



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2001 Volume III: Reading and Writing Poetry

The Poetry We Sing: A Women's Perspective

Guide for Curriculum Unit 01.03.07
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Poetry: the medium of expression that can cause even the strongest students to become tense and back away from participation. Lyrics: the category of poetry that every student can relate to and regurgitate upon demand. Why do so many students fear poetry if they are so deeply invested in it on a daily basis? The answer may be a bit surprising: Most students don't realize that the lyrics to many of their favorite songs are forms of poetry that are just as valid as "high poetry." The many different forms and styles of lyrics that we hear on the radio or on our CD players utilize the very same elements of poetry as the great masterpieces that we read in our literature texts and anthologies. The song lyrics that many students write are of the same tradition as the cryptic lyrics of Bob Dylan or Lauryn Hill and as the flowing verses of Geoffrey Chaucer or Emily Dickinson.

The curriculum unit offers new ways to make poetry more accessible to the student body. The unit is designed to be taught to a senior Women's Literature English course at an arts and humanities magnet high school. The unit will begin by introducing students to lyrics written by famed, contemporary artists such as Lauryn Hill, Ani DiFranco, and others. The lyrics will be used to demonstrate various elements of poetry in a less overwhelming manner than traditional poetry so that students can easily see and assimilate the devices. Each song's lyrics will be broken down to as fine a point as possible in order to completely illustrate the above mentioned elements in a way that students can understand and employ in their own writing. Students will then apply the terms to more traditional poetry. The last piece of the unit involves a group project that incorporates the students' arts concentrations.

(Recommended for English, grades 10-12.)

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