

Native Voices: Indigenous American Poetry, Craft and Conversations
Native American Poetry Lesson Plan for 6-12th

This is a lesson plan derived from Tupelo Press' *Native Voices: Indigenous American Poetry, Craft and Conversations* from editors CMarie Fuhrman and Dean Rader. This lesson plan is intended for middle school and high school students and it includes contemporary native poetry especially useful for November, Native American Heritage Month.

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Curriculum

English, Social Studies, History

Anticipation Guide: Print these yes/no questions or conduct a live survey in class.

1. Christopher Columbus and other European explorers “discovered” America.
2. I am aware of current indigenous/Native American social concerns and protests.
3. I can name an indigenous/Native American writer or poet.
4. I know the name of the tribe who’s land this city was founded on.
5. I think we need more education surrounding the history of indigenous and Native American peoples.

Encourage a class discussion about students’ answers. *Why do we think that the indigenous/ Native American community and its history lacks visibility?*

Class Lesson/Discussion

Joy Harjo’s 1990 “Eagle Poem”

Can be accessed on Poetry Foundation here <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46545/eagle-poem> or on page 140 in *Native Voices: Indigenous American Poetry, Craft and Conversations*

Begin by introducing the class to poet Joy Harjo (possible show a photo of the poet). Harjo was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma and is a member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. Her poems feature the themes of storytelling, feminism, myths, and social justice. She is quoted saying, “I feel strongly that I have a responsibility to all the sources that I am: to all past and future ancestors, to my home country, to all places that I touch down on and that are myself, to all voices, all women, all of my tribe, all people, all earth, and beyond that to all beginnings and endings.” Harjo has

been honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Native Writers Circle of the Americas.

As a class, read the poem aloud or play the audio recording of the poem on PoetryFoundation.org

Joy Harjo's 1990 "Eagle Poem"
To pray you open your whole self
To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon
To one whole voice that is you.
And know there is more
That you can't see, can't hear;
Can't know except in moments
Steadily growing, and in languages
That aren't always sound but other
Circles of motion.
Like eagle that Sunday morning
Over Salt River. Circled in blue sky
In wind, swept our hearts clean
With sacred wings.
We see you, see ourselves and know
That we must take the utmost care
And kindness in all things.
Breathe in, knowing we are made of
All this, and breathe, knowing
We are truly blessed because we
Were born, and die soon within a
True circle of motion,
Like eagle rounding out the morning
Inside us.
We pray that it will be done
In beauty.
In beauty.

Discussion Questions

1. Who is the "we" in this poem?
2. To whom is the speaker praying to and addressing in the poem?
3. Where is nature and the natural world represented in the poem and what is it connected to?
4. How does the speaker and her beliefs view life?
5. Note literary devices such as simile, imagery, repetition, etc. and explain how they contribute to the poem's overall mood.

Educators should use this class analysis of the poem in preparation for the group work in the next section of the lesson.

Group/Partner Work

Assign or direct students to pick partners/groups and pick a poet from *Native Voices: Indigenous American Poetry, Craft and Conversations*. The team will present to the class briefly on one of the poems of their choice from the poet's section in the collection.

Some recommended poets are Ishmael Hope, Bojan Louis, Ruby Murray, Simon Ortiz, Leslie Marmon Silko, Luci Tapahonso, dg okpik, Sherwin Bitsui, Heid E. Erdrich, Layli Long Soldier, and Orlando White.

Conclusion

After student presentations bring the class back together for one final discussion. *Educators should emphasize the diversity of voices of the different poets*. Ask the students to make connections and explain common themes they recognized among the poetry.

Optional: Revisit the Anticipation Guide questions and note differences.
