

The Power of Poetry

Objective:

You will be able to...

- analyze how two communities use poetry to illuminate challenges in their lives in order to create your own poetry exploring social issues that are important to you.

Warm-up:

1. Write your responses to the following questions in the grid below.

1. What is the purpose of poetry?	
2. Why do people write poems?	
3. How does poetry benefit the poet? How does it benefit the reader?	
4. What is the connection between poetry and journalism?	

Introducing the Lesson:

In this lesson, you will analyze two Pulitzer Center-supported reporting projects about how communities from two different countries use poetry to cope with discrimination. The first project, "Shame: HIV/AIDS and the Church in Jamaica," highlights the difficulties people with HIV/AIDS have in Jamaica, a religious and highly conservative country. The second project,

"Afghanistan: On Love and Suicide," discusses the oppression of women in Afghanistan. The subjects of both projects use poetry to communicate their feelings in relation to their struggles.

Introducing the Reporting:

Read each of the articles mentioned. After reading each article, answer the accompanying reflection questions.

Resource 1: "The Guard and the Shame: HIV and the Jamaican Church"

Read Kwame Dawes's essay from the Pulitzer Center/the *Virginia Quarterly Review*.

As you read, keep an eye out for answers to these questions, and jot down your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. How did Carol Flemmings contract HIV?
2. Why is there a stigma against HIV/AIDS in Jamaica?

Now, read Dawes's accompanying poems. Pick a poem that you like the most. On the same sheet of paper, write why you have picked this poem, and how you think this poem illustrates the challenge this author is facing.

Resource 2: "Why Afghan Women Risk Death to Write Poetry"

Read Eliza Griswold and Seamus Murphy's reporting from the Pulitzer Center/the *New York Times*.

As you read, keep an eye out for answers to these questions, and jot down your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What is a landai?
2. How do landais dispel stereotypes about Afghan women?
3. Why do women want to keep landais anonymous?
4. What city doesn't forbid women from writing landais?
5. How was Zarmina a poet-martyr?
6. Why don't Pashto stories feature two lovers?

Pick one landai that you enjoy. Write a short reflection explaining why you picked this landai, and how you think it illustrates the challenge this author is facing.

Extension Activity:

Personal reflection

1. Research a social issue that is relevant to your community.
2. Write a long form poem and landai about the topic.

Be prepared to share your work with the class. Share your work with the Pulitzer Center by tweeting @pulitzercenter or emailing your poems to education@pulitzercenter.org.