

Fighting Words: Writing Poetry in Response to Current Events

Lesson Overview:

Using this graphic organizer, you will explore how poetry and journalism can highlight global issues that impact you, your community, and the world.

You will read poems written by young poets that respond to news stories, and then write your own poem using a Pulitzer Center news story about the global issue of your choice.

You can enter the poem you write into the Fighting Words Poetry Contest for the chance to win a cash prize and be published on the Pulitzer Center website! For complete contest information and guidelines, please see page 5 of this document.

Step 1: Answer the questions in the table below.

1. What is a <i>global issue</i> ? Write the definition in your own words.	
2. Share an example of a global issues that impacts you and/or your community. How is it impacting people?	
3. How can you raise awareness about global issues that matter to you? Consider different ways in which people share stories.	

Step 2: Explore an underreported news story.

1. Read [“This ‘Super Banana’ Was Designed To Save Lives. Will It Matter That It’s Orange?”](#), a news story by Agostino Petroni for *National Geographic*.

Story excerpt (language has been adapted):

Scientists at Uganda's National Agricultural Research Laboratories have made a "super banana." It took millions of dollars and 20 years to make. It was created for the noblest of causes: to save the lives of Ugandan children. Thousands die each year from vitamin A deficiency.

The World Health Organization estimates that 190 million preschool children suffer from vitamin A deficiency. It is the leading cause of preventable blindness in children. It also inhibits kids’ growth and weakens their resistance to illness so much that many die from treatable diseases.

In Uganda, bananas are found virtually everywhere...Not only are they piled high in open-air markets; they fill the shelves of all kinds of stores, whether a barbershop, a CD reseller, or an internet café. Nearly every farm and home garden grows multiple banana plants. Locals eat them steamed with a pinch of salt, smashed into chicken stew, fried, barbecued, boiled, brewed into wine, distilled into alcohol, or simply peeled for a sweet afternoon snack. Yet local bananas have never provided enough provitamin A for a healthy diet.

Scientists have long crossbred banana plants to improve resistance to pests, fungus, or drought. But fortifying bananas to deliver nutrients to humans who eat them is a first.

After reading the story, write down:

A 1-3 sentence summary of the story	
Two feelings you have in response to this story	
One feeling you think a person in the story might be feeling	

Step 3: Analyze a poem written in response to the news story you explored.

Read [“Super Banana”](#) by William Taylor, a second-grade poet. William wrote in response to the news story you just read, and he included several words and phrases from the news story! Try to notice these words and phrases while you read the story.

After reading the poem, write down:

1. What words and phrases came straight out of the news story?
2. What lines jump out at you as important, interesting, and/or beautiful?
Line 1: _____ _____
What I like about this line: _____ _____
Line 2: _____ _____
What I like about this line: _____ _____
Line 3: _____ _____
What I like about this line: _____ _____

Step 4: Choose a focus issue and a story to respond to in your poem.

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

First, visit pulitzercenter.org/poetrycontest and click on the Suggested Stories tab. Click on a global issue that interests you, and explore the stories there!

Take some time to explore headlines (story titles), images, and the first paragraph or two of different stories. Choose a news story that you care about—you will be writing your poem in response to this story.

If you don't find a story you want to use in our Suggested Stories, you can find all news stories at pulitzercenter.org/stories. TIP: you can sort stories by "Issue" (the themes of the stories) and by "Country." Please note! Some stories may have disturbing content. Please choose your story with the support of an adult, and let them know if you want to talk about your feelings about the story after you explore it.

Step 5: Gather words and phrases from the news story, and use them to start writing your poem.

Once you have chosen a story, use the worksheet on the next page to write down the title of the story you chose and the name(s) of the journalist(s) who reported the story.

Read/watch/listen to the story. While you read/watch/listen, copy and paste words and phrases that jump out at you as important, interesting, or beautiful. These should be phrases that capture the feeling of the story, important information you want to share, and/or a powerful image. You can write down both full sentences *and* shorter phrases. You may need to read/watch the story more than once!

Step 6: Write and revise your poem!

Use the worksheet on pages 7-8 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. Then, use the checklist on page 9 to help you edit/revise your poem.

OPTIONAL: Record a video or audio clip of yourself reading/performing your poem!

Step 7: Enter your poem in the 2026 Fighting Words Poetry Contest using the form at pulitzercenter.org/poetrycontest.

The form will ask for some basic information about yourself. You will also need to include the name and contact information of your teacher, or another adult in your life.

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 10, 2026 at 11:59pm ET.

If you have any questions, please email education@pulitzercenter.org.

Fighting Words Poem Writing Worksheet

Write an original poem that includes at least one line from the underreported news story you read/watched on the Pulitzer Center website. The poem must be related to the main topic(s) of the story. This worksheet will help you get started!

Title of your chosen article:

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

Words and phrase from the Pulitzer Center story:

Write down words and phrases that stand out to you as interesting, emotional, or beautiful while you explore the story. These should be phrases that capture the feeling of the story, important information you want to share, and/or a powerful image.

Form those words and phrases into complete lines.

Choose three of your favorite words/phrases from your list above, and write them into a complete line of poetry, or a sentence. Here is an example from William Taylor's poem:

Line from the story: "blindness"

Lines from the poem: "Be gone blindness!"

Your Poem

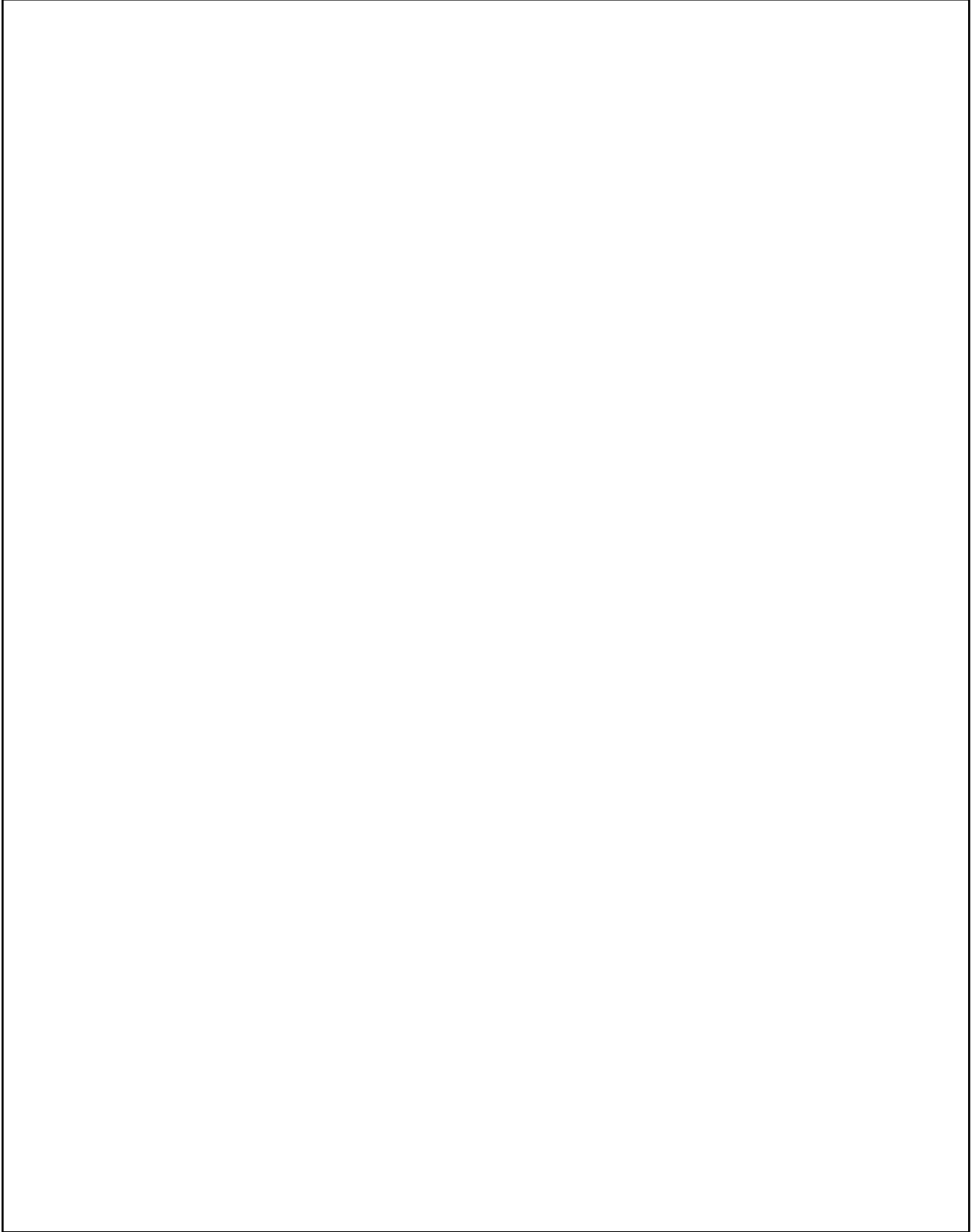
Use the words and phrases from the story you have gathered, and the lines you have begun forming, to write a complete, original poem of your own!

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 overall?

Questions to ask yourself:

- How do I want people to feel when I read this poem? Have I chosen the best words to lead them to feel this way?
- Have I chosen my words carefully? Have I double checked their definitions?
- Have I read my poem aloud and listened to how it sounds?

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

Questions to ask yourself:

- Have I chosen phrases that add something important to the poem?
- Are the phrases included in the poem smoothly, so their presence feels natural?
- Does my poem call attention to the underreported news story I explored?

3. Does my poem treat its topic and the people affected by that topic with respect?

Questions to ask yourself:

- Why did I choose this story? How can I make a personal connection to the story?
- 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 people featured in the story I have chosen read my poem, how might they feel? Am I treating their voices and stories with respect? If someone wrote a poem like this about me, my story, or my community, how would I feel?