certain poem.

Slide 2 Spoken word/ Hip Hop:

Spoken word and Hip Hop (Rap) are both rhythmic and have a performance quality to them, but if you ask many scholars, they are quick to say, *nope that is not poetry.*

Critics often argue that poetry should be timeless and hold up on the page, which means without being performed it should be just as meaningful.

Question 1: Do you think that is a fair way of deciding if something is poetry?

Question 2: Is your favorite hip hop song excellent without music? Is it timeless?

Take a look at this song: *This Is America* by Childish Gambino
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6DlcfacMos>)

Take a look at this spoken word poem: Shane Koyczan
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sa1iS1MqUy4>)

Take a look at this poem: *Alternate Names For Black Boys* by Danez Smith
(<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/56843/alternate-names-for-black-boys>)

Question 3: Do you think the above examples are poetry? Why or why not.

Slide 3 “Literary” Poems:

In America, for a long time “literary” meant written by white male poets. Why? Because the poetry that everyone else was writing was being ignored. The problem is we still primarily teach white male poets when poetry is a vast.

Take a look at this poem by Lucille Clifton:
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50974/wont-you-celebrate-with-me>

Or this poem by Ocean Vuong:
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/88733/toy-boat>

Or this poem by Sonia Sanchez: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/155749/this-is-not-a-small-voice>

Or this spoken word poem by Sarah Kay: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0snNB1yS3IE>

All of these poems are written by marginalized poets.

Question 4: Have you read a lot of poetry by marginalized poets?

Question 5: Who is your favorite poet?

Slide 4 Novels in verse:

Sometimes poets write entire novels with poetry. These are called novels in verse. They are different from poetry collections because they have storylines similar to novels.

Examples of young adult novels in verse include:

- *A Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds
- *All of Me* by Chris Baron
- *Me (Moth)* by Amber McBride (yes, I just plugged myself)
- *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo

- *White Rose* by Kip Wilson

Question 6: Have you ever read a novel in verse? Have you ever read a poetry collection? In what ways do you think they are similar or different.

Slide 5 Devices to Help you write poems:

Literary Devices help us write poems that engage all of our senses. Metaphors, assonance, personification are some examples. Line breaks are another device used to help set the pace and rhythm of a poem.

Metaphor: A comparison using like or as.

Assonance: Repetition of a vowel sound.

Personification: Giving human characteristics to inanimate objects.

Task 1: Make a list of some literary devices you think would be useful when crafting a poem and then use a few of them for practice.

Slide 6 Now, let's write a poem together...:

Writing a poem and sharing it can be scary, so I am going to write a poem with you following my own directions (this could turn out very badly).

Question 7: Whenever you sit down to write a paper, poem or in a journal do you have a ritual? Do you need snacks or classical music? Maybe you need the background noise of a TV show you already watched or maybe you go on a long walk before. Take a second to talk about your rituals before writing.

Or, hear me out, maybe you are like me. You know what I am talking about, a professional procrastinator (it's a full time job really). Sheer panic, coffee and a deadline make you sit down in front of your computer and get the thing done! The problem with that is it is very stressful (lets leave stress in 2020)!

Creating a ritual around writing (whatever kind of writing it may be) can help you get ahead and stay ahead. Which means less stress, more time to edit and more fun overall.

Slide 7 Writing Prompt One (Music Roulette):

First, pull up whatever device you use to listen to music. I use Spotify the most. Shuffle your songs and whatever song comes up is the name of your poem or the vibe of the poem you are going to write.

My song: *Shade of Yellow* by Griff

Ok, next listen to the song a few times so you are in the right headspace. Now go back to your list of literary devices and pick two that you must use in this poem.

My literary devices: Personification and Alliteration

Now craft two lines from those literary devices:

Line One Alliteration: Like feathers falling freshly

Line Two Personification: Dancing like the sky saying, *Tell me why the wind moves like birds everywhere I go.*

Let's get a snack and take a five min break because distraction is key when writing a good poem. I am not completely joking, spending a few mins away from your work can give you perspective.

Slide 8 Writing Prompt Two (road-trippin):

First: Pull up a map of the USA.

Second: Think about the song you just used for your first poem.

Third: Add a few more songs that go with that first song you randomly got. Make a ten song playlist.

Fourth: Where would this playlist take you? Map out a road trip with at least three destinations.

Fifth: Research each place.

Last: Write a poem that talks about one of the destinations, all of them or the feeling of the trip. Be descriptive in your poems. Who are you with, what car are you driving. Remember poetry does not have to be based on real life...let your imagination go crazy.

My road trip stops:

Washington DC, Charlottesville, Richmond, Charlotte

I've decided on this road trip I am traveling with my friends and we are playing a game to pass the time where we must use words that start with the letter P as much as possible. So I am going to start with making a list of words that start with P, I also want this poem to be funny, because road trips are fun. I also think it is going to be a prose poem, which means no line breaks. Did you know there are poems called prose poems that don't have line breaks? Also this feels like a very TikTok inspired prose poem.

Slide 9: My Poem/ (Song) Tweet me yours @ambsmcbride:

Shade of Yellow (Dance Girl)

It broke on stage

while I was pirouetting

the black swan in red pointe shoes

& I thought first of the lighter

that my instructor held under my

leg in practice to scare strength

into it, so I kept dancing—

dancing like the sky saying,

Tell me why the wind moves

like birds everywhere I go.

Like feathers falling freshly

in a sleeping city, god

is a brown blanket I sometimes

sleep on, like the wind saying,

Tell me why the clouds hover so close.

I moved like the shadows

of gazelles jumping in African sunsets

manic dancers, a lion trailing close behind—

so one is always dying & somewhere

it's always raining & the rain is

always humming, life *is a baptism of*

wingless birds of shattered bones—

Slide 10 My Poem/ (road trip) Tweet me yours @ambsmcbride:

BEFORE I DIE IN THIS PANNI PRESS, I WANT PONDEROSA

I don't want to say the P word. The P word that starts with Pan and ends with, how is this not over yet, so instead we are living in a Pan's Labyrinth, if you will. There's a Pacsun to left of this Panic at the Disco Christmas Tree, kinda times. Like Pluto. Remember Pluto, the dog, the kid at the Planet Hollywood? Pinch me, we are living during a paddleboard picnic in the middle of a piranha pond. People, honestly cover your noses, close your mouths, this is not the time for pouting, we are in the middle of a prayer box in the pulpit.

You see this? This in the middle of my palm is not a psalm, is not a year gone, it is in fact, a pancake pastry in a pomegranate syrup puddle. This is such a Pitbull pissing on hydrant end of days. For Pandora's sake, stop punching everyone in the middle of this Pottery Barn Palace. This is the year of Princess & the Pea, Princess Pea, a Princess playing ping-pong? You know they cancelled Pride twice because of this pasta sauce sticking to the pot?

We are living in a Paramore would never have I ever seen Papa Roach kinda times. It's a I am Pansexual, no really, I am living in a pan feeling sexual time in history. It's a Pollock painting. It's that Prince line.

Ok, I've got it, basically we are living in the middle of a Peter Pan minus Neverland enter Persephone throwing Pestilence like party poppers, panty droppers kinda ish. This is not that *good good trouble*, it's that we are living in the middle of a pastel Picasso & I'll ask Pollock to paint me, with only plaster & splattered lines like spaghetti plated at Ponderosa.

Pollock, please paint the moment at Ponderosa, where I sneak the pudding right before Mama says, *bow your heads, let us say grace, let us pray*. So I pray, proud child with pudding already in my mouth. Proud.

Slide 11: About Me (Amber McBride)

Amber McBride is an English professor at the University of Virginia and holds an MFA in poetry from Emerson College. Her poetry has been published in several literary magazines including *Ploughshares* and *The Rumpus*. She lives in Charlottesville, Virginia with her dog, Shiloh. *Me (Moth)* is her young adult debut to be followed by *We Are All So Good at Smiling* in August of 2022.