



## **Exploring Citizenship and Racial Justice through African American Poetry**

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Recommended for:  
Grades 11-12

**Keywords:** Connotation, Theme, Tone, Citizen, Empathy, Text Structure

**Teaching Standards:** See [Appendix 1](#)

**Synopsis:** As I embark on my sixth year at Rocky River High School, I have become well acquainted with the climate of the upperclassmen at Rocky River High School. Some students plan to follow the path of academia after high school, but a number of students, whether they have a plan or not, really struggle to understand how their life can contribute to their communities and the world. The difficulty with understanding their roles in the world that surrounds them seems to come from various factors including a need to become more self-aware and to connect to American History. Additionally, I have also observed that students desire this knowledge, but they do not learn how to initiate the pathway for realization that they can use towards their goals. Therefore, they lack the ability to be attentive about the effects of their actions as well as how this country's foundation has affected them. In this unit, I plan to bring attention to some of the issues that young scholars have within themselves because of racial injustices and other forms of discrimination and to help them connect with authors that have shared their experiences. Additionally, students will express their perspectives on their communities while also exploring the lives of African American writers who have embarked on a similar journey. Students will explore poetry by a group of diverse writers, with a concentration on Black writers, in order to learn how writers have started on the path of self-awareness while also testifying about the environments within which they commit to being a citizen.

*I plan to teach this unit during the Fall semester of the 2020-2021 school year to approximately 60 11th grade English III students.*

*I give permission for the Institute to publish my curriculum unit and synopsis in print and online. I understand that I will be credited as the author of my work.*

## **Introduction**

### Rationale

Due to the various racial and ethnic demographics at Rocky River High School, students have personal encounters with citizenship, acceptance, and belonging. There are students who are first generation American citizens, on the path to graduate high school, and are encouraged by their families to live the American dream that they struggled and strived to achieve independence. These families come from all over the world, but majorities of them come from Spanish speaking countries. With that being said, at one point, there is constant fear concerning government policies and ICE that has, for many of our students, separated them from some of their loved ones. Therefore, in this unit, as we explore African American poetry, my students will understand that using one's voice to express the struggle for belonging in America can encourage others and help to love one's identity despite the rejection one may experience within a country.

Additionally, this unit aims to help students connect to literature and to inspire them to evaluate the state of our society. By studying, analyzing, and discussing these various forms of expression, students will not only see value of expressing thoughts but also, how to be artistic through the use and understanding of literary techniques. Students will learn literary works from various periods in order to see that the human experience stretches across generations. This will hopefully help students understand that age is not an excuse to be silent. Regardless of generational differences, sharing thoughts about injustice and representation or a lack thereof, can benefit all people.

### Demographics

At 10 years old, River High School is comparatively one of the newer public schools within Charlotte-Mecklenburg. As of now, Rocky River High School has approximately 1,600 students and class sizes range between 25-38 students. Out of the 1,600 students, approximately 60% are Black, approximately 30% are Hispanic/Latino, and approximately 10% are white. The racial dynamic of Rocky River is not reflective of the Mint Hill Community where it resides as Mint Hill is approximately 77% white. The differences have affected how students, teachers, and administrators see themselves in the surrounding environment. Prior to dismissal due to Covid-19, based on conversations among the staff, as well as news coverage, a majority of the Mint Hill community neglected to highlight the positive achievements of students, and instead focused on fears of criminal behavior. Recently, however, the community invited Rocky River staff and community members to participate in a peaceful protest for Black Lives. This seems to be a step in the right direction in order to integrate our staff and students in the Mint Hill community. Additionally, to bridge the gap, teachers and staff members make consistent efforts to relationships with some of the local churches and the nursing home located directly across the street from our school. Despite the generational and ethnic differences, Rocky River believes it will be beneficial to form supportive and positive relationships.

Being culturally responsive is another focal point. Cultural responsiveness is not just limited to racial and ethnic background knowledge, but it is also an effort to understand our students' social norms as well as cultural practices within their homes. Rocky River High School serves a population of students who mostly come from low-income households at 64 percent. Daily

lessons, school activities, and parent communication is organized based on the needs of our families. Since the impact of Covid-19, being in touch with families looks very different, as we had to diligently contact parents using multiple forms of communication, either due to lack of flexibility, or due to lack of resources. Several of our students were “lost” initially, and teachers, counselors, and social workers had to come together to find ways to make contact only to discover that a number of our students were essential workers or were required by their families to work within their family businesses. Prior to Covid-19, some of our clubs and organizations created mentoring opportunities and promoted opportunities to help our students explore options for college that catered to their financial needs. For example, “Lunch and Learn” programs offered students the opportunity to meet professionals and entrepreneurs from Charlotte during their lunchtime. These activities were quite beneficial, as we noticed a need for our students to explore the community within the walls of the school because they may lack access to transportation resources. However, since Covid-19 dismissal from school, we lost the opportunity to work with students within these influential programs, so there has been a disparity when it comes to guiding students on their path to the next level in their lives.

### Unit Objectives

At the end of this unit, students will accomplish the following:

- Understand themes concerning racial injustice and be able to empathize with writers.
- Explore issues of racial injustice and evaluate how these issues are addressed in literature
- Through discussion of texts, explore how matters of racial injustice impacts their view of citizenship
- Communicate ideas and concepts that are expressed in the poems as well as share their interpretations as it relates to personal experiences.
- Formulate reflections that show evolution of thought while utilizing standard grammar and organized structure.
- Organize a presentation through distance learning on a multimedia platform.
- Demonstrate an understanding of literary devices and use those devices to create their own poems

The majority of our population at Rocky River High School is Black and Hispanic. I currently teach two Honors English III classes and one Standard English class. Generally, the number of students I teach are somewhere between 100 and 110 per semester. For the current semester, I have 105 students and in the spring, I will have about the same number. Teaching this curriculum is truly a challenge because I am incorporating it with the lessons that my professional learning community (PLC) has developed. We are following our lessons according to the American History timeline in our English Literature textbooks and the modules posted in Canvas by Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools. I have chosen to individually incorporate this unit within our lessons that focus primarily on poetry and I have shared some of the poems with my colleague. I do not have any students that require an IEP and since we are learning virtually, I do not have any direct behavioral issues. In the past, however, a number of my students have taken a great interest in African American literature and poetry because many of them feel as though it is not taught enough in schools. Whenever I teach about slavery or the Harlem Renaissance, they are amazed at the work and art that comes as result of people who have struggled towards acceptance in America.

Additionally, I am glad to use this unit as a way to inspire my students who may be able to identify with the poets, however, this is very challenging to teach for all of my students regardless of which level of English they are assigned. Many students do not understand or remember what they have learned in American history, therefore, the context, for a lot of the literature is lost or misunderstood unless I intentionally focus on the history. Therefore, I believe in highlighting artists that not only talk about the struggle of black people in America, but also artists that reveal light-heartedness and loving experiences so that information will resonate.

## **Content Research**

### Overview of Unit Terminology

#### *Connotation*

In English III, we define Connotation as the “deeper meaning” in the text with literary devices. Some examples are Similes, Metaphors, Onomatopoeia, and Allusions. Each poem presented in this unit varies in its connotative meaning, for example, *Requiem for a Nest* by Wanda Coleman is an extended metaphor that defines the perils of society that surround the “nest” of a bird raising her babies. Another example of connotative meaning is found in *I, too* as Hughes responds to Whitman’s, *I Hear America Singing*. While Hughes refers to Black people in positions of servitude, he uses the idea of “sitting at the table” to be a symbol for acceptance for Black people in American society.

#### *Text Structure*

I typically define text structure in poetry as “the shape of the poem” as a poem may follow a construct including patterns, grammatical form, length, and organization. While using the TPCASTT Graphic organizer, students will be able notice whether the structure of the poetry has an effect on connotative meaning. To show examples of various structures in African American Poetry, these are poems that teachers may find helpful: *Primer for Blacks* by Gwendolyn Brooks and *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* by Langston Hughes.

In *Primer for Blacks*, by Gwendolyn Brooks uses various structures within her text between the forms of the poem through capitalization. In this poem, Brooks uses repetition of the word “Black” and uses dash marks to create moments to pause and emphasis. Towards the end of the poem, Brooks begins to use capitalization in non-traditional ways. She capitalizes words like “COLORED” or “NEGRO” in order to stress the theme, which is that Black people should be proud of their heritage. She strategically capitalizes the “WASH” in Washington as she alludes to George Washington and his effect on Black people in America during his presidency. The style is powerful and unique, and it is an example of a contemporary message about accepting one's identity.

In *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, there is also Rhythm and repetition. The refrain states, “I’ve known Rivers.” The speaker talks about African Americans and their connections to the rivers and civilizations of Africa and America. He also uses “I” at the beginning of most of the lines which further emphasizes personal experience.

#### *African American Poetry*

Students should learn about the historical context behind African American writers in poetry. It is crucial that they understand that literacy was forbidden for Black people in America for hundreds of years, and as a result, there are few written accounts of their lives written by Black people in America until the year 1760. Jupiter Hammon becomes the first Black poet published in North America with his poem “An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ, with Penitential [sic] Cries,” then Phillis Wheatley who arrived in Boston, purchased by her new owner, John Wheatley. The Wheatley family taught her to read and to write, resulting in her being the first woman of African descent to be published in America. Students may view [Phillis Wheatley: African American Author](#), which explains the Wheatley’s journey from Africa to America. Even still, Black people were threatened by racists constructs. Despite the threats, some of the most well-known American pieces were written by Black people including Frances Watkins Harper, Frederick Douglass, James D. Corrothers, Claude McKay, and Zora Neal Hurston, just to name a few. They should observe a timeline of various works leading in to poets such as Nikki Giovanni and later on, Wanda Coleman. Since then Black people continued to express themselves poetically, and their works still reflect some of the struggles we see in society today.

### *Tone*

Students will observe the tone in the poetry. Tone is the writer’s attitude about a specific subject and is shared through the author’s word choice. I typically use, Whitman’s *I Hear American Singing* and Hughes’, *I, Too Sing America* to make comparisons in the author’s tone. Each poem references the same topic; however, the speakers share different perspectives about their American Experience. In *I, Too* there is a tone that reflects rejection and determination as the author seeks equality and acceptance in America. Whitman’s Poem carries an airy and light experience as White American’s swiftly work towards the American dream. Both are reflective of their roles as people in the American society, but they vary in experiences.

### *Theme*

The Theme of a text is the life lesson or the moral message. Students often confuse Topics with the word Theme. It is important to stress that discovering the Theme requires an understanding of the Topic and then an explanation of what the author wants readers to learn about the Topic.

### *Themes in African American Literature*

African American poetry expresses the Black American experience by promoting culture, civil rights, and history. The themes include topics that deal with the struggle for freedom, identity, Black History, expression, and community. Themes concerning the struggle for freedom, for example, reiterate that civil rights was a hard, yet a necessary endeavor. Through that lesson, readers learn that the lack of acceptance and civil rights have contributed to the difficulty of self-identity and the struggle being accepted as citizens within the American society. *I, Too* and *On Being Brought from Africa to America* open discussions about citizenship and acceptance or a lack thereof. *Friendship* and *Requiem for a Nest* express ideas about community and its impact on one’s emotional wellness or one’s demise.

### *Jim Crow*

To add context to the poetry and history behind the poems, students should understand the Jim Crow era. Jim Crow laws were named after a Black minstrel show character that poked fun at Black people and their exterior qualities. These laws began as early as 1865, immediately following the ratification of the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery in the United States. White citizens, especially in the confederacy, were angry about the emancipation of slaves, and as a result, formulated way to intimidate, dishearten, and demean Black people as a way to maintain power over money, land, and other means of progression. These laws were enforced at the state and local level and was responsible for the legalization of racial that segregation. The laws were in effect for about 100 years, and currently, these laws have had an impact on our United States Justice system. These laws were intended to keep African Americans from progressing by denying them the right to vote, hold jobs, by land and housing, obtain an education, be treated with quality medical care, and many other rights were denied to them as American citizens. If people objected to these rules or promoted action against them in any way, they were faced with arrest, fines, jail sentences, violence and death.

Students should have a clear understanding of these laws in order to understand how Black people endured racial inequality post slavery. As intended, the effects of the Jim Crow laws are prevalent through systemic racism. The poetry that we are using in this unit reflect the effects of Jim Crow on Black people, but, furthermore, students will be challenged to connect with the History behind the poems through exploring their personal experiences with citizenship and how their identity has been shaped through their American experiences.

#### *Willy Lynch (Honors):*

As an extension exercise, students may study the Willy Lynch Letter and relate it to how these ideas have influenced the way Black people view themselves and how they have been viewed historically and presently in America. “The letter is said to be a speech delivered by Willie Lynch on the bank of the James River in the colony of Virginia in 1712. Lynch was a British slave owner in the West Indies. He was invited to the colony of Virginia in 1712 to teach his methods to slave owners there. In his speech Lynch said that he had a foolproof method for controlling Black slaves” (McTier).

#### *Citizen*

Students will initially engage in conversation about how they define citizenship through a series of questions on the first day of the lesson. Then we will explore its formal definition as defined by the Fourteenth Amendment that states, “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and the State wherein they reside.” By engaging with the formal definition, we will informally discuss the conflicts that current citizens face regarding the lack of acceptance between citizens of various ethnicities.

#### *Empathy*

Through conversations and bullying, racial differences, and mental health within our schools and by the CMS District, empathy is a topic that resounds. I am choosing to focus on this word as a way of explaining how students can connect with writers and their peers by “putting themselves in another person’s shoes.” As with the term, citizen, I will give students the opportunity to

informally express their definition of empathy and then, they will use their Chromebook as a resource to look up a formal definition. As an educator, I prioritize emotional wellness, and in doing so, the hope is to help students connect with their personal feelings concerning the shared experiences in the poetry.

## **Instructional Implementation**

### Teaching Strategies

*Activity Title:* Poetry and Identity

#### *Objectives:*

Students will explore African American poetry with the TPCASTT method by developing an eye for language that reflects citizenship and identity. They will also construct narratives through individual poems that reflect their identities within places they consider themselves as citizens.

Begin the unit by exploring how students view themselves in their home environment. They will follow the instructions below:

First, using colorful and descriptive language, in five to seven sentences, describe these locations in your home or in a place you consider home: The kitchen, your bedroom, the common area, and the exterior directly outside of the residence.

Next, use descriptive language that will appeal to the reader's five natural senses in your descriptions by asking yourself the following questions: What do these environments sound like? What colors are in the space? Is there a smell that brings memories? How does the atmosphere make you feel? Is it welcoming, comfortable, or inviting? Do you have memories from early childhood at this place and what aspects grant your most fond memories? What makes this location yours?

Through these guiding questions, I hope to get specific details about students' experiences within the environments where they consider themselves citizens. This will also give us the opportunity to discuss, share, and compare their perspectives of the surrounding environment and experiences within that environment.

In the next part of the introductory assignment, students will respond to a series of questions that reflect how their communities have shaped their identity or places where they consider themselves citizens. In an open discussion within Break Out Rooms, they will share responses to the following questions:

How would you describe your identity in three sentences? Describe the community you consider yourself a citizen. How has this community shaped your identity?

Next, students should learn and research information about American history concerning slavery and Jim Crow Laws. By studying this history, students will have an understanding of the writers' point of view and they will use the opportunity to relate ails of present day society to America's past through their personal poetry. Honors students may also read the "Willie Lynch Letter" and

discuss the long-term impact of a slavery and its impact on the current identity of African American People. I would challenge them to relate these negative intentions to events they have personally witnessed. Students should be encouraged to use online resources to study, discuss, learn and then present about the following poems using the TPCASTT method:

“On Being Brought from Africa to America” by Phyllis Wheatley

“I Hear America Singing” by Walt Whitman

“I, Too, Sing America” by Langston Hughes

“Requiem for a Nest” by Wanda Coleman

“Friendship” by Nikki Giovanni

The next task that we will explore will allow students to read each poem and explore how they reflect belonging and citizenship. Students will explore the poetry using TPCASTT as a method that explores the elements of poetry. Each letter represents the following: Title, Paraphrase, Connotation, Attitude, Shift, Title, and Themes. In groups, students will present the poems using TPCASTT through a Google Slide Presentation.

After exploring these poems through TPCASTT presentations in their groups, students will independently write a brief description (3-5 sentences) of how these poems reflect ideas about belonging. Then, they will describe how the speakers of the poem display personal identity (3-5 sentences). This will lead students into using their personal environmental descriptions to write their own poems that reflect their personal citizenship or identity.

## **Classwork and Instruction**

*Day 1:*

Warm Up

First, students will define the following terms: Identity, Citizenship, Connotation, Empathy, Text Structure. They will use their Chromebooks for resources to locate definitions.

Next, they will discuss these word meanings in small groups (3-4 students) or in Breakout Rooms on Zoom and then we will review these meanings in a whole group discussion. They will maintain these same groups for the upcoming group assignment. As we are in whole group discussion, we will take the opportunity to discuss what they discovered about citizenship and empathy on a personal level. Students will be encouraged to share examples during the discussion.

Classwork

Students will respond to the opening questions about their citizenship experiences and identities in a journal. Students have the option to share their writing with the class in a whole group discussion. They will write about their home environment or a place they consider a home by responding to the following questions:



What do these environments sound like? What colors are in the space? Is there a smell that brings memories? How does the atmosphere make you feel? Is it welcoming, comfortable, or inviting? Do you have memories from early childhood at this place and what aspects grant your most fond memories? What makes this location yours?

Next, students will be introduced to TPCASTT using the TPCASTT Graphic Organizer. I will post the TPCASTT Chart by sharing my screen on Zoom or post a life sized chart of the graphic organizer. We will first review each element of the acronym TPCASTT and then use *Friendship* by Nikki Giovanni for our example. I will then ask the students to assist me with filling in the elements of the chart either voluntarily or through code calling. The purpose of doing this is to model the use of TPCASTT. Students will also understand that their TPCASTT graphic organizers will be converted to a Google Slide presentation for presenting their findings.

*Day 2-4:*

Warm Up:

Review the elements of TPCASTT. Students should be familiar with each of the components as well as how to identify them in a work of poetry. They should also be able to share how these components impact the meaning of a poem.

Classwork:

Students will reconvene with their groups to explore assigned poetry by filling out their own TPCASTT Charts. Next, they will discuss presentation style for their poems. Students are required to put their presentations on a Google Slide as well as incorporate relevant images and/videos that will assist in explaining the meaning of their poems. They will be responsible for teaching the class what they learned about their poems through TPCASTT and then they will explain how the poem reflects ideas about their identity and their perspectives on citizenship. While students are in groups, it is important that each group member share their personal experience with identity and citizenship as it relates to the poem.

Students will have two days to complete these projects. Project will be presented starting on day five. Before students begin working, we will review the grading rubric for this group assignment.

*Day 5:*

Warm Up:

Introduce the assignments by review TPCASTT and the Presentation Grading Rubric. Reviewing the grading rubric is important so that students present and organized project.

Classwork:

First, Students will present their group assignments. Since this will happen over Zoom, students that are not speaking will “Mute” their microphones to prevent distracting noises. Every student in the group is responsible for speaking. Therefore, students will be responsible for assigning

individuals to present each aspect of the TPCASTT Chart and each student in the group will present the portion of the project that reflects their personal experiences.

Once assignments are completed, students will complete a reflection by showing how their personal identity or experience with citizenship relates to the poem they were assigned. They will complete this task in their journals. Students may use these guiding questions to assist with their reflection:

Which idea is mostly reflected in your assigned poem, identity or citizenship? How are the speaker's ideas about him/herself similar or different from your ideas about yourself? What makes the speaker feel accepted/unaccepted? Have you had similar experiences? What events shaped those experiences?

### *Day 6*

Warm Up:

Students will share their reflections (voluntary)

Classwork:

First, Students will reflect on the poems that have been introduced.

Once they are finished reviewing, students will construct their own poems that reflect ideas of identity and/or citizenship. Students will follow the grading rubric for writing a poem. We will review the grading rubric for poems before students begin their writing pieces. Students should consider the poems we have studied as well as their journal entries when constructing their poems.

### *Demonstration of Learning:*

Students will have presentations graded on a rubric based on the Common Core Standards and fulfillment of the tasks' instructions. Students will also show mastery of writing a narrative poem by following guidelines of a rubric. Both of these assignments are considered a formal grade.

Students will be assessed informally throughout this unit. The initial TPCASTT activity that we complete as a class is informal and a participation grade. Students will also be graded for completion of their journal entries. The first journal assignment is the opening task where students will evaluate themselves within the guise of what they consider to be their homes, and then the next journal entry is the reflection to be completed at the end of their group presentations. Reflective journal entries should address the following questions:

What did you learn about yourself while working with your group? What did you find most interesting about the poem that was assigned to your group? What aspect of the project do you think could be improved and how can those improvements be implemented? And finally, what do you think your group did extremely well?

## **Extension Activities:**

### 1. *Make Poetry Relative Activity:*

#### *Objective:*

Students will gain a greater appreciation for how poetry reflects society with text structure and vocabulary. Students will also make societal connections to poetic expression. By exploring figurative language, vocabulary and technical meanings, students will learn the elements needed to refine written expression. They will also determine central idea, themes, and learn how to collectively develop ideas with their peers.

#### *Instructions for teacher:*

To prepare for this assignment, the teacher should research up to five current events that capture the themes and topics covered that are addressed in the poetry for this unit. The teacher will need to ensure that students have access to all five events whether they are online or printed. The teacher should underline between three to five words within each article for a context clues activity. It may also benefit the students if the teacher displayed or shared media reports that cover the events in order to provide students with a visual representation of the texts. After locating the articles, the teacher can assign independent reading of the articles, group reading, or whole class reading. The purpose of reading the articles is to allow students an opportunity to determine which of the articles are most relevant to their assigned poetry. The teacher may choose to assign this activity as an independent task or paired task. It is not suggested to complete this assignment in groups because of the detailed reading and writing involved. The following steps explain preparation:

- Locate five news articles (Should be current events within the last 3 years).
- Ensure students have access to the articles and have been assigned a poem.
- Locate pertinent vocabulary and underline the words or make a list of them to provide for students.
- The teacher may assign the articles with the poems to match or the teacher can examine, with the students, each one of the articles, and allow students to choose which article is most relevant to their assigned poem.
- Teachers may assign students in pairs or they may work independently.
- If students are working in pairs, each person is expected to examine and comprehend the article and the poem collectively.
- It is suggested that the teacher assign the current events for homework. By assigning the reading outside of class, students can use more of that time to discuss the poetry as it correlates with the current event. Reading the articles during class may be helpful for struggling readers.
- The teacher should also identify the vocabulary that students are expected to understand during the course of the assignment.

#### *Student Instructions (with partners):*

- Identify the poem that you have been assigned. We will further examine this poem with your TPCASTT activity and with one assigned current event.
- With your partner, review the meaning of your assigned poem.
- Next, read the article that has been assigned to you and your partner. Notice the underlined words and find the definitions or use context clues to discover the meanings of these words. In your notes, copy the words and explain how the writer's use of each word has an impact on the meaning of the text.
  
- After reading reviewing your poetry and reading the article, discuss the following questions with your partner and develop your responses in a google slide presentation:
  - Summarize the article
  - Which aspects of the article stand out to you the most? Explain your reasoning.
  - Did your article have any images attached? If so, how do the images affect the meaning or the theme of the article
  - Based on the TPCASTT, how is this current event relative to your assigned poem?
  - Chose 2 or 3 lines from your poem that are reflected in the article and explain the relationship between the two.
  - If you could change the poem by using the vocabulary from the context clues exercise, which words would you use and where would you use them in the poem?
  - Rewrite a stanza in your assigned poem using two or three of the words from the article. Does this change affect the tone? Why or why not?
  - After responding to these questions, transition these responses in to a Google Slides presentation. The presentation may include pictures or videos that are relative to the poem and/or the article. Each slide should address the questions above in the order they were given.
  - During the presentation, ensure that both individuals alternate speaking on behalf of the partnership.

## 2. *Poetic Response Activity:*

### *Objective:*

Students will be able to make poetry personal by responding to the speaker of their assigned poem. They will continue to explore figurative language and apply it to a personal writing piece.

### *Instructions for Student:*

Using any of the poems that we have studied in this unit, students will write an original piece as a response to a poem of their choice. Their original pieces should involve the elements of TPCASTT and students will be graded based on the poetry rubric. The response can be in agreement with the speaker or against the speaker, but there should be a detectable theme as well as connotative meaning.

## 3. *Podcast Discussion Activity:*

*Objective:*

Students will be able to have an open discussion by reading and research content dealing with current events and poetry that we have studied in class. They will exchange ideas in an academic setting, initiate conversation, propose and respond to questions, and challenge their peers. They will also learn how to produce a podcast with a planned introduction and well-constructed closing statement.

*Instructions for the Teacher:*

Completing a podcast is very similar to a Socratic Seminar as students will have the opportunity to take command of the conversation at hand and also learn from each other through organized conversation and research. Students will have the opportunity to converse with their peers in the academic setting; however, this will be recorded. Because they are recording, students have the opportunity to listen again to their commentary and evaluate themselves. It also gives teachers the opportunity to listen to students and make direct comments on information that they may otherwise miss through a regular conversation. Teachers should send home a permission slip to record students prior to this activity. Teachers can develop their own permission slips that ask parents for permission to record and for permission to share the recording with students in the class or with teachers at the school. Students may find an interest in podcasting and may want to elevate this skill for other platforms. If students choose to do so, they should consult with the teacher and with their parents or Guardians to take the next steps.

First, teachers can share examples of podcast episode through the use of Spotify, Apple podcast or through episodes that are posted on YouTube. There are various podcast episodes that deal with African American poetry and art that teachers can use. TED Talks Daily and Michelle Obama have podcasts, but if you'd like to find something that is covered in school, these are two other recommended podcasts for students: "Stuff You Missed in History Class," which is little-known history facts, or "Hidden Brain" which educates students on psychology and social sciences.

After sharing these examples, teachers should ask students about their observations. They may want to listen to varying podcasters in order to reveal the different styles of podcasting. Teachers will also need to share the requirements for the assignment, which are included in the guidelines for students. Students should be provided with a list of resources in order to research their poems that includes a copy of the poem as well as an approved list of sources. These sources may include news outlets, [history.com](http://history.com), or the African American Poetry website at [African American Poetry.Org](http://AfricanAmericanPoetry.Org).

*Instructions for Students:*

After completing the TPCASTT presentation, students can develop a video podcast episode discussing one of the poems in their TPCASTT. The poems can be assigned or students may choose. Students will respond to a series of questions and their episode should last for 10 minutes. Students should follow these steps and respond to the following questions:

- Name your episode.
- Review questions and responses in advance.
- Make notes about the questions that would enhance your responses to the questions.
- Select a group member that will create the opening or introduction for the episode.
- Select a timekeeper that will also develop closing remarks for the episode.
- Select a group member that will download the episode and convert to a shareable file.
- Select a group member that will email the episode.

What was the author's purpose for writing this poem? Are there any current events that are relative to the topic of this poem? What are those current events and how are they connected to this poem? How do you personally connect to the poem? How do you personally connect to the current events? In what ways are the topics in this poetry relative to your identity?

Students may consider using this model for opening their episode:

“Welcome to the (insert name of your group) show. Today we are discussing (insert the name of your topic) and we are truly excited for you to join us in this discussion. We are going to first start by responding to a few questions and then participants will elaborate on their responses as well as more questions concerning the topic. Listen up as we go through this 10-minute episode. We hope you enjoy!

Ideas for closing the podcast episode:

“Thank you so much for listening in as we discussed (insert your topic). We are so grateful for the opportunity to share knowledge about African American poetry and we hope that you were able to learn from us. If you have any questions please feel free to ask the members of our group (insert the names of all group members) or reference our resources which include (name your resources).

Students will record their episode on a zoom platform. After recording their episode, they will be required to watch the episode and do a personal assessment. With the personal assessment, they can evaluate themselves by answering the following questions in a journal:

How would you describe the sound of your voice? Were your responses relevant to the topic and did they enhance the conversation? Did you ask pertinent questions? Did you show agreement or disagreement to one of your peers? What was one thing that you said that resonates? Was there anything that you wish you did not say?

The purpose of this exercise is to promote academic conversation and to encourage students to process information while conversing with their peers. They will also have the opportunity to complete a self-evaluation regarding their conversational Style, speaking skills, and the way they choose to express themselves in the midst of a timed constraint. These are all skills that will be valuable for their future when they are promoting ideas, expressing new discoveries, or presenting to a group of colleagues. Furthermore, his activity will promote a real life skill students can apply this practice for use on various social media platforms.

## Appendix 1:

### Teaching Standards

Standard English III classes use the Common Core Standards from the English curriculum, grades eleven and twelve. When completing this lesson, consider enhancing some of the activities to fit the needs of students in an Honors course by requiring the implementation of more complex texts, essays, or novels in their TPCASTT group presentations. Modeling is crucial in the initial TPCASTT activity with the poem by Nikki Giovanni, "Friends." By modeling activities, students will better understand descriptive language and connotation before they construct their narrative poems. Additionally, teachers should reflect on previous lessons and develop modifications based on students' progression in writing. In order to guide students, the teacher should initiate discussions concerning students' research and findings concerning their assigned poetry. This will encourage further research, analysis, and application while completing their presentations and their own poems. In addition, students should be able to develop meaning and connections of real life settings. The following piece of information include the areas of focus and standards addressed:

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

- Students will present their information on a Google slide in groups of 4-5. The TPCASTT method requires that to support their findings with a graphic organizer and with evidence from researching their poetry.

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.5

Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

- Students are encouraged to use pictures and videos in their presentations.

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.6

Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating a command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

- Students are encouraged to use formal English during their presentation.

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2

Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

- Part of the TPCASTT activity requires students to uncover themes in the poems.

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

- Students should be able to express connotative meaning by citing the text.

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

- Students will compare the various tones expressed in the poetry. They will be able to analyze the vocabulary and express how the author's word choice affects the tone.

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

- Students will evaluate the author's perspectives while also relating their point of view on specific subject matters dealing with citizenship, race, and identity.

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

- We will use videos, articles, and websites to learn background about the poets and their work.

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

- Students will journal as a reflective exercise and they will write their own poems that reflect their identity and how their communities helped to shape them.

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

- Students will utilize the poetic devices we have studied in their works of poetry.

Students will utilize various mediums in order to increase their communication skills and to engage their peers. These mediums will include but are not limited to Zoom, YouTube, and Google Slides. Focusing on these standards allows students to make connections to the poets; they study as well as their perspectives of their identity within their communities. While researching, reading, and studying through different mediums, students are expected to use context to develop their creativity, originality and expression of thought in their narrative poems and in their journals.



## Appendix 2:

### TPCASTT Planning Sheet/Graphic Organizer

<b>Title</b> Based on the title, what do you think the poem will be about?	
<b>Paraphrase</b> Write the poem in your own words Look at the number of lines in the poem—your paraphrase should have the same number. <b>Connotation</b> Consider imagery, figures of speech such as simile, metaphor, personification, symbolism. Also consider diction, point of view, and sound devices such as alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhythm, and rhyme.	
<b>Attitude</b> What is the speaker’s tone?	
<b>Shift</b> Look for key words, (but, yet, however, although, punctuation (dashes, periods, colons, ellipsis), stanza divisions, changes in line or stanza length or both, irony, changes in sound that may indicate changes in meaning, changes in diction	
<b>Title Revisited</b> Now look at the title again, but this time on an interpretive level. What new insight does the title provide in understanding the poem?	
<b>Theme</b> What subject or subjects does the poem address? What do you learn about those subjects? The theme of any work of literature is stated in a complete sentence.	
<b>APPLICATION:</b> How does this poem reflect ideas of citizenship and identity? What is your relationship with this piece and how does it influence the way you view yourself in present day society	

## Appendix 3:

### Poetry Grading Rubric

Category	1 Needs more work in this area	2 Missing a few elements	3 Above average, includes most requirements	4 High performing, exceeds expectations
The poem has connotative meaning				
There is a detectable theme				
The poem reflects ideas of identity, citizenship or both				
The poem is 12-14 lines				

#### Appendix 4:

##### Group Presentation Rubric

Category	1 Needs more work in this area	2 Missing a few elements	3 Above average, includes most requirements	4 High performing, exceeds expectations
Every member of the group speaks during the presentation				
Google slides are easy to navigate and attractive				
Proper use of grammar including spelling and punctuation				
Presentation includes all elements of TPCASTT				

**Materials:**

Chrome Book

Zoom

Writing Materials (Notebook or paper, pen/pencil)

*On Being Brought from African to America* by Phyllis Wheatley

*I Hear America Singing* by Walt Whitman

*I, Too, Sing America* by Langston Hughes

*Requiem for a Nest* by Wanda Coleman

*Friendship* by Nikki Giovanni

**Student Resources:**

*Google Slides*

Students will use Google Slides as a presentation tool for their TPCASTT Projects. Since we are on Zoom, students can “share” the presentation among peers in order to share their contributions.

*Literarydevices.net*

This resource is helpful for more information about literary devices. As students study connotative meaning within poetry, they may discover some other meanings that we have not reviewed as a class.

*Willie Lynch Letter* (Honors)

The Willie Lynch letter can be used with Honors students as an extension to discuss the impact of slavery on the way Africans were stripped of their identity to appease the intentions of slave holders.

*On Being Brought from African to America* by Phyllis Wheatley

This poem written to discuss the impact of Christianity on African people. She details her personal journey and observation of Christianity after initially practicing pagan religions in Africa.

*I Hear America Singing* by Walt Whitman

This poem is written about the day and life of American workers. The workers are on the pathway towards the American dream as they come together with various skills and expertise.

*I, Too, Sing America* by Langston Hughes

This poem is known as a response to Whitman's poem, "I Hear America Singing." It reflects an opposing experience as Black people are working to be accepted as citizens in the American society.

*Requiem for a Nest* by Wanda Coleman

This poem is about a mother raising her young in a place that she cannot guarantee safety. She creates the nest to the best of her ability, but the corruption in society is sure to prevent her young from surviving.

*Friendship* by Nikki Giovanni

This poem shows strong affection and feelings that are shared when one is being accepted under the guise of friendship. It will be used as the model for the TPCASTT activity.

### **Teacher Resources:**

*Websites*

*LOC.Gov*

[https://www.loc.gov/law/help/citizenship/fourteenth\\_amendment\\_citizenship.php](https://www.loc.gov/law/help/citizenship/fourteenth_amendment_citizenship.php)

This site is helpful in understanding the establishment of laws within the American government. It can be used as a resource to explain American citizenship.

*History.com*

<https://www.history.com/topics/early-20th-century-us/jim-crow-laws>

This resource explains the history of Jim Crow and also includes videos that explain the impact it had on race relations in America.

*Common Core Standards*

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/11-12/>

This website is used to identify the skills and areas of focus that are used in this unit. Students will primarily focus on Writing, Reading Literature, Reading Information, and Speech standards.

*African American Poetry*

<https://www.africanamericanpoetry.org/themes>

This resource can be used to explore numerous resources concerning African American Art and Poetry. The various links give views and readers access to video, articles, poetry, and events that focus on Black art and poetry.

*Poetry Foundation*

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/70284/verse-journalism-the-poet-as-witness>

This is a unit plan that explores verse journalism. It aims to teach students about current events and to relate to others. Students can apply the skills in this lesson to tell stories through poetry.

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