

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 from the Pulitzer Center, analyze poems that respond to those stories, and write your own poems using a Pulitzer Center story of your choice.

Poems written in this workshop can be entered into the Fighting Words Poetry Contest for the chance to win cash prizes and publication. For 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 an underreported news story
- write a poem that amplifies an underreported news story that is important to you

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. Choose one of the following stories, and read it in full. When making your selection, please consider the topic and whether it feels safe for you to explore at this time; some stories contain difficult content. While you read, consider: What makes this an underreported story? Why should we care about it?

- A. [“One Bullet Can Kill, but It Takes More Than 100 People To Save a Gunshot Victim’s Life”](#) by James Sprankle, Paige Skinner, and Kate Bubacz
- B. [“In the Trenches of Ukraine’s Forever War”](#) by James Verini and Paolo Pellegrin
- C. [“A New Vision of Artificial Intelligence for the People”](#) by Karen Hao
- D. [“Young Climate Activists Warn Their Elders: Stop Destroying the Planet”](#) by Emily Baumgaertner, Parth MN, and Kate Linthicum

2. Read the poem that responds to the story you chose. (The poem will have the same letter as the story!) Some poems also have audio recordings you can listen to. While you read/listen, underline any lines you hear that you recognize from the story you read.

- A. [“One Bullet, One Hundred Sets of Hands”](#) by Jamar Jackson
- B. [“as another day breaks”](#) by Grace Liang
- C. [“More Is Not More”](#) by Fiona Lu
- D. [“melting softly”](#) by Charlie Johnson

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 story you read? 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.	

More Model Poems:

1. Look through the Fighting Words poetry contest winners and finalists from [2022](#), [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 6 and up:

- [Heaven to Hell, Blue Skies to Pain: the Lament of Iraq's Climate Migrants](#)
- [The Lost Ancestors](#)
- [Cost of a KitKat: Big Brands Leave Sugar Farmers at the Mercy of Climate Extremes](#)
- [No School, No Hair Cut: One Girl's Journey Through COVID Lockdown](#)
- [Native People Won the Right to Vote in 1948, but the Road to the Ballot Box Is Still Bumpy](#)
- [To Fully Vaccinate Population, Ghana Faces Scarcity and a Troubled History](#)
- [How an Activist Group in Brooklyn Is Empowering Latina Cleaning Workers](#)
- [Disaster Aid Running Out As Pakistan Struggles To Recover From 2022 Floods](#)
- [With New Unions, Argentina's Domestic Workers Fight Their Way Out of Poverty and Insecurity in the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [In a Small Eastern Shore Community Descended From Slavery, a Grassroots Affordable Housing Model Expands](#)
- [Tam's Comeback: Diary of First Visit Home After Transitioning](#)
- [Seasons: A Story of Succession on a New Jersey Farm](#)

Stories for grades 9 and up:

- [Broken by Design: A Special Report on Jackson's Water System](#)
- [Beyond the Green Wave: Dominican Afro-Feminists Fight for Reproductive Freedom](#)
**Content notes: Mention of sexual assault, brief expletive*
- ['Ticking Ecological Time Bombs': Thousands of Sunken WWII Ships Rusting at Bottom of Pacific](#)
- [Drawn to War: A Ukraine Journal](#)
- [Across the South, Black Workers Defy Labor History](#)
- [For Ghana's Only Openly Transgender Musician, 'Every Day Is Dangerous'](#)
- [Jerusalem's Town Forgotten Behind the Wall](#) **Content notes: State violence*
- [Criminal Justice or Criminal Injustice? The Power of Language](#)
- [The 'Spider-Man' of Sudan](#) **Content notes: State violence and protest repression*
- [Working in Their Sleep: Labor Conditions at America's Largest Meatpacking Company](#)
- [The Talk: These Teens From Rural Utah Are Filling 'The Gaps' in Sex Ed](#) **Content notes: Mention of sexual assault*
- [Is the Next Misinformation Crisis Fear-Based and Local?](#)
- [After the Fire: Bronx Residents Return to Building That Burned](#) ** Content notes: Description of death in a fire*

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, write down lines that jump out at you as important, interesting, or beautiful. You can write down both full sentences *and* shorter phrases. Try to identify phrases that...

- capture the feeling of the story
- share important information
- paint a powerful image

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!

Entering Your Poem in the Fighting Words Poetry Contest:

Enter your poem in the 2023 Fighting Words poetry contest using the form at pulitzercenter.org/poetrycontest. (Scroll down to find the form.)

The form will ask for some basic information, and you will upload your poem as an attachment; you will need to save your poem as a Word document or PDF (do not submit a Google Doc). Please do not include your name, school, or other identifying information in the attachment. The **contest deadline** is Monday, May 15, 2023 at 11:59pm EDT.

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:



Reviewing Your Poem

Directions: All poems get better with revision! Ask yourself these questions while you re-read your poem, and identify areas you may want to work on more. When you have reflected on the question, check it off.

1. How successful is my poem on its own terms? (Am I communicating what I want to communicate?)

Questions to ask yourself:

- What response(s) do I want to evoke in my reader? Have I chosen the best words to evoke this response?
- Have I used poetic devices (e.g. repetition, imagery, metaphor), or chosen not to use them, to achieve a specific effect?

2. Have I successfully included words and phrases from a Pulitzer Center story, and responded to the themes of that story?

Questions to ask yourself:

- Have I chosen lines that add something important to the poem?
- Are the lines integrated into the poem smoothly, so their presence feels natural?
- Have I amplified the underreported story in my poem?

3. Did I select my story and perspective thoughtfully, and have I treated the story and people involved in it respectfully in my poem?

Questions to ask yourself:

- What is my relationship to the story I have chosen? How can I make a personal connection?
- Why am I writing from the perspective I have chosen? What other perspectives could I choose, and how would those choices change the poem?
- If the subjects of the story I have chosen read my poem, how might they feel? Am I honoring their voices, stories, and agency?