

VIDEO

Write With. . . Life Stories: Soundscape Poems with Jason Reynolds

by 826 National and Life
Stories

GRADES 9–12

TYPE

POETRY

PRESENTED BY

LIFE STORIES

You will write a “soundscape” poem filled with familiar sounds of your neighborhood or home.

WHAT YOUR STUDENTS WILL LEARN

About [Life Stories](#)

Life Stories is a non-profit media organization that creates and distributes documentaries, interviews, and educational resources about people whose lives inspire meaningful change. These stories address issues of civics, history, politics, the arts and culture by shining the spotlight on relatable human stories of purpose and meaning in times of change. Life Stories provides open access to all their content for communities and classrooms through their curated website and YouTube channel.

About [The Thread](#)

The Thread is a new documentary interview series by Life Stories, exploring what it means to live a purpose-driven life through conversations with multi-faceted people who have helped shape our society. Each 30-minute episode takes viewers on a personal journey into the life of extraordinary people who candidly share their triumphs and failures. *The Thread* is available on the Life Stories website and YouTube channel, and as a podcast across all major platforms. Teaching *The Thread* brings the series into the classroom with episode

lessons designed to strengthen social emotional learning and media literacy skills and expand the scope of subject matter in Social Studies and English Language Arts. Future seasons of *The Thread* will include similar curricular support.

WHAT YOU WILL DO

Introduction:

In this lesson, Jason Reynolds reflects on his upbringing in Oxon Hill, Maryland, and how his parents gave him freedom and encouraged open communication. Reynolds discusses his approach to connecting with young readers and the importance of literacy, emphasizing how it teaches discipline, persistence, and broadens vocabulary. Please visit “[Jason Reynolds: The Power of Narrative](#)” to see the full lesson provided by Life Stories.

Content Notes:

- While delivering this lesson, it is important to be mindful that every student has a different relationship with the sounds in their homes and neighborhoods. For this reason, we suggest you open up the prompt to other places students go, in addition to the types of neighborhoods mentioned in the lesson. Students could describe the sounds of their after-school program, their grandparents’ home, their place of worship, or their school—anywhere they feel comfortable writing about. Every student should feel welcome to participate.
 - We suggest you screen the video beforehand for topics that might need more historical or cultural context to help students access the full meaning of the speaker’s story. [The lesson](#) provided by Life Stories offers discussion questions to help your students dig deeper.
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STEP 1

Begin by watching the introduction of Jason Reynolds’s *The Thread* interview: 0:34–3:43. In the first three minutes, Jason Reynolds recounts the “soundscape” of his old neighborhood. **A *soundscape* is the sounds of a particular location, when considered as a whole.**

For this exercise, we recommend viewing the introduction two times:

1. First, watch and listen as Jason Reynolds describes his home and his childhood neighborhood. What does Reynolds remember most about where he grew up?
2. Watch again, and this time, jot down the specific sounds Jason Reynolds shares from his home and neighborhood. Notice the different types of sounds he remembers and how he shares these sounds.

STEP 2

Next, think about the sounds of your home and neighborhood. You can use the place where you live currently, a neighborhood from your childhood, or a neighborhood you visit often and know very well. Use the Brainstorm Activity on page 1 of the [Soundscape Poems—Handout](#) to guide you in this process.

***Educator Note:** After students complete the brainstorm activity, ask for volunteers to share one sound from their neighborhood. As you go around the room, you will create a soundscape together as a class. To take the idea of a soundscape even further, you could have students share in two rounds: For the first round, ask volunteers to share one sound each, one at a time. For the next round, ask students to share their sounds together, repeating their sound and playing off of the other sounds in the room (it’s OK to get silly!) to create a new, collective sound.*

STEP 3

Now, it's time to write a soundscape poem! You will weave together all the sounds you've identified from your neighborhood into one cohesive piece of writing. Think about how the sounds interact and build upon one another in your neighborhood. How might you capture this environment of sound in one poem? Here are couple ideas to get you started:

- **Play with onomatopoeias.** Onomatopoeias are sound effect words like *buzz*, *chirp*, and *bang*. Give the reader a tour of your neighborhood, using onomatopoeias to bring the scene to life.
- **Start with the story.** Do any of the sounds work together in harmony? Tell the story of these sounds and where they come from.

Finally, write your poem on page 2 of the handout.

MATERIALS

- Jason Reynolds: The Power of Narrative – *The Thread* video
- [Soundscape Poems—Handout](#)
- Writing journal and writing utensil