

dream in color 

A resource guide for
high school teachers



Dr. Maya Angelou



Dream in Color

Imagine a world where diversity is celebrated. A world where people of all complexions and cultures express themselves freely. If you imagine it, then you Dream In Color.

Target, in partnership with the Poetry Foundation, Furious Flower Poetry Center at James Madison University and Dr. Maya Angelou, invites you to celebrate Black History Month through the rich legacy of African-American poetry. Discover the work of poets past and present, whose voices move us all to continue to dream.

As part of our 2007 Black History Month celebration, Target is proud to provide a toolkit to inspire children of all ages to Dream In Color. Students will discover the works of important African-American poets, classroom activities designed to encourage them to develop their own poetic voices, discussion guides, bibliographies and links to engaging online poetry resources.

Dream In Color is just one of the ways that Target supports diversity and makes a real difference in the lives of children through the arts and education.

To the Teacher:

The exercises in each unit are meant to serve as guidelines to excite students about poetry. The exercises are not sequenced, so you may use as many or as few as you like, and in any order. You may want to do one exercise per class period, or you may want to stretch an exercise over a few days. The exercises should be fun for both you and the students, so just jump in and enjoy the results.

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POETRY



FOUNDATION



1. Love and Compassion

the sonnet-ballad

Oh mother, mother, where is happiness?
 They took my lover's tallness off to war,
 Left me lamenting. Now I cannot guess
 What I can use an empty heart-cup for.
 He won't be coming back here any more.
 Some day the war will end, but, oh, I knew
 When he went walking grandly out that door
 That my sweet love would have to be untrue.
 Would have to be untrue. Would have to court
 Coquettish death, whose impudent and strange
 Possessive arms and beauty (of a sort)
 Can make a hard man hesitate—and change.
 And he will be the one to stammer, "Yes."
 Oh mother, mother, where is happiness?

Gwendolyn Brooks

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Background

When people think of common themes for poetry they often think of love, and for good reason; quests for love, excitement or nostalgia about being loved, and sadness over lost love are subjects poets often write about. African-American poets are no exception. Love is about being in a relationship with another person, and compassion is the glue that holds the relationship together. In Gwendolyn Brooks' poem "the sonnet-ballad," a young woman laments when her lover goes off to war, and wonders what will she do with all of her feelings while he courts death on the battlefield.

Discussion Questions

General

Who is the speaker in the poem?
 To whom is she speaking?
 What tone does the speaker use in the poem?
 What event does this poem describe?
 What happens in the poem?

1. Sonnet and Ballad Forms

Based on the title of the poem, what two poetry forms do you think Gwendolyn Brooks used to write the poem? These are, of course, the sonnet and the ballad.

Traditionally, a ballad tells a story. The story is often about love, but can concern almost anything, such as a battle or other historical event. Ballads are common on pop, country and hip-hop radio stations. Ask your students if they have heard any songs on the radio lately that tell a story.

A sonnet is also often about love, but has a specific form: 14 lines of iambic pentameter. Iambic pentameter is based on the way people naturally talk and is used in many types of poems. Pure iambic pentameter has five feet, each with an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed or accented one. It sounds like:

ta DAH ta DAH ta DAH ta DAH ta DAH

However, poets rearrange the rhythmic patterns often. You might want to use this example to illustrate pure iambic pentameter to your students. Bold corresponds to the stressed DAH syllable above.

What's **up**? Did **you** guys **hear** about the **game**?

The sonnet form can be quite challenging because the poet has to follow the iambic form, but also has to make the poem rhyme in a certain pattern. The rhyming pattern depends on the type of sonnet. Two common types of sonnet are the Italian (or Petrarchan) and Shakespearean sonnet. Brooks uses the Shakespearean sonnet form in “the sonnet-ballad.”

You may opt to lead a discussion about iambic pentameter in Brooks’ poem, but she alters the pattern several times. A simpler discussion may be of the rhyming pattern. The Shakespearean sonnet has the following rhyming pattern:

a b a b c d c d e f e f g g

Oh mother, mother, where is happiness? a
 They took my lover’s tallness off to war, b
 Left me lamenting. Now I cannot guess a
 What I can use an empty heart-cup for. b
 He won’t be coming back here any more. c
 Some day the war will end, but, oh, I knew d
 When he went walking grandly out that door c
 That my sweet love would have to be untrue. d
 Would have to be untrue. Would have to court e
 Coquettish death, whose impudent and strange f
 Possessive arms and beauty (of a sort) e
 Can make a hard man hesitate—and change. f
 And he will be the one to stammer, “Yes.” g
 Oh mother, mother, where is happiness? g

Write the rhyming pattern on the blackboard, and ask the students to identify the rhyming pattern in the poem.

2. Refrain

Ballads often include one or more refrains. Refrains in poetry are similar to the chorus in a song. Refrains are used for emphasis. Depending on the voice, this repetition may heighten sadness, happiness, or other emotions and feelings.

Where does Brooks use refrain in the poem?
 What does the use of refrain add to the poem?

3. Word Choice

Word choice is very important to poets. Sometimes the words they choose are meant to be symbolic, that is, they represent something beyond their literal meaning. Sometimes they are meant to serve as images or to create certain sounds, as in assonance or consonance. Brooks uses words to give death life. In her poem, death is not simply the end of life; it has the qualities of a human. In literature, this is called personification.

Ask the students to identify the words Brooks uses to make death a character in the poem. Some examples are “coquettish death,” “impudent and strange possessive arms” and “beauty.”

Does Brooks make death a man or a woman? How do you know? How does Brooks use gender assignment to make the poem more dramatic?

Activities

1. Performance

Read the other love poems in this curriculum. Ask members of the class to choose one to memorize. On the date that this assignment is due, each member should recite the poem in front of the class.

Discuss what techniques they used to memorize the poem. Did the rhyme scheme make it easier? How about the story that the poem tells?

Suggest that the students memorize one of the poems on the Poetry Foundation's "Poetry Out Loud" web site (www.poetryoutloud.org) and enter the national recitation competition!

2. Ask the students to write a poem about love or heartbreak. They can write it as a sonnet or a ballad. This will be very challenging to do during a class period; they could start the process in class and turn in the completed poem on the next day. If you have any musicians in the class, challenge them to set their poems to music and perform them for the class.

When the students bring their completed poems to class, ask them which forms they chose for their poems and why they chose them. Was anyone brave enough to attempt a sonnet? Ask them what using a formal poetic structure taught them about writing. Did having only 10 syllables per line make the process easier or more difficult? Did the use of rhyme limit what they could say in the poem, or force them to find the perfect words in order to say what they desired? Commend anyone who successfully wrote 14 lines of iambic pentameter with a rhyme scheme!

More poems about Love and Compassion

Those Winter Sundays

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

Robert Hayden

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form or by any means without the prior written permission
of the publisher.

Urban Renewal XVIII

How untouchable the girls arm-locked strutting
up the main hall of Central High unopposed
for decades looked. I flattened myself against
the wall, unnerved by their cloudsea of élan,
which pounced upon any timid girl regrettably
in their way, their high-wattage lifting slow motion
like curls of light strands of honey. The swagger
behind their blue-tinted sunglasses and low-rider
jeans hurt boys like me, so vast the worlds
between us, even the slightest whiff of recognition,
an accidental side glance, an unintended tongue-piercing
display of Juicy Fruit chew, was intoxicating
and could wildly cast a chess-playing geek into
a week-long surmise of inner doubts, likelihoods,
and depressions. You might say my whole life led
to celebrating youth and how it snubs and rebuffs.
Back then I learned to avoid what I feared
and to place my third-string hopes on a game-winning
basketball shot, sure it would slow them to a stop,
pan their lip-glossed smiles, blessing me with their cool.

Major Jackson

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Heart to Heart

It's neither red
nor sweet.
It doesn't melt
or turn over,
break or harden,
so it can't feel
pain,
yearning,
regret.

It doesn't have
a tip to spin on,
it isn't even
shapely —
just a thick clutch
of muscle,
lopsided,
mute. Still,
I feel it inside
its cage sounding
a dull tattoo:

I want, I want —

but I can't open it:
there's no key.
I can't wear it
on my sleeve,
or tell you from
the bottom of it
how I feel. Here,
it's all yours, now —
but you'll have
to take me, too.

Rita Dove

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We Never Know

He danced with tall grass
for a moment, like he was swaying
with a woman. Our gun barrels
glowed white-hot.
When I got to him,
a blue halo
of flies had already claimed him.
I pulled the crumbled photograph
from his fingers.
There's no other way
to say this: I fell in love.
The morning cleared again,
except for a distant mortar
& somewhere choppers taking off.
I slid the wallet into his pocket
& turned him over, so he wouldn't be
kissing the ground.

Yusef Komunyakaa

From *Pleasure Dome: New and Collected Poems* ©2001 by Yusef Komunyakaa and reprinted by permission of Wesleyan University Press.



2. Heritage and History

Daybreak in Alabama

When I get to be a composer
 I'm gonna write me some music about
 Daybreak in Alabama
 And I'm gonna put the purtiest songs in it
 Rising out of the ground like a swamp mist
 And falling out of heaven like soft dew.
 I'm gonna put some tall tall trees in it
 And the scent of pine needles
 And the smell of red clay after rain
 And long red necks
 And poppy colored faces
 And big brown arms
 And the field daisy eyes
 Of black and white black white black people
 And I'm gonna put white hands
 And black hands and brown and
 yellow hands
 And red clay earth hands in it
 Touching everybody with kind fingers
 And touching each other natural as dew
 In that dawn of music when I
 Get to be a composer
 And write about daybreak
 In Alabama.

Langston Hughes

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Background

Have you ever wondered about your grandfather's childhood? Ever asked what kind of life your grandfather's grandfather might have led? Have you ever spent time wondering how your own life has been shaped by the struggles and successes of those who lived before you? Such questions are central to the work of many African-American poets. Starting in the eighteenth century, poets such as Phillis Wheatley, Jupiter Hammond and George Moses Horton set a poetic tradition in motion characterized by the pursuit of liberation. Nineteenth-century poets voiced the slaves' complaint in the abolitionist struggle and rallied society in the cause of emancipation. In the 20th century, African-American writers continued to challenge the status quo and protested attitudes and institutions that stood to impede their access to the full rights of U.S. citizenship. Today's African-American poets often look to the generations that came before them for models of strength, heroism and inspiration.

Discussion Questions

1. Imagery

Pass out the poem and have students read it once silently. Then, ask the students to close their eyes and listen to the poem being read by the teacher. After hearing the poem, give the students five minutes to fast-write a paragraph describing the scene Hughes paints in the poem. There is no right or wrong picture — each student will visualize this differently. Ask the students to share the scene they visualized. Note the commonalities between the scenes.



Ask the students:

What about the words and the phrases in the poem caused you to “see” the scene you described?

Does a phrase such as “the smell of wet clay after rain” help you to visualize the scene better than a phrase like “the muddy ground”? Why?

If there are commonalities between the paragraphs, ask the students why they think so many of them saw the same world. Hughes uses imagery that allows his readers to see what he imagines.

Ask the students to pinpoint the images in the poem without looking at the text or their fast-write: “smell of red clay after rain,” “touching everybody with kind fingers,” “poppy colored faces” and so forth.

Now you should be in a position to lead a very simple, yet revealing discussion on imagery and how writers use imagery to paint a scene that will stick with the reader.

2. Symbolism

The imagery in “Daybreak in Alabama” naturally leads to a discussion of symbolism. If you used discussion question 1, the conversation about imagery can move into a new set of questions, guiding the students toward a recognition of creation symbolism.

The speaker in the poem begins and ends it with the refrain, “When I get to be a composer / I’m gonna write me some music about / Daybreak in Alabama” (lines 1–3). If the speaker is a composer writing music, why do you think the poem uses so much nature imagery? What else is the speaker “composing”?

The students might observe that the composer is telling a creation story—not only of a song but of a world. Look at lines 7 through 17. The poem’s imagery is fundamentally grounded in the earth. Ask the students:

What creation stories have you heard? What role does clay play in those stories?

Ask the students to look at lines 9 and 17—What do they have in common? The students will notice right away that both reference red clay. What lies between these lines might tell us something about the symbolism of the clay. In many creation stories, humans are created out of the earth.

What will Hughes’ creation look like? Will Hughes’ world be one of inclusion or exclusion? How will Hughes’ world be different than the world he lived in? What colors are present in the new world Hughes imagines? Hughes extends the clay into a metaphor for humans of all colors.

Now you are in a position to lead a discussion of symbolism and how writers use symbolism to give their work rootedness and layers of complexity.

3. The Language of Identity

If your class discussed symbolism using discussion question 2, you can then move into a conversation about the cultural significance of farming for people of African descent. When Africans were sold or stolen from their homes and brought to America to work as slaves, the fields became the site of hard labor. In the African-American culture, the fields shifted from a symbol of sustenance and rootedness to one of oppression and toil. The poem’s soil imagery describes a new way of life and a new relationship to the soil—a rebirth of freedom, and a return to roots and sustenance.

Our language of identity reveals our values and our heritage. As you read through the other poems included in this curriculum, look for language that reveals something about cultural identity. In “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” Hughes sets a context of both geography and African-American history as he calls on the rivers of Africa and America.

narrow down their topics. Encourage the use of language that evokes the cultural identity of students at their school.

Once the poems are complete, have students share them with the class. Write on the board any recurring themes. Do the students recognize these as defining elements of their community?

Activities:

1. Writing for Change

Ask the students to name something they would like to see changed. The items may range from the sublime — global peace — to the everyday — no more Spam in the lunchroom. Next, have the students list all of the elements that need to be addressed for the change to take place—as Hughes did in “Daybreak in Alabama.” For advanced students, encourage the use of imagery or symbolism to describe this change. For students who need guidance, you could suggest that they begin their poem as Hughes did his:

When I get to be a composer
I'm gonna write me some music about

2. Using the Language of Identity

Ask the students to imagine that they are describing their experience as students in an American high school to someone in another part of the world. If your school is in the New Jersey suburbs, have them describe it to someone in rural Guatemala. If the school is in downtown Los Angeles, have them describe it to someone in downtown Tokyo. It might help to have them brainstorm current trends in music, fashion or hair at their school to get started on the language of identity. Choosing one specific event or location (the pep rally, the high school theater, the after-school program, the lunchroom) might help them to

More poems about Heritage and History

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Langston Hughes

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Mother to Son

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.

But all the time
I've been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So, boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps.
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I've still goin', honey,
I've still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Langston Hughes

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roots

call it our craziness even,
call it anything.
it is the life thing in us
that will not let us die.
even in death's hand
we fold the fingers up
and call them greens and
grow on them,
we hum them and make music.
call it our wildness then,
we are lost from the field
of flowers, we become
a field of flowers.
call it our craziness
our wildness
call it our roots,
it is the light in us
it is the light of us
it is the light, call it
whatever you have to,
call it anything.

Lucille Clifton

From *Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir 1969-1980* by Lucille Clifton. BOA Editions, Ltd. Copyright ©1987 by Lucille Clifton. Used by permission of the author.



3. On Being Black

Eddie Priest's Barbershop & Notary *Closed Mondays*

is music is men
 off early from work is waiting
 for the chance at the chair
 while the eagle claws holes
 in your pockets keeping
 time by the turning
 of rusty fans steel flowers with
 cold breezes is having nothing
 better to do than guess at the years
 of hair matted beneath the soiled caps
 of drunks the pain of running
 a fistful comb through stubborn
 knots is the dark dirty low
 down blues the tender heads
 of sons fresh from cornrows all
 wonder at losing half their height
 is a mother gathering hair for good
 luck for a soft wig is the round
 difficulty of ears the peach
 faced boys asking Eddie
 to cut in parts and arrows
 wanting to have their names read
 for just a few days and among thin
 jazz is the quick brush of a done
 head the black flood around
 your feet grandfathers

stopping their games of ivory
 dominoes just before they read the bone
 yard is winking widowers announcing
cut it clean off I'm through courting
and hair only gets in the way is the final
 spin of the chair a reflection of
 a reflection that sting of wintergreen
 tonic on the neck of a sleeping snow
 haired man when you realize it is
 your turn you are next

Kevin Young

From *Most Way Home*, published by Zoland Books,
 an imprint of Steerforth Press of Hanover, New Hampshire.
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Background

African-American poets have expressed both the triumphs and limitations of life in a country that is home but that has not always fully accepted them. Paul Laurence Dunbar and Robert Hayden reveal in their poetry the conflict of being African-American in a culture that valued “white” as superior. These poets and others convey a sense of pride in African-American culture and traditions, making a point of celebrating selfhood, industry and community even while honestly pointing out the turbulence of life in the United States. For instance, Gwendolyn Brooks, Lucille Clifton and Kevin Young revel in a culture that values the rituals of the corner barbershop and the beauty and uniqueness of black style. In the poem “Eddie Priest's Barbershop & Notary,” music, generations and enterprise are all a part of the scene that is a slice of black life.



Discussion Questions

1. Free Verse

Distribute copies of “Eddie Priest’s Barbershop & Notary” and ask the class to read it silently.

Ask the students:

What do you think the poem is about? What is happening in the poem?

Did you find the poem hard to read?

Most students will probably find the poem’s style much different from what they expect in poetry, if not difficult reading. Because Young does not use punctuation, he often forces his reader to read and re-read until the reader understands how one phrase connects with the previous phrase or the next. Even without punctuation, Young is able to create emphasis on many of the phrases in the poem.

Would you say that this poem’s style is structured? Why not?

If the poem is not structured, then what is it?

The poem is written in free verse. Free-verse style does not require adherence to a prescribed structure, and it usually does not rhyme. Unlike blank verse, however, it is not written in iambic pentameter, which has a regular system of 10 syllables per line, an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one. For reinforcement, have the students compare Lucille Clifton’s “homage to my hair” with Paul Laurence Dunbar’s “Sympathy” or “We Wear the Mask” (below).

2. Metaphor

Young’s poem provides excellent examples of metaphor on two different levels. Young uses metaphors to describe items in the barbershop, and the entire poem is a metaphor for life in his community. Metaphor is the implied comparison of unlike things—metaphor does not use words such as “like” or “as” in the comparison. Examples of metaphor include:

all the world’s a stage life’s a beach
road map to peace housing bubble

Ask the class to identify metaphors in the poem. Be careful that they are selecting metaphors, not just adjectives! Write the metaphors on the blackboard, and then lead the class in a discussion of what the metaphors stand for. Examples of metaphors in the poem include:

eagle steel flower black flood bone yard

Why do poets use metaphor? Does using metaphor add color to a poem? What is the difference between calling something an “eagle” and calling it a “quarter”? Or, between “ceiling fan” and “steel flower”?

Does using metaphor create an image in your mind?

Do you think the image of “steel flowers” will stick with you longer than “ceiling fan”?

What kind of men are in the barbershop?

How do you know?

Students might note that the poem includes working men, displaced men, boys, toddlers, adolescents, old men and widowers.

What do you think Young is telling us when he says “the final spin of the chair,” “the reflection of a reflection,” and “you realize it is your turn you are next”?

The entire poem is a metaphor. What do you think it is a metaphor of?

The poem includes many generations of men. Could the chair spinning echo the arm of a clock turning, or the world rotating through days, month and seasons? For an African-American man, the barbershop is a fixture in each stage of his life. Stories are passed on from one generation to the next as the chair spins.

In review, what techniques did Young use to create this metaphor?

3. Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of initial consonant sounds. Repetition of consonant sounds may be in adjacent words or at short intervals. Repetition used correctly gives a poem, or a line within a poem, a sound that is pleasant to the reader, and it aids in memory. All of us are able to remember phrases because the use of alliteration makes them memorable:

live and let live sink or swim
do or die foot loose and fancy free

Young uses alliteration in “Eddie Priest’s Barbershop & Notary” in a way that not only makes a pleasant sound, but gives the otherwise unstructured poem cohesion.

Ask the students to circle all of the examples of alliteration they can find in the poem. Remember, alliteration occurs in adjacent words or at short intervals. Some examples are noted in bold below:

is **music** is **men**
off early from **work** is **waiting**
for the **chance** at the **chair**
while the eagle claws holes
in your pockets keeping
time by the **turning**
of rusty fans steel flowers with
cold breezes is having nothing
better to do than guess at the years
of hair matted beneath the soiled caps
of drunks the pain of running
a fisted comb through stubborn
knots is the **dark dirty** low

down blues the tender heads
of sons **fresh from** cornrows all
wonder at losing **half** their **height**
is a mother **gathering** hair for **good**
luck for a soft wig is the round
difficulty of ears the peach
faced boys asking Eddie
to cut in parts and arrows
wanting to have their names read
for **just** a few days and among thin
jazz is the quick brush of a done
head the black flood around
your feet **grandfathers**
stopping their **games** of ivory
dominoes just before they read the bone
yard is **winking widowers** announcing
cut it clean off I’m through courting
and hair only gets in the way is the final
spin of the chair a **reflection** of
a **reflection** that sting of wintergreen
tonic on the neck of a **sleeping snow**
haired man when you realize it is
your turn you are next

Activities

1. Punctuation

Divide the class into groups of three or four and ask them to punctuate Kevin Young's poem so that the poem is easier to read and understand. Ask one or two students to read the poem aloud following the punctuation scheme.

Did any of you notice that the poem is a list of things that the barbershop "is"? For example:
Eddie Priest's Barbershop & Notary:

is music
is men off early from work
is waiting for the chance at the chair while
the eagle claws holes in your
pockets ...
is having nothing better to do than guess
at the years of hair matted
beneath the soiled caps of drunks ...
is the dark dirty low down blues...

Even though the poem is written in free verse, there is still a structure that the careful reader can decipher.

Do you think Young has a reason for this structure or do you think he was just messing around with sound?

2. Writing Free Verse

Ask members of the class to think of a place that has been a "fixture" in their lives so far. It might be a community center, a temple or church, an annual family gathering, a perennial summer vacation location or somewhere else. Have the students fast-write for five minutes and describe that place with as many details as they can.

As they read over their own descriptions, ask the students if they included colors, sounds, people, animals, smells.

You might ask:

What other ideas came to mind as you were writing? Were you surprised to remember some of the details of the place you know so well? Or were you surprised at how few details you could call up in your mind?

Poets have an important role in our culture because they use words to preserve the places that are significant in our communities and our lives. Why is the barbershop important to Young? Why is your "fixture" place special to you?

Can you imagine continuing to have this place in your life until you are 90 years old? How has it changed in the time that it has been part of your life? How do you imagine it might change in the future? Write these ideas down.

Highlight the parts of your writing that best capture what the place means to you.

Try to write a free-verse poem that captures the place. Students might imagine reading this poem when they are 50. What would they want to remember at that point? The challenge is to create a poem that allows outsiders to enter the room just as Kevin Young allows us into Eddie Priest's Barbershop & Notary.

Suggest that the students play with punctuation. When the poems are complete, allow students to trade papers. Did each student write in a way that was easy to comprehend, even without the help of punctuation? If not, compare the students' attempts to those of Kevin Young. This is an opportunity to teach students about the revision process, which is key for any aspiring poet!

More poems On Being Black

Sympathy

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
 When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
 When the wind stirs soft through the
 springing grass,
 And the river flows like a stream of glass;
 When the first bird sings and the first
 bud opens,
 And the faint perfume from its chalice steals—
 I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
 Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
 For he must fly back to his perch and cling
 When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
 And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
 And they pulse again with a keener sting—
 I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
 When his wing is bruised and his
 bosom sore,—
 When he beats his bars and he would be free;
 It is not a carol of joy or glee,
 But a prayer that he sends from his heart's
 deep core,
 But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
 I know why the caged bird sings!

Paul Laurence Dunbar

The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar
 New York: Dodd, Mead and Company. 1930.

Ice Storm

Unable to sleep or pray, I stand
 by the window looking out
 at moonstruck trees a December storm
 has bowed with ice.

Maple and mountain ash bend
 under its glassy weight,
 their cracked branches falling upon
 the frozen snow.

The trees themselves, as in winters past,
 will survive their burdening,
 broken thrive. And am I less to You
 my God, than they?

Robert Hayden

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 system, or transmitted in any form or by any means
 without the prior written permission of the publisher.

homage to my hair

when I feel her jump and dance
i hear the music! my God
i'm talking about my nappy hair!
she is a challenge to your hand
black man,
she is as tasty on your tongue as good greens
black man,
she can touch your mind
with her electric fingers and
the grayer she do get, good God,
the blacker she do be!

Lucille Clifton

From *Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir 1969-1980* by Lucille Clifton. BOA Editions, Ltd. Copyright © 1987 by Lucille Clifton. Used by permission of the author.



Poetry Out Loud Description

Created by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation, the *Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest* is administered in partnership with the State Arts Agencies of all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

By encouraging high school students to memorize and perform great poems, *Poetry Out Loud* invites the dynamic aspects of slam poetry, spoken word and theater into the English class. This exciting new program, which began in 2005, helps students master public speaking skills, enhance their reading abilities, build self-confidence and learn about their literary heritage.

In 2006, *Poetry Out Loud* awarded over \$100,000 in prizes to high school students and stipends to schools at the state and national levels. Ohio senior Jackson Hille won a \$20,000 scholarship prize as the 2006 *Poetry Out Loud* National Champion.

The program will continue to expand in the 2006 – 2007 school year. More than 200,000 students across the nation will be participating in *Poetry Out Loud* this year. The competition begins at the classroom level, with winners advancing to school-wide, statewide and ultimately to the National Finals.

From September through early winter, school-level competitions will be taking place across the country. School-level winners will advance to state-level competitions, with each state winner receiving \$200 and an all-expense-paid trip (with a chaperone) to Washington, DC, to participate in the National Finals in late April 2007.

The entire curriculum for the contest is freely available at www.poetryoutloud.org. Teachers interested in making poetry come alive in their classrooms should visit the site and contact their State Arts Agency (listed on the site) about entering next year's competition.

