



Voices of the Sixties and the Modern Poetry Slam

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by Sean Griffin

Introduction

The more I teach middle school English and the older I get, the more I realize how difficult it is to bridge what so many cited as a major social problem in the sixties; the "generation gap." As an adult trying to reach middle school age students in a world that is quite different than the one I grew up in, I am constantly remembering those days when as a youngster, I proclaimed that the adults just didn't "get it." They simply didn't understand. Now that I am the adult and a teacher, no less, children undoubtedly are feeling the same way as I did about adults during my adolescence, so I am always searching for ways to understand or to reach my students. How, after all, can we really reach the students without understanding where they are coming from? And although they are probably not prepared to admit it themselves, wouldn't it be nice if they could understand where we were coming from?

This realization really hit home last year when I was preparing a poetry unit for my students. In the past my annual attempt to incorporate a poetry unit into my eighth grade language arts classroom in recognition of National Poetry Month had ranged from moderately successful to one of those "aha" moments that teachers live for. When I first began teaching in New Haven seven years ago I was able to utilize the poetry published in our textbook (Frost, Giovanni, Dickinson) to generate some discussion of poetry and get students to write some of their own works. As the years progressed I substituted various poems, bringing in outside works and authors in an attempt to get students to get involved with poetry. It wasn't until last year when I invited a group into my classroom to do a poetry slam that I saw students really embrace poetry through "the spoken word."

This moment last April was an eye opening experience for me as I realized that a renewed interest in poetry through the "open mike" and the "poetry slam" is born from a desire to speak out against a world that many of our children find disheartening. Not unlike the Ginsbergs and the Dylans of the fifties and sixties, participants in the modern poetry slam are often concerned with some aspect of the social breakdown of modern society. I watched last year as my students rebelled through their own poetry, angry at the streets, angry with their parents, angry and confused with themselves. Actually many of them were confused about the same things that many others, including myself, were grappling with during our adolescence. As my students tried to work through their disillusionment, I recognized the many similarities between modern times and those of the sixties.

As I began to think about it I was able to draw many similarities between myself and the children, my times and their times, my worries and their worries, my anger and their anger. How did I relieve my anger and frustration--through poetry and writing. I am the last of the "Baby Boomers," a term unknown to many of my current students. My fellow "boomers" were equally frustrated and confused, ready to bend the rules, to challenge the norm and the accepted. They followed the beat poets, the Ginsbergs, the Keroacs and they became the Dylans the Giovannis the Brooks', the Ferlenghettis, the Seegers. They became the anti-"father know best" generation. They fought against the wars and the rules. They blamed their parents and the politicians. They read in bars, at open mikes, they sang in concerts and on street corners, sharing their poetry, sometimes for poetry's sake, sometimes for the sake of change, sometimes to question. The songs and poetry of the sixties and seventies led to the open mike sessions that characterized the eighties and nineties. From the open mike I believe I can trace a direct link to what today is being called the "spoken word" revolution and performance poetry. Young people's modern poetry has become alive through the spoken word. Due perhaps to the development of our electronic world, where TV images race past the eye on music videos and the "X Box" has replaced the hoola hoop, the poetry of this generation cannot just sit on a page. Instead it is prompted to come to life through the words and animation of the speakers. The spoken word is just that, the living poetry, read with feeling and emotion and movement, often-inviting audience members to join in, to interact and to work with the poet.

In this unit I will introduce students to the performance poetry of the past beginning with the Beat poets of the 1950s and leading into the protest poetry and music of the 1960s. I will attempt to lead students through a discovery of the performance poetry of the past and allow them to draw their own conclusions as we study the modern poetry slam and the spoken word revolution, which is a part of this modern poetry movement. Students will read the poetry of others and read and write their own poetry at first, mimicking past poets as they find their way to their own inner voice and hopefully are able to perform for their classmates.

In this unit I will make links that I think I see in the history of poetry and the natural need to rebel that appears with adolescence and sometimes never goes away. By showing students how writers of the past worked with poetry as an artistic form of expression, I hope I can come close to making the link I saw forged in my classroom last year. I am a firm believer in the therapeutic value of creative writing and I want to share that value with my students, many of whom may find an outlet, a way to work out their issues in the modern poetry slam.

Purpose

As mentioned in my introduction, one of the main purposes of this unit is to provide a link between generations. I think students need to understand that adults and particularly teachers have or have had some of the same concerns as they do now. There are many ways to do this, but this unit will use poetry as the impetus or vehicle to get to that point.

The unit will also provide a fun way for teachers and students to study and appreciate poetry. What teacher hasn't had the experience when introducing a poetry unit or lesson when a student (usually male) gives a sigh and asserts, "I don't do poetry." The stigma students sometimes attach to poetry may be alleviated here. I find that many students, even the die-hard anti-poetry ones, enjoy poetry once they begin to understand it and experiment with it. The spoken word and the poetry slam are aspects of poetry that my students at the

middle school level have not really been exposed to. But, again as mentioned in my introduction, I have seen the power of the spoken word and can vouch for its effect on my previous students. The poetry slam that is the end product of this unit should provide students with a really enjoyable production that will be an eye opening experience.

Connecticut Writing Project

The Connecticut Writing Project is a University of Connecticut writing program that is a part of the larger National Writing Project. The program is designed to help students and teachers explore writing through various creative writing strategies. Teachers in New Haven have been fortunate enough to be introduced to the program as a part of the English curriculum. Due to our inclusion in the Connecticut Writing Project, teachers in New Haven have been introduced to various ways to help our students become more comfortable with their writing as they discover new ways to express themselves. Journal writing in which content is the focus, I-search research papers, dialogical notebooks and writer conferences are all techniques that New Haven teachers have been invited to explore as they lead students through writing that emphasizes connecting literature and self, taking critical stances and focusing on higher order thinking skills in their writing.

The main impact the Connecticut Writing Project has had on my teaching is the concept of journal writing. Before the Connecticut Writing Project came to New Haven I would have students write in their journals and then go through and correct every spelling mistake, grammar mistake, etc. I was told at one of our first meetings that I was using journal writing incorrectly. My attacks on students journals with the red pen was simply stifling their writing. Students were not letting their writing flow in their journals because they knew I would be correcting and grading every entry. At first overlooking the spelling and grammar mistakes was very difficult for me as an English teacher, but as we went on through the training I realized that I simply wasn't letting the students write. If I had someone stopping me after every sentence of a short story or chapter that I had written I would never get anything worthy written. It is the same thing with the journals. We use the journals to make breakthroughs on the writing. The writing workshop, the essay, the research report were all places where students would be held accountable for spelling and grammar, but the journal was meant for letting the writing flow.

I will always be greatly indebted to the Connecticut Writing Project for making a huge difference in my students' and my own writing. I encourage other systems to get involved with the National Writing Project and to encourage innovative creative writing in the classroom.

Journal Writing

Journal writing will be a big part of this unit. I find that journal writing is one of the most exciting and creative types of writing that my students regularly take part in. I emphasize creativity in the journals that I require my eighth graders to keep. They are never penalized for spelling or grammar in their journals because the entries are all about their ideas. I want students to feel free to express themselves in their writing. I want them to

enjoy their ideas and allow themselves the freedom to not worry about form, structure, grammar and the elements that we regularly examine during other types of writing such as essay and research writing.

Journal writing combined with literature is meant to lead students to the type of higher-order thinking that the latest changes in educational curriculum aim to enhance. Students make connections, take critical stances and are able to think past the literal interpretation that so often characterizes traditional assessment.

Journal writing will work easily into this unit. Students will be examining a number of poets' works and writing several of their own poems. I will encourage students to write as much poetry as they like during this unit and they will not be required to share it if they do not want to do so. But I have found over the years that aspect of journal writing that is especially helpful is that it is an easy way to get students to share their work. I always ask students to share what they have written with classmates when they are done writing. It is not mandatory to share, but it is encouraged, and I find that most students enjoy reading their work out loud. The more they share, the more they enjoy the writing. In this unit journal writing will help to extend the conversation that we have about the literature and about poetry. I will ask my students to set aside a section of their journals for this unit. The possible topics are endless. Trying to get students to choose a topic that makes those connections to higher order thinking is key to a successful unit.

Some possible journal topics:

- Write a story based on a poem
- Write a paragraph in which you are a famous poet, explaining one of your poems
- Write a dialogue between two beat poets
- Write a song
- Write a poem about what really makes you mad
- Write a soliloquy from an issue's point of view
- Compare two poems
- Analyze an aspect of a poem (mood, form, rhythm, etc.)
- Describe your inner conflicts/dreams/worries
- How might your poetry make others feel? How does a poem make you feel
- Illustrate a poem

Art

As our school is an arts magnet school, whenever I do an extensive unit I try to incorporate art into the unit wherever possible. In an arts magnet school the arts and academics are linked in a way that promotes learning that is often overlooked in a regular school setting. In our school, students study math, social studies, science and languages, but are also invited to explore the arts for half of their day. The students study drawing and painting, photography, video, dance, pottery, drama, sculpture, and music. It is through this vehicle, this arts magnet atmosphere, that students are allowed to explore and find their strengths and weaknesses. Virtually every student in the school finds his or her niche, his or her interest, his or her means to succeed in an arts magnet school. Personally, I feel that every middle school should be an arts magnet school. In an arts magnet school students use the arts as a way to further explore and understand the academics.

I find that infusing art into my academic classroom is one way to help students succeed while tapping into their interests and finding routes to higher order thinking. In this unit I will toy with visual arts, music, and drama as students find different aspects of the arts to explore with the poetry.

The Unit

This unit seeks to explore links between discontent in poet's minds with an evolution of poetry that runs through three time periods and leads to today's Spoken Word. The unit is divided into three sections; The Beats, Protest of the Sixties, and finally, The Spoken Word. In each section I will give background for the students, explore the poetry of the era, give students a chance to write similar poetry and finally produce some artwork to accompany each study. Hence, the students will be working with the text, writing in their journals and working with art as they discover the commonalities that they hold with past generations.

A word about Assessment

Besides journal writing, I ask students to partake in three types of projects in this unit. At the end of the Beat Generation section, students are asked to create an artistic visual that will help portray their favorite beat poem or their own beat poem. At the end of the second section I ask students to put music to their poetry. Finally at the end of the third section, I ask students to participate in a poetry slam. Let students know ahead of time that these are the three bigger projects connected with this unit. While student participation is required throughout the unit, I'll let the students choose which section they would like to have a major grade on. This way students will be allowed to capitalize on the learning strategy that best fits their personality. We are not all musicians, artists or performers, but hopefully students will be able to choose one of these categories to be graded on.

Section One-The Beat Generation

Without a doubt the best place to begin tracing the evolution of poetry to today's Spoken Word Poetry Slam is with the Beat Generation of the 1950s. The "beatniks" as they came to be known derived their nickname from the term "beat" or "beat down." This group of antiestablishment artists was really the generation that grew out of the materialistic world of the 1950s. As white picket fences sprung up across a nation of suburban

neighborhoods filled with all the gadgets and conveniences of the modern, post WWII American society, the beatniks became the anti-50s. In a world of established hairdos and pleated skirts, the beatniks chose to not comb their hair and wore dirty clothing. In a world of "Father Knows Best" marriages and stay at home moms, the beatniks chose to experiment with sex and homosexuality; in a world of complacency with keeping up with the Joneses, the beatniks chose to give everything up. They became a sort of conscience in a society that was prospering as never before. Thomas F. Merrill writes in Allen Ginsberg:

The anger is there, the zealotry is there; but what makes it different from the protests of the past is that the Beat attitude is not interested in social reform-in making the world a better place to live in where all people can have decent houses and food on the table; the beat protest is against the spiritual anemia that is a result, perhaps, of the successes of the truly social protests of the past. The Beatniks' was the only kind of protest possible, one begins to think, in a rich, affluent society. And their protest knocks against every smug layer of American convention with the full brunt of its antithesis. (21)

Teachers exploring the Beat generation with their students will have to be mindful of the material being used and make good decisions. The references to drugs, sex and godless society need to be minded according to the group you are working with. Also how in depth you want to explore the Beatniks will vary depending on the grade level you are teaching. Do you want to explore Zen Buddhism, the main religion/philosophy associated with the beatniks? Do you want to explore existentialism with your students while looking at the Beat Generation? Since this unit is designed for me to use with middle school students (eighth grade) I will forgo a very extensive study of the Beat Generation, but leave that up to the teacher to explore.

I will suggest however that teachers explore the poetry and writings of at least three of the major players in the Beat Generation; Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Jack Kerouac.

Ginsberg

A graduate of Columbia University, Allen Ginsberg is generally thought of as the leader of the Beatniks. His poem "Howl" sparked controversy before even being published in 1957, spurring a court case in which the poem was defended by writers and critics. The famous poem and namesake for the beat generation, is lengthy and again, teachers must use their discretion in use of the poem. I think the first six to eight lines of the poem will suffice for middle school students. With the introduction to the Beatniks that you provide, students should be able to see where the author is coming from when he asserts "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."

Students should be able to see where the author is going with this poem and may be able to visualize the images. Another Ginsberg poem worth exploring is "A Supermarket in California" (1956) in which the author imagines seeing Walt Whitman in the aisle of the supermarket along with "Wives in the avocados, babies in the tomatoes!" Students may need to be prodded to see what exactly Ginsberg is saying about modern society in this poem, but again ample background to the Beat Generation will help with that a lot. Another poem worth looking at is "Homework" (1980) in which Ginsberg talks about cleaning up the world. This poem would work well for teachers trying to get students to look at and comment on the many environmental and or political problems facing our world today.

Ferlinghetti

The second author I would include in a discussion of the Beats is Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Ferlinghetti became very influential as not only a poet but also a publisher of the beatniks. His publishing company, City Lights Books, was the first to publish Ginsberg's "Howl" in the United States. A Ferlinghetti poem that I will use with my eighth graders is "People Getting Divorced." Today's students in any grade will quickly relate to this poem of despondence with the loss of people's souls. Read through it a few times. Examine the poem's placement. Ask students to look closely at the word choice.

Kerouac

Finally any discussion of the beatniks is incomplete without an examination of Jack Kerouac. Jack Kerouac is best known for his book *On the Road*. High school teachers may want to teach the entire book as a sort of background for this unit. As a middle school teacher I may take excerpts to share with the students or emphasize some of Kerouac's poetry which revealed the beat attitude while embracing Zen Buddhism.

Have students choose their favorite work from the beat Generation and create a visual. What kind of drawings, sculpture or artwork can students come up with for the opening lines of "Howl"? How do they imagine Ferlinghetti saw divorcees, or how does Kerouac look traveling *On the Road*. Students choosing to receive a unit grade on this section of the unit should be reminded that while the majority of their grade will be on this art project, their participation in the other sections of the unit is still required.

Have students share their work and read the lines of poetry while the class looks at the visual. Finally have students write their own "Beat poems" in journals and share them with the class. Ask students to snap their fingers as a sign of applause. You might even consider setting up a Beatnik Café in which students can spend a day sharing their own work or their own interpretations of the Beat Generation literature you have discussed. This is also a way to lead students towards the poetry slam presentation that will be the cumulating project of this work. Have fun with it!

Section Two-Voices of the Sixties

This section of the unit probably allows the most flexibility and room for creativity for teachers. Here I will be focusing on several of the poets/musicians of the protests of the sixties. The huge amount of authors and musicians that fall into this category make for a wide variety that a teacher can choose from. Just glance at a Woodstock album to get a quick handful of musicians who were protesting at the time; Crosby, Stills and Nash, Joni Mitchell, Country Joe and the Fish, Joe Cocker, Jimi Hendrix, and countless others. The number of poets that fall into the same category is just as lengthy. For this particular unit I will focus on Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix and Nicki Giovanni.

The path of this section of the unit will follow the path of the other section focused on the Beat Generation. Students will be given some background on the era, they will examine the literature of the given subjects and they will experiment in a similar fashion with their own writing.

The Sixties

Although the sixties was a complicated and controversial decade, it will help teachers to focus by remembering where the unit is coming from. Since we are coming from a focus on the beatniks of the fifties, it makes sense to stay focused on similar characters in the sixties. Unfortunately, this includes most of the

younger members of the US population at that time. A little background on the Vietnam War, touching on the Civil Rights Movement and talking about the rise of women's and Native American rights will help set the stage for this section of the unit. Again how in-depth a teacher wants to take the students into the background really depends on several factors including teacher interest, grade level and curriculum. This unit would work well as an interdisciplinary one between an English and a social studies teacher. Use the unit the way you see fit.

In this section of the unit I will focus on putting the poetry to music. Working at an arts magnet school puts me at an advantage here. Students in our school are constantly encouraged to tap into their artistic talents.

Jimi Hendrix

It will be interesting to see how many students know who Jimi Hendrix was. I suspect that in my middle school classroom about ninety percent of the students will either have never heard anything about him or would not be able to identify his music. But Hendrix is a wonderful way to start the introduction to the sixties. It should be easy for you to use Hendrix as a sort of bridge between the Beatniks and the protests of the sixties. His music, like the poetry, writing, and thoughts of the Beat Generation, was really rebellious in nature. Even among the rebellious rock and roll of the times, Hendrix's music really sticks out as an even further step away from conformity, an even larger silent protest against society just through the nature of the music itself. He lived in society that still largely shunned African Americans and was himself somewhat ostracized by his own race due to his connections to a movement dominated by white youth.

Begin the focus on Hendrix by giving students lyrics to "The Star-Spangled Banner." Read them together and ask the students to put music to the lyrics. They will undoubtedly sing you a traditional version of our national anthem written by Francis Scott Key. Next, play Jimi Hendrix's version of the song for students. Why was his song controversial? What was Hendrix trying to say in his version? Why did he burn his guitar at the conclusion of the performance? How was Hendrix's performance at Woodstock an expression of protest? This illustration will really epitomize the focus of this section of the unit; poetry as music.

Bob Dylan

It can probably be said that Bob Dylan was to his generation in the sixties what Allen Ginsberg was to a generation of Beat Poets. His impact on the music of the times and the music of generations to come can still be felt today. But he is also known as a poet and was even considered at one time for a Pulitzer Prize in poetry.

Give students the lyrics to a song like Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues." Read it as a class and examine it. What does Dylan mean when he says "You don't need a weatherman to tell which way the wind blows?" Examine other Dylan songs including "Mr. Tambourine Man," "Blowin' in the Wind," "The Times They Are A-Changin'" and any number of others. The goal is to look closely at the lyrics first. Examine them like you would any poem. Ask students to imagine what kind of music they would put to the work and finally let them hear what music Dylan used. After students hear the song and talk about their feelings, allow them to reflect in their journal. What kind of connections can they make between Dylan's music and the Beat Generation and/or Hendrix? Is the music that Dylan plays similar to what they would play. How is it the same, how is it different? Once again I have chosen Dylan for this section of the unit because he seems to epitomize the movement. He is also one of my personal favorites from the era. There are many others that could be used in his place if teachers prefer. Look into Jim Morrison, Simon and Garfunkel, Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, or a number of other artists from the sixties whose work can easily be read as poetry before examining it as music.

Nikki Giovanni

Born in Knoxville, TN in 1943, Nikki Giovanni came to be known as one of the most successful of African American poets during the 1960s. Her first collection of poetry, *Black Feeling, Black Talk* was published to wide acclaim in 1967. She has continued writing and publishing into the 21st Century. Giovanni is an especially good author to use in this unit because she is a writer that many of my students know today. Her poetry is widely published in English textbooks and her work continues to gain popularity now. Giovanni becomes another bridge in this unit. Here, after all is a voice from the sixties that is being read and enjoyed by children today. Here is a living connection for the students and therefore a key to one of my goals in this unit. Dylan and Hendrix might also reach the modern day student, but I suspect that neither will have the notoriety that Giovanni will have with today's students. Ask students what music they could set to Giovanni's poetry.

Finally this section of the unit should end with students working together to put their own poetry to some kind of music. Be ready to give a unit grade to those students who feel they can best share their work through music. There is a more detailed lesson plan on this section at the end of the unit.

Section Three-The Spoken Word and the Poetry Slam

This third section of the unit is really a culmination of the previous two sections. Spoken word poetry is a newer artistic movement, but the connections to the past will be evident to your students right away. The development of spoken word in this unit begins with the Beat poets who regularly read their poetry in New York bars, it continued with protest music of the sixties and then entered a more public forum with the introduction of the open mike in the late seventies and eighties. In the eighties "performance" was added to the poetry readings and in the mid eighties Marc Smith organized the first "poetry slams" which are basically spoken word competitions in which the audience scores the performers. The poetry slam turns this new look at poetry, the spoken word, into a competitive sport. Spoken word performance poetry is really poetry reading combined with performance in a competitive format. It is poetry and emotion put out there for the audience and for the poet. Introduce the spoken word to your class with the help of others. As I mentioned in my introduction, I was fortunate to have a small group come to my classroom for a performance that neither my students nor I will ever forget. But there may not be a group that you can get a hold of right away. That's ok. There are books, recordings and movies that you can utilize. I have mentioned several of them in my bibliography. There are also open mike sessions all over our country. It is important that the students get an ample introduction to the art, so that when it comes time for them to get up and share, they won't just read the lines on the page, but they will let them live and send them out to the class.

Once students understand the spoken word and have heard some examples of poetry in action, simply let them write their own feelings. Let them spend some time with their journals and then, of course, let them share. Students will have a great time with this. Try to have a microphone available for them and if possible get the AV department to send down someone to film the students performing their work.

The Poetry Slam

After students have had their try at performance poetry, introduce them to the poetry slam. Remember the basic difference between performance poetry and a poetry slam is the competition. Audience participation is vital as they are the ones who score the performers. Devise a system of scoring that works for your class. Establish a point system where students can score the performers based on a set of criteria that you establish. (Perhaps students could score each other on a scale of one to ten with categories including performance,

poem, poetic devices or whatever you decide.) Finally allow the students to perform their poetry. Invite other teachers, students and administrators to participate in the slam. Remember to grade those students who choose this option as their final project.

Conclusion

With the completion of this unit both you and your students will have made some connections with the fifties and sixties and had a fun time exploring poetry in a different manner. There should have been a lot of sharing and experimentation with poetry and the many ways of self-expression touched on in the unit. I hope that your students were able to use this unit, not only as a way to make those connections that I have spoken of, but to also really tap into their inner thoughts, issues, and concerns.

Lesson Plans

The following lesson plans are designed for an eighth grade classroom. The period for each class is 52 minutes. The lesson may need to be adapted in certain ways for your classroom, but this will give you the basic format of the course. I focus here on three lessons from "The Sixties" section of the unit. I feel that this section of the unit is the most instrumental in showing students how poetry and music have been used to deliver a message.

Just to review, by this point in the unit you would have been over the beatniks with the students. Starting out by giving the student some background on the time period, you would have continued by reading some of the sampled poetry and the students should have tried their hand at some beat poems of their own. Finally in the culminating art project of that section of the unit, students should have made some artwork to accompany either their own beat poem or one of the poems that they discovered through your explanation.

It is worth noting that the general pattern of each of the three sections in the unit is similar. The teacher should start out by brainstorming with the students to find out what they know about an era. Secondly, the teacher introduces the text to the students, studying as you would any poem. The next step in the unit is where the poetry becomes more specialized. With the beatniks, poetry and art are combined as works are read aloud; with the sixties we put music to the poems; and with the spoken word section we actually treat the poetry as performance poetry.

Sample Lesson One-Building the background to the sixties

Objectives

- Students will brainstorm what they know about the social issues of the sixties
- Students will read the words to "The Star Spangled Banner"
- Students will listen to Jimmy Hendrix's version of "The Star Spangled Banner."

- Students will reflect in their journal

Materials

- Text of "The Star Spangled Banner," recording of Jimi Hendrix playing "The Star Spangled Banner" at Woodstock, journals

Initiation

Begin the class by asking students what they know about the 1960s. How much input you will get from your class depends on many things; their age, grade level, who their social studies teacher was the year before, what your history curriculum is and any number of any other issues. It is safe to say that most classes, especially middle school students, will need a little prodding. Ask questions such as what was the war, what was going on with women, with African-Americans, etc. As they come up with ideas write down their ideas on the board and see what sort of images you come up with. Turn it into a great teaching moment by filling students in on the feeling of the sixties. Who are some of the big names from the sixties? What were some of the big events? Who has relatives that lived through the sixties? What did they do during the decade? Who has seen "Forest Gump?" (You might even want to bring a copy in and show parts of the film as part of your background.) It is a lot to cover in one class period and you can easily extend it to two or more if you prefer. Remember the best thing about these units is their adaptability.

Procedure

Once students have shared some of their knowledge and you and the class have had a conversation about the sixties, hand out a copy of the words to our nation's national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Students have heard many versions of this song over the years. But Jimmy Hendrix's version is perhaps one of the most unique. After reading through the song once, allowing one or two students to sing a verse, play Hendrix's version for the class. Ask students what they heard. Without too much discussion, ask students to write down in their journals what this version of the song said to them.

Closure

Ask students to share the thoughts they wrote in their journals. Some students will undoubtedly be willing to share and again it will be up to you, the teacher, to help shape a conversation as to how and why the song would be controversial and an indication of the times.

Sample Lesson Plan-Two- Dylan and the Protest Song

Objectives

- Students will read the lyrics of several 1960s song writers
- Students will identify images in the poetry
- Students will listen to the musical versions of the songs
- Students will create their own "protest" poetry

Materials

- Students' journals
- Lyrics and music for a selection of sixties music
- tape recorder
- web organizers

Initiation

Ask students what an image is. Take a few minutes to talk about how important images are to poets. I often tell students poets paint pictures in our minds through words and images. Ask students to give you examples of images from literature or poetry that they are familiar with.

Procedure

After talking about images, ask students to read the lyrics of the poetry you have chosen. Ask students to go through the poetry and highlight some of the images. Take for example, Dylan's *Subterranean Homesick Blues*. What is going on in the song? How does it represent the era? What are the images that Dylan plays with in the song? Chances are that many of the students have never hear the song before, so see if they can imagine the type of music that might accompany the lyrics. Finally play the song for the students. Repeat this section of the unit as many times as you like with as many different artists as you like. Think of using Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Jim Morrison, CSNY, The Who, the Stones and a multitude of others

Now students are ready to write their own protest poem. Brainstorm the issues that are important to them. What would they like to change? Once you have shared these ideas, ask students to come up with a poem that can later be set to music. They may have to finish it for homework.

Closure

If anyone is ready ask him or her to share his or her poem!

Sample Lesson Three- Making the music

Sample lesson three begins the cumulating project for this section of the unit. I want students to set music to the poetry they have created. Since many of the students may not feel comfortable coordinating music with their work, the class will be working in groups for this section. Again, the type of work you get from your students will depend on the class you are working with. But music can be anything from drumming on a table to a group of students with guitars, drum sets and lead vocalists. Allow your students to provide the background that they can come up with.

Objectives

- Students will share their protest poetry
- Students will work in groups to set music to some of the poetry they have written
- Students will perform their poetry for the class

Initiation

Go over the term "music" with your class. What is music? What types of music do they like? Who can make music? How? Who can demonstrate music making now? I'm sure about half my class would be glad to get up and do a off the cuff rap bit. Students are constantly drumming on desks and making noise in class. This part of the unit may sound difficult, but I believe it will be easier than it seems. Turn it over to the students.

Procedure

Get the students in groups of four or five. Pay close attention to the composition of the groups, making sure that some of the personalities you put together have the potential to create great music. Tell them they have approximately five minutes to share what they have written. Tell the students each group is going to set music to one piece and then perform for the class. You may want to give the students extra time for this, especially students who are going to take it beyond, desk tapping and scattng.

Closure

Students should perform their songs for the rest of the class. From here the section of performance poetry should be a natural for students.

Reading List

Bonair-Agard, Roger, Stephen Coleman, Guy LeCharles Gonzales, Alex Olsen and Lynne Procane. Burning Down the House: Selected Poems from the Nuyorican Poet's Café's National Poetry Slam Competition. Soft Skull Press, 2003. A selection of the authors' materials used in a national poetry slam.

Eleveld, Mark, editor. *The Spoken Word Revolution*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc, 2004. This excellent publication touches on every aspect of the development of the "Spoken word Revolution" from the beat generation to hip hop and the poetry slam. It also comes with a CD that will come in handy in the classroom when introducing the poetry slam at the end of the unit.

Ellmann, Richard and Robert O'Clair, editors. *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*. Norton: New York, 1988. A nice selection of a wide variety of modern American poetry.

Gitlin, Todd. *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. Bantam Books: New York, 1987. This critically acclaimed book gives teachers a thorough background on this turbulent decade.

Glazner, Gary. *Poetry Slam: The Competitive Art of Performance Poetry*. San Francisco: Maniac D. Press, 2000. A great book for exploring the history of the poetry slam and arranging your own.

Grimes, Nikki. *Bronx Masquerade*. Puffin Books: New York, 2003. This fictional account of a classroom poetry slam is a wonderful introduction to what I want teachers to do in the third section of this unit.

Hewitt, Geof. *Hewitts Guide to Slam Poetry and Poetry Slams with DVD*. Discover Writing: New York, 2005. This book is a handy reference to the poetry slam including plans and help for creating your own poetry slam. Book comes with DVD.

Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*. New York: Penguin, 1955. This is a classical representation of the beat generation written by one of the leading figures from the period.

Kerouac, Jack. *Some of the Dharma*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1997. This large collection of Kerouac writing is helpful in getting a different view of the writer and stepping away from *On the Road*.

Medina, Tony and Louis Reyes Rivera, editors. *Bum Rush the Page: A Def Poetry Jam, 2001*. New York: Penguin Books, 2001. An interesting collection of material used in the slam.

Merrill, Thomas F. Allen Ginsberg. Twayne Publishers: New York, 1969. This comprehensive study of Ginsberg and his work provides excellent background on the poet.

Paschen, Elise and Rebekah Presson Mosby, editors. *Poetry Speaks*. Source Books: Naperville, IL, 2001. A concise collection of African-American poetry which can be used in this unit.

Smith, Marc Kelly, and Joe Kraynak. *Complete Idiot's Guide to Slam Poetry*,. Alpha Books: New York, 2004. The famous "Idiot's Guides" takes on Poetry Slams with the help of two leaders in the field.

White, Timothy. *Rock Stars*. Stewart, Tabori and Chang, Inc: New York, 1984. A collection of nearly fifty short biographies on musicians who can be used in this unit.

Websites

www.poetryslam.com

A great source for information on the slams, includes links, chat rooms and a variety of valuable information

www.webenglishteacher.com

This is a great site for English teachers. Check out the link to classroom poetry slams.

www.slampapi.com

A wonderful site for getting a variety of information (history, material, other sources) on the poetry slam.

www.slamnation.com

This site provides information on the movie, Slamnation. Also provides links and material for teachers' use.

Appendix A: Standards

Connecticut's Common Core of Learning Program Goals

Having completed this unit, students will have achieved the following Connecticut's Common Core of Learning program goals for language arts:

- Create works using the language arts in visual, oral and written texts;
- Read, write, speak, listen and view to construct meaning of written, visual and oral texts;
- Choose and apply strategies that enhance the fluent and proficient use of the language arts; (brainstorming, use of graphic organizers)
- Read with understanding and respond thoughtfully to a variety of texts

When done with this unit, students will have achieved the following Connecticut's Common Core of Learning program goals for the arts;

- Create (imagine, experiment, plan, make, evaluate, refine and present/exhibit) art works that express concepts, ideas and feelings in each art form
- Respond (select, experience, describe, analyze, interpret and evaluate) with understanding to diverse art works and performances in each art form
- Understand the connections among the arts, other disciplines and daily life.

New Haven Public Schools Academic Performance Standards

Students will also achieve the following goals from the New Haven Public Schools Academic Performance standards for eighth grade Language Arts;

- Students will demonstrate strategic reading skills before, during and after reading
- Students will demonstrate strategic writing behaviors
- Students will participate in a wide variety of writing experiences

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