

Contemporary Poetry: Thought & Creation
Fall 2006
Syllabus

Objective: Students will be introduced to a myriad of poets, beginning with Walt Whitman and moving through present day poetry/poets. During the study of these poets, students will also be introduced to the development of contemporary poetry over time; schools of thought; stylistic elements and structures of contemporary poetry and different aspects of reading, writing, and listening to poetry.

Required Text: *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry, Volume II*, Third Edition. W.W. Norton & Co.: New York, 2005.

Other poems will be copied and handed out in class.

Goals:

- Students will collectively and individually read poetry;
- Students will recite poetry out loud and respond to recitations by their peers;
- Students will begin to understand explication of poetry;
- Students will be able to identify different poetic forms and techniques;
- Students will understand the different schools of contemporary poetry; and
- Students will be able to create different forms of poetry.

All goals will be met within adherence to the NYS ELA Standards.

Requirements: Recitations (15%)
Each student is required to recite **one** poem of at least *three* stanzas (15 lines) in length. The poem should be contemporary in nature; the selection can be from the anthology or an outside source, but it must be appropriate. If you are unsure of the appropriateness of a poem, bring it to me **first**. The poem **must be memorized** and recited on the assigned day to receive full credit.

Student Responses (10%)
Students will be assigned to respond to one peer presenter orally and to another peer presenter in writing. Students should respond based on the recitation of the poem—the peer’s speaking ability, conveyance of the poem’s tone, and the content of the poem.

Class Participation (20%)
Students are expected to participate in all class activities and discussions. Assignments that are not turned in or that are turned in late will result in a lower grade on both the assignment and the overall class participation grade.

Homework Assignments/Quizzes (25%)
Homework will be assigned on a regular basis. Students are expected to complete all assignments. I am available to provide assistance to those students who would like help. Quizzes will also be given on a regular basis to ensure students are reading the assigned material. Quizzes will only encompass reading material and basic aspects of what has been covered in class.

End-of-Semester Poetry Anthology & Presentation (30%)
Each student will put together a collection of poetry that he/she has written over the semester. Poetry will be revised and collaborated on throughout the semester, and students will have a choice about what selections they include in their anthologies. Students will also present their anthologies to the class and community during an end-of-semester poetry reading/coffeehouse.

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Timeline: Week 1 – Introduction to Modern & Contemporary Poetry

Billy Collins, “Introduction to Poetry”

Beginning of Free Verse—Walt Whitman

Activities

1. Mad-Lib Poetry (A well-known poem will have key words removed—nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc., and, as a group, students will replace the words to create a new poem). This will introduce the key aspect of word choice in poetry to students.
2. Select ten of each—nouns, adjectives, and verbs.

Assignments

1. Create sentences using selected words.
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Week 2 – Forms of Poetry & Poetic Terms

- Sonnet, villanelle, sestina, haiku, persona poetry, ode, lyric vs. narrative poetry, etc.
- Meter, rhyme, alliteration, theme, motif, etc.

Activities

1. Scansion practice using students’ sentences.

Assignments

1. Scansion worksheet.
 2. Worksheet on identifying poetic forms.
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Week 3-4 – Schools of Poetry Overview/Explication of Poetry

- Beat Poetry, New Formalism, New Hermeticism, Post Formalism, post-Modernist Resistance, Documentary Poetry, Ordinary Language Poetry, Meta-Poetry

Activities

1. Cliché interpretation to jumpstart students’ thoughts about the underlying meaning of statements.
2. Explication of poems in groups. Compare interpretations among groups.

Assignments

1. Explication of poem of choice (essay form).
 2. Writing of free form poetry—2-3 poems per student.
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Week 5 – Beat Poetry

- Connection to Jazz Music
- Ferlinghetti, “Dog,” “I Am Waiting”
- Ginsberg, “Howl,” “A Supermarket in California”
- Corso, “Marriage”

Assignments

1. Listen to piece of jazz music; write poem about the music.
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Week 6 – New Formalism

- Donald Justice, “On the Death of Friends in Childhood,” “On An Anniversary,” “Men At Forty,” “The Tourist From Syracuse”

Assignments

1. Write two formally structured poems—sonnet, sestina, ode, haiku, etc.
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Week 7-8 – New Formalism & Women in Poetry

- Sylvia Plath, “Metaphors,” “The Arrival of the Bee Box,” “Daddy,” “Lady Lazarus,” “Spinster”

Activities

1. Compare Plath’s work with Ted Hughes’ work and other famous “neurotic” poets (Byron, Poe, Shelley, etc.)

Assignments

1. Critical Opinion Essay – Why is Plath famous—her poetry, her lifestyle, her tragic death? What do you think and why?
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Week 9 – Women in Poetry & New Hermeticism

- Louise Glück, “The Edge,” “Epithalamium,” “For My Mother,” “The School Children”

Activities

1. Pick an emotion. Write a poem about it; the poem can be formal or nonce.

Assignments

1. Louise Glück uses a lot of color and texture within her poems. Write a poem about texture and color.
 2. Explain (in writing) how the use of your chosen textures and colors expresses a mood. Does it express the mood you were striving to set accurately?
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Week 10 – Women in Poetry/Post-Modern Resistance

- Lucille Clifton, “why some people be mad at me sometimes,” “homage to my hips,” “grief”

Activities

1. Group work—debate about resistance poetry vs. resistance prose. Which is more effective?

Assignments

1. Possible collaboration with history classes—select a historical event that has meaning to you. Write a poem as if you had experienced the event.
 2. Write two other poems—one supporting/lauding the event and one denigrating/resisting the event.
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Week 11 – MetaPoetry/Women in Poetry

- Wistawa Szymborska, “Nothing Twice,” “Laughter,” “Could Have,” “Terrorist, He’s Watching,” “Some People Like Poetry,” “The Three Oddest Words”
- Billy Collins, “The Lesson,” “On Turning Ten,” “Marginalia,” “Sonnet,” “Snow Day”

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Activities

1. Have students read poems on announcements for the week. (Get administration approval first.)

Assignments

1. How do you feel about poetry? Writing, in general? Write a poem about it.
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Week 12 – Documentary Poetry

- Carolyn Forché, “The Colonel,” “The Visitor”
- Martín Espada, “The Right Hand of a Mexican Farmworker in Somerset County, Maryland,” “White Birch,” “My Native Costume”

Activities

1. Begin poetry peer reviews and preparation for student anthologies.

Assignments

1. Take a newspaper article documenting a current event. Write a poem about the event.
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Week 13 – International Poetry

- Jean Follain, “Existence,” “The Secret,” “Voluntary Mutilation,” “Father and Daughter”

Activities

1. Work with foreign language classes—translate English poetry into another language (formally structured). Does it lose its metrical structure and form? Translate foreign language poetry into English.
2. Student discussion—does poetry, when written in one language and translated into another, become less poetic?

Assignments

1. Take a poem that you have written. Work in your foreign language class and with a dictionary to translate your poem to another language. Which do you like better? Why?
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Week 14 – Contemporary Poetry for All Ages

- Jack Prelutsky
- Shel Silverstein

Activities

1. Students each select several children’s poems—read to elementary class. Have students explain to classes whether they like/appreciate poetry, why poetry should be read, and why they selected the poems they did.

Assignments

1. Write a poem appropriate for children.
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Week 15 – Anthology Work and Coffee Hour/Poetry Reading