

Spoken Word

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Subjects: English Language Arts

Estimated Time: 5-6 Sessions, 45-60 minutes each

Grade Level: 6-8, 9-12

About This Lesson Plan:

This Spoken Word lesson plan is part of a curriculum developed at the Youth Leading Change Project at Duquesne University. It was developed alongside Gwen's Girls, The Restorative Justice Group, Sisters of eSTEAM, Power(ed) by Grace, and Amil Cook Media Services.

About Youth Leading Change:

Ready to upset.disrupt.ignite.transform? [Youth Leading Change](#) promotes the power of youth and teachers as change agents who are committed to social justice and equity in today's schools. Using the power of youth voice and advocacy, Youth Leading Change equips teachers and their students with the resources to advocate for and educate the larger community on issues that matter to them most. Rooted in concepts of critical citizenship, Youth Leading Change seeks to use innovative learning techniques to promote effective teaching and learning in school environments across the region.

Using the intersection of social justice and 21st Century learning as its foundation, Youth Leading Change supports young people and teachers that want to use their classrooms as spaces for problem-solving and community building. In an effort to tackle institutionalized oppression, YLC partners have created impactful digital and traditional media pieces that have informed their peers, educational leaders, and community members about important and critical topics that matter the most to them.

Pro Tips:

Consider using this lesson plan as a starting point for introducing students to key literary terms. Or, use this in-depth discussion of literary terms to ride alongside an existing creative writing activity in your ELA class. The big picture is that those terms aren't just dry vocabulary for students to memorize; instead, they're helpful language for describing creative language, whether the author is Maya Angelou or a creative young person.

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Lesson Plan

Lesson 1 (45 minutes)

Objective

Students will be able to identify words or objects that provide the audience with a glimpse of who they are and how they view themselves.

Materials

- “Crooked Smile” by J. Cole: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMadllvoDN8>
- Student Journals
- Old Magazines enough for students to share and cut pictures out of
- 12 x 18 sheets of construction paper
- Glue sticks
- Scissors

Activities

1. Do Now (8 minutes):
 - a. Read the quote and question aloud. “A photograph is a secret. The more it tells you the less you know.” – Diane Arbus
 - b. What does Arbus mean by this quote? What is your “Crooked Smile”? You know, that one thing that others may see as a flaw, but it represents a part of you or who you are regardless of what others may think.
2. Explain to the students that they have until the song is over to have a minimum of 6 sentences responding to the question above. As students begin to write play the song “Crooked Smile” by J. Cole <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMadllvoDN8>
3. Explain to students that In the song “Crooked Smile” by J Cole he says “We ain't picture perfect but we worth the picture still” How does that relate to the above quote by Diane Arbus? Allow 3-5 minutes for students to use the strategy Think-Pair-Share to discuss their thoughts to this question.
4. Allow for at least 2 groups to share their response to the question out loud and allow time for at least 2 students to share their response to the question above.
5. Explain to students that we all have a story to tell and our stories help shape our character. Ask the students in what ways have we as a people shared our stories throughout history?
6. Students will share a glimpse of their stories by searching through magazines and cutting out words, and pictures that describe how they see themselves. Students need a minimum of 8 pictures or words that they are to glue on a 12 x 18 sheet of

construction paper. Under each object students should write a couple words that describes why they selected that object. For Example, if I cut out a diamond ring maybe it symbolizes how my personality shines bright I may appear glamorous, but if you look close I'm very intricate.

7. Allow time for students to share their posters either one at a time or by using a Gallery Walk method where the teachers/facilitator hangs each poster around the room and in small groups students walk around the room to share ideas and respond to meaningful images.
8. As a homework assignment, students are to take 2 selfies of themselves one with filters and one without. Students can email the pictures or bring them to the next class to show completion.

Lesson 2 (45 minutes)

Objective

Students will be able to be introduced to poetry that engages them in this medium of spoken expression, explore the power of poetry that is written to be spoken, examine spoken word as a form of poetry that is written to be performed, and examine different literary techniques in spoken word.

Materials

- Students Journals
- Student Selfies
- Video "[Somewhere in America](#)"
- Poem "[Let America Be America Again](#)" by Langston Hughes.

Activities

1. Ask students to write in their journal one thing that they walked away with from the previous lesson. Advise students to get in a small group of 2-3 and share the photos taken for homework. They say "A picture is worth a thousand words." As you look at your peers selfies what assumptions can you make about that person's mood or character? Together share your thoughts.
2. Explain to students that often time people make assumptions without knowing the full story or the whole truth. But if we could tell them how we really feel what would we say and how would be say it. How would could you tell someone that you are proud to be a Black Man, Latina Woman, Pansexuale Male, or a beautiful size 16 or 2. How can you tell the world or the person sitting beside you that you are not the problem, but maybe they are the problem and the lies that society feeds them.
3. Write the word Spoken Word on the board and provide students with 1 minute to write down what they think this means? Allow for 2-3 students to share out their responses.
4. Watch the video "[Somewhere in America](#)"
5. Instruct students to take notes. Watch and listen twice.
6. During the first viewing students should pay attention to the words that stand out when they hear the poem/performance. Have students write down the words that they hear. During the second viewing, students should listen for visual images that they see in the poem. Have students draw these images. After students complete this activity, have them share their results.
7. Ask students after viewing this selection write their definition of Spoken Word. Did your definition change? Allow for students to come to the realization that Spoken Word is someone's TRUTH.

8. Allow time for students to read the poem "[Let America Be America Again](#)" by Langston Hughes.
9. Draw connections between poetry that is written to be spoken and poetry that is written to be read. Have students take notes.
10. Engage in group discussion (In spoken word every word counts there is typically no such room for open-ended interpretation with spoken word. To make the listener have to work for understanding is to lose the audience. Spoken word relies heavily on audience engagement).
11. For homework students need to look through their phone or take a minimum of 3 pictures that expresses where they're from, and where they go or do to feel at peace.

Lesson 3 (60 minutes)

Objective

Students will be able to be exposed to another medium of written expression; learn the rules and conventions of poetry, including figurative language, metaphor, simile, symbolism, and point-of-view; learn five strategies for analyzing poetry; and interpret meaning in poetry.

Materials

- "Always There Are the Children" by Nikki Giovanni
- *[I Am a Man](#)* 9th-12 grade
- *[Woman Card](#)* 9-12 grade
- *[War](#)* 9th-12 grade
- [Shots Fired](#) 6th-8th grade
- [I am Not Black](#) 6th-8th grade

Definitions of Literary Terms

- **Rhyme:** The correspondence of sounds, particularly at the end of words. Examples: Fair and Square, Hocus-Pocus, Fender Bender
- **Alliteration:** The repetition of sounds at the beginning of words or syllables.
Examples: White Water, Pretty Please, Five Fat Frogs Feeling Fairly Feverish
Frequently Fall Flat...Hip Hop.
- **Onomatopoeia:** The use of words whose sounds suggest their meaning. Examples: Bow Wow, Swoosh, Beep
- **Simile:** A phrase that uses the words like or as to describe someone or something by comparing it with someone or something else that is similar. Examples: She is like a rose, As brave as a lion
- **Metaphor:** The definition of a metaphor is a word or phrase used to compare two unlike objects, ideas, thoughts or feelings. Examples: All the worlds a stage, He is the black sheep of the family"
- **Repetition:** Repetition consists of repeating a word, phrase, or sentence, and is common in both poetry and prose. It is a rhetorical technique to add emphasis, unity, and/or power.
- **Personification:** Giving human traits to objects or ideas. Examples: Water on the lake shivers, The sunlight danced, The streets are calling me
- **Hyperbole:** Exaggerating to show strong feelings or affects. Examples: I will love you forever, My house is a million miles away, She'd kill me
- **Symbolism:** is the practice or art of using an object or a word to represent an abstract idea.

- **Tone:** is the attitude you feel in it; the writer's attitude toward the subject or audience
- **Mood:** literary element that evokes certain feelings or vibes in readers through words and descriptions.

Activities

1. Begin with another Spoken Word selection
2. Identify the rules and conventions of poetry. Introduce students to the role of literary techniques like figurative language, hyperbole, simile, symbolism, metaphor etc.
3. Introduce and discuss the following five strategies for reading and analyzing poetry:
 - Read the poem more than once.
 - Define any words that you do not understand.
 - Look for emotions in the poem (happiness, sadness, etc.).
 - Look for symbols. What do they symbolize?
 - Make connections between the poems and the other works of literature that we have read.
4. Together read the poem, "Always There Are the Children," by Nikki Giovanni
5. Identify the literary techniques that Giovanni uses in her writing.
6. Have students take notes.
7. Divide the class up into five groups. Give each group the poem "Equality" by Maya Angelou. Instruct the groups to analyze Angelou's poem together.

Have students answer the questions:

- What message does this poem convey to you?
- What comparisons does the author make? How are the things being compared alike?
- What figurative language is used and in what line?
- After you read the poem, how does it make you feel? What causes that feeling?
- Does the poem change at any point? If so, where and how? What effect does this change have?
- Why would the poet choose that title for the poem?
- Does the Author's tone change throughout this piece?
- What if the poem were told from a different point of view?

And here are some questions that are more specifically about words and language:

- What word surprises you? Confuses you? Interests you?
 - Is there a word that seems like it isn't needed or doesn't fit?
 - What word is most important in this poem?
 - Which words may have multiple meanings?
8. As a class, discuss Angelou's poem and have each group present 2-3 answers to the questions above.

Lesson 4 (90 minutes)

Objective

Students will be able to identify one major theme in their life; and vocalize their feelings in an original spoken word poem.

Materials

- Students Journals
- Computers for Adobe Spark (Adobe Spark only works with Apple products. Students need a quiet place to record their poem)

Activities

1. Now is the time for students to tell their story. Remind students that there is much more behind a picture. Brainstorm themes that students believe apply to their lives. (Peace, Love, Wisdom, Justice, Freedom, Renewal, Evolving, Unity, Potential, Truth, Perspective, life & Death) Students can also add to this list.
2. Create a "Theme Web." Write down key events that have happened in your life that bring you to write using this theme in mind.
3. Pick an issue, or life changing event that has somehow impacted your your life in way that your story might encourage the next person to tell their story.
4. Conduct a writing workshop in class where students will begin writing their poems. Students must have a title, use repetition, 4 examples of figurative language, and must have a minimum of 20 lines. Students poem can be from the perspective of a person or an objective that is tangible or intangible.
5. Students must also show a change in tone utilizing how they seen themselves at the beginning of this unit when they created their collage.
6. Organize a Poetry Slam for students who want to share their poems in class
7. Students will then use Adobe Spark to record their Spoken Word Poems
8. Students will use their creativity to embed their 5 pictures within their Adobe Spark piece and include 3 other pictures for a total of 8 pictures from their phone or from the internet to help visually tell their stories.

Standards, Knowledge, Skills, and Understandings

Content Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1: Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.D: Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.4: Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.5: Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

Understandings

- All poetry is not spoken word, and all poets do not have the ability to be spoken-word artists. Spoken word poetry is said rather than read, the greater revelation is that spoken-word poetry is meant to be performed. Langston Hughes and E. E. Cummings are considered to be great poets. Amiri Baraka and The Lost Poets are revered as great spoken-word artists.
- Spoken word has the ability to put power behind the words. It is a way to express emotion, whether it be about life, love, the state of the world or one's community, they can offer a very emotional and powerful experience.
- Spoken word competitions or SLAM Poetry is not a rap battle. The art of spoken word did not become a national phenomenon until about 30 years ago, around the same time as hip-hop. The art of spoken word poetry is respected within the rap community because it is often defined as "performance poetry set to music."

Embraced within the African-American culture, spoken word provides people with an outlet to share their social, racial and political views in a way that is creative and non-threatening, but influential and effective.

Essential Question

- How can we use our voices as a weapon to discuss the many issues that are affecting our youth and the world in which they live; in a creative and non-threatening, but in an influential and effective way?

Knowledge

- Throughout this unit students will explore poetry as a medium of written and spoken expression. The goal is for students to gain appreciation for poetry as a medium for authors to express commentary on the pressing social issues or ism's such as racism, sexism, ageism, classism, etc. that have affected our lives and so many lives before us.

Skills

- Students will be able to identify and utilize literary techniques used by poets in their writing such as: Rhyme, Alliteration, Simile Metaphor, Symbolism, Point-of View, Climax, Interpreted Meaning, Onomatopoeia, Repetition, Personification, and Hyperbole.