

To the Young Who Want To Live: Creating a Positive Message

Note: This would be a great follow-up to the **Looking Upstream** lesson plan examining the causes behind gun violence.

PURPOSE

To create and present an anti-violence message for young people in the form of a poem, song, or theatrical piece.

GRADE LEVELS

Upper Middle and High School

CONTENT AREAS

English/Language Arts

Theatre

Music

TIME

45-70 minutes or

One class period

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

- Students will identify poetic devices in a poem.
- Students will interpret a piece of poetry.
- Students will utilize poetic devices to create an effective message.

PSAE/ACT SKILLS

Reading Skills: Main Ideas and Author's Approach

Writing Skills: Expressing Judgments; Using Language

STANDARDS AND BENCHMARKS

Fine Arts State Goal 26B

English Language Arts State Goals 1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 3B, 3C, 4B

LEARNING STYLES

Musical/Rhythmic

Bodily/Kinesthetic

Verbal/Linguistic

Interpersonal

Intrapersonal

MATERIALS

"To The Young Who Want to Die" by Gwendolyn Brooks Student Handout

"To The Young Who Want to Die" by Gwendolyn Brooks Teacher Guide

"To The Young Who Want to Die" by Gwendolyn Brooks Sentence Strips

VOCABULARY

Assonance

Personification

Repetition

Alliteration

Symbolism

Metaphor

ASSESSMENT

Positive message poem or song

ACTIVITIES

Anticipatory Set

- Ask students to write for a moment, listing as many issues facing teens or kids their age as they are able. Prompt them by asking questions such as: “What issues do you have to deal with at school— from friends, from classmates, from teachers?” “What issues might some students face outside of school?” “What issues might girls face that boys do not or vice versa?”
- Allow, but do not require, some students to share their responses.
- Tell students to set their lists aside to return to at the end of class.
- They will be using their lists to pick a topic for their Positive Message poem or song.

Lesson:

Define (or review) the following terms and ask students to copy them into their notebooks: **assonance, personification, repetition, alliteration, symbolism, metaphor** Students’ textbooks should have all of these term, but you may also wish to use the definitions provided on the **teacher’s guide** copy of the poem handout.

- Pass out **sentence strip** lines of the Gwendolyn Brooks poem to small groups of students and have them read through the line a few times. Tell students they will be reading their line for the class and to decide how to deliver the line. They should consider the following:
 - What gestures should accompany the reading?
 - What facial expressions would be appropriate?
 - Which words should be emphasized?
 - Where should the volume grow louder or softer?
 - When and how should pauses take place?
- Have students stand in a circle in order of the lines and read them one after another. Be sure to instruct students to listen for the meaning of the poem as a whole and not to talk while other students are reading their lines. The first time through will probably have a lot of stumbling and students might be a little shy so leave time to go through the entire poem multiple times. Briefly debrief after each try using the following focus points.
 - For the first reading, ask students to pay particular attention to the lines immediately before and after their own line and consider how they might change the delivery of the line.
 - For the second reading, ask students to pay attention to particular sounds they notice in the poem.
 - For the third reading, ask students to pick out strong or powerful images in the poem.
 - For the fourth reading, ask students to identify the overall message and meaning of the poem. What is the author trying to communicate? You may also wish to talk about mood or tone if you feel students are ready.
- Have students return to their seats and pass out a **copy of the poem** as a whole. Using the discussion and their poetic terms notes, they should work to identify the use of these terms in the poem. See the **teacher guide** of the poem for examples. You may wish to complete this activity in small groups, independently, or as a class, depending on the group of students. The Gradual Release model described in the resource section below also works well.
- Point out to students that Brooks uses the poetic devices in the poem to help make her message powerful and positive to readers and listeners.

Debrief/Assessment:

- Ask students to return to the list of issues facing youth that they made at the beginning of class and choose one that they would like to create a positive message about.
- They should title their poem modeled after Brooks: “To the _____ who want _____”. After the title, allow students to write freely, using Brooks as a model if they choose, or deviating from the original poem’s format entirely. Some example titles: “To The Girls Who Want Respect” or “To The Schoolboys Who Want to Get High”
- Remind students that Brooks used poetic devices to create her message and that their poems or songs should include the same. Have them refer to the copy of the rubric attached to the bottom of the poem handout to see how they will be assessed.
- Allow students to share their poems.

*Variation or possible extension activity: In a **theatre class**, you may wish to de-emphasize the literary terms and focus instead on the physical and verbal presentation of the poetry. In a **music class**, you can ask students to sing their initial lines during the opening exercise and instead of writing poems, require students to write songs set to a melody.

RESOURCES:

What Is Gradual Release?

The **Gradual Release of Learning Responsibility** is an instruction model in which the responsibility for task completion shifts gradually from the teacher to the student, through guided practice of comprehension lessons

A general format for gradual release:

1. teacher modeling or demonstrating for whole class
2. whole class work with student input
3. small group work with teacher moving around room to help, correct and reinstruct when necessary
4. independent work without assistance

Some teachers choose to explain this process to students using this simple and memorable tool:

I do. You watch.-----I do. You help.-----You do. I help.-----You do. I watch.

Rubric: Positive Message Poem or Song

	A	B	C
5	Title is modeled after Gwendolyn Brooks and addresses a specific audience	Positive message is communicated strongly and clearly	Poem or Song uses at least two poetic devices correctly to add emphasis to message
3	Title is modeled after Gwendolyn Brooks but it is not entirely clear who the intended audience is	Attempt to communicate positive message is partially successful, but lacks clarity	Poem or song uses only one device, or uses two but may be awkward, forced, or contain minor usage errors
1	No title or title not related to assignment or Gwendolyn Brooks model	No clear message, or message is negative, contradictory, or confusing	Does not use a poetic device to support the meaning of the poem or song

Total Points Possible: 15

Suggestions for Extension Activities:

1. Coordinate with an art class and have students create paintings or collages of images that support the meaning of the poems.
2. In a technology class, ask students to turn the poems into visual essays using PowerPoint or similar software.
3. Have students visit other classrooms or younger students to share their positive message poems.