

SPARKS

Last Times with Amanda Gorman

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GRADES 7–12**TYPE****NARRATIVE
POETRY**

Students recall “last times” in their lives and revisit the depth of their experience through writing.

WHAT YOU WILL DO

This exercise from Inaugural Youth Poet Laureate of the U.S. Amanda Gorman asks students to recall “last times” in their lives and revisit the depth of their experience through writing. The prompts were first introduced by Amanda as part of 826NYC’s quaranTEEN voices program, which connects teens and professional authors around the country. Learn more about quaranTEEN voices [here](#).

To begin, introduce the prompts to students. They can choose the prompt that most resonates with them or respond to both. Either way, encourage students to fully revisit the memory, writing 5-10 minutes without pausing and without filtering their thoughts.

When they finish, students should review and apply both revision tips to further develop and refine their writing.

Prompt 1: Write about the last time you were angry.

This is a prompt to get you to dig into your emotions, and to let them flow rapidly onto the paper. As you write, recall not only why you were angry, but how it felt to have that anger inside you. There are a variety of ways to experience rage—not just emotionally, but physiologically and physically (did your blood feel hot? Was your throat tight? Did your fingers twitch as if

playing keys). Fully allow yourself to remember the sensations, and put them to pressure. Just as a forewarning, this exercise tends to get people to tap into some deep emotions. If you need a cool-down session after letting yourself go red with fury, look no further than the exercise below!

Prompt 2: Write about the last time you were dead wrong.

This is a similar exercise, yet it draws on a few different dimensions of emotions. As you write, think about your mistake, and the journey, process, or moment that brought you to realize that you were wrong. When was the moment when your mind-light switched on, enabling you to see things in a new way? What do you think you could've done differently? And what are some reasons you have for forgiving yourself for your error, even now? This exercise isn't about blaming yourself, but revisiting a memory (even if painful) to reflect on how it has taught you something new and expanded your thinking.

Revision Tips

1. Get as specific as possible with your language. The reason these exercises both call for recent memories is so that you can still remember finite details which will make your writing all the more vivid. For example, we all experience rage, but sometimes in different registers. I hear a lot of people say that when they're angry, they feel fire-hot; I, on the other hand, feel ice-cold. Ask yourself some questions of detail: Where were you in this memory? What time of day was it? During what part of the year? What did your emotions taste like? If other people were present, what were they wearing? What colors do you remember?
2. Cut 10% of your writing! This is something I do with every piece of writing I create. **SAVE YOUR FIRST DRAFT SOMEWHERE ELSE**, but try out another version that takes out a few unnecessary words. Eliminate cliches, the vague words that said something you've already said before, sentences that are unclear, etc. This will help you get to the point faster, and keep your reader engaged. This is especially important when you add more specific detail to your writing, so you can focus on highlighting the descriptions that best serve the story.