Teaching Poetry: Poetry 180
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Welcome. We’re glad you’re here! Use the chat box to introduce yourselves. Let us know:

- Your first name
- Where you’re joining us from
- What you teach
Today’s Agenda

- Introduction of Project
- Discussion/Readings of Poems
- Q&A
- Wrap Up
Questions?

Post them in the chat box!
About This Program

Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature

Listen to historic recordings by Andre Lorde, Kurt Vonnegut, Adrienne Rich, Robert Hayden, and many more.

The Library of Congress promotes poetry and literature year-round through our online and in-person programs, our honors and prizes, and our ambassadors.

Start Your Literary Journey

Watch
Take a front-row seat at events with literary luminaries—no matter where you live.

Listen
Tune in and discover the literary voices that speak directly to you.

Explore
Join our poets laureate as they engage communities across the country.
Poet Laureate

Joy Harjo, 33rd Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry. Photo credit: Shawn Miller

Current Poet Laureate

Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden appointed Joy Harjo as the 33rd Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress on June 19, 2019. Harjo was reappointed to a second term on April 30, 2020, and a third term on Nov. 19, 2020.

Joy Harjo is the first Native American poet to serve in the position—she is an enrolled member of the Muscogee Creek Nation. She was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on May 6, 1951, and is the author of nine books of poetry—including An American Sunrise (2019), Conflict Resolution for Old People (1993), The Woman Who Fell from the Sky (1994), which received the Oklahoma Book Arts Award and in Med Love and War (1996), which received an American Book Award and the Delmore Schwartz Memorial Award. Harjo has also written a memoir, Crazy Brave (W. W. Norton, 2012), which won the 2013 PEN Center USA literary prize for creative nonfiction, as well as a children’s book, The Good Luck Cat (Harcourt, Brace, 2000), and a young adult book, For a Girl Growing (University of Arizona Press, 2004).

- Librarian of Congress Names Joy Harjo the Nation’s 33rd Poet Laureate (06/18/2019)
- U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo Appointed for a Second Term (04/30/2020)
- Joy Harjo Appointed to Third Term as U.S. Poet Laureate; Launches Signature Project, “Living Nations, Living Words” (11/19/2020)
- Mail Resource Guide on Joy Harjo
- Watch Q&A with Poet Laureate Joy Harjo
Poet Laureate Projects

Since the Poet Laureateship was created by an act of Congress in 1985, nearly half of the laureates have taken on a signature project to raise the national appreciation of poetry. Learn about and explore these dynamic projects—with a digital presence—here.

Living Nations, Living Words

Created in 2020 by Poet Laureate Joy Harjo, this project gathers a sampling of work by 47 contemporary Native poets from across the nation to show that Native people and poets have vital and unequivocal roots in the United States. The project features an interactive Story Map and a newly developed audio collection.

American Conversations: Celebrating Poems in Rural Communities

During 2018, Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith visited rural communities around the country and gave away copies of her anthology, American Journal: Fifty Poems for Our Time, to spark conversations about the power of poetry.

The Technicolor Adventures of Catalina Neon

Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera and artist Juana Medina created this bilingual, illustrated project in 2016-2017 with input from second and third graders and their school librarians from around the country.
Welcome to Poetry 180. Poetry can and should be an important part of our daily lives. Poems can inspire and make us think about what it means to be a member of the human race. By just spending a few minutes reading a poem each day, new worlds can be revealed.

Poetry 180 is designed to make it easy for students to hear or read a poem on each of the 180 days of the school year. I have selected the poems you will find here with high school students in mind. They are intended to be listened to, and I suggest that all members of the school community be included as readers. A great time for the readings would be following the end of daily announcements over the public address system.

Listening to poetry can encourage students and other learners to become members of the circle of readers for whom poetry is a vital source of pleasure. I hope Poetry 180 becomes an important and enriching part of the school day.

**Billy Collins**
Former Poet Laureate of the United States

Learn more about Billy Collins »
More About Poetry 180

More About This Program

From Billy Collins, former Poet Laureate of the United States, to the high school teachers of America:

I want to acquaint you with a program for making poetry an active part of the daily experience of American high school students. The program is called Poetry 180 and offers a poem for every day of the approximately 180-day school year. But there is another reason I chose that name.

A 180-degree turn implies a turning back—in this case, to poetry. The idea behind Poetry 180 is simpler: to have a poem read each day to the students of American high schools across the country. How the program is applied is completely up to each school. Following are guidelines for implementing Poetry 180. I have tried to keep the program as flexible as possible so that it can be easily adapted to the needs of your school and especially to your particular school calendar.

How does a school take part in Poetry 180?

All you need to do is print out one of the poems from this Web site, numbered from 1 through 180, and have it read to the school in a public forum, such as at the end of the day’s announcements. You may want to print out a new poem every day or it may be easier to print out several at a time for a week or even a month.

What do we do with the poems?

Select someone to read a poem to the school each day. Or, better still, give prospective readers the opportunity to look at the next few weeks’ worth of poems and let them choose a poem they want to read. The daily poem may be read aloud by any member of the school community—a student, a teacher, an administrator, or a staff person. Students with literary inclinations might be the most eager to read, but teachers should aim at creating a broad spectrum of readers to encourage the notion that poetry belongs to everyone. Ideally, the editor of the student literary magazine would read one day and the volleyball coach the next day, a member of the grounds crew the day after that. The program should be as democratic as possible and not property of one group. Wide participation might even increase the overall sense of community in the school.

The goal is to give students a chance to listen to a poem each day. The best time for the reading would be at the end of the daily announcements, whether they are delivered over a public address system, at an assembly in an auditorium or by teachers in their individual homerooms. The hope is that poetry will become a part of the daily life of students in addition to being a subject that is part of the school curriculum.
Poem 013: Did I Miss Anything?

Nothing, When we realized you weren't here we sat with our hands folded on our desks in silence for the full two hours.

Everything, I gave an exam worth 40 percent of the grade for this term and assigned some reading due today on which I'm about to hand out a quiz worth 50 percent.

Nothing, None of the content of this course has value or meaning. Take as many days off as you like; any activities we undertake as a class I assure you will not matter either to you or me or anyone without purpose.

Everything, A few minutes after we began last time a shaft of light suddenly descended and an angel or other heavenly being appeared and revealed to us what each woman or man must do to attain divine wisdom in this life and the hereafter. This is the last time the class will meet before we disperse to bring the good news to all people on earth.

Nothing, When you are not present, how could something significant occur?

Everything, Contained in this classroom is a microcosm of human experience assembled for you to query and examine and ponder. This is not the only place such an opportunity has been gathered.

but it was one place.

And you weren't here.

—Tom Wayman

Tom Wayman (1944) is the author of 17 poetry collections, including High Speed Through Shooting Water (Harbour Publishing, 2007).
Poem 126: God Says Yes To Me

I asked God if it was okay to be melodramatic
and she said yes
I asked her if it was okay to be short
and she said it sure is
I asked her if I could wear nail polish
or not wear nail polish
and she said honey
she calls me that sometimes
she said you can do just exactly
what you want to
Thanks God I said
And is it even okay if I don’t paragraph
my letters
Sweatcakes God said
who knows where she picked that up
what I’m telling you is
Yes Yes Yes

—Kaylin Haught

Kaylin Haught
Kaylin Haught (1947-2018) was a poet from Albion, Illinois. Her poems appeared in Ms. Magazine, On the Bus, and other magazines and journals.
Poem 050: Otherwise

I got out of bed on two strong legs. It might have been otherwise. I ate creamy, smooth, milky, ripe, flawless peach. It might have been otherwise. I took the dog uphill to the birch wood. All morning I did the work I love. At noon I lay down with my meek. It might have been otherwise. We ate dinner together at a table with silver candlesticks. It might have been otherwise. I slept in a bed in a room with paintings on the walls, and planned another day just like this day. But one day, I know, it will be otherwise.

—Jane Kenyon

Rights & Access

Jane Kenyon

Jane Kenyon (1947–1995), former Poet Laureate of New Hampshire, was the author of four volumes of poetry. Her collected poems were published by Graywolf Press in 2007.
Q&A: Post questions in the chat box
Thank You!

Please take our survey

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LOCP180