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Poets in Revolt!

by Ola Faleti, with an
introduction by Amanda
Gorman, Inaugural US
Youth Poet Laureate of
America

GRADES 6–10

TYPE

POETRY

**VISUAL, PERFORMING,
AND MEDIA ARTS**

COMMITMENT

4 SESSIONS: 60-90

MINUTES EACH

Hello teachers in revolt!

I'm so incredibly excited for you to bring this
phenomenal curriculum by 826CHI's

Ola Faleti to life. In this lesson, you'll be showing
your students actual historical

examples on the power of the pen. What's more,
you'll help reveal to them the power

within themselves as they write. There's no literary
movement more compelling than

a teacher demonstrating to students how the pen is
mightier than the sword.

As the daughter of a 6th grade English teacher, I've
learned this lesson

instinctively. Growing up, my mother would come
home from a long day at school,

brimming stock-full with stories of So-and-So who
read an advanced book today,

or So-and-So who knows the fastest rap in Hamilton.

Every day, I got the sense that

I wasn't just hearing academic updates on a myriad of students. I was receiving a special window into the lives of students, many of whom were students of color, immigrants themselves or in mixed-status families, and low-income. They understood language in itself as a most potent resistance. In lifting their pens they dared to defy poverty, presumption, and even poetry itself.

I often draw from this idea of poetry as an inherent revolt against the status quo. It's guided me as the Inaugural U.S. Youth Poet Laureate of America, where I'm frequently told not to make my poetry "political." I just smile, because all poetry is political. Just look at how it's been used by all three waves of feminism, as well as the Black Arts Movement. If you need any more evidence, look at how poetry ignites your classroom!

When teachers open students' eyes to the social potential behind poetry, you aren't just teaching revolution. You aren't just participating in it. You're writing it into the very pages of our world.

Here's to happy writing,

Amanda Gorman

Inaugural U.S. Youth Poet Laureate of America

SESSION 1:

YOU WILL NEED

- Projector
- Laptop
- Printed copies of [“God to a Hungry Child” by Langston Hughes](#)
- Printed copies of [“Statistics” by Jim Waters](#) (on page 21 of linked PDF)
- Assorted pens and paper
- M&M’s

BEFORE YOU START

Gather resources, pictures, and/or videos that introduce the Labor Movement to students. In the original workshop by 826CHI, the instructor identified 10 key events from the Labor Movement that provided an overview and timeline for students. We recommend checking out www.history.com to dive in.

HOW TO BEGIN (10 MINUTES)

Start by finding some common ground with Community Agreements. We sometimes call these Writers’ Promises; promises that writers make to each other so they feel safe, supported, free to be curious, free to take creative risks, and free to proudly share their work. Brainstorm these collaboratively and write them on a gigantic sheet of paper, which you’ll hang on the wall during each session.

STEP 1 (10 MINUTES)

M&M Icebreaker

Depending on when you lead this lesson, this M&M icebreaker will get students to know each other and get them thinking about their identity in relationship to the topics at hand: poetry and social change. Ask students to randomly pick one (or two) M&Ms from a bag then answer the question that goes with corresponding color:

- Red – Do you think poetry has a role in today’s world?
- Blue – Do you consider yourself a poet?
- Yellow – Do you know what a revolt is? How would you define a revolt?
- Brown – Do you read poetry? What kind of poems do you like?
- Green – What are some ways you can revolt?
- Orange – Do you think a revolt/revolution has a role in today’s world? Why/why not?

STEP 2 (2 MINUTES)

Give students an overview of the lesson: they will learn about three different social movements and look at the poetry behind them, then write their own poems.

STEP 3 (10 MINUTES)

Spark

Start with examining the language of revolt by sharing a quote from Adrienne Rich. Ask students to discuss their response Rich’s words. What do they agree, disagree, or otherwise connect with? Is there anything that surprised them? Review the bolded key terms.

“Yes, where poetry is **liberative** language, connecting the fragments within us, connecting us to others like and unlike ourselves, **replenishing** our desire...In poetry words can say more than they mean and mean more than they say. In a time of **frontal** assaults both on language and on human **solidarity**, poetry can remind us of all we are in danger of losing – disturb us, **embolden** us out of **resignation** .” – Adrienne Rich

STEP 4 (15 MINUTES)

Labor Movement: Mini Lesson #1

Next, present the Labor Movement overview in 10 key events. Ask students what they know, or think they know, about the Labor Movement before starting. Afterward, check student understanding of the overall scope of the movement by asking: who was revolting? What were they fighting for? What, or who, were they up against? How do we, or workers and employees, benefit from the Labor Movement?

STEP 5 (30 MINUTES)

Poem Share

Pass out copies of two poems from the Labor Movement. As a class, look over two poems, [Langston Hughes’ “God to a Hungry Child”](#) and [“Statistics” by Jim Waters](#) (located on page 21 of linked PDF).

Starting with “God to a Hungry Child”, have students read the poem aloud as a class and then individually.

After reading, discuss the poem as a class. Feel free to provide a list of common poetic devices to your students to help facilitate dialogue.

Read “Statistics” by Jim Waters first as a class and then individually.

Discuss the poem like you did with the first one as a class. Connect both poems back to the Adrienne Rich quote that presented poetry as liberative or liberating. Pose the question to the class:

- What is “liberative” about the language being used in these poems?

STEP 6 (15 MINUTES)

Exquisite Corpse

Using either the first or second line from the poem, “Statistics”, tell students they will be writing a poem as a class, where each student writes one line. Once they have written one line, tell them to fold the paper so only the line they have just written can be seen by the next writer. You may choose to start a few different “chains” to allow for greater engagement among students. Once the entire class has completed the activity, read the poem aloud to close.

SESSION 2:

YOU WILL NEED

- Printed Copies of [“Ego Tripping \(there may be a reason why\)” by Nikki Giovanni](#)
- Printed Copies of [“Caliban in the Coal Mine” by Louis Untermeyer](#)
- Computer
- Projector
- Assorted pens and pencils

BEFORE YOU START

Gather resources, pictures, and/or videos that introduce the Black Arts Movement to students. In the original workshop by 826CHI, the instructor identified 10 key events from the movement that provided an overview and timeline for students. We recommend checking out www.poets.org to dive in.

STEP 1 (5 MINUTES)

Spark

Set the stage for transitioning to the Black Arts Movement by projecting two quotes, one by Roger Baldwin and one by Steven Biko:

“Silence never won rights. They are not handed down from above; they are forced by pressures from below.”—Roger Baldwin

“The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”— Steven Biko

Ask students to choose one quote to respond to in their notebook or journal. What does the quote make them think of? What stands out? After a few minutes, students can share their reactions with a partner and class.

STEP 2 (20 MINUTES)

Mini Lesson #1

Start with a quick recap of the Labor Movement. Ask students to remember what we covered. Then, read (first individually, then aloud) and discuss [Louis Untermeyer's "Caliban in the Coal Mine"](#). In discussion, focus on **repetition** and **rhyme scheme** of the poem.

STEP 3 (20 MINUTES)

The Modern Worker

Ask students: What struggles do you think the modern worker, or student, faces? What's changed and has not changed, according to what you know?

Then, share this poem prompt: Looking at "Caliban in the Coal Mine", write about the modern worker—or student's—struggle. Think of it as a letter, using the person's name that you're writing to to serve as repetition. Use the AB rhyme scheme that Untermeyer uses (aim for 2 stanzas).

Ask students to share out in pairs or small groups. Students may choose to share both stanzas, one stanza, or one line.

STEP 4 (20 MINUTES)

Play the song, “The Corner” by Common, featuring Kanye West and the Last Poets.

Ask the class why this song is relevant to the lesson. After the song/video, transition to talking about the Black Arts movement. Summarize the movement in under 10 major events. Ask students what they know, or think they know, about the Black Arts Movement before starting. Afterward, check student understanding of the overall scope of the movement by asking: who was revolting? What were they fighting for? What, or who, were they up against?

STEP 5 (20 MINUTES)

Poetry Share

Distribute copies of [“Ego Tripping \(there may be a reason why\)” by Nikki Giovanni](#). Read the poem aloud as a class then individually. There are also beautiful audio versions of this poem, read by Giovanni, available online that you may choose to play. Afterwards, discuss the use of afrocentric imagery, history, and tone of the poem. Ask how it connects to the Adrienne Rich quote from session one.

Pose the question to the class:

- What is liberative about the language in this poem?

Point out that many poems from this era were spoken and performed. Ask students to consider how a poem sounds when they begin writing it next class.

SESSION 3:

YOU WILL NEED

- Printed Copies of [“9 Haiku” by Sonia Sanchez](#)
- Printed Copies of [“For Teenage Girls” by Clementine von Radics](#)
- Computer
- Projector
- Assorted pens and pencils

BEFORE YOU START

Gather resources, pictures, and/or videos that introduce the Third-Wave Feminism to students. In the original workshop by 826CHI, the instructor identified 10 key events from the movement that provided an overview and timeline for students.

STEP 1 (10 MINUTES)

Spark

Project the below quote from Gwendolyn Brooks. Ask students to brainstorm what is happening in their life or the world right now that is exciting, disturbing, or otherwise worthy to write about:

“Look at what’s happening in this world. Every day there’s something exciting or disturbing to write about. With all that’s going on, how could I stop?” — Gwendolyn Brooks.

Students should pick one or two things from their list to write about. Students will have five minutes to free write on their topic(s). Once students are done writing, open up the class to share what they wrote about or one line from their piece.

STEP 2 (20 MINUTES)

Mini Lesson #1 (20 Minutes)

Read [Sonia Sanchez's poem "9 Haiku"](#) individually then together as a class. Afterwards, have the class discuss the purpose of the haiku, how the author changes it, and then her word choice.

STEP 3 (15 MINUTES)

Power People Haikus

It's time to write! Pose the prompt to the class: Sanchez's haiku are written about people in power who she admires. Who do you admire? Write 3-5 haikus inspired by them. It can be 1 haiku per person or 3-5 haikus all about 1 person.

Once students are done writing, ask them to share who they wrote about and one line or one haiku with a partner or in small groups.

STEP 4 (15 MINUTES)

Mini Lesson #2

Next, transition into the Third-Wave (or modern) Feminism Movement. Summarize the movement in 10-15 main events. If possible, you could show a relevant clip pertaining to the movement.

STEP 5 (15 MINUTES)

Poetry Share

Read [“For Teenage Girls” by Clementine von Radics](#) individually, then as a class. After, [play the video](#) of the poet performing the piece, then discuss the poem as a class. What is liberative about the language in this piece? About the way it is performed?

SESSION 4:

YOU WILL NEED

- Printed Copies of [“Saturdays” by Ana Castillo](#)
- Computer
- Projector
- Assorted pens and pencils

STEP 1 (10 MINUTES)

Spark

This last session starts with students taking a look inward. Start with a simple “who are you” exercise. Give students 1-2 minutes to list or map all of their identities, or parts of their identity, that they can get down on paper. Then, ask students: Are the identities you listed identities that you think of often? Do you ever feel limited by these identities? Do you face special issues with them? Reflect and write about the liberating and limiting aspects of their identities.

STEP 2 (15 MINUTES)

Mini Lesson #1

Quickly recap the last class by asking students what they remember about Third-Wave Feminism. Mention how all poems are focused on some aspect of each poet’s identity. Think of how identity affects the way you speak/are heard.

Move on to discussion of a second feminist poem, [“Saturdays” by Ana Castillo](#). Read the poem aloud and discuss: What are the aspects of identity can you glean from this? What makes this a feminist poem? Is this liberative?

STEP 3 (20 MINUTES)

I Revolt! (20 Minutes)

Transition into writing time! Students will write their final poem addressing feminism or the identity they chose to write about for the Spark activity. Based on your group, you may consider adding a writing challenge for poets. This could be anything from adding a secret or lie in their poem to incorporating strong, liberative verbs throughout.

STEP 4 (20 MINUTES)

Review and Revise

Bring out all poems that have been written over the course of the lesson. Have students pick their favorite to revise and share. You may choose to create a classroom chapbook comprised of their chosen poems, or plan to host a poetry reading to cap off the lesson.

STEP 5 (10 MINUTES)

Conclusion

Ask students questions such as: What did they learn? Anything you think you'll look at more? What do you think poetry is capable of? How do you think modern poetry will be affected by the current political climate, and how do you think the current political climate will be affected by poetry and other revolting artists?