

WORDS HAVE POWER

Learning and Writing from Poems and Songs of Enslaved People

Introduction:

This unit introduces students to a unique set of primary sources: poetry written by enslaved people living and working in the United States during the time of the Civil War. Students will practice analyzing poems and songs written about emancipation and freedom by enslaved and formerly enslaved people and will create and perform their own poetry or songs that connects to the content and/or personal connections to perseverance.

State Standards

Common Core State Standards for ELA:

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1](#)
Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.4](#)
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other text
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.10](#)
By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

C3 Standards for Social Studies/History

- D2.His.1.6-8. Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.
- D2.His.4.6-8. Analyze multiple factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.
- D2.His.7.9-12. Explain how the perspectives of people in the present shape interpretations of the past.

Learning Objectives:

- Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source.
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text.
- Identify how the historical context informs analysis of the text.
- Analyze Civil War era poems and songs written by enslaved, formerly enslaved and free Black people, and explore how their words shape our understanding of life in the U.S. during our Civil War.
- Create and perform poems based on prompts or address concepts/ideas that describe obstacles overcome or express meaningful aspects of their lives.

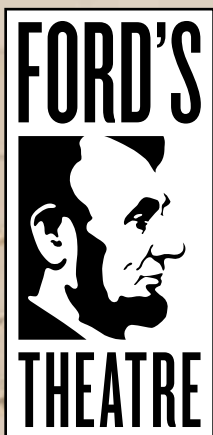
Essential Questions:

- How do the poems and songs of enslaved people, formerly enslaved people and free Black people help shape our understanding of life in the United States during our Civil War? After? Today?
- How does understanding the historical context of a poem/song influence our ability to analyze and make personal connections to it?
- How does creative writing help people share their experiences?

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Grade: 6-8

Length: 10 classes
(Poetry Preloading
Optional)



Classroom Activities

Please note, all resources are linked in the Materials and Resources page at the end of the lesson.

Poetry Preloading (50 minutes)

Introduction to Podium Points and Warm and Cool Feedback Protocol

In order to complete the performance portion of the lesson, students should have basic oratory skills. Please view the videos and share the information below with students prior to the performance piece of the lesson.

Teacher will introduce Podium Points and Warm/Cool Feedback using the videos and anchor charts linked below. The teacher will explain that these skills will be used throughout the analysis, creation and performance stages of the lessons.

The Ford's Theatre Approach to Oratory | Podium Points

- [Podium Points Anchor Video](#)
- [Podium Points Anchor Chart/Poster](#)

The Ford's Theatre Approach to Oratory | Warm and Cool Feedback

- [Warm and Cool Feedback Anchor Video](#)
- [Warm and Cool Feedback Anchor Chart/Poster](#)

The Ford's Theatre Approach to Oratory | The Rhetorical Triangle

- [Rhetorical Triangle Video](#)
- [Rhetorical Triangle Chart/Poster](#)

Discussion:

- What makes someone a powerful public speaker?
- How does the speaker's purpose and intended message influence their choices for tone, pace and emphasis?

Day One (50 minutes)

Anticipatory Set:

Watch Video: [The Hill We Climb](#)

- What do you notice about Amanda's performance? Use the Podium Points to discuss: eye contact, pace, emphasis, posture, presence and any other verbal or physical Podium Points.
- What warm and cool feedback could you offer Amanda?

Read Transcript: [The Hill We Climb](#)

Class Discussion Prompts:

- Who is Amanda Gorman?
- What is her poem about? How does it make you feel?
- When/where was it delivered?
- Who was the intended audience?
- What can you infer about the author's/speaker's purpose from knowing the date, time and audience?

Classroom Activities (continued)

Days Two and Three (110 minutes)

Direct Instruction

NOTE: Before beginning the lesson below, spend five to ten minutes discussing the importance of reading, analyzing and interpreting the words of a person or group of people's lived experiences. Ask students to share a song or poem that moves them and why. Explore how those words become more powerful through poetry and song. Introduce the topic of enslaved/ formerly enslaved poetry and song.

- **Distribute the William Slade poem to students. Look at the title, poem and notes.**
- **William Slade's poem, "[The Slave to His Star](#)"**
 - Students will read along as the teacher reads "[The Slave to His Star](#)."
 - Students will read independently and annotate, focusing on unknown words and phrases.
 1. Create your own annotation guide as a class, use a guide that your school or district already has in place or use the annotation guides below.
 - a. Ford's Oratory Annotation Guide
 - b. [Teaching Tolerance Thinking Notes.pdf](#)
 2. Annotation Example: "The Slave to His Star" (can annotate further than the example demonstrates)
 - a. [Ford's Oratory Annotation Guide](#)
 - b. [Teaching Tolerance Thinking Notes.pdf](#)
 - Discuss as a class: vocabulary, content, author's background, author's purpose
 - Share out words/phrases that students have annotated
 - Discuss the author and context of the poem using [Poem Analysis Graphic Organizer](#)
 1. Discussion Prompts:
 - a. What is this poem about? How does it make you feel?
 - b. When/where was it delivered?
 - c. Who was the intended audience?
 - d. Can you infer anything from the date, time and audience?
 - e. What were the speaker's goals?
 - f. What did the speaker hope to accomplish or convey by sharing this poem?
 - g. What is the message?
 - h. How does this poem resonate or reflect events and emotions?
 - Exit Ticket: Students will write a journal response to three of the questions listed above

Classroom Activities (continued)

Days Four and Five (110 minutes)

Guided Practice

- In groups of three to four, students will choose a poem or song from the Guided Practice Resource List (see materials and resources section) and annotate selected poems/songs, research the author and background of the poem, and complete the [graphic organizer](#) for selected poem or song.
- **Check for Understanding:** Groups present/share out their completed work from the Poem Analysis graphic organizer.

Days Six and Seven (110+ minutes); Day Eight (50 minutes)

Independent/Group Practice; Performance

- **Independently or in groups, students will create poems or songs based on prompts (see prompts below) or personal connections to overcome obstacles. Students will share or perform their poems.**
 - Teachers should create rubrics based on school/district needs.
 - Adapt as needed based on class time and student ability.

Writing Prompts:

- What struggles/obstacles have you overcome in your life?
- How do you cherish your freedom?
- What motivates you to push through hard times?
- Teachers can create additional prompts based on class discussion/lesson.

Day Nine (30 minutes)

Closing: Journal Reflection (student notebooks)

- How do you see your poetry impacting future historians? What can they learn from you about life today?

Assessment:

- **Group Analysis of Poem/Song**
- **Poem and Performance**
- **Self-Created Rubric (Teacher/Student collaboration)**

Materials & Resources

Introduction to Podium Points and War/Cool Feedback; Anticipatory Set:

Amanda Gorman: "The Hill We Climb"

- [Video: The Hill We Climb](#)
- [Transcript: The Hill We Climb](#)
- Resources on Amanda Gorman and youth poetry:
 1. Feel free to create your own annotation guides as a class, use a guide that your school or district already has in place or use the annotation guides below:
 - a. [Amanda Gorman's website](#)
 - b. [Academy of American Poets](#)
 - c. [National Youth Poets](#)

Podium Points

- [Video: The Ford's Theatre Approach to Oratory | Podium Points](#)
- [Podium Points Anchor Chart/Poster](#)

Warm and Cool Feedback

- [Video: The Ford's Theatre Approach to Oratory | Warm and Cool Feedback](#)
- [Warm and Cool Feedback Anchor Chart/Poster](#)

Direct Instruction Resource:

- [Teaching Tolerance Thinking Notes](#)
- William Slade, [The Slave to His Star](#)
- Graphic organizer [Poem Analysis Graphic Organizer](#)
- Annotated example: [The Slave to His Star Annotation Example](#)

Guided Practice Resources:

- [Poem Analysis Graphic Organizer](#)
- Voices Beyond Bondage - <https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2014/11/14/african-american-poetry>
- "American Slavery" by Unknown - <https://scholarlyediting.org/2013/editions/aa.18630912.4.html>
- "Emancipation Song" Jr - <https://scholarlyediting.org/2013/editions/aa.18640130.4.html>

Additional Resources:

- <https://scholarlyediting.org/2013/editions/index.cwnewspaperpoetry.html>

Performance Resources:

- [How to Coach Public Speaking](#)
- [Refining Tone, Pace, Emphasis](#)