



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2023 Volume I: Poetry as Sound and Object

Poetry as Community Practice

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by Katie Yates

Introduction

“I’d like to invoke the Native American Navajo because their word for road is used as a verb. Their whole relationship to road has to do with how you travel it” Anne Waldman

This poetry unit is conceived for teachers for whom the road to learning is an active interdisciplinary verb, a method with which to weave together academic protocols with creative learning. The plan is expansive, as it asks teachers to build their own cross-curricular lessons. Cross-curricular, based on the logic of this unit, asks teachers to give students meaningful problems to solve with discussion-based questions and project-based assignments. This deep dive into what it means to be a creative writing instructor is designed for educators who are lifelong students, activists, writers, researchers, journalists, and explorers.

The purpose of an arts-inspired lesson plan that takes poetry as both sound and object foregrounds intensive research activity alongside hands-on writing activity as a nexus for composing authentic narrative. While conferencing, conversation and collaboration are at the heart of a strong editing process, the logic of this unit hopes to distance teachers from critique and to align students with innovation, study, and immersion into research and into traditional poetic forms. Rather than focusing on writing something good according to conventional metrics, the power of writing in this curriculum comes from the heart of an intentional student architected culture. Students and teachers collaboratively find innovative structures to develop and promote writing that will keep us sane. Innovative writing technologies and multi-media performances deserve to be at the center of teaching practice.

The unit is a call to offer our students honorable life-long roles as writers. Writers who make meaning and who make change as they research and problem-solve. Following in the footsteps of the seventeenth-century poet Andrew Marvell in his *An Horatian Ode Upon Cromwell’s Return from Ireland* and *The Black Panther: Black Community News Service* in the twentieth century, students writing in this curriculum take innovative forms to support revolutionary voices against power and racism.

Acknowledging recent communities of artists who collaborated and studied art together during the Harlem Renaissance and the Beat movement, we find the rich rewards of collaboration and exchange. These are

examples of the energies this unit draws its inspiration from. We build relationships through collaboration, improvisation, and performance rather than prioritizing revisions on the page.

This curriculum introduces close-reading and close-listening research as the ground for creative writing personal essay writing mirrored in the seventeenth-century form of the commonplace book, a self-published notebook of relevant phrases and poetry. This is a practice of book making that mirrors the essential qualities of book-building outside of traditional publication and distribution norms, freeing students to see their writing as a relevant object. Some other examples of non-traditional books to inspire creative work include:

Read aloud illustrated children's books such as *Good Night Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown and *Bedtime for Frances* by Russel Hoban

The abecedarian such as Geoffrey Chaucer's *The ABC* or the mnemonic word games in the works of Dr. Seuss

Emily Dickinson's cryptic poetic parables and her letters

Mina Loy's modern manuscript length poem *The Last Lunar Baedeker*

Psalms verses offering hope and healing, advice, and comfort

Ta-Nahesi Coates' epistolical essay of advice and warnings to his son in *Between the World and Me*

Journalist, publisher and queer poet, Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*

Anne Fadiman's contemporary narrative essays/narrative nonfiction teaching techniques and ethics

Poet and performer Anne Waldman's series *IOVIS*

Zen monk, singer songwriter and poet, Leonard Cohen

Notes and Recipes from A Young Black Chef by the writer, chef, biographer, and restaurant owner Kwame Onwuachi

Netflix series *High on the Hog* designed by Stephen Scatterfield, writer and producer of a series researching family and cultural stories through the roots of recipes

Kendrick Lamar's album *How to Pimp a Butterfly*

Students guided by their teachers, in consultation with peers, and supported by their community networks, structure a piece of rigorously researched manuscript inspired by the wisdom gathered by the writers listed above. The path is to gather relevant and harmonic as well as discordant voices of contemporary urban youth culture in the spirit of Allen Ginsberg mantra poems modeled on the long form poem, inspired by contemplative arts practices, including informational texts such as *The Farmer's Almanac*, and travel guides. A deliberate syllabus then provides methodologies for students to collect and document their lives by recording biographical stories. These stories can be told in cadenced, organized, multivocal lyrical form as a unique cultural anthem, or a non-fiction essay. The plan is for teachers who want to take their students on an authentic writing journey to teach research practices to benefit teachers and students alike. Students and teachers will study authentic texts from a culturally diverse range of self-selected wisdom and literary traditions to document and appreciate their lives and futures.

Following these suggestions for practice and study results in a manuscript broadly defined, a hand-held book or recorded spoken word anthem in the tradition of Tyehimba Jess's redemptive *Olio*. This poet's redemptive work retells stories unscripted in the past. In this way, Jess remarkably preserves intergenerational knowledge and stories of resilience and love, from rediscovered artifacts, recipes, songs, and interviews. The ground established through research might take the form of: Capstone project requirement for graduation, a recorded archived audio Story Corps or TED Talk script, a 3-D map, a letter-pressed broadside, or mural, depending on resources.

Students gather and record the history of their neighborhoods, through the songs in their personal playlists and taking time to script/record conversation, and voices that surround them in their daily lives. In this way students record the authenticity of their individual and societal present and past. Their work reveals the suffering and the triumphs in the world around them. This research-based writing projects benefit students, teachers, families, and schools alike, by initiating dialogue. Reading and writing in this syllabus amplifies confidence in both student and teacher's intuitive knowledge. It is a skillful method to acknowledge our diverse experiences by sharing with each other what it means to be a citizen, in the broadest definition of this role. Inspiring confidence in the value of reading and writing to recognize the importance of who we are.

Teachers and families commit to understanding community dynamics and therefore can help one another design and implement service projects. Original research will lead to tangible networking generating new conversations while supporting community service hours or other graduation requirements. Lessons focused on first-person research methodologies alongside geography-specific writing prompts and multimedia assignments are the basis for writing. Students of all ages collaborate to generate and record conversations around culture and location to document or to critique the society we live in. In our rigorous writing practice, we will illuminate connections in the creative spirit of art and family.

Additionally, research notably supports the social emotional learning ground necessary to appreciate our individual writing process. Listening to each other and by sharing the arts, performance, we free ourselves from an insistence on productivity over consideration. This unit provides a new basis for understanding our surroundings while exploring the powers of research and of writing. Investigations centered in academic skills deepen our intellectual and creative journeys. Writing manuscripts establishes relationships within our community to inspire and to support one another into the future. Literary, research, collaborative and studio-based approaches could include:

Contemplative practice from traditions of choice including making posters in the style of the revolutionary artist Emory Douglas, which advertised the need for good health care and education for Black children in the United States.

Commonplace Book: sharing benefits of keeping a contemporary Commonplace Book. Readers turn their books into a repository of beautiful phrases, logic, prayers, recipes, annotations. Studying methods from contemplative traditions that are known to the community of students and practicing traditions as a society, find new value and power in our relationship with one another.

Investigations: tours of local university campuses, public fountains, libraries, neighborhood gardens, libraries, city murals, memory gardens, children's theatre, playwrighting camps, archivists to teach research methods, interviews, Story Corps project. Teachers can design field trips to collect culturally relevant data.

Resources: Poets RaY'dyo, Christopher Funkhouser (NJIT) recorded interviews with writers talking about their process while sharing their creative work to create both a record and build a revenue stream for a creative

writing arts department.

Mapping: using different mappings of your city to build stories around what has happened on the land we live on. Knowing the history of where we live helps us to understand and to deepen our relationships with each other and with the environment: See, for example, the writing in *Public Citizen* by the environmental historian Paul Sabin. A close reading of this text diagrams responsible citizenship. Having a say in well-being makes life worth living. Advocacy is an important power to hold on to.

The Other Side of Prospect by Nicholas Dawidoff directs us to his redemptive relationship with a city that supported him, brought him and his family resources and peace even though his background was fraught with difficult circumstances. Dawidoff returns the city of his childhood to write a story which frees a man from a wrongful conviction. His book, while a researched personal narrative, is also a labor of social justice. His book shows how research, intention, hard work, and effort can make a community better.

Mixed media collage methods which play with relationships between words, images and sounds help students understand the steps to building a larger manuscript, a more in-depth story, or series of poems. These layers of thinking are reflected in student knowledge of social media. Text rich social media which includes critical thinking is a sign of developing wisdom. Authentic writing, like anything of value, comes from working hard with the materials we have on hand.

Poetry and Research

This course of study speaks to intergenerational community healing by teaching fundamental research techniques, such as note taking and bibliography making which will serve students and teachers for a lifetime. In the United States the public school system encompasses and serves the rich social and economic diversity in this country. Teachers can find ways to group poetry research projects so that they serve their student population. Research can build bridges between students with little in common by explaining why this is the case. Knowing the origin of our diversity and our privilege helps us find ways to access our potential. Discussion and empathy lead to understanding which is also a means for reconciliation. Reading and writing poetry has a long history of helping bring people together through valuable, selective, organized words. Teaching students to present themselves as poets changes the outcome of their academic process.

Skills taught include: the hands-on, kinesthetic learning of bookmaking, collaging, interviewing, performing, sharing work made for a specific audience. All these processes are designed by the teacher to share reinforce the value of intellectual text rich practices. Teaching writing as a survival skill is part of the plan. This curriculum emphasizes community building disguised as rigorous disciplined creative writing practices as the road.

Reflecting on our personal literacy narrative, we recognize that early on in our time at school, our reading and writing focus turns towards textual analysis. We learn the literary language of plot, characters, themes, tone, moral, and message. Then we are thrown into the domain of the 5-paragraph essay. Introduction, body paragraph, conclusion, argumentative essays are taught formulaically. While convenient for administrative purposes and for collecting data, this writing style is overtaught, leading to unnecessary tedium and boredom within the vast possibilities of the writing landscape. Encouraged to read broadly across the curriculum from treatises on astrophysics, to local spoken word poetics, then learning to read and navigate international maps, becoming comfortable reading a graph during a track meet on Athletic Net, brings joy to reading and interpretation.

Exploring reading texts rich anthropological studies, mysteries, poems, novels, cartoons, song lyrics opens classroom potential. Often required reading in a public-school curriculum entails books that are read and reread for generations. These books are plowed through for an entire year. The final act is an analytical or narrative essay employing ethos, pathos, and logos as the engine. This sequence is often followed by a PowerPoint presentation. This genre of practice, not surprisingly, results in formulaic disenfranchised reading and writing—students who summarily hate English. Habitual negligence of this kind naturally reinforces a monotonous relationship with anything to do with books not to mention the consistency of a dense rigorous, complicated rubric in and of itself, too much of the same kind of thing that makes students hate writing.

The force behind a poetry-based writing program hopes to revive a deep dive, a multi-season exploration of word and text, image, and sound not limited to subject matter (English versus History versus Art versus Math versus Science versus Music versus Gym and Geography), but which leaves adequate time and space for deepening relationships to an academic project as well as time to nurture social-emotional skills throughout an entire school year or grade. Students, teachers, and families build intentional environments/projects designed to recognize and appreciate one another. Instruction within this program is not authoritarian, thus maintaining a natural hierarchy between shareholders with intentional productive exchanges between students, teachers, and their families. The goal is to study poetry and all its inherent possibilities, learning in and as a community, developing academic, technical as well as creative skills arising from an authentic connection to reading, researching, writing, drawing, performing. This unit is designed to tacitly alter the course of a student and their family's belief in the value of their education with enriched, relevant content. Additionally, this curriculum presents itself with cultural forms and practices to bring social-emotional learning, practicing how to find peace where we are, well-being and healing to communities through meditation, mindful contemplation, warrior walks, ikebana, and restorative listening and conversation.

We shall build an infrastructure of intentional practices restoring joy to teachers and their students. Families are urged to place value on enjoying one another's company through orchestrated, planned, simple nonsectarian rituals: tea ceremony, cooking, sharing recipes, food, dance, and celebration. Activities are modeled on Japanese, Tibetan, Navajo, and Scottish sacred tradition valuing beauty, purification, ikebana and ceremony, rituals often forsaken in the secular classroom. We reinvigorate classroom space, redeem time, our relationship to the earth, and co-develop needed resources for social-emotional well-being, patience, and love. Through cross-curricular studies in writing, literature, history, and the arts, we rediscover school as a place for genuine relationship building, uncovering the tools each student, each teacher, each family needs to be safe, resourced and connected.

Example of Ritual: The Tibetan lhasang ceremony

Offering. In his writings in *The Indestructible Truth* on Tibetan Buddhism, Reginald Ray discusses the lhasang, "The offerings consist both of actual physical substances and those that are conceived with the imagination...consisting of the visualization of all the good and fine things that the world has to offer... then offering them can be equally powerful, whether they are material or not." Becoming an intentional architect of a peaceful learning environment while creating space for critical and creative thinking infused with rich intellectual and social emotional intention, is a ceremonial construction and building of the highest order: making chaos a garden, and for some students a paradise. The classrooms in public schools are mostly poor in resources yet rich in social capital, diversity, and culture. Exploring maps and methods for cultural practice and awareness to the classroom increases the likelihood students will be comfortable enough to acquire new learning, develop executive functioning necessary to improve on what they know. Teachers are working in front of the eight ball when they arrive to teach students whose individual nonacademic needs are so high.

In many ways as teachers, we are looking for ways to help students lead lives with individual meaning and purpose. This curriculum is designed to inspire teachers to carefully and intentionally create an environment so rich in activities and content that time spent reading, writing, collaging, or conversing within its confines, lifts our student towards success. Teaching writing follows so closely in the conundrum of “you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink” thus with teaching writing poetry, one of the highest orders of thinking humans perform. Innately we are given to understanding our lives through language. There is no problem with this. However, we can lose our connection to the basic intuitions and the natural grammar where our emotions and our images flourish. By intentionally arranging a deliberate place for studying and developing intellectual talents through reading, researching, and appreciating poetry in many forms, we give students the gift of value. Writing comes from every aspect of who we are, in a sense, a limitless ocean of possibility. To be a student is to be a fish moving through the ocean, learning the natural hierarchies of nature. School is an intensive immersive experience which can be holistically measured through reading and writing poetry given the depth of the practice.

A poetic analogy for how students learn through relationships, community is a family of trees. Outside the window where I am writing is a family of trees from pine to lilac, from various parts of the ecosystem yet they share resources and thrive. While the nutrients the trees share are vital, they are rarely acknowledged by human society. We might take sunlight, water, and soil for granted yet when we notice the beautiful relationships between trees, the power of the environment becomes clear. This is true especially at a time when students are aware of the fragility of our lives, livelihoods, and our future on this planet. There is no better time than the present to practice meaningful writing.

Rituals: Chanoyu, Ikebana, Haiku, Calligraphy, and Gardening

Chanoyu literally means “hot water for tea.” The art of Chanoyu, preparing and serving a bowl of tea, is a synthesis of many Japanese arts such as flower arranging, calligraphy, poetry, ceramics, lacquerware, cooking, architecture, gardening, and more. Recognizing we cannot bring boiling hot water into the classroom; it is the blending of arts that draws me to make tea ceremony an example for bringing intentional contemplative practices to the schools.

The practice of flower arranging according to heaven, earth, and human principles, clandestinely enlivens students’ senses with the beauty of tea in a teacup, flower arranged artfully in space each flower acknowledging the presence of another.

Haiku, an improvisational “make it new” practice can be expanded and differentiated with materials associated with a traditional activity related to Japanese brush work of calligraphy. “Make it new” is a call from the American Objectivist poets to get away from overdone poetic verse to rediscover a spontaneous spirit in writing, a style which imitated the crisp connections haiku makes between mind and body. Haiku is visual and physical writing practice that naturally lends to ceremony which is a form of appreciation: Haiku poetry is chance to connect with our shared intelligence and creativity moment. The value of this writing emerges from how we value each other and how we respect each other’s effort.

Gardens: working with city-based initiatives to plant intentional gardens at school or at home as the basis for a unit of researched poetry writing based in studying the effects of green spaces on well-being and health.

Teaching Strategies

Mind: Contemplative Arts & Community Building: Making Mindfulness Culturally Relevant

Creating an uplifted society of sane, balanced learners engaged through both healthy mind and body-based practices was brought to the United States from Eastern Tibet in the 1970s by Trungpa Rinpoche and collected as an instructional manual for how to live one's life as a warrior. In *The Sacred Path of the Warrior*, "Sacred Path" is an innovative society-based social-emotional learning curriculum based in contemplative arts and meditation, such as the slogan that knowing how to brew a proper cup of tea is a sign of a completely accomplished citizen. Connecting with our shared origins of creativity is a straightforward way to have a strong, gentle impact within the classroom. Intentional, healthy, uplifted environments and lessons in poetic narrative and visual methods that are tried and true (poetry and storytelling) give us a way to simplify and clarify for our students the importance and the power of writing.

We know that relationships are built on experiences and expressions of love and gentleness. To create a classroom with an ethical structure which allows for creativity and wisdom where there is scarcity, fear, and exhaustion, we need a method. We could equate this practice of building a society with going through the steps for how to make a cup of tea: filling the pot, boiling fresh water, scattering the leaves in the pot, setting the clean, polished, dry cup out, then serving it to one another. How do we learn how to write together, how to share in meaningful conversation? By paying attention to the details of how we study and write together. Meditation/contemplation are tools we use to get to know each other in a simple, gentle, uplifted space. From a place of trust and synchronicity, we can develop our consciousness, our awareness of each other by sharing our writing, in expansive ways that benefit generations. In this environment we create work that is not about ourselves. The Japanese Tea Ceremony celebrates ritual, hands-on learning, refining our inward and outward momentum training ourselves to understand each other and how to be of benefit in the world on levels that are necessary now more than ever. Writing and meditation based in practices associated with the contemplative arts naturally sharpen the environment, bringing healing to school communities. Writing and composing with purpose, holding ourselves with tenderness and dignity at this moment in history as teachers and students.

"Appreciating sacredness begins very simply by taking an interest in all the details of your life. Interest is simply applying awareness to what goes on in your everyday life—awareness while you are cooking, awareness while you are driving..." is how Trungpa Rinpoche describes this experience in *Sacred Path of the Warrior*, which he wrote after escaping the Chinese invasion of Tibet by crossing the Himalayas on foot. A subsequent scholarship at Oxford helped him make connections in the West after he arrived at a refugee camp in India.

Hands on Learning i.e., Commonplacing, Archives as Narrative

Commonplacing: The art of commonplacing is assembling a self-constructed, self-published bound book of words and images building a personal historical object like a memoir, but which could also be a work of visioning, fiction, or humor. Taking the steps towards self-publishing models for students how to assemble an archive of letters, songs, notes, stories, photos, lists, which in the process naturally become the backdrop for narrative. Commonplacing allows a collective differentiated format for exploring and explaining the world we share.

While historically commonplace figured mostly as an elite parlor game, a gentlemanly pursuit which took place on the page, a digital version of commonplace makes sense for our students. Already students have a virtual commonplace book in their playlists, their galleries, and their messaging systems. Using their phones to collect and organize knowledge and firsthand experiences, stories and inquiry with their handheld personal computing device, a format that might work would be to create a social media profile as the holding place for gathering relevant phrases. In this way, the art of commonplace develops practical relevant planning and research skills of more immediate value than research skills applied to a discussion based historical research paper. Commonplacing encourages research in everyday life. Writers who research form positive personal skill sets, the habits of the writer, the artist, and the anthropologist, the minister/monk. A relevant example of contemporary hands-on learning for students at Yale Center for British Art where they have a collection of historical commonplace books, for example Harriett Sargeant's commonplace book, written in pen and ink circa 1830.

Another example of poetry as object is a slavery-based practice for keeping track of family wisdom and connection discussed in "All That She Carried," Tiya Miles' excellent recounting of anthropological research and a revival of letter writing practices using embroidery floss and sacks to honor and to make material family love and loss. Miles writes "Many of us feel connected to history through women's handiwork. Some save and repair hand-me-down table linens. Others hunt flea-market aisles for vintage fabrics. A few of us learn the skills of traditional sewing and quilting to reproduce the experience and art of our ancestors. The past seems to reach out to us through these fabrics and the practices of making them that have survived over time. Gathered up like the crisp ends of a cotton sheet fresh from the wash, past and present seem to meet above the fold."

Working with fabrics and with clothing as a source for poetry and connection makes for commonsense learning for city students who are not always primarily emotionally or intellectually connected to literary works and forms. Slowly introducing the word as poem or symbol as clothing or as a part of an outfit, makes writing tangible and vivid. Meanwhile we create a metatextual community archive. Bringing writing into daily life, finding expressions of meaning and of love as articles of clothing gets us closer to how poetry is the net that binds our awareness mirroring who we are and who we become. This developmental understanding builds positive relationship practices into language arts practices. Wedding practical language with sacred language by embellishing common objects is the core of what learning should be. Looking at poetry as an object, we recall and reconnect to writing as a beautifully relevant activity.

Poetries of Sound

The recording studio setting serves as a classroom in which to listen, to absorb an audio syllabus of poets whose voices and lyrics derive from sound, chant, and music as much as they do from form. Learning to imitate cadences, document forms, musical themes, and anthropological themes makes for better writing with deeper effect. In this way, sound and meaning coemerge as a location and a basis for writing and studying poetry. A sub-syllabus of past and present audio files is followed and edited by the class, serving as an archive for the group, a sound stamp of learning and identity as it evolves throughout the school year, or longer.

The contrapuntal form Tyehimba Jess uses in his epic collection of poems *Olio* shows how conversation alongside, vigorous, meticulous research melds into lyrical writing bringing to life voices and facts, phrases in conflict moving towards resolution. Researched writing supported by narrative poetic forms from oral narrative history and storytelling, reinvigorates the practice of honoring culturally relevant voices. Listening to Tyehimba Jess recordings, students practice recording their own scripts in contrapuntal verses. Conversation

between lyric voices much like rappers laying down beats, expose natural cultural nuance, conflict and the rhymes of colloquial speech blended into socially distinct layers of historical and contemporary literary phrasing.

Presenting powerful living cultural figures like Tyehimba Jess offers powerful motivation for young writers to take their writing process seriously by mirroring his scholarship and talent. Carrie Golius writes in *The University of Chicago Magazine* “Tyehimba Jess demonstrates classically compelling contrapuntal form in his epic poem *Leadbelly* — two columns of text, printed next to each other, read either down or across—to tell the story of Leadbelly’s fractious relationship with folklorist John Lomax...for example, Jess juxtaposes an excerpt from one of Lomax’s actual letters with an imagined version of the story from Leadbelly’s perspective.”

John William Boone (1864-1927) world-renowned Ragtime pianist.

C

my motto for life

- merit, not sympathy, wins-

my song against death.

E♭

a stroke piano’s

eighty eight mouths. each one sings

hot colors of joy

F

pentatonic black

keys raise up high into bliss,

Here Jess’s writing takes space up on the page visually inviting us to speak it and to hear the conversation. There are natural breaths and line breaks which jump off the page, breaking down tension we feel when reading dense text. The beauty of space on the white page is another inspiration for writing. One can see in this poem that meaning comes by relaxing into the shorter phrase “my song against death” or “hot colors of joy.” Jess models how patterns of speech, or patterns of thought, if we record them directly are already naturally poetic. This is the practice of sculpting verse from the soundscape we live in. Practicing this art teaches us skills artists naturally enjoy, tools to manage our experiences, meanwhile creating a necessary narrative for our community, redemptive, and clarifying. The musical *Hairspray* includes a line “the blacker the berry, the sweeter the wine” a statement of Black power in poetic meter.

The former poet laureate Billy Collins describes the process for drafting a contrapuntal poem “The writing process for contrapuntal poetry is multi-pronged. Poets will find their way into this poetic form based on their tastes, experiences, and explored ideas, but consider the following approaches:

- a. Side by side contrapuntal poem: When crafting the individual poems, consider their relation to each

other, and craft each line to create a legible third poem when combined. You can use the right-hand poem to respond to the words on the left side or use a repeating refrain to add a new harmonic relationship to the poetry.

- b. Venn diagram contrapuntal poem: When using a Venn diagram approach, try creating the middle poem first (the overlapped circles), which can be shorter and communicate the key ideas echoed in the other two left and right poems. Then, flesh out the words that come before and after that poem to fill out the rest of the Venn diagram.

Gathering voices from speech and coming from the environment, sounds and the natural rhythm of conversation makes writing relevant and fun. Listening to the melodies in the words around us brings us closer to an immersive understanding of what we value culturally and personally. Listening to each other speaking, working with found language such as overheard conversation takes the academic work out of writing, making writing accessible as song to a wide audience. By juxtaposing voices, we can appreciate conflicting voices, noting where at times the conflict is necessary to highlight tension and meaning.

A second vocal tradition to practice and study is the chant such as the traditional healer Maria Sabina, a curandera of the Mazatec tradition of visioning. She writes incantatory prose reminding us of our connection to the natural world: “Because I can swim in the immense/Because I can swim in all forms/Because I am the launch woman/Because I am the sacred opossum...Because everything has its origin/And I come going from place to place from the origin”

Chants arise in a simple, repetitive spoken word cadenced framework. Sabina as a melodic carrying case for thoughts and logic. The act of reading together gives us another path to insight with melody, connecting us from generation to generation. Chants are a natural extension of the contrapuntal poem.

Classroom Activities

Lesson One: Commonplace Book

Purpose: Writing across time, students gather quotes from a variety of genres which they come to during their life experiences to create a catalogue of meaningful phrases which connect them to their community and their values. Books are shared as writing-initiated community building conversation.

Activity

Share and go over the components from examples of the seventeenth century through present day commonplace books found in electronic archives such as the Beinecke Rare Books Library and the Yale Center for British Art. It would be best to make your own Commonplace Book, so students connect to your writing aesthetic and values inspiring students by setting a scholarly example.

Students plan and design their Commonplace Book not necessarily in a bound format (formats could include 3D formats such as a box or a flag made from found not purchased resources available. Encourage repurposing, recycling, and upcycling.

Share the wide variety of written sources so students consider, recognize, and discover the breadth of texts in

their everyday lives as they collect quotes for their commonplace book: recipes, songs, maps, captions, indices, maps are examples of appropriate texts.

Exploration of paper: students learn to differentiate between various kinds of paper, exploring qualities like texture, thickness, and color.

Exploration of pens, crayons, pencils, and ink: ballpoint, felt tip. Students find connection to writing through their choice of appropriate tools.

Materials: found objects, paper, pens, scissors, magazines

Lesson Two: Crown of Sonnets

Purpose: As an extended writing assignment, a crown of sonnets gives students a circular form to string together an intensive study of form and content.

Activity: Students develop a program of study based in archival research on a topic of significant interest to the student on which to base their crown of sonnets. A strong example of this work is *American Sonnets for My Once and Future Assassin*, by Terrance Hayes. Hayes explores contemporary political issues infusing the traditional sonnet rhyme structure with internal rhyme and other playful provocations to make the sonnet an inviting long form.

Materials: Examples of crowns of sonnets, recommendations, and guidance for individualized research plans on which to base crowns of sonnets. Rhyme scheme template for Shakespearean sonnet. Organize the collaborative means to connect sonnets on a topic such as "Black Joy." Record, perform and design posters or slides to accompany lyrical writing.

Lesson Three: Erasure

Purpose: Connecting with the writing process by reclaiming complex or poetic texts. Reading and interpreting of, for example, a legal document – the Declaration of Independence, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" – or the Baroque opera *Doriclea* by Cavalli. Erasure allows students to connect to writing by giving them direct agency to identify words and phrases that speak to their experience. Separating out vocabulary, figurative and lyrical language that resonates with a young writer's experience, be it social or personal, they reclaim language for their own purpose. This redemptive practice connects students with a disciplined way to understand text which is not primarily analytical. This exercise trains students to value writing of all kinds, making writing new, making it relevant, making them their own.

Erasure makes an object out of student writing. Black/white, visible/invisible, known, and unknown meanings emerge from a flat text.

Activity: Choose controversial, meaningful classical literary texts for students to explore through the practice of 'erasure' to make new writing.

Materials: base texts of choice, black out markers

Lesson Four: Cooking

Purpose: Meaningful research and book making practice engaging narrative nonfiction writing as the vehicle

for archiving our family culture.

Activity: Students investigate and collect family recipes, histories and family narratives to honor family values and traditions. Teachers help students amplify cultural contexts by encouraging deep conversations and by listening closely to students' stories.

Materials: Preferred writing instruments, paper, thread, glue, thread, needles, scissors

Lesson Five: Gardens and terrariums

Purpose: Writing plans organized to produce tangible and practical academic skills with healthy outcomes for the classroom and student's home lives. For example, students explore native plants to connect to create and maintain green spaces.

Activity: Write a collaborative strategic plan for building a self-contained terrarium from collective resources. Research and gather vases, pots, and plants to beautify and revitalize school grounds and windowsills. Research green spaces and bio swales. Look for help from city park staff.

Materials: containers, soil, plants, cuttings

Lesson Six: Calligraphy

Purpose: Clear away fear about competition and criticism. Hand students the tools to write change-making poetry using contemplative methods to discover openness and change.

Activity: With teacher leading the motions with simple oral instructions using paper, ink, and a brush to make a circle (Enso) on their paper beginning at 7:30p, ending at 6:00p with strong head and shoulders. Students look straight forward, feeling the movement of their brush rather than looking down at the paper.

Following this group calligraphy exercise which synchronizes body and mind, students write spontaneous short form lyric of choice following a template or via improvisation.

The coordinated gesture of painting a circle in pen and ink as a group brings fresh focus to the classroom space opening the possibility for writing narrative in a synchronized moment. By unifying our purpose, strength and creativity emerge. Breaking down conventional writing habits by infusing them with innovative approaches ignites a positive relationship with academic work and with.

Materials: paper, brushes, ink

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

CCSS 11-12.RL.5 Reading Literature: Craft and Structure

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Students will imitate contemporary writers to make new texts with original, relevant content.

CCSS 11-12.W.4 Production and Distribution of Writing

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Students will compose a book of purposeful poetic writing in hand-held forms suitable for exhibition and performance.

CCSS 11-12.W.10 Range of Writing

Write routinely over extended periods (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter periods (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Students will research a topic using digital archives taking the form of a crown of sonnets following Terrance Hayes's example in *Sonnets to My Once and Future Assassin* and Tyehimba Jess's example in *Olio*.

CCSS11-12.L.3 Knowledge of Language

Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Students create and perform narratives based on independent and group research projects to demonstrate and share their understanding of culture and society. Narratives take the form of ritual, 3-dimensional poems, and performance-oriented, scripted collaborations in Black aesthetic styles of Billie Holiday, Bill Lowe, Nathaniel Mackey, Amiri Baraka, and Maria Sabia.

CCSS 11-12.L.5 Vocabulary Acquisition and Language Use

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Students design simple rituals by studying new traditions such as haiku composition, flower arranging, gardening, and ceremony to build and to study healthy community relationship using community building vocabulary from a variety of traditions.

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