

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 underreported 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 5 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>underreported story</i> ? (If you're not sure, watch this video .)	
2. What underreported 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 underreported stories that matter to you?	
4. What is the role of journalism in responding to underreported issues? What is the role of art and poetry?	
5. How are journalism and poetry similar? How are they different?	

Analyze a Model Poem:

1. Watch [Guanajuato Norte](#), a short documentary made by Ingrid Holmquist and Sana Malik for *The New Yorker*, through **at least** 7:42. While you watch, consider: What makes this an underreported story? Why should we care about it?

2. Read “Unfatherland” by Muna Agwa. You can also listen to Agwa read her poem aloud in English [here](#). 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 underreported 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. Read Muna Agwa’s bio and author’s note:

Muna is a rising junior at Hathaway Brown School in Cleveland, Ohio. She enjoys reading and writing, swimming, problem-solving, and learning new things. She hopes that one day, people can overcome their differences through art and empathy. As a first-generation American, she has seen firsthand how immigration can separate families and was inspired to write a poem highlighting this reality. Muna aspires to be a surgeon one day, although she hopes to never stop writing.

5. Discuss:

- Does Agwa’s bio and author’s note change your perspective on the poem in any way?

- What might we learn from Agwa about how to making personal connections to underreported stories through a poem? (Think about Agwa’s own bio, and her use of quotes in the poem.)

More Model Poems:

1. Look through the Fighting Words poetry contest winners and finalists from [2021](#), [2020](#), [2019](#), and [2018](#). All of these poems were written by students in grades K-12. Choose two poems and read them in full, then skim the news stories the poets responded to.

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

First poem

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

Second poem

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

Selecting Your Story:

Now it's your turn to choose an underreported story that matters to you!

1. Take some time 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/stories. TIP: you can sort stories by “Issue” (the themes of the stories) and by “Country.”

Here is a list of suggested news stories to get you started!

Stories for grades 3 and up:

- [No School, No Hair Cut: One Girl's Journey Through One of the World's Longest COVID Lockdowns](#) [Photo, text]
- [Afropunk Brings the Black Lives Matter Ethos Abroad](#) [Photo, text]
- [In Isolation, Abby Dreams of Space](#) [Video, illustrations]
- [To Fully Vaccinate Population, Ghana Faces Scarcity and a Troubled History](#) [Audio]
- [Down from the Mountains: Millions of Chinese Kids Are Parenting Themselves](#) [Video]
- [Taking Care of Each Other: Madison Communities Respond to Food Insecurity in the Age of COVID](#) [Text]

Stories for grades 6 and up:

- [The Lost Ancestors](#) [Video]
- [How Stigma Makes It Harder to Fight Epidemics](#) [Text]
- [Destined for Bullfighting, He Chose To Revolutionize Flamenco Instead—by Dancing in Drag](#) [Video]
- [No Bars, No Chains, No Locks: How Finland Is Reimagining Incarceration](#) [Photo, text]
- [An American Emergency: America's Hottest Cities](#) [Photo, text, audio]
- [The Untold Story of Black Cowboys in America: How One Florida Farmer Made History](#) [Video, text]
- [Moving Migrants: Inside Bangladesh's Climate Migration](#) [Video]
- [The High-altitude Quest to Save Alpacas](#) [Photo, text]

Stories for grades 9 and up:

- [How Greece Secretly Adopted the World's most Brazen—and Brutal—Way of Keeping Out Refugees](#) [Text]
- [Who's Watching? How Governments Used the Pandemic to Normalize Surveillance](#) [Photo, text]
- [Lack of Government Support Leads to Grassroots Effort To Aid LGBTQ Asylum Seekers](#) [Photo, text]
- [In the Trenches of Ukraine's Forever War](#) [Photo, text]
- [Young Climate Activists Warn Their Elders: Stop Destroying the Planet](#) [Text]
- [Criminal Justice or Criminal Injustice? The Power of Language](#) [Text]
- [Visions of Coronavirus](#) [Photo, text]
- [Nearly 100 Confederate Monuments Were Toppled Last Year. What Happened to Them?](#) [Photo, video]

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.

Writing 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, and to respond to the overall theme of the story.
2. OPTIONAL: Record a video or audio clip of yourself performing your poem!
3. **Enter your poem to the 2022 Fighting Words poetry contest using [this 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 or PDF (please do not submit a Google Doc). Please do not include your name, school, or other identifying information in the attached document containing your poem. The **contest deadline** is Sunday, May 15, 2021 at 11:59pm EST.

If you have questions, or if the entry form is not accessible to you, please email education@pulitzercenter.org.

Fighting Words Poem Writing Worksheet

Select a Pulitzer Center news story and integrate at least one line from that story into an original poem of your own. The poem must be related to the main theme(s) of the story. This worksheet will help you get started! Suggested stories are available at pulitzercenter.org/poetrycontest, and all eligible stories are available at pulitzercenter.org/stories.

Title of your chosen article:

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

Line(s) from the Pulitzer Center story:

1. Write down words and phrases that stand out to you as interesting, emotional, or beautiful while you explore the story.
2. After you have finished exploring, go through your word / phrase bank and highlight the words and phrases that you like best.

Your Poem

Title of your poem:

Epigraph:

Use this format: *With lines from "STORY TITLE" by JOURNALIST'S NAME, a Pulitzer Center reporting project*

Poem:

