

Make Space for Poetry

Wendy DeGroat

wdegroat@gsgis.k12.va.us

It inspires empathy, compassion, and awe (Laux 2013). It is inclusive, vibrant, and mind-expanding (Legaspi 2013). Its nuance and focused attention build our capacity for the “sweet music of contradiction” (Dawes 2013), countering the media’s tendency to reduce complex issues to good or bad.

Poetry.

Yet a visit to a library’s poetry section may turn up only a few poets who students could bump into somewhere other than at a séance. The speaker in Cornelius Eady’s poem “Dance at the Amherst County Public Library” (published in 1986) imagines our children’s children visiting a public library:

*Which poets would they find
on the shelves?*

The answer probably is

They will only find

What I found this afternoon:

Shakespeare

And Paul Laurence Dunbar.

It’s unlikely that school libraries are *this* barren of poetry today, but if poetry offers students so much, including familiarity with metaphor, a language power that sways public opinion more than statistics or political affiliation (Thibodeau and Boroditsky 2011), then why does a gap persist between the poetry young readers, poets, and writers find in school libraries and the poetry they *could* find there? How can the space we make for poetry offer more to our students?

Lack of collection development resources contributes to this gap’s persistence. Reviews in *School Library Journal* regularly provide suggestions for elementary and middle grades, but few for high school students. Yet as students’ yearning to express themselves intensifies, and with it, for some, their sense of isolation, poems in which students discover struggles and joys similar to their own can instill a sense of belonging. Some students will also find in poetry a way to reach into themselves and reach out to the world, for at its essence, “poetry is singing. It is a way to give voice to the unspoken” (Legaspi 2013).

So let’s explore resources and strategies that can move our poetry collections, particularly our high school collections, closer to reflecting these possibilities. The

main ingredient: contemporary poetry.

Several poets shared insights that inform this article: poet-professors Laure-Anne Bosselaar; Jim Daniels;

Smaller presses to watch include BOA Editions, Copper Canyon, Coffee House, Graywolf, Sarabande, Tupelo, and University of Pittsburgh Press (Pitt Poetry Series). Tupelo offers reader's companions for

strategies to selecting poetry books as you would to fiction or nonfiction, considering your students' diverse identities and interests, and potential curriculum connections. No book preview

Poetry resists typical weeding timelines. In the world of fiction and nonfiction, we're accustomed to the meteoric rise of new writers, trilogies, or series or the rush of popularity after a book garners a rave review or the movie version comes out in theaters.

Kwame Dawes, editor-in-chief of *Prairie Schooner*; Camille T. Dungy, cofounder of *From the Fishouse*; and Dorianne Laux. Others who shared their insights were poet and Kundiman cofounder Joseph O. Legaspi, poet-teacher Von Thompson, poet and teaching artist Arlyn Miller, and poet-librarian Cynthia Grady.

Sources of Reviews and Other Leads

If you're not a poet or avid poetry reader, how do you find contemporary American poetry books that might appeal to your students? *Publishers Weekly*, *Booklist*, and the *New York Times Book Review* publish poetry reviews. If you subscribe to EBSCO's Advanced Placement Source (AP Source) or Gale's General OneFile (a core part of PowerSearch), you're in luck. Full-text *Booklist* reviews appear in both databases; *Publishers Weekly* is in AP Source, and the *New York Times Book Review* is in General OneFile.

However, the coverage in these review sources skews toward books published by Norton and other large publishers, when university and small independent presses publish top-notch poetry books, too.

some of their titles, such as Aimee Nezhukumatathil's *Lucky Fish*, and book-detail pages for the Pitt Poetry Series include links to sample poems, such as ones from Richard Blanco's *Looking for the Gulf Motel*.

Poets who win the Nobel, Pulitzer, or National Book Award may also appeal to your students, but just as with *New York Times* bestsellers, only some will be a good fit. (I can still see the sly smirks from students who asked if I'd order *Fifty Shades of Grey*.) The same is true of books by current and former poets laureate (for the Library of Congress or your state) and winners of awards from publishers and other entities.

Poets who win first-book prizes aren't necessarily in their twenties. One distinguishing aspect of the Yale Younger Poets Series <<http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/youngerpoets.asp>>, the oldest annual literary award in the United States, is that the winning poets must be under forty; like accolades, however, even the relative youthfulness of the poets who win this award doesn't assure their poems will speak to your students.

What factors should you consider? Apply the same matchmaking

available from your book jobber or Amazon? Googling a contemporary poet usually leads to at least a handful of poems (though perhaps not all from the book you have in mind). Listen to the poet's voice, the poems' tone and music. What feelings do they evoke? Would the experiences they encapsulate, their contexts, speak to your students? Can you see a student reciting one of them for a forensics or Poetry Out Loud competition?

As you survey the poetry landscape, look at who's reading at poetry festivals like the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival and Split This Rock, as well as in reading series sponsored by Cave Canem, Kundiman, Poet's House, and similar organizations, as well as poets visiting or on faculty at your local universities.

The Arc of Poetic Recognition Is Long

Poetry resists typical weeding timelines. In the world of fiction and nonfiction, we're accustomed to the meteoric rise of new writers, trilogies, or series or the rush of popularity after a book garners a rave review or the movie version comes out in theaters.

Poetry's arc of recognition is longer. When Nikky Finney won the 2011 National Book Award, over twenty-five years had passed since her first book was published. Before Richard Blanco stepped up to the microphone to read "One Today" at President Obama's second inauguration, he'd been publishing for fifteen years. Garrison Keillor read Laure-Anne Bosselaar's poem "A Paris Blackbird" on *The Writer's Almanac* <<http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/archive.php>> fifteen years after the collection in which it was printed hit library and bookstore shelves.

This reality means the guideline to weed a poetry book if it was published five to fifteen years ago unless it's a classic, as suggested in *Less Is More* and many similar guides, needs reconsideration (Baumbach and Miller 2006). If you selected the book with the matchmaking care described above, read a few poems. Can you hear your students' joy or pain? Do the poems sing? Surprise?

As you make your decisions, strive to maintain students' access to widely recognized classics, the poets and poetic movements most studied in your school, and a diverse range of 20th- and 21st-century poetic voices. Would discarding a book erase a literary movement in American poetry, particularly controversial ones that may get erased from future time-period anthologies? For instance, if you're keeping a book that includes the Beat poets, do you also have something in which the Black Arts Movement is represented?

Literary Magazines

If the arc of poetry recognition is long, how else can you discover poets your students might enjoy? Connect students with literary magazines (aka lit mags), an

essential source of new poetry by emerging and established writers. Most publish quarterly. Some, like *Prairie Schooner*, offer mobile apps or mobile versions of their publications.

Develop a webguide for creative writing or add a poetry section to your webguide for English classes and include links directly to lit mags in your databases. Both General OneFile and AP Source include coverage of *American Poetry Review*, *Antioch Review*, *Chicago Review*, *Harvard Review*, *New England Review*, and *World Literature Today*, as well as *The Atlantic*.

In addition, AP Source includes *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Kenyon Review*, *VQR: Virginia Quarterly Review*, *African American Review*, and the *Beloit Poetry Journal*. General OneFile provides access to *The New Yorker*. Feel free to copy the Maggie Walker Library's lit mag list as a starting point <<http://gsgis.libguides.com/content.php?pid=299919&sid=2460610>>.

Some of these magazines sponsor contests for high school students, such as the Patricia Grodd Poetry Prize for Young Writers sponsored by *The Kenyon Review* each November.

No budget for books or database subscriptions? Many respected literary magazines, such as Virginia-based *Barely South*, *Blackbird*, and *Shenandoah*, make their content freely available online. Do lit mags based in your district, state, or region make their content available online? Download the *2013 Literary Magazine Guide* from NewPages.com (available in PDF and mobile versions) for literary magazine titles, descriptions, and Web addresses. Not all lit mags contain poetry, but most do. Some also have a regional focus or feature writers who represent specific ethnicities/nationalities.

Free Online Resources

Thanks to the Poetry Foundation's Poetry Tool (also available as a mobile app), *Poetry Daily* (available at <<http://poets.com>>), Poets.org from the Academy of American Poets, and sites like them, even school librarians with no acquisitions budget can connect students with poetry. This is especially true for poetry published prior to 1923 and several high-profile poets of the mid-20th century. Selections are more limited for poems published since the parents of our freshmen were born (i.e., post-1983 or thereabouts), which is another reason purchasing books by contemporary poets is an essential step in improving students' access to their work.

Other key sites include Poetry Out Loud <www.poetryoutloud.org/poems-and-performance/find-poems> and Poetry 180 <www.loc.gov/poetry/180>.

Poetry reaches a new dimension—and a different audience—when embodied and given breath, so include audio resources on your webguide, such as Penn Sound <<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound>> and the site cocreated by Camille Dungy and Matt O'Donnell to raise awareness of emerging poetic voices: From the Fishhouse <www.fishhousepoems.org>.

Of these resources, Poetry Tool, Poets.org, and Fishhouse provide the most options for discovering poems by something other than title or poet's name. Interested in knowing more poets from your region? Use Poets.org's interactive poetry map. Have budding filmmakers in your hallways or students who like to collaborate on multimedia projects? Connect them to multimedia poetry projects from The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting: *Voices from Haiti* <<http://pulitzercenter.org/features/>>

[voices-haiti](http://livehopelove.com)> and *Hope: Living and Loving with HIV in Jamaica* <<http://livehopelove.com>>.

Beyond Anthologies

Since poetry can be challenging to select, some librarians limit their purchases to anthologies. While anthologies can be useful for broad coverage of time periods, global regions, or themes and introduce students to a variety of voices, they limit students' familiarity with a

American poetry, some that lend a global perspective (e.g., *Vintage Book of Contemporary World Poetry* 2002), some that focus on themes to which your students can relate (e.g., *The Art of Losing: Poems of Grief and Healing*, Bloomsbury USA 2010), and ones that expand the diversity of poetic voices in your collection (e.g., *When She Named Fire: An Anthology of Contemporary Poems by Women*, Autumn House 2009). For middle and high schools, Cynthia Grady recommends *Poetry Speaks Who I Am*

in the Mirror: A Novel in Poems and Journal Entries, Persea 2012) or biographies in verse (e.g., *A Wreath for Emmett Till*, Houghton Mifflin 2005).

Remember your young writers too, the ones who can't fit creative writing into their schedule or who prefer self-education for creative arts. The most popular book on poetic craft among my students is Kim Addonizio's *Ordinary Genius* (Norton 2009). Titles recommended by two or more poets who offered suggestions were *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms* (Norton 2001), *The Poet's Companion* (Norton 1997), *Best Words, Best Order* (Palgrave Macmillan 2003), *In the Palm of Your Hand* (Tilbury House 2003), and *Triggering Town* (Norton 2010). On your webguide, you'll want to include the *How a Poem Happens* blog. Here's the URL for the post about Gabriel Spera's "In a Field Outside the Town" <<http://howapoemhappens.blogspot.com/2010/07/gabriel-spera.html>>.

Prefer starting with a list of titles and matchmaking from there? Refer to the supplemental poetry collection development kit that follows this article.

Nurturing a Poetry Culture

What can you do to raise students' awareness of your poetry collection? Poets.org offers a list of ideas for celebrating National Poetry Month, many of which apply to promoting poetry year-round.

Visiting poets at our school have ranged from David Wojahn, director of Virginia Commonwealth University's creative writing program, to members of VCU's slam poetry team, Slam Nahuatl. I've had book spine poetry contests to invite students to get their hands on the books, hosted coffeehouse-style

Remember your young writers too, the ones who can't fit creative writing into their schedule or who prefer self-education for creative arts.

poet to a few poems, precluding the deep study of poets that single-author books (including volumes of collected/selected works) facilitate and omitting examples of the narrative arc reflected in single collections.

Every poet who provided feedback for this article emphasized the need for single-authored books so that students have the opportunity to fall in love with a poet's work and understand the range and complexity a poet's work can encompass. Kwame Dawes recommends that high school students graduate having read at least three single-author volumes of contemporary poetry. When selecting single-author books, consider the matchmaking factors discussed earlier.

For the anthologies you do purchase, select a mixture of publishers and editors. Along with Norton books and Keillor's *Good Poems* (Viking 2002), select a few anthologies that represent various time periods in

(*Jabberwocky* 2010), which includes a CD of poets reading their work.

To round out your collection, talk to your English/Language Arts teachers about the poets or poetic movements they highlight in the classroom. Are several of your students first- or second-generation immigrants from the same country or global region? Include a related book, perhaps a bilingual edition. What upper-level languages are offered at your school? Comparing translations of poems is a wonderful vehicle for discussing diction, connotation, tone, and the dance between words' music and meaning. Are certain issues, like environmental concerns, impacting your locality? Include an eco-poetry or nature anthology. In regard to diversity, are the economic difficulties some students face reflected? What about poets whose work includes poems that explore their identities as LGBTQ?

In regard to other ways into poetry, consider novels in verse (e.g., *The Girl*

events where students read original writing or poems they love, featured book displays about poetry, and cosponsored a collaborative poetry-photography contest with the English and art departments.

Just as teachers' expectations for research assignments can increase students' use of databases, teachers' enthusiasm about poetry and their willingness to integrate it into their lessons can enhance students' interest in poetry.

A popular assignment here is for students to develop a personal anthology focused on a theme they choose, such as marginalization, the sacred, or hands. As they get started, I introduce students to a variety of sources and search strategies for finding poems, essays, and stories related to a theme, including developing a list of related keywords like "palm" and "touch" (for a "hands" theme), and using Google Books to search the preview of a book in our library to find all references to those words. Students may create anthologies like these in several formats, including using the poetry notebooks feature of Poets.org.

For collaborative lessons, I've worked with English teachers on units about documentary poetry (a pulse within poetry that combines poetry writing with research from primary source research) related to the events in novels or to genealogy research, and with a social studies teacher on a war poetry unit.

Our school curriculum is organized by global region, so when I send a reminder about library resources and webguide updates as we transition between regions, I sometimes include a poem. As they introduce new regions, some teachers integrate the library's poetry CDs into their teaching, such as *I Want Burning: The Ecstatic World of Rumi, Hafiz, and Lalla*.

Making Space for Poetry Matters

Whether you make space for poetry online, on the shelf, or both, the space you make matters, the voices students find there matter, and the wonder, power, possibilities, and connections they can find in this living art matter.

Academic reasons abound. "Poetry teaches economy and precision of language" (Thompson 2013) and is "central to the study of language and rhetoric" (Dawes 2013), and with poetry's subtleties and layered meanings, many poems score high on the Common Core's text-complexity rubric, particularly in qualitative complexity. Cynthia Grady, poet and head librarian at Sidwell Friends School, has made Common Core State Standards sheets for several of her poetry books. A sample is included in the poetry collection development kit that follows this article.

In regard to curriculum, poetry touches nearly every discipline. Teachers can integrate poems to enhance content they're already teaching, use poems to introduce or conclude a unit or as a mental refresher between activities (Miller 2013).

More importantly, poetry matters for students and their lives beyond the classroom. For long-range perspective, "poetry teaches students about the emotional history of the world" (Laux 2013), and for the sometimes messy reality of their right now, "poetry teaches students about what it means to be a human being on this planet" and shows them that they are not alone in their struggles or their joys (Daniels 2013).



Wendy DeGroat
serves as the librarian
at Maggie L. Walker
Governor's School
for Government

and International Studies in Richmond, Virginia (library site: <www.resourceress.info>). Beyond school, Wendy curates Poetry River <www.poetryriver.org>, a site that facilitates diversification of the contemporary poetic voices taught in American literature courses. She'll be teaching a workshop about documentary poetry on March 28, 2014 at the Split This Rock Poetry Festival in Washington, DC. Her last KQ article was "Together We Can: Libraries as Story Centers, Students as Story-makers" in the September/October 2013 issue.

Works Cited:

- Baumbach, Donna J., and Linda L. Miller. 2006. *Less Is More: A Practical Guide to Weeding School Library Collections*. Chicago: ALA.
- Daniels, Jim. 2013. Response to "Make Space for Poetry" survey.
- Dawes, Kwame. 2013. Response to "Make Space for Poetry" survey.
- Dungy, Camille T. 2013. Response to "Make Space for Poetry" survey.
- Grady, Cynthia. 2013. Response to "Make Space for Poetry" survey.
- Legaspi, Joseph O. 2013. Response to "Make Space for Poetry" survey.
- Laux, Dorianne. 2013. Response to "Make Space for Poetry" survey.
- Miller, Arlynn. 2013. Response to "Make Space for Poetry" survey.
- Thibodeau, Paul H., and Lera Boroditsky. 2011. "Metaphors We Think With: The Role of Metaphor in Reasoning." PLOS One. <www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0016782> (accessed November 1, 2013).
- Thompson, Von. 2013. Response to "Make Space for Poetry" survey.

Poetry Collection Development Kit for School Libraries

This kit provides resources for developing a digital, print, or blended collection of contemporary American poetry (post-1980) in school libraries, particularly high school libraries. It is inspired by my lifelong passion for poetry kindled by an English teacher and the ways I've witnessed poems light the imaginations, expand the understanding of, delight, soothe, and embolden students over my two decades of work as an English teacher, librarian, and writing mentor. In the "Suggested Books" section, the kit also reflects survey responses from several poets who teach, including Laure-Anne Bosselaar, Jim Daniels, Kwame Dawes, Camille Dungy, Cynthia Grady, Dorianne Laux, Joseph O. Legaspi, Arlyn Miller, and Von Thompson.

What's New? Sources of Leads

Reviews:

- *Booklist* (in Gale's General OneFile and EBSCO's AP Source databases)
- *Publishers Weekly* (in AP Source)
- *New York Times Book Review* (in General OneFile)
- Print and online literary magazines (some on the open web, others in databases)

Featured readers at poetry events and faculty and fellows in poetry organizations:

- Cave Canem <www.cavecanempoets.org> focuses on African American poetry
- Canto Mundo <www.cantomundo.org> focuses on Latino/a American poetry
- Kundiman <<http://kundiman.org>> focuses on Asian American poetry
- Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival <www.dodgepoetry.org> offers readings on a YouTube channel
- Split This Rock Poetry Festival: Poems of Provocation and Witness <www.splitthisrock.org>

Sampling of smaller presses known for poetry (some with annual contests):

- Alice James <<http://alicejamesbooks.org>>
- BOA Editions <www.boaeditons.org>
- Copper Canyon <www.coppercanyonpress.org>
- Coffee House <<http://coffehousepress.org>>
- Graywolf <www.graywolfpress.org> features a poem of the week
- Milkweed <<http://milkweed.org>>

- Persea <www.perseabooks.com> features teacher's guides for some titles, like Kearney's novel-in-verse *The Girl in the Mirror*
- Sarabande <www.sarabandebooks.org>
- Tupelo <www.tupelopress.org> offers reader's companions for some titles, like Nezhukumathail's *Lucky Fish*
- University presses: Louisiana State <<http://lsupress.org/books/by-subject/poetry>>, Pittsburgh (samples for some books in Pitt Poetry Series <www.upress.pitt.edu/renderHtmlPage.aspx?srcHtml=htmlSourceFiles/Series/poetry.htm>, including Blanco's *Looking for the Gulf Motel*), and Yale (Yale Younger Poets Series) <<http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/youngerpoets.asp>>

Free Online Resources

Poets and Poems

- Academy of American Poets <www.poets.org> includes an interactive U.S. poetry map <www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/382>; an app <www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/404> for the site is also available
- From the Fishhouse <www.fishhousepoems.org> offers an audio archive of emerging poets; it also supports keyword searching
- PennSound <www.writing.upenn.edu/pennsound> features an audio archive featuring a wide range of poets
- Poetry 180 <www.loc.gov/poetry/180/p180-list.html> offers a poem-a-day project edited by Billy Collins
- Poetry Daily <<http://poems.com>> offers poems reprinted with poet bio and stay on the site for one year; an app <http://poems.com/special_features/app/app_announce.php> is also available for the site
- Poetry Out Loud <www.poetryoutloud.org> offers an annual high school competition, as well as some audio files

- Poetry Tool (Poetry Foundation) <www.poetryfoundation.org> supports subject browsing; it offers podcasts and an app <www.poetryfoundation.org/mobile>
- Verse Daily <www.versedaily.org> offers poems reprinted with poet bio and links to other poems by the poet
- Writer's Almanac <<http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org>> offers audio text archive for the popular public radio program

Poetic Craft:

- How a Poem Happens <<http://howapoemhappens.blogspot.com>> offers poems and interviews with poets (e.g., Spera's "In a Field Outside the Town")
- Learning Lab (Poetry Foundation) <www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/>
- On Writing (American Academy of Poets) <www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/55>

Multimedia Poetry (two examples from the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting):

- *Hope: Living and Loving with HIV in Jamaica* <www.livehopelove.com> features poems by Kwame Dawes
- *Voices from Haiti* <<http://pulitzercenter.org/features/voices-haiti>> features poems by Kwame Dawes

Online Literary Magazines:

For help selecting from the thousands of literary magazines available, including many online (e.g., *Cortland Review* <www.cortlandreview.com>), consult the *NewPages Guide to Literary Magazines*, 2013 <www.newpages.com/LitMagPDF>.

Suggested Books

These lists offer a sampling of American poetry published since 1980 that has appealed to students with whom I've worked, as well as anthology/craft titles recommended by poets I surveyed.

In December 2013, each book was still available new (although I purchase used copies of books for my library when that's the only option). As you would in other genres, select those books that best fit your curriculum, your students, and their interests. (Those books that were recommended by a poet are indicated with "rec." and the poet name after the title.)

Individual Collections

- *What Is this Thing Called Love* by Kim Addonizio (Norton, 2004)
- *Looking for the Gulf Motel* by Richard Blanco (Pitt, 2012)
- *Rice* by Nikky Finney (Triquarterly, 2013; first published in 1985)
- *Becoming the Villainess* by Jeannine Hall Gailey (Steel Toe, 2006)
- *Kingdom Animalia* by Aracelis Girmay (BOA Editions, 2011)
- *Feeding the Fire* by Jeffrey Harrison (Sarabande, 2001)
- *Hip Logic* by Terrance Hayes (Penguin, 2002)
- *Given Sugar, Given Salt* by Jane Hirshfield (Perennial, 2001)
- *What the Living Do* by Marie Howe (Norton, 1999)
- *Hoops* by Major Jackson (Norton, 2011)
- *Quantum Lyrics* by A. Van Jordan (Norton, 2007)
- *E-mails from Scheherazad* by Mohja Kahf (UP of Florida, 2003)
- *Dien Cai Dau* by Yusef Komunyakaa (Wesleyan, 1988)
- *The Book of Men* by Dorianne Laux (Norton, 2011)
- *The Rose* by Li Young Lee (BOA Editions, 1986)
- *Up Jump the Boogie* by Joseph Murillo (Cypher, 2010)
- *A Wreath for Emmett Till* by Marilyn Nelson (HMH, 2009)
- *Lucky Fish* by Aimee Nezhukumatathil (Tupelo, 2012)

- *Why I Wake Early* by Mary Oliver (Beacon, 2004)
- *Mezzanines* by Matthew Olzmann (Alice James, 2013)
- *Fast Animal* by Tim Seibles (Etruscan, 2012)
- *Shoulda Been Jimmie Savannah* by Patricia Smith (Coffee House, 2012)
- *Life on Mars* by Tracy K. Smith (Graywolf, 2011)
- *The Standing Wave* by Gabriel Spera (Harper, 2003)
- *Here, Bullet* by Brian Turner (Alice James, 2005)

Collected/New & Selected

Along with earlier American poets like Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Robert Hayden, Langston Hughes, Adrienne Rich, and Gwendolyn Brooks, consider newer collected/selected works, such as:

- *Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton* by Lucille Clifton (BOA Editions, 2012)
- *Sailing Around the Room* by Billy Collins (Random House, 2001)
- *Fire to Fire* by Mark Doty (Harper Collins, 2008)
- *Hardheaded Weather* by Cornelius Eady (Putnam, 2008)
- *Alabama: New and Selected Poems* by Martín Espada (Norton, 2004)
- *New Selected Poems* by Philip Levine (Knopf, 1992)
- *Shadow Ball: New and Selected Poems* by Charles Harper Webb (Pitt, 2009)
- *Words Under the Words* by Naomi Shihab Nye (Eighth Mountain, 1994)



When I asked poets surveyed to list other poets they wished more high school students read/studied, poets who responded to the survey mentioned the following names (not all of whom are American). None of them listed their own name.

Full names: Kim Addonizio, Joe Bolton, Lucille Clifton, Mark Doty, Matthew Dickman, Stephen Dunn, Cornelius Eady, B.H. Fairchild, Aracelis Girmay, Louise Glück, Kathleen Graber, Jane Hirshfield, Marie Howe, Major Jackson, Jane Kenyon, Yusef Komunyakaa, Dorianne Laux, Li-Young Lee, Philip Levine, Larry Levis, Audre Lorde, Joseph Millar, Honor Moore, Pablo Neruda, Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Naomi Shihab Nye, Sharon Olds, Mary Oliver, Adrienne Rich, Theodore Roethke, Pattiann Rogers, Patrick Rosal, Tim Seibles, May Swenson, Brian Turner, Tom Wayman, Charles Harper Webb, and Walt Whitman.

Anthologies – Norton and Beyond

Along with anthologies for 19th- and 20th-century American poetry, consider anthologies that diversify the poetic voices students encounter and add global and/or multilingual dimensions for literary movements.

Organized by Place or an Aspect of the Poets' Identities

- *Black Poets Lean South* (2006); *Every Shut Eye Ain't Asleep* (1994); *Furious Flower* (2004)
- *Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* (2011); *FSG Book of Twentieth Century Latin American Poetry* (2012); *Paper Dance: 55 Latino Poets* (2000); *El Coro: A Chorus of Latino and Latina Poetry* (1997)
- *Indivisible: An Anthology of Contemporary South Asian American Poetry* (2010): this collection features forty-nine American poets who trace their roots to Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka
- *Asian American Poetry: The Next Generation* (2004)
- *Sing: Poetry from the Indigenous Americas* (2011) – rec. by Dungy
- *When She Named Fire: An Anthology of Contemporary Poems by Women* (2008)

- *Working Words: Punching the Clock and Kicking Out the Jams* (2010)
- *American Poetry: The Next Generation* (2000) – rec. by Daniels
- *From the Fishhouse* (2009) – rec. by Dungy, co-founder of From the Fishhouse
- *Poetry Speaks Who I Am* (2010) – rec. by Grady
- *Vintage Book of Contemporary World Poetry* (1996)– rec. by Laux

Organized by Theme

Art: *Heart-to-Heart: New Poems Inspired by Twentieth Century American Art* (2001) – rec. by Miller

Human Relationships: *Risking Everything* (ed. Housden)

Happiness: *Dancing with Joy* (ed. Housden)

Loss/Grief: *The Art of Losing: Poems of Grief and Healing* (ed. Young); *What Have You Lost?* (ed. Nye)

Nature: *Black Nature* (ed. Dungy); *Bright Wings* (ed. Collins)

Politics/Witness: *Against Forgetting* (ed. Forché) – rec. by Legaspi; *Poetry Like Bread* (ed. Espada) – rec. by Thompson

Spirituality/The Sacred: *Women in Praise of the Sacred* (ed. Hirshfield); *The Soul Is Here for Its Own Joy: Sacred Poems from Many Cultures* (ed. Bly)

Poetic Craft

My students' favorite poetic craft book is *Ordinary Genius* by Kim Addonizio. Books recommended by multiple poets surveyed included the following:

- *In the Palm of Your Hand* (Kowitz)
- *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms* (eds. Strand and Boland)
- *The Poet's Companion* (eds. Addonizio and Laux)
- *Triggering Town* (Hugo)

Common Core Standards

See the appendix of this kit for a sample Common Core correlation sheet (grades 3 to 8) created by Cynthia Grady for her poetry picture book, *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* (Eerdmans, 2011).

Reflections

As I expect you do with fiction and nonfiction, read widely in poetry and be open to the unexpected. Like the winds that "buffet" the speaker's car in Seamus Heaney's "Postscript" as he drives along the coast, some poems will "catch [your] heart off guard and blow it open." Others, even by the same poet, may not resonate with you. Read on. Encourage students to approach poetry this way too. As they explore, invite them to see the page (or screen) as a blank canvas rather than a long left margin (e.g., Nezhukumatathil's "Two Moths").

As your heart, ear, and imagination tune in to poetry, you may find yourself even more alive to the joyful possibilities of wordplay and the dance between language's music and meaning than you are already.

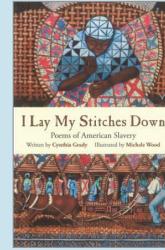
Stay in Touch

In addition to being a poetry advocate at school, I promote poetry beyond school by curating <poetryriver.org>, a resource for diversifying the contemporary poetic voices studied in American lit classes and for learning about documentary poetry (which combines primary source research and poetry).

For future tips and suggested titles, visit the site or subscribe to posts. Questions? E-mail me at poetlibrarian@gmail.com.

Appendix: Sample Common Core Connections Sheet

Created by Cynthia Grady



Common Core Connections

I Lay My Stitches Down:

Poems of American Slavery

Written by Cynthia Grady, Illustrated by Michele Wood

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), in cooperation with the Children's Book Council (CBC), reviews and selects books for their annual Notables list. For the past decade, the list has included an average of five books of poetry each year. Some suggestions are listed below for implementing the Common Core State Standards in grades three through eight with *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery*.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.7. Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g. create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1. Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.6. Compare and contrast the points-of-view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first and third-person narrations.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2. Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.6. Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.2. Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text, or issue under study.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.5. Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.6. Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.9. Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.5. Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.