



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

SYLLABUS | Spring 2017

Course Team

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. See “Community of Interpreters” for a full list of guest interpreters featured in this 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.

Community of Interpreters

Across this course, you will encounter a diverse community of poetry readers and interpreters through video conversations. Our guest interpreters include:

Part 1

Martín Espada, Poet and Professor, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Nasir “Nas” Jones, Hip Hop Artist

Karen Karbiener, Clinical Assistant Professor of Liberal Studies, New York University

Greg LeMond, Three-time Tour de France Winner

Readers from the 2013 “Song of Myself” Marathon at Brooklyn Bridge Park

Teachers as Scholars Seminar Participants: Abby Phyfe, Anita Goldberg, Brian Mahoney, Elizabeth Craig-Olin, Henry Bolter, Jeff Koczenski, Karen Lustig, Khriseten Bellows, Lenke Wood, Peter Franklin, Shannon Murphy, Sharon Howell, Sheila Walsh

Elena Kagan, Associate Justice, U.S. Supreme Court

Betsy Preval, Teacher, and her 8th-grade class at Cambridge Street Upper School
Tarik Smith, Teacher, and his 11th-grade class at Dymally High School

Part 2

Duy Doan, Poet and Director of the Favorite Poem Project
Graduate Students and Faculty of the Harvard Graduate School of Education: Sarah
Leibel, Ricardo Jara, Julia Jeffries, Alexis Morgan
Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers
Cristina Jiménez, Co-Founder and Managing Director of the United We Dream
Network
Frank Gehry, Architect
National Student Poets: Baylee Champion, Cameron Messinides, Rapheal Mathis,
Weston Clark
Peter Galison, Joseph Pellegrino University Professor in the Department of the
History of Science at Harvard
Herbie Hancock, Jazz Pianist
Sonia Sanchez, Poet, Activist, and Scholar
Clint Smith, Teacher, Writer, and Doctoral Candidate at the Harvard Graduate School
of Education
Joseph “Joe” Biden, Vice President of the United States
Elizabeth Alexander, Poet
Students at Harvard Law School and Harvard College: Jimmy Biblarz, Maia Usui, Sam
Benkelman
University of Iowa MFA Program Alumni: Adrienne Raphel, Chris Schlegel, Dan
Poppick, Jess Laser
Kevin Carey, Director of the Education Policy Program, The New America Foundation
Andrea Mitchell, Journalist
Yusef Komunyakaa, Poet
Stephanie Yewdell, Teacher, and her 6th-grade class at Success Academy North
Central
Nina Basinet, Teacher, and her 6th-grade class at Greenwich Country Day School

Part 3

Natalia Zukerman, Singer-Songwriter, Musician
Alfre Woodard, Actress, Producer
Robert Polito, Poet, Scholar, former President of the Poetry Foundation
Mary Jo Bang, Poet
Lisa Sun, Founder and CEO of Project Gravitass
Eileen Myles, Poet and Writer
Christopher Massenburg, Artist-in-Residence and Assistant Professor, Saint
Augustine’s University
John Lithgow, Emmy and Tony Award-winning Actor and Musician
Robert Pinsky, Poet Laureate of the United States and Professor of Creative Writing,
Boston University
Billy Collins, Poet Laureate of the United States
Alicia Jo Rabins, Singer-Songwriter
Todd Colby, Poet

National Student Poets

Donald E. Pease, Jr., Ted and Helen Geisel Third Century Professor in the Humanities,
Dartmouth College

Amber Tamblyn, Actress, Poet, and Director

Eve Ensler, Playwright, Performer, and Activist

Edward Hirsch, Poet and Critic

Lynn Burke, Teacher, and her 12th-grade class at Boston Latin School

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, on **Sunday, March 5, 2017, at 11:59 PM EST**.
- **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, on **Sunday, April 2, 2017, at 11:59 PM EST**.
- **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. These are due on **Sunday, April 23, 2017, at 11:59 PM EST**.

In addition, students pursuing graduate or undergraduate credit will attend:

- **A weekly discussion section** led by Teaching Staff member Carra Glatt. These live seminar discussions will be held virtually via Zoom. Students who are unable to attend their regular section meeting will be asked to complete makeup assignments to demonstrate participation. Section date and time to be announced.

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. Date and time to be announced.

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, section participation, 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 and Participation
- 20% Expository Essay #1
- 25% Expository Essay #2
- 25% Lesson Plan and Reflection

Grading Breakdown for Graduate Credit

- 10% Annotations
- 10% Discussion Posts and Participation
- 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 Work Force"
- Part 3: Frank O'Hara, "Steps"

PART 1 | Walt Whitman, Poet of the City

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.

WEEK 2 | Whitman: Making Observations

Attending to Whitman's early poems of 1840s and 1850s New York, we will focus this week on observing the thematic, formal, and tonal details that contribute to a poem's meaning.

Readings:

Walt Whitman, "To a Stranger"
Walt Whitman, "Song of the Broad Axe"
Walt Whitman, selections from "Song of Myself"

WEEK 3 | Whitman: Understanding Structure and Form

With Whitman's iconic poem "Song of Myself" as a springboard, we will pay close attention this week to the structural and formal choices that characterize his verse.

Readings:

Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"
Walt Whitman, "To A Locomotive In Winter"
Walt Whitman, selections from "Song of Myself"

WEEK 4 | Whitman: Situating Texts in History

We will next turn to the intersection of Whitman's poetry with relevant historical and cultural contexts, including nineteenth-century print culture and the Civil War.

Readings:

Walt Whitman, "Broadway"
Walt Whitman, "Mannahatta"
Walt Whitman, "1861"
Walt Whitman, "O Captain! My Captain!"
Walt Whitman, selections from "Song of Myself"

WEEK 5 | Whitman: Enjoying Language

This week will draw us more fully into Whitman's great masterpiece "Song of Myself," with particular attention to linguistic elements including figurative language, sound, imagery, and diction.

Readings:

Walt Whitman, "I Sing the Body Electric"
Walt Whitman, selections from "Song of Myself"

PART 2 | “Yearning to Breathe Free”: Social Mobility and Social Justice in the City, 1880-2000

WEEK 6 | Spotlight on “The New Colossus”

This week will apply the four approaches learned in Part 1 to an analysis of Emma Lazarus’s “The New Colossus” that draws on observations about content, theme, structure, form, history, and language.

Readings:

Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus”
MacKinlay Kantor, “The Empire State Lights”
Rita Dove, “My Mother Enters the Workforce”

WEEK 7 | Migration and Movement

This week will continue our application of the four approaches into a consideration of poems of migration and movement in early twentieth-century New York and Chicago. We will pay particular attention to the innovations of the Harlem Renaissance, including the revolutionary influence of popular forms such as jazz on poetic verse.

Readings:

Gwendolyn Brooks, “each body has its art”
Countee Cullen, “Atlantic City Waiter”
Langston Hughes, “The Weary Blues”
Langston Hughes, “Harlem”
Claude McKay, “Subway Wind”
Carl Sandburg, “Skyscraper”
William Carlos Williams, “[Rapid Transit]”
Rita Dove, “My Mother Enters the Workforce”

WEEK 8 | Labor and Family Life

This week focuses on the theme of labor and family life American cities across the country, allowing us to consider the intersections between work, family life, and national identity.

Readings:

Richard Blanco, “Looking for The Gulf Motel”
Martín Espada, “Who Burns for the Perfection of Paper”
Robert Hayden, “Those Winter Sundays”
Robert Pinsky, “Shirt”
Gary Soto, “Teaching English from an Old Composition Book”
Rita Dove, “My Mother Enters the Workforce”

WEEK 9 | Counterculture and Protest

This week explores mid-to-late twentieth-century poetry of counterculture and protest, situating these poems in the context of movements for civil rights and the Vietnam War controversy.

Readings:

Gwendolyn Brooks, "To Prisoners"
Lucille Clifton, "the mother's story"
Allen Ginsberg, "Howl"
Allen Ginsberg, "Hum Bom"
Yusef Komunyakaa, "Facing It"
Robert Lowell, "July in Washington"
Rita Dove, "My Mother Enters the Workforce"

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

WEEK 10 | Coming of Age in the City

Part 3 of the course expands our study of poetry from analysis of form and content to exploration of poetic process. This week's poems engage with youth culture and adolescence, and they directly address the moments of transition and emotional epiphanies that lead to personal and artistic revelations.

Readings:

Gwendolyn Brooks, "a song in the front yard"
Rita Dove, "Dusting"
Edna St. Vincent Millay, "First Fig"
Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Four Sonnets"
Ed Hirsch, "Cotton Candy"
Sylvia Plath, "The Applicant"
Frank O'Hara, "Ave Maria"
Frank O'Hara, "Steps"

WEEK 11 | Humor, Mixing, and Collage

This week focuses on the incorporation of "stuff"—the stuff of high art, the stuff of commercial world, and everything in between—into poems. We explore how poets use wit and juxtaposition to revolt against conventions of narrative and theme.

Readings:

John Ashbery, "And *Ut Pictura Poesis* Is Her Name"
Dr. Seuss, "If I Ran the Zoo"
Kenneth Fearing, "St. Agnes' Eve"
Kenneth Koch, "You Were Wearing"
Marianne Moore, "Poetry" (1919)
Dorothy Parker, "The Red Dress"
Frank O'Hara, "Steps"

WEEK 12 | Studio Week: It's Your Turn!

Contemporary poets discuss their writing processes, often through reading and analyzing their own work. Our guests also consider audience and how they think about performance. In addition, this week will give us the chance to draw on the inspiration from our guest artists in finding our own poetic voices.

Readings:

Todd Colby, "Wednesday Poem"
Leonard Cohen, "Suzanne" and "Who By Fire"
Frank O'Hara, "Personal Poem"
National Student Poets, Spoken Word Performances
Adrienne Rich, "Diving into the Wreck"
Clint Smith, "Counting Descent"
Amber Tamblyn, selections from Dark Sparkler
Natalia Zukerman, "Your Little Day"

WEEK 13 | Performance in the City: Spoken Word and Hip Hop

This week, we will continue to explore poetic innovation and performance with particular attention to both hip-hop and spoken word poetry.

Readings:

Eric B. & Rakim, "Lyrics of Fury"
Yasiin Bey, "Mathematics"
Fugees, "Zealots"
Nas, "It Ain't Hard to Tell"
Nas, "N.Y. State of Mind"
National Student Poets, Spoken Word Performances
Frank O'Hara, "Steps"

Week 14 | Conclusion and Reflection

In this last week of the course, we'll take time to reflect together on our learnings and our goals moving forward as both readers and teachers of poetry.

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.

You can also contact Course Manager Caitlin Rajagopalan (caitlin.b.rajagopalan@poetryinamerica.org) with any questions, concerns, or issues that you might have throughout the course.

HES Plagiarism Policies

You are responsible for understanding Harvard Extension School policies on academic integrity (<https://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 (<https://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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