



## Poetry: The Medium of Choice for Political Unrest

Guide for Curriculum Unit 03.03.08

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Why do we still produce and value lyric poetry? This unit will explore one way that poetry allows people to express their views regarding a subject that affects everyone: politics. Political poetry has a long-standing tradition in American and world history. As each dynasty and civilization developed and collapsed, poets with political opinions were memorializing the events. As early as the first settlers visited America, poetry became a clear medium for people to express their political views. Colonial poets used political poetry to convey their patriotic pride as well as their uneasiness concerning the impending war with England. During the First World War era, poets were quite vocal in their views about war and its effects on generations of soldiers. More recently, poets have begun to voice their beliefs far more outspokenly than their predecessors. During the 1950s and 1960s, poets-and songwriters too-did not simply speak their views to listeners and readers; rather, these poets screamed their pride in or disgust with America. At a time when the world seemed overwhelmed with chaos, poetry-even in song form-became an outlet of choice for those who needed to vent their frustrations and fears. Although this response was not created by the hippie generation, it sparked a new acceptability for these anti-establishment poems. Our more recent political unrest has prompted a new resurgence of the genre. The Gulf War era has reintroduced political poetry through both poems and songs. The controversy concerning political statements by artists is no less intense today than it was over two hundred years ago. There remain our loyal patriots and our conscientious objectors. The irony is that the patriots and the objectors share a common goal: the safety of their brethren. In the modern age, the fine line between them can mean the difference between an artist's name on an award nominee list and on a black list.

(Recommended for English and Creative Writing, grades 9-12, and for Language Arts, grades 7-8.)

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