

Title: Poem Painting

Grade Level: K-5

Objective: Have students practice their listening skills, and stretch their imaginations as they use auditory and visual skills to interpret a poem, and communicate expressively about their interpretation.



Lesson Plan

Materials: heavy media paper/watercolor paper, pencils, erasers, paint, paintbrushes, water, poems!

Opening Activity: Choose between 1-5 poems from this site- and print them ahead of time. Poems from the African American Experience:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/101640/celebrating-black-history-month> (I have included a few on the following pages, in case you do not have time to choose and print your own.) February is "Black History Month," a time to commemorate African-Americans who have changed the world.

Core Activity:

- In this exercise you are going to DRAW and PAINT what you hear!
- Listen to the poem or poems read to you by the staff. First, on a separate piece of paper, write down your interpretation of the poem. Here are some questions to get you thinking! What do you think the poem is about? What ideas or themes did you hear in the poem? What words jumped out to you? How did the poem make you feel? What did you like about the poem? What didn't you like about the poem? What did you hear that you DIDN'T understand?
- Take your understanding of the poem and create a work of art ABOUT a work of art! Start with pencil, sketching out a scene, image or representation of a feeling from the poem. Use the WHOLE piece of paper. Paint your interpretation of the poem.

Reflection: As members help clean up the space, ask them: Is it different to respond to poetry with a painting? Did you listen to the poem differently because you were making art out of your listening experience? Did you like the poem, or dislike the poem?



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Billie Holiday

BY E. ETHELBERT MILLER

sometimes the deaf
hear better than the blind

some men
when they first
heard her sing

were only attracted
to the flower in her hair

Ethelbert Miller, "Billie Holiday" from *First Light: New and Selected Poems*. Copyright © 1994 by Ethelbert Miller. Reprinted by permission of Black Classic Press.

Source: *First Light: New and Selected Poems* (1994)

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Caged Bird

BY MAYA ANGELOU

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream

his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

Maya Angelou, "Caged Bird" from *Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?* Copyright © 1983 by Maya Angelou. Used by permission of Random House, an imprint and division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

Source: *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou* (Random House Inc., 1994)

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Harlem

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes, "Harlem" from *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. Copyright © 2002 by Langston Hughes. Reprinted by permission of Harold Ober Associates, Inc.

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I, Too

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

Langston Hughes, "I, Too" from *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. Copyright © 2002 by Langston Hughes. Reprinted by permission of Harold Ober Associates, Inc.

Source: 2004

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Lift Every Voice and Sing

BY JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

A group of young men in Jacksonville, Florida, arranged to celebrate Lincoln's birthday in 1900. My brother, J. Rosamond Johnson, and I decided to write a song to be sung at the exercises. I wrote the words and he wrote the music. Our New York publisher, Edward B. Marks, made mimeographed copies for us, and the song was taught to and sung by a chorus of five hundred colored school children.

Shortly afterwards my brother and I moved away from Jacksonville to New York, and the song passed out of our minds. But the school children of Jacksonville kept singing it; they went off to other schools and sang it; they became teachers and taught it to other children. Within twenty years it was being sung over the South and in some other parts of the country. Today the song, popularly known as the Negro National Hymn, is quite generally used.

The lines of this song repay me in an elation, almost of exquisite anguish, whenever I hear them sung by Negro children.

Lift every voice and sing
 Till earth and heaven ring,
 Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
 Let our rejoicing rise
 High as the listening skies,
 Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
 Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
 Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.
 Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
 Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
 Bitter the chastening rod,
 Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
 Yet with a steady beat,
 Have not our weary feet
 Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
 We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
 We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
 Out from the gloomy past,

Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand.
True to our God,
True to our native land.

Source: *Complete Poems* (2000)

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Praise Song for the Day

BY ELIZABETH ALEXANDER

A Poem for Barack Obama's Presidential Inauguration

Each day we go about our business,
walking past each other, catching each other's
eyes or not, about to speak or speaking.

All about us is noise. All about us is
noise and bramble, thorn and din, each
one of our ancestors on our tongues.

Someone is stitching up a hem, darning
a hole in a uniform, patching a tire,
repairing the things in need of repair.

Someone is trying to make music somewhere,
with a pair of wooden spoons on an oil drum,
with cello, boom box, harmonica, voice.

A woman and her son wait for the bus.
A farmer considers the changing sky.
A teacher says, *Take out your pencils. Begin.*

We encounter each other in words, words
spiny or smooth, whispered or declaimed,
words to consider, reconsider.

We cross dirt roads and highways that mark
the will of some one and then others, who said
I need to see what's on the other side.

I know there's something better down the road.
We need to find a place where we are safe.

We walk into that which we cannot yet see.

Say it plain: that many have died for this day.
Sing the names of the dead who brought us here,
who laid the train tracks, raised the bridges,

picked the cotton and the lettuce, built
brick by brick the glittering edifices
they would then keep clean and work inside of.

Praise song for struggle, praise song for the day.
Praise song for every hand-lettered sign,
the figuring-it-out at kitchen tables.

Some live by *love thy neighbor as thyself*,
others by *first do no harm or take no more
than you need*. What if the mightiest word is love?

Love beyond marital, filial, national,
love that casts a widening pool of light,
love with no need to pre-empt grievance.

In today's sharp sparkle, this winter air,
any thing can be made, any sentence begun.
On the brink, on the brim, on the cusp,

praise song for walking forward in that light.

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Source: *Praise Song for the Day* (Graywolf Press, 2009)

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