



Poetry in America for Teachers: The City from Whitman to Hip Hop

SYLLABUS | Spring 2017

This draft syllabus is subject to change. A final version of the syllabus will be posted on January 15, 2017.

Instructor

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Course Overview

Poetry in America for Teachers is a course designed specifically for secondary school educators interested in developing their expertise as readers and teachers of literature. In this course, available for Professional Development, undergraduate credit, or graduate credit, we will consider those American poets whose themes, forms, and voices have given expression to visions of the city since 1850. Beginning with Walt Whitman, the great poet of nineteenth-century New York, we will explore the diverse and ever-changing environment of the modern city – from Chicago to Washington, DC, from San Francisco to Detroit – through the eyes of such poets as Carl Sandburg, Emma Lazarus, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Langston Hughes, Marianne Moore, Frank O'Hara, Gwendolyn Brooks, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Hayden, and Robert Pinsky, as well as contemporary hip hop and spoken word artists.

For a preview of what you can expect in this course, watch our trailer at <http://bit.ly/PoetryCityPreview>.

Course Objectives

This course will develop teaching expertise relevant to the Common Core English Language Arts (ELA) standards in grades 6-12. Course participants will master advanced strategies for teaching students how to close read complex texts, and, relatedly, for facilitating productive classroom discussion centered on those texts. Specifically, Poetry of the City is anchored in four approaches to close reading literary texts:

1. **Making Observations**, with a focus on such skills as gathering and drawing conclusions from textual evidence; noticing patterns; tracing the development of central ideas and themes; detecting shifts in voice, tone, and point of view; and drawing comparisons across texts.
2. **Understanding Structure and Form**, with a focus on analyzing structural features and patterns, such as the relation of structural sub-units (the sentence, the stanza) to one another and to the whole; and the impact of formal choice (rhymed couplet or free verse, sonnet or limerick, lyric or narrative) on a given text.
3. **Situating Texts in History**, with a focus on analyzing the relation of authors and texts to particular cultural, historical, and geographical contexts.
4. **Enjoying Language**, with a focus on cultivating the pleasure and fun of poetry in the classroom, and on analyzing the function of such elements as figurative language, word choice, sound, and imagery within a literary text.

Course Experience

Poetry of the City features a combination of video tutorials and conversations, archival images and texts, expeditions to historic literary sites, sample classroom visits, and practical exercises designed to support skills development. In this course, you will:

- Learn and practice the course's four approaches to reading a poem, which can also be applied to reading literary texts more broadly (see **Course Objectives**). Laying the foundation with Professor New's video tutorials, the course encourages skills practice through a customized poetry annotation tool that enables you to create and share your own close readings. You will also have the opportunity to apply these skills through a final lesson planning and delivery project.
- Develop the art of literary conversation and grow as a facilitator of classroom discussion. Literary texts allow us to explore language and build critical thinking skills together, discussing and debating what we have read as a community of educators. Through video footage, you will observe facilitated poetry discussions featuring a wide range of guest interpreters – including hip hop artist Nas; journalist Andrea Mitchell; National Student Poets; architect Frank Gehry; former President Bill Clinton; poets Elizabeth

Alexander, Yusef Komunyakaa, Robert Pinsky, and Juan Felipe Herrera; and students and teachers from public, public charter, public exam, and independent secondary schools in Illinois, California, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York; among others. You will also engage in conversation with your peers and members of the course Teaching Staff through online discussion forums, where you will have the opportunity to apply the skills demonstrated in the course.

- Experience the power of place through video excursions to the actual sites where our poets lived and wrote. Together we will read Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" while riding across the East River, consider Frank O'Hara's "Steps" in Midtown Manhattan, and compare Carl Sandburg's Chicago of 1914 with Gwendolyn Brooks' Chicago of the 1950s.

Enrollment

The course is appropriate for educators at all stages of their teaching careers, and can be taken for graduate credit, undergraduate credit, or Professional Development credit. No specialized knowledge of American poetry is required. Course participants are encouraged to enroll with fellow educators from their schools.

A limited number of scholarships are available to those seeking Professional Development credit. For more information, send an e-mail to info@poetryinamerica.org with "[Insert Your Name Here], Teacher Course Scholarship Inquiry" in the subject line.

Assignments

All students will complete the following assignments on a weekly basis:

- **Readings:** Students are responsible for reading the poems assigned in each week. Poems will be made available as PDFs.
- **Videos:** Each week will also feature a series of videos, including tutorials by Professor New, conversations with guest discussants, and classroom footage. Students are responsible for keeping up with the video content as well as the readings.

- **Annotations:** Using a customized course tool, students will annotate the assigned poems for the week and comment on their peers' annotations.
- **Discussion Forum Posts:** Students will engage in conversation about individual poems with peers and course Teaching Staff through the discussion forum.

In addition to the weekly assignments listed above, students pursuing graduate or undergraduate credit will complete:

- **A short (500-word) expository essay**, applying the skills and methods learned in the course to make an argument about a single poem by Walt Whitman. This essay will be due at the end of Part 1.
- **A longer expository essay (1000 words for undergraduate students, 1500 words for graduate students)**, applying the skills and methods of the course to make an argument about a poem or poems relevant to the themes explored in Part 2 of the course. This essay will be due at the end of Part 2.
- **A lesson plan** demonstrating an understanding of how to apply this course's four approaches to close reading texts when developing activities and assessments for the classroom, and when offering feedback to improve student writing. Students will also prepare a written reflection to accompany their lesson plans.

In addition, students pursuing graduate credit will attend:

- **A writing workshop** session led by Professor New. This live workshop, conducted virtually via Zoom, will enable graduate students to engage in an in-depth discussion about best practices for writing and grading expository essays, and for teaching writing across disciplines.

Feedback and Grading: Students Pursuing Credit

Students pursuing undergraduate or graduate credit will receive a **letter grade** upon completion of the course, and will be awarded a certificate for 90 participation hours from the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Professional Education Program. Grading is based on written assignments (expository essays and the lesson plan) and on participation (completion of annotations / discussion posts, and, for graduate students, virtual attendance at the writing workshop), and is broken down as follows:

Grading Breakdown for Undergraduate Credit

15%	Annotations
15%	Discussion Posts
20%	Expository Essay #1
25%	Expository Essay #2
25%	Lesson Plan and Reflection

Grading Breakdown for Graduate Credit

10%	Annotations
10%	Discussion Posts
10%	Writing Workshop Participation
20%	Expository Essay #1
25%	Expository Essay #2
25%	Lesson Plan and Reflection

Annotations and discussion posts will be graded satisfactory / unsatisfactory on the basis of completion. Students must complete at least 80% percent of annotations and 80% of discussion posts to pass the course. Course Teaching Staff will check annotations and discussion posts for completion, and will engage with students regularly in the discussion forums.

Expository essays and the lesson planning project will receive letter grades. Course Teaching Staff will provide individualized written feedback to students on their essays and lesson planning projects, highlighting strengths as well as areas for development. All graduate students, in addition, will participate in an online writing workshop led by Professor New.

Feedback and Grading: Students Pursuing Professional Development Credit

Professional Development students **will not receive a grade**, but their transcripts will reflect noncredit enrollment in the course. Professional Development enrollees who meet the following requirements will be awarded a certificate for 90 participation hours from the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Professional Education Program upon completion of the course:

Annotations and discussion posts will be graded satisfactory / unsatisfactory on the basis of completion. Students must complete at least 80% percent of annotations and 80% of discussion posts to pass the course. Course Teaching Staff will check

annotations and discussion posts for completion, and will engage with students regularly in the discussion forums.

Completion of the expository essays and the lesson plan is **not required** to pass the course. However, students may choose to complete these optional assignments.

Course Readings

Note: Readings listed in the syllabus are subject to change.

Each week, students will read a selection of poems centered on a particular theme or set of themes. Using this course's four approaches to analyzing literary texts, students will strengthen their analytical and interpretive skills as they annotate and discuss these works closely.

Each part of the course also spotlights a single poem that we will revisit across multiple weeks. The spotlighted poems will also appear in weekly classroom videos featuring secondary school teachers and students applying the approaches taught in the course. These poems are:

- Part 1: Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" (Sections 8 and 10)
- Part 2: Rita Dove, "My Mother Enters the Workforce"
- Part 3: Frank O'Hara, "Steps"

Orientation (1 week)

This first week will serve as an orientation to Poetry in America for Teachers: The City from Whitman to Hip Hop, providing a course overview and an introduction to its four guiding approaches to the close reading of literary texts.

PART 1 | Walt Whitman, Poet of the City (4 weeks)

In the first part of this course, we will explore the origins of American poetry's fascination with the sounds and images, the stimulations and inspirations, the challenges and possibilities of the urban world. Reading many of Whitman's shorter works, as well as selections from his great long poem "Song of Myself," we will also visit the streets of New York where Whitman lived and wrote – from the print shop where he published *Leaves of Grass* to the ferry he immortalized in the poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry."

Our approach to Whitman will be organized explicitly around the four approaches to reading and teaching poetry, introduced sequentially: each week will focalize our

study of Whitman through a different approach, which we will practice through aligned annotation and discussion exercises.

Sample Reading List:

Walt Whitman, "Broadway"
Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"
Walt Whitman, "I Sing the Body Electric"
Walt Whitman, "Mannahatta"
Walt Whitman, "O Captain! My Captain!"
Walt Whitman, "Song of the Broad Axe"
Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" (selections)
Walt Whitman, "To A Locomotive In Winter"
Walt Whitman, "To a Stranger"
Walt Whitman, "1861"

PART 2 | "Yearning To Breathe Free": Social Mobility and Social Justice in the City, 1880-2000 (4 Weeks)

What does it mean to be modern? The twentieth century brought change to Whitman's city, which evolved rapidly with the growth of factories, mass transit, and fast living. In Part 2, we will read a wide selection of twentieth-century poems that treat the experience of living and working in American cities. Beginning with Emma Lazarus' "The New Colossus," a late nineteenth-century poem commemorating the Statue of Liberty, we will consider the gap between promise and practice, between aspirational expression and reality. We will pay special attention to the cultural and poetic innovations of the Harlem Renaissance, and to poetry's role in counterculture and protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Throughout the unit, we will consider the power of poetry to reflect, to revise, and to critique visions of American life.

Sample Reading List:

Lucille Clifton, "the mother's story"
Countee Cullen, "Atlantic City Waiter"
Rita Dove, "My Mother Enters the Workforce"
Martín Espada, "Who Burns for the Perfection of Paper"
Allen Ginsberg, "Howl"
Robert Hayden, "Those Winter Sundays"
Langston Hughes, "Harlem"
Yusef Komunyakaa, "Facing It"
Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus"
Robert Lowell, "July in Washington"

Claude McKay, "Subway Wind"
Robert Pinsky, "Shirt"
Carl Sandburg, "Skyscraper"
Gary Soto, "Teaching English from an Old Composition Book"
William Carlos Williams, "[Rapid Transit]"

PART 3 | Making It New: The Poet As Artist and Innovator (4 Weeks)

The final part of this course treats the artist in development, and art as it fosters cultural change. How do poets develop, and what does it take to be a "great" artist? How does poetic innovation happen, and what impact does it make? How do poets respond to, and create, social contexts? In these weeks, we will consider a wide array of poetic works on the page and the stage, including folk music, spoken word, and hip hop. We will think with poets about the making of art, considering the relation between writing for print and writing for performance; between borrowing and originality; between artist, art object, and audience.

Sample Reading List:

John Ashbery, "*And Ut Pictura Poesis* Is Her Name"
Leonard Cohen, Selected Lyrics
Gwendolyn Brooks, "a song in the front yard"
Eric B. & Rakim, "Lyrics of Fury"
Fugees, "Zealots"
Kenneth Koch, Selected Poems
Mos Def, "Mathematics"
Nas, Selected Lyrics
Frank O'Hara, "Steps"
Eileen Myles, "That Country"
Scarface, "No Tears"
Sylvia Plath, "The Applicant"
Clint Smith, "Counting Descent"
Edna St. Vincent Millay, "First Fig"
Spoken Word Performances by National Student Poets

Course Policies

Office Hours

Course Teaching Staff will hold regular virtual office hours. The course Teaching Staff will send course-wide reminders before each office hour session, and also send notification if a session must be moved or cancelled for any reason.

E-mail

Course Teaching Staff will also be available to answer questions from all students by e-mail. Students can expect a response within 48 hours. For-credit students may also e-mail to set up appointments outside of regularly scheduled office hours.

HES Plagiarism Policies

You are responsible for understanding Harvard Extension School policies on academic integrity (www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/student-conduct/academic-integrity) and how to use sources responsibly. Not knowing the rules, misunderstanding the rules, running out of time, submitting "the wrong draft," and being overwhelmed with multiple demands are not acceptable excuses. There are no excuses for failure to uphold academic integrity. To support your learning about academic citation rules, please visit the Harvard Extension School "Tips to Avoid Plagiarism" page (www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/tips-avoid-plagiarism), where you'll find links to the Harvard Guide to Using Sources and two free, online 15-minute tutorials to test your knowledge of academic citation policy. The tutorials are anonymous open-learning tools.

Note on Accessibility:

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