



Poems, Prayers, Promises, and Possibilities: The Music of Poetry

Curriculum Unit 01.03.08
by Deborah Hare

I teach all seniors and after my year with them they will be done with high school. I feel that gives me a profound responsibility to make sure they leave with something valuable, something worthwhile. So in addition to forcing another Shakespeare down their throat, and endless five paragraph essays, I will be strangling them with more poems. For some of them it will be their first experience with poetry so I don't want to mess up my one chance with them. Since I teach Honors level students as well as basic level students this unit is designed for any level. As I reexamine my high school years and ponder the last few months of my students high school years it is so clear to me that we rob these once joyous kids of any possible joy school could give them by stupid, meaningless rules, the constant ringing of bells, unnecessary and annoying announcements, 7:30 in the morning at school still asleep, study for the culturally biased SAT's, feel badly when you don't do well, apply to school you can't afford because it doesn't matter anyway you won't get in. Okay, well, yes - I have a bit of anger over the crap that goes on in high school that they call "education." It makes me think of that Paul Simon song "When I think back on all the crap I learned in high school it's a wonder I can think at all" so I, in my great wisdom, have decided to give my students something meaningful, that they can hold in their hearts and in their hands: I will give them poetry.

The following are my overall objectives for this unit:

- To introduce ways for high school students to enjoy poetry
- To encourage students to express themselves through poetry
- To familiarize my students with some new poems
- To take the fear out of poetry
- To facilitate a safe way for students to write their own poetry
- To help students see the connection between their music and the music of poetry
- To help students hear their work and how the sound of a poem or an analytical paper will improve their written work
- To develop public speaking skills

We will begin by reading an interview from Bill Moyers' book *The Language of Life* . He has a terrific interview with Quincy Troupe, whom he refers to as "the reigning World Heavyweight Poetry Champion," a title he won in 1994 at the Taos Poetry Circus.

THE GRIOTS

We will read the interview in its entirety as well as some of Troupe's poems. Moyers asks him why his words hang out "apart from any apparent meaning, existing just for the experience of the sound of them." Troupe responds that that is what poetry is supposed to do, "because one of the things we have to remember is that poetry at first was song - it was the troubadours, the griots, the singers." He further describes the griots as "African troubadours, men who sang and brought songs to the villages." My point to my students is this - we are the griots. We have to carry on our songs and sing them through the village, in this case the village of New Haven. I intend to use music to hook them and get them interested. Since music is a main part of their lives they will understand the connection between poetry and music.

In his book *Making Your Own Days* , Kenneth Koch put it well when he said, "poets think of how they want something to sound as much as they think of what they want to say and in fact it's often impossible to distinguish one from the other." He says further, "the poetry language is used by persons who have things (known to them or not known) that they need to say, and who are moved by this need and by a delight in making music out of words."

HIP HOP AND RAP To bring this point home, and to essentially hook them, I intend to start with rap and hip hop music and compare them to the griots of old. To this end I will use *The Rose that grew from Concrete* , a collection of poetry by Tupac Shakur that he wrote before he was famous. Tupac, named after a South American rebel fighter from Peru, Tupac Amaru, is a favorite of my students. He seems to reach them in places that resonant deeply for them. He is their hero, their icon, their John Lennon. Shakur, born and raised in Los Angeles and a former street kid and gang member, expresses his angst about his past and asks forgiveness of his mother and tries to explain his actions in his songs. This year will be the 30th anniversary of Mayday, 1970. I wasn't in New Haven then but people tell me it was quite something. The whole of the New Haven green was filled with people of all ages and races demonstrating against the war in Vietnam and the racism that filled our country. Bobby Seale, the former secretary of the Black Panther party was there speaking about equality for all African Americans.

Out of that movement came a young woman named Afeni Shakur. She joined the Black Panthers when she was 20. By the time she was 22 she had been arrested and charged with conspiracy to bomb several public areas in New York. Pregnant (with her son Tupac) she was sent to The Women's House of Detention. On June 16th, 1971 Tupac Shakur was born. Tupac is an Inca word that means serpent. We will discuss his life, and try to make connections between his lyrics and his experiences. Thinking of him as a modern day griot we will decipher and analyze his message through a variety of his poems and some of his songs.

In one of the poems *In the Depths of Solitude* he ponders his true goal of trying to find peace of mind:

Trying 2 find peace of mind

And still preserve my soul

I found this particularly striking because I am very aware, living as I do in the city, of the chaos in my students' lives. Poverty comes with many costs and one of them is noise. Poverty is loud and in your face. Often my students do not have the luxury of a room of their own to ponder anything. They do not have time to write papers or relax. They have after-school jobs. Because they cannot afford a car they use public transportation, they help out welfare mothers and sisters, so the idea of "quiet" time is almost unheard of.

A few times this year I turned off the lights and lit a candle and put on classical music and told them to just write anything at all. At the end of class they usually give me a hug or a handshake and thank me for a good class. Solitude is a luxury for most of my kids. I read the above Tupac poem with them and they asked me what the word solitude meant. I said it meant really quiet alone time. They wish they had that. I am amazed by what my students produce within the circumstances they live. I hope to create a kind of writing laboratory, a creative safe space next year.

A former student e-mailed me recently about a lecture he attended in college given by the author Cornell West. He was pleased because West referred to his generation as the hip-hop generation. He quotes West as saying that "hip hop essentially evolved both musically and culturally from jazz and specifically the blues, and that just like the jazz age, our age is defined by our refusal of either cynicism or sentimentalism."

West also spoke about gangsta rap and how it's criticized for its rampant use of homophobia, sexism and violence. He argues that while these things should be criticized they should be seen as a product of the society that perpetuates it and that the music cannot be blamed for reflecting the conditions of our environment.

At one time, said west, black people could turn to church for comfort but now the church, too, is corrupt and spiritually bankrupt. Some turn to crack, some to suicide and some to the music studio. Those who channel their voices towards music become part of strengthening their culture by expressing their freedom to speak. The personal becomes the political and democracy is preserved.

"Live by your mind and be a slave; live by your heart and be free." Joshua Erlanger

I won't even pretend to enjoy listening to rap music but I do appreciate that it expresses real life and emotions for many of my students. In addition to analyzing some of Tupac's lyrics and some of his poetry we will watch his performance in John Singleton's movie *Poetic Justice*. Although there is a fair amount of sex and violence, and it is only suitable for older students, it does a good job of portraying street life and poetry and the everyday chaos of our kids' lives. One of the main characters, played by Janet Jackson, considers herself a poet and writes her own poetry. It is, however, the poetry of Maya Angelou, which I will use in connection with the movie.

The great poet Nikki Giovanni says in the foreword to Tupac's book, "People will stand up and say really stupid things like 'I don't think profane language should be used, and I think they can make their point without bad language.' But I always think bad language is school vouchers, lower taxes on capital gains, don't ask, don't tell, and language that silently kills people who are different. Mostly I keep seeing the emptiness of lives that have nothing better to do than judge and condemn. Tupac once said, Only God can judge me. He has taken that step to understand that no matter what anyone says you have an obligation to follow your own muse."

An assignment that I will give to my students at this point will be to write about the tension in their life or in their city following the style of Tupac's music or poetry.

I will then share *The Journey is the Destination*, the journals of Dan Eldon, with them. Eldon was a young photojournalist who was killed while on assignment in Somalia. He kept many years of journals (even though he died at 23) and his mother, in honor of her son, published them. My students love his book. We dedicated our school's literary magazine to his memory last year, and we modeled our magazine after his style: part poetry, part diary, part collage, and part scrapbook.

Last year's editor of the Literary Magazine described Eldon's work as "an amazing collection of Dan's pictures, writing and experiences. He shares his life in Africa where he took safaris and incredible pictures. His book is amazing. As one turns the pages of his offbeat journal it seems more like turning the pages of a flipbook. Each page contains a new world of people and cultures." It is this idea that I want to replicate.

I will also introduce another book to them along the same lines by a young woman, Sabrina Harrison, titled *Spilling Open*. Like Eldon's book it contains drawings, poetry, and random messages to herself like "we all at our own age have to claim something even if it's only our own confusion" and "I am in the middle of growing up and into myself."

She explores many facets of love and friendship, growing up, art, truth, identity intimacy and self-expression. Coincidentally and conveniently she starts her book with a quote and a tribute to Walt Whitman.

Students who do this unit with me will be given their own hardcover journal that they can hold in their hand and feel good about. I will pass out the spiral bound hardcover journals to my students and tell them by the end of the year this has to be full - full of gap ads, poems, original or otherwise, drawings, graffiti art, photographs, watercolors, telephone messages, notes they passed in school - because it will be their book, and this collage of their life will represent them. Their grade will be based solely on the effort, originality and creativity they put into this book.

A traditional poetry section will begin with Walt Whitman. Whitman was a true American poet. He was born in 1819 on Long Island and loved his country. He cried when Lincoln was shot and he became disillusioned with the rapidly growing materialism and corruption of his country.

His best work is considered by most to be "Song of Myself" in which we are told that we all possess something of the divine within ourselves and that the holiest thing we can do is to listen to and learn from all, regardless of how humble the source "And there is no trade or employment but the young man following it may become a hero...In the faces of men and women I see God." Whitman was a free spirit like many of the men and women he influenced who came after him.

Whitman loved life, he loved children, loved to have a good time, loved good company and he was open about his sexuality. To continue with my theme of singing we will concentrate on "Song of the Open Road", "Song of Myself" and "I Hear America Singing."

This is a perfect segue into Langston Hughes' poem, "I too Sing America, I am the darker brother. They send me to eat in the kitchen...Tomorrow I'll be at the table when company comes. They'll see how beautiful I am and be ashamed-I, too, am America".

We will read biographical information on Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance, sections from his autobiography *The Big Sea*, and write a poem about ways in which my students feel disenfranchised from our country.

Lesson Plan 1

Read poem by Walt Whitman "I Hear America Singing".

Analyze and discuss meaning.

Various questions about the poem could include:

- a) What is Whitman singing about?
- b) In what way does Whitman glorify the workingman?
- c) Based on what you have read about Whitman's life why is does he glorify his country?

Then read Langston Hughes poem "I Too Sing America".

Analyze and discuss.

- a) Why does Hughes say I too sing America?
- b) What does he mean by "darker brother?"
- c) When might "tomorrow" be?
- d) What does the metaphor "sitting in the kitchen" stand for?

Write five to six paragraph essay comparing and contrasting them.

The outline for this assignment could look like the following:

- I. Introduction: includes names of both poems and names of both authors
- II. Overall meaning of Whitman's poem
- III Overall meaning of Hughes poem
- IV. Compare them
- V. Contrast them (in what way/s are the poems different?)
- VI. Do you sing America? Are you part of this country? How?
- VII. Conclusion

In a new book of poetry you hear me? a collection of poetry by teenage boys, a poem "There's a Harlem Renaissance in My Head" pays homage to Hughes. "Let your ink run rampant Langston Hughes, let your fingers tickle the ivories forever, Duke." This collection has over 60 poems and a few essays that are very real and speak to kids about issues that truly affect them, "I hate school. I don't believe. I think that I'll just f. king leave". I recommend it highly. It has been a great find.

For the remainder of my poetry unit, I want to concentrate on using sports as a metaphor for life. Since this unit is designed as a way to reach non-Honors-level students who have a set curriculum and will be reading mandatory things like "The Rape of the Lock" and "The Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock", I have a chance to do something kids can relate to and of course hopefully find helpful in their search for meaning. To this end, we will read the play *Fences* by August Wilson. Although it is a play with a beginning, middle, and an end, it is in my humble opinion, a long prose poem. Wilson uses baseball to analyze race relations in the 1950's.

BUILDING FENCES

The main character, Troy Madsen, who we are to believe possessed excellent baseball skills when he was young, had been denied entrance into the major leagues because he was black. He carries this bitterness with him all his adult life and uses it as a reason to deny his own son a chance to play football. When explaining to his wife why he cheated on her he says, "Honey I stood on first base for twenty years! I just had to steal second." As a way to keep death away and to show to himself and to his friend Bono that he isn't afraid he says, "Death ain't nothin' but a fastball on the outside corner."

As we read and interpret the play students will be asked to explain what Wilson means with these metaphors and to perhaps write some of their own. As the play is titled *Fences* and is a metaphor for the fence Troy is literally building around his house to keep death, racism, and other assorted evils away it seems a perfect opportunity to read Robert Frost's "Mending Wall". Although I do not intend to do a biographical unit on Frost as that is the only poem I want to do in this unit by him, we will spend sometime on that poem discussing its implications in the play ("Before I built a fence I would ask what it is I am walling in and walling out") and in the world as the cold war raged on.

Other sports poems we will use include "To James" by Frank Horne, which is a beautiful and accessible poem for kids. Horne says to a young boy running track that he should "live as I have taught you to run, Boy - it's a short dash." The poem uses track as a metaphor for running a good race (life) and to enjoy it and relish his youth and his body because even though kids feel immortal life is shorter than expected. He further states that the runner should dig his starting holes deep and firm, which my students might interpret as preparing for life rather than just letting it happen to them by happenstance. I want them to take control and make plans for after graduation - any kind of plans.

The next poem "The Ex Basketball player" by Updike, exemplifies what can and often does happen to an athlete who does not make plans but just continues to live on his glory days of playing high school basketball: "Pearl Avenue runs past the high-school lot...Berth's Garage is on the corner and there these days you'll find Flick Webb who helps Berth out."

I find this particular poem excruciating because I have seen so many of my students who come back after their glory days trying desperately to recapture that old feeling. When asked what they are up to they mumble

something about how they went to college for a little while but it didn't work out and now they play ball with friends sometimes but mostly they are just trying to put a few dollars together and oh yeah they have a baby on the way.

Although the poem is depressing I think it is important to let kids know that they will grow up and that they should "dig their starting holes deep" and that their glory now unfortunately will fade one day. After this section students will be asked to choose a sport they like to watch or play and then using details and vivid language write a poem describing an athlete playing this sport.

THE BEATS

Next I will show *Dead Poet's Society*, an inspiring movie starring Robin Williams as a teacher at a rather stuffy private school. His love of poetry becomes dangerous, or is at least perceived as dangerous, as it incites his students toward self-expression and to "travel to the beat of a different drum." They see Williams as their Captain because he teaches them Whitman's poem, "O captain! My Captain!" and they do not want to, like their parents, "lead lives of quiet desperation" and find when they come to die that they are already dead. For young men in the late 1950's who had not yet discovered the beats and for whom the name Allen Ginsberg meant nothing, this was heady stuff. Anne Charters in her book *The Portable Beat Reader* says that the "word beat was primarily in use after World War II by jazz musicians and hustlers as a slang term meaning down and out, or poor and exhausted. Allen Ginsberg remembered first hearing the word beat to mean exhausted, at the bottom of the world, looking up or out, sleepless, wide-eyed, perceptive, rejected by society, on your own, streetwise.

In a June 1959 article in *Playboy* "The Origins of the Beat Generation", Jack Kerouac explained that the linguistic root of the word "beat" also carried connotations of beatitude or beatific. When the term beat generation began to be used as a label for all young people it became a synonym for anyone living as a bohemian or acting in a rebellious manner.

I was fortunate to have Allen Ginsberg as a professor at City College in New York, a school I was forced to attend after I dropped out of college and my parents refused to support my education anymore. To a young radical, trying to make sense of the late sixties, early seventies, listening to Ginsberg was pretty much a dream come true.

"Howl", Ginsberg's great opus speaks powerfully for his generation. Ginsberg screams that the crazy people are right. They are right about the corrupt government, sexuality, poverty, and many other things. "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the Negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix..." We will read and analyze this poem, making sense of what we can.

Kenneth Koch in his book *Sleeping on the Wing* says that Ginsberg was a poet who responded to the social and political world in his poetry and that in "Howl" written in 1956 he had written an entirely different kind of poem about sick, crushed, and desperate people who were also brilliant and artistic who wanted to find beauty and meaning in ordinary normal American life. They couldn't so they turned to alcohol and drugs, much like Tupac and rap.

Koch's book *Sleeping on the Wing*, by the way, is a great source for teacher because it contains an excellent choice of poems for high school students and it has a page or two of explanation about them, biographical information about each poet, and suggestions for writing. It has been my bible for many years.

Students will also read an interview with Kerouac on his interpretation of "beat" generation and analyze some of his poetry and Buddhist philosophy. A good movie to accompany this section is *The Source*. It traces the life of Ginsberg, Kerouac and Gregory Corso and helps explain why white people began to question their superiority in the world. It also began the movement toward seeing music as dangerous and inciting passion is it sexual or political.

This was clearly a time when the music of the time helped create and define the era. The beat of modern jazz was a necessary element for understanding the importance and place of the beat poets. For example, Dave Brubeck's *Take Five* or Jobim's *Girl from Ipanema* gave musical validation to the feelings of the time.

The beats sort of naturally lead me into the sixties rock music. In particular Bob Dylan, the poet laureate of 60's. I might as well end with something that is so near and dear to my heart. If I have to listen to their music than they will have to listen to mine!

ROCK AND ROLL

Bob Dylan who started life as Robert Zimmerman in 1941 made his way east from Minnesota to find his hero Woody Guthrie. He sort of landed in New York City and rather rapidly became a cult hero. His songs seared into our hearts and minds and gave voice to our angst and confusion. One of the guidance counselors at Wilbur Cross High School, where I work, once described him as the original rap star with lyrics like "Johnny's in the basement mixing up the medicine, I'm on the pavement thinkin' bout the government" from his song *Subterranean Homesick Blues* written in 1965.

Folk singer Eliza Gilkyson described Dylan as a person who freed her because he "was all about breaking out of structure, as a lyricist, a vocalist, a poet, a philosopher and a storyteller. He rocked, he spewed venom, he seduced, and he sang us to sleep and slapped us awake. He was truly our modern day griot by singing loudly that the times they are a -changin' (Come gather 'round people wherever you roam and admit that the waters around you have grown...come mothers and fathers throughout the land and don't criticize what you don't understand, Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command, Your old road is rapidly agin')

I also intend to play Dylan's song *Hurricane* and then show the movie to show the power that music/poetry can have to literally save lives. "This is the story of Hurricane, the man the authorities came to blame for somethin' that he never done". Because of Dylan's popularity Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, an African-American boxer falsely accused of murder, received another trial after spending twenty years on death row and was eventually set free. I showed the movie this year and it was a powerful experience for all of us. Perhaps the times really are a-changin'. From these songs we will be able to make connections to rap and the importance of poetry and song to express our situations in life.

Throughout this unit students will be required to bring in music and lyrics to their favorite songs. I will bring in Bob Dylan, they will bring in rap. Doesn't this seem like a nice way to end one's senior year in high school?

LESSON PLAN TWO / SHARING OF LYRICS

Sweet Honey in the Rock is an award winning African American female a cappella ensemble with musical roots in the black church - spirituals and gospel and jazz and the blues. I heard them about twenty years ago at Woolsey Hall and I was hooked. They were amazing. I believe their music transcends time and racial barriers. They began in 1973, have gone through twenty two different female singers, won a Grammy, shared a stage with the poet Gwendolyn Brooks at the National Black Arts Festival in Atlanta and they are still going strong. They sing loud and strong and they sing with a purpose. My unit has quite a few strong voices but not enough women.

This lesson plan is about singing and lyrics. It is about listening and writing and I want to start with Sweet Honey in the Rock. On day one (of about a two week activity of give and take) I will have students listen to a song called "A tribute." A tribute explains the social and political message of the group - "Try to crack a rock and you will see the power of a woman and it will blow your mind". They continue with, "Take a taste of honey and you will see it is just what you are missing." They use a combination of strength and sweetness to fight for their causes which they refer to as all the isms -racism, sexism, ageism, etc.

"There Are No Mirrors in My Nana's House", another one of their popular songs deals with the self image of young black women trying to grow up in a very white country (I never knew my nose was too flat, my skin was too black) The beauty this young girl saw was through her grandmother's eyes who defined beauty for her, not magazines or cosmetics. She learned that beauty is in the eyes of those who love you. I can't really express how important a message this is for teenagers. Always has been, probably always will be.

One of their songs that I particularly like is "LA, Birmingham, Soweta", "as we fight against misogyny, race hatred and aids " is an excellent way to discuss the significance of those places (apartheid, race riots, bombings)

This lesson plan is also a chance to compare lyrics with poetry. How are they similar? How are they different? Make sure students notice that both don't necessarily follow rules of grammar or formal expression. Also point out that both poetry and lyrics send a condensed message not necessarily explained in detail. For example, "Ain't no one know at sunrise how this day's going to end, ain't no one know at sunset how this day's going to end." I interpret this as none of us have the power over what will happen in the future. All we have control over is the moment and how we react to our surroundings. Sweet honey in the Rock believes in the power of political activism, as did Tupac and Bob Dylan.

After we talk about the messages and lyrics I will have the students think about their own message they would like to express. Then students should write their own lyrics that express that message for them. Then write a paragraph to show how those lyrics explain the message because like poetry the lyrics might be symbolic or esoteric and may take some explanation. It is suggested that each student read them out loud to the other members of the class. Perhaps this can be taken to ever-greater heights if a musician in the room can be convinced or inspired to collaborate with and provide some music?

"In nonsense is strength" Kurt Vonnegut

MEASURING SUCCESS

There are many ways to measure success of this unit. The two that I will focus on are their completed journals and a poetry slam to mark the end of the unit. At the end of the year each student will have their own journal, a song to themselves modeled after *The Journals of Dan Eldon*, or Walt Whitman, or their new favorite poet whoever he/she is, and of course their own original work. Marc Kelly Smith who ran The Uptown Poetry Slam in Chicago for many years invented his own rules. His overall philosophy is "The performance of poetry is an art - just as much an art as the writing of it." Some of his rules are excellent as well as helpful. His basic feeling is that a slam is "a gift from one city to another. This is the philosophy behind my wanting to share our poems with other schools. Smith also says "the purpose of poetry is not to glorify the poet but rather to celebrate the community to which the poet belongs."

Since public speaking is a major component of my unit and the gift of being articulate is a precious one we will rehearse and learn to enunciate and speak clearly following the poetry slams rule that "No audience should be obligated to listen to the poet. It is the poet's obligation to communicate effectively, artfully, honestly, and professionally so as to compel the audience to listen."

This philosophy helps build an atmosphere of trust among its participants and helps teach our students the importance of hearing a poem. I strongly suggest showing the movie *Slam*. It is an incredible movie about a young drug dealer who turns his life around and discovers his inner life through poetry.

"Don't play the saxophone. Let it play you." Charlie Parker

A POETRY SLAM/LESSON PLAN THREE

Public speaking is something that is sadly neglected in public schools. Although most of us have a hard time speaking in class or in front of a group of people it is a skill and a talent that should be developed for social and academic reasons. It is also really important to own a poem by memorizing it if possible. So this lesson plan is really in two parts.

"We cannot have real learning in school if we think it is our duty and our right to tell children what they must learn.", John Holt, *How Children Fail*

The first part is to take a short poem and memorize it. It should be something they do not already know. They should find something new and practice it. Learn a new poem. Memorize it. Share it with their friends. Share it with their family. Read it out loud on the bus. Read it on the bus on the way to school. Then on the assigned day they must recite it in front of the class.

Part two is similar except, and I mean except, they must write a poem or take a poem that they have written along the way in this unit, and recite it out loud. There should be class time reserved for practice. I suggest small groups so that they will be more willing to share and feel less vulnerable. They should listen to each other and give suggestions for emphasis and perhaps for a bit of rewriting.

The Poetry Slam will happen at the end of the curriculum unit. I will get a microphone from the school librarian so we can be loud and be heard. It will be an in school slam perhaps competing against another class or

perhaps against Hamden Hall to have that private/public school tension or even an urban/suburban program where we invite East Haven High School to be a part of this as I have contacts there. What an amazing way to bring kids together that transcends racial and economic barriers.

Kids love quotes! Put one on the board every day that you are doing this unit and let it subliminally play its way into their heads and hearts as you analyze and tear poetry apart. It frees their minds, gives them food for thought...

"Fear is an amazing human emotion. It can stop us from doing things we should, and make us do things we should not." Joshua Erlanger.

"A Hacker is any person who derives joy from discovering ways to circumvent limitations." Robert Bickford

"The best inspiration is an unpaid rent." August Strindberg

"Those who think that education is expensive do not know the price of ignorance." Einstein

"When life gives you lemons, make orange juice." Sam Crawford

"Everyone has talent. What is rare is the courage to follow that talent to the dark place where it leads." Erica Jong

"If it works, it's obsolete." Marshall McLuhan

"You live and learn ... or you don't live long." Robert Heinlein

"At times things can happen outside school that compensate for closed, alienating classrooms." Herbert R. Kohl

"Every artist dips his brush in his own soul, and paints his own nature into his pictures." Henry Ward Beecher

"Fiction is the truth inside the lie." Stephen King

"Drama is life with the dull bits cut out." Alfred Hitchcock

"For just when ideas fail, a word comes in to save the situation." Goethe

"Art is a collaboration between God and the artist, and the less the artist does the better - Andre Gide

Teachers' Bibliography

Cameron, Julia, *The Artist's Way, A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*, Tarcher, Putnam: New York, New York, 1992. Although bringing spirituality of any kind into the classroom can be a tricky thing Ms. Cameron does it in a way that opens kids up to the possibility of a higher power which may or may not be a muse or a channel for our own creativity. Her book is inspiring and freeing.

Koch, Kenneth *Making Your Own Days*, Touchstone: New York, New York, 1998. Koch's book helped verbalize things about poetry that I never thought could be verbalized. He really understands poetry and he knows how to get students of any age to understand poetry. Quotes from his work or assigned passages from his work will go a long way toward getting your students to appreciate and

feel safe around poetry.

Koch, Kenneth and Kate Farrell, *Sleeping on the Wing* , Random House, 1981. I use this book now every year with my Honors level Seniors. Although the poems tend to be a bit esoteric rendering them unavailable to my lower level kids, they are fun for kids who have been scared away (not yet!) from a hard poem. It has everything from "Howl" to "Somewhere I have never travelled, gladly beyond", to "Song of Myself," and it has biographical information and creative writing assignments!

Moyers, Bill *The Language of Life, A Festival of Poets* , Doubleday, 1995. When Moyers tackles a subject he does a good job. He clearly loves poetry and his love for the craft and for the writer comes through in this book. His interviews clarify and illuminate. The selections are interesting and poignant. There are many videos of his interviews floating around, either at Best Video or for purchase at Public Television.

Perrine, Laurence and Arp, Thomas, *Sound and Sense* , Harcourt Brace,1992. Personally this has been my poetry bible for teaching for the last 15 years. It has all the great poems including "The Ex Basketball Player", "Mending Wall" and "The Love Song Of J. Alfred Prufrock.". It has questions to go along with them. It teaches rhyme and meter. It is easy to hold in one's hand. It has a range and a good selection.

Pinsky, Robert and Maggie Dietz, eds., *Americans' Favorite Poems: The Favorite Poem Project Anthology* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000). Robert Pinsky did this book as his project during his tenure as poet laureate of the country. He asked people throughout the country to send in their favorite poem. I heard him speak at the festival of Arts and Ideas and I was blown away. I then bought one of his books and was mesmerized. They were difficult for kids, however. But this collection is accessible for most students and each selection has a written accompaniment of why they chose the poem they did. Those are helpful teaching tools.

STUDENTS' BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ayazi-Hashjin, Sherry, *Rap and Hip Hop, The voice of a generation* , The Rosen Publishing Group: New York, New York, 1999. This book describes the history of African American music and roots of rap. It gives the reader a view of rap music today and where it is headed.

Eldon, Dan *The Journey is the Destination* , Chronicle Books, 1997. Eldon's book gives kids the chance to keep a cool journal that is part diary, part ticket stubs, part photography, part watercolors, and part collage. A great way to keep a record of high school! Kids love it!

Franco, Betsy, editor, *You Hear Me? Poems and writing by teenage boys* , Candlewick Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000. Ms. Franco has managed to collect a nice sampling of writing by teenage boys that our teenage boys will be able to relate to and be inspired by. The poems are about modern day urban life and the essays show that even tough kids want to write.

Harrison, Sabrina Ward, *The Art of Becoming Yourself* , Random House: New York, 2000. A private journal of one woman's attempt to understand herself through art and poetry

Kaufman, Alan *The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*, Thunder's Mouth Press,

New York, New York © 1999. *The Outlaw Bible of Poetry* is a collection of poems that are rebellious. They will reach that student you thought was unreachable. They will inspire and touch you and your students by their simplicity, free spirit nature, and honest recording of the chaos of the world that surrounds us - now!

Shakur, Tupac *The Rose That Grew from Concrete* Pocket Books, a division of Simon and Schuster, Inc. New York, New York. It is a collection of Tupac's poems that he wrote before he was famous. They are not lyrics to his songs. They are heartfelt poems of love, solitude, death, fear and loss. This is a book that does not stay on my desk for long. Highly recommended!

CDS

BOB DYLAN'S GREATEST HITS

(contains The Times They Are A Changin', and Subterranean Homesick Blues")

DESIRE

(Contains "Hurricane")

THE BEST OF SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK

(Contains "There are no mirrors in my Nana's House and "LA, Birmingham, and Soweto")

Dave Brubeck - Take Five

FILMS

"The Source"- Biographical Look at the lives of poets Gregory Corso, Allan Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac. Has good insight into their lives and the history of the time

"Slam" - a young man reclaims his soul and discovers a way to express his anger and his sensitive side and all of his emotions including love through poetry in this movie that my students adore.

"Poetic Justice" - Tupac Shakur stars in this love story with Janet Jackson (a poet) who try to make sense of their life in the LA ghetto.

"Voices and Visions"- a documentary of the life and times of Walt Whitman.

"Dead Poet's Society"- Robin Williams stars as an inspirational and rebellious teacher at a stuffy boarding school in the 1950's using poetry to free young men of the trappings of society and the expectations of their parents.

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