

LANGUAGE ARTS

Finding Your Voice

Related Subjects:

Social Studies

Objectives:

- o Identify the key elements of writing
- o Produce an original poem

Resources:

- o **Hip-Hop Poetry and the Classics for the Classroom** (By Alan Sitomer and Michael Cirelli)
A book that connects classic poetry with Hip-Hop poetry.
- o **The Rose That Grew From the Concrete** (By Tupac Shakur) A collection of Tupac Shakur's poetry
- o **Brave New Voices** (By Jen Weiss and Scott Herndon) A guide to teaching spoken word poetry
- o *Poetic License* A documentary film focusing on youth spoken word poetry

Introduction:

So much of Hip-Hop revolves around language — the creative and rhythmic use of words to convey a message — that it's imperative that students understand how language is constructed, and how they can use it to creatively express themselves. This lesson is intended to encourage students to find their individual voice and tap into their daily lives as material for their writing. The writing exercises should start the process, and hopefully inspire students to become more deeply engaged in their writing as a powerful form of self-expression.

Activity:

Have students select one of the following writing exercises.

I Am Poem

- 1) Students write down five words they would use to describe themselves.
- 2) On the board, the teacher creates a table like the one below, listing six broad categories across the top. (We have suggested some categories, but feel free to use whatever titles you like.)
- 3) Students copy the table into their notebooks.
- 4) The class as a whole calls out and fills in each of the columns with descriptive words.
- 5) Students copy those words into their notebooks and circle four of the words in each column. Those words, combined with their original five words, will compose their poetic palette.
- 6) Students then use these words to create a poem. (They can use any other words as well, but they must use the words that they wrote down and circled.)
- 7) The first words of the poem must be: "I am..."

Animals	Musical Instruments	Mythical characters	Weather	Places	Colors

Note: For more advanced work, change "I am" to "I was" or "I will be." Also, the students can use for their palette the words that they did not circle.



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Community Voice

Many writers find the material and inspiration for their work in their communities. The environment informs their voices, prompting them to observe and chronicle life around them. This writing exercise is intended to have students draw on their communities for their own work, encouraging them to notice the people and events that make up their everyday lives. What observations can you make about your own neighborhood? What makes your neighborhood unique? Where could you be most inspired to write? Why?

The List Poem

Asheena, a youth poet, describes her writing process this way: “Sometimes I’ll just sit on the train and write what I see. Not necessarily a poem, I’ll just write:

- a man with blue pants...
- a red hat...
- a little girl cries...
- her mother puts a pacifier in her mouth.”

Following this model, students create a list, writing down descriptive phrases. The list should describe elements of their community, whether it is their street, the school cafeteria, or their corner market.

From that list, students then construct a poem. To help get students started, you may find it helpful to offer some writing prompts:

- o “Everyday on the way to school, I see...”
- o “During the school day, I hear...”

A Poem for My Generation

Students write a poem to their peers. What message would they like to convey to other teens around the country, or the world?

(lesson plan developed by Youth Speaks)

