

Fighting Words Poetry Workshop: Writing in Response to Current Events

Lesson Overview:

In this workshop, you will examine the intersections of poetry and journalism. You will have the opportunity to explore under-reported news stories, analyze poems that respond to those stories, and write your own poems using a pressing story of your choice.

Poems produced in this workshop can be entered into the Fighting Words Poetry Contest for the chance to win cash prizes and publication. For complete contest information and guidelines, please see page 4 of this document.

Objectives:

By the end of this workshop, you will be able to...

- explain the connection between journalism and poetry
- analyze the connection between a poem and the news story by which it was inspired
- make a personal/local connection to a Pulitzer Center news story
- write a poem that includes lines from a news story

Discussion Questions:

1. What is an <i>under-reported story</i> ?	
2. What under-reported stories are you aware of in other parts of the world? What about in your own community?	
3. How can you make people aware of the under-reported stories that matter to you?	
4. What is the role of journalism in raising awareness? What is the role of art and poetry?	
5. How are journalism and poetry similar? How are they different?	

Reading/Listening/Watching:

1. Watch 0:00-5:05 of the New York Times documentary [“Inside a Suicide Prevention Center in Puerto Rico.”](#) While you watch, consider: What makes this an under-reported story? Why should we care about it?
2. Read and listen to the audio (1:55) of [“Permission”](#) by Noel Quiñones. While you listen, underline any lines you hear that you heard word-for-word in the documentary.
3. Discuss the poem:

1. What lines jump out at you as important, interesting, and/or beautiful? Copy them here.	
2. What is the subject of this poem? What under-reported stories can you identify?	
3. In what ways is the poem similar to the documentary? In what ways is it different?	
4. How does the speaker of the poem express personal connection to the subject matter?	
5. What poetic devices can you identify in the poem? (Metaphor? Repetition? Alliteration?) Choose one and explain how it contributes to the poem.	

4. What do you think Quiñones’s reference to “119 syllables” means? To find out, read his commentary on the poem:

“In the aftermath of Hurricane María, Puerto Rico has been struggling to rebuild and been denied federal grants to do so. While reporters and news stations have focused on people’s access to food, water, and electricity we are seeing a new crisis develop. The New York Times published a mini documentary entitled ‘Inside a Suicide Prevention Center in Puerto Rico’ at the beginning of January highlighting the mental health crisis now taking hold. As a third generation Puerto Rican, I have never been able to shake the pain of being from a place that is not quite a country and not quite a state. We have always lived in a precarious identity and while many state Hurricane María as the beginning of our traumas, we have suffered since America’s invasion 119 years ago.” —Noel Quiñones

Now, consider:

- What does "119 syllables" refer to? How is this related to the content of the rest of the poem?
- Does Quiñones's commentary change your perspective on the poem in any way? What about your perspective on how poetry can respond to under-reported stories?

More Model Poems:

1. Look through the Fighting Words poetry contest winners and finalists from [2019](#) and [2018](#). All of these poems were written by students in grades K-12. Choose **one poem** and read it in full, then skim the news story they wrote in response to.

2. Respond to the following questions, using evidence from the poem you chose to read:

1. What lines jump out at you as important, interesting, and/or beautiful? Copy them here.	
2. What is the subject of this poem? What under-reported stories can you identify?	
3. What poetic devices can you identify in the poem? (Metaphor? Repetition? Alliteration?) Choose one and explain how it contributes to the poem.	

Selecting Your Story:

Now it's your turn to choose an under-reported story that matters to you!

1. Take about 10 minutes to explore headlines, images, and article summaries. Choose a news story that you care about—you will be writing your poem in response to this story. You can find all eligible news stories at pulitzercenter.org/reporting (TIP: click "Show Advanced" to search by country, region, issue area, and more criteria). Here is a list of **suggested news stories** to get you started!

Text and photo stories:

- [Black Puerto Ricans Say They're a Police Target](#)
- [America's Clean Water Crisis Goes Far Beyond Flint. There's No Relief in Sight](#)
- [El Salvador: The Deportees Taking Our Calls](#)

- [Even with a Harvard Pedigree, Caste Follows ‘Like a Shadow’](#)
- [‘We Are All We Have’: Sexual Assault Victims Find Their Collective Strength](#)
- [Afropunk Brings the Black Lives Matter Ethos Abroad](#)
- [These Three Supertrees Can Protect Us from Climate Change](#)

Video stories:

- [Ballet and Bullets: Dancing out of the Favelas](#)
- [She's Not a Boy: Intersex and Proud](#)
- [Young Indigenous Rainforest Defenders: Plastic Is Killing Us in the Amazon](#)
- [We Became Fragments: A Teenager Starting Over in Canada](#)
- [Diego's Rebirth](#)
- [Ugandan Widow's Relatives Stole Everything. Now She's Fighting Back.](#)
- [Pro-Democracy Demonstrators and Beijing Fight for the Future of Hong Kong](#)
- [Across the Border and Back: An Asylum Seeker's Journey](#)

2. Once you have chosen a story, **refer to the worksheet at the end of this document**, called “Fighting Words Worksheet.” Write down the title of the story you chose and the name(s) of the journalist(s) who reported the story.

3. Read or watch the story you chose. **While you read or watch**, copy and paste lines that jump out at you as important, interesting, or beautiful. These should be phrases that capture the feeling of the story. You can write down both full sentences *and* shorter phrases.

Creating Your Poem:

1. Use the second page of your “Fighting Words Worksheet” to write your poem. Remember to incorporate *at least* one line from the story you selected into your poem.

2. OPTIONAL: Record a video or audio clip of yourself performing your poem!

3. **Enter your poem** to the 2020 Fighting Words poetry contest using [this Google Form](#). The form will ask for some basic information, and you will upload your poem to the form as an attachment; you will need to save your poem as a Word Document, PDF, or another text file. The **contest deadline** is Friday, May 15, 2020 11:59 pm EST.

Prizes:

- 1st place: \$100, publication on the Pulitzer Center website
- 2nd place: \$50, publication on the Pulitzer Center website
- 3rd place: \$25, publication on the Pulitzer Center website
- Finalists: Publication on the Pulitzer Center website

If you have questions about these guidelines or if the Google Form is not accessible to you, please email hberk@pulitzercenter.org.

Fighting Words Worksheet

Select a Pulitzer Center story and integrate at least one line from that story into an original poem of your own. Make it personal. Show that you care. Make the reader care.

Title of the news story you selected:

Name(s) of the journalist(s) who reported the story:

Line(s) from the Pulitzer Center story:

Your poem: