

# Finding Your Voice

## English II CP Poetry Project

Most of you have at least basic proficiency in writing. Some of you still can't articulate the rules of punctuation, but you can produce a piece of writing with fairly good grammar. The biggest thing your writing lacks is voice.

### Voice

Voice is a difficult thing to teach. It's even difficult to define. But it's easy to know when it's there. Recognizing the writer's voice and sensing his or her passion, the reader feels an authentic touch of the writer's mind.

### A Quest

So where do you find a voice if you don't have one? You must first have a desire to find it. This semester we will be looking for voice through a poetry-writing project. Throughout the semester as we're working on debate, argumentation and the persuasive research paper, regular time will be set aside for poetry writing. Over the course of the semester, you will produce and deliver many poems and participate in a poetry slam competition in April. By the end of the semester each student will publish a collection of his or her eight best poems.

### Requirements

- Minimum of eight polished poems
- Top eight poems laid out and printed for a personal publication.
- Submission of at least one poem to Cherry Center Poetry Contest
- Participation in the poetry slam in April

### Topic Ideas

What are some good topics for poetry?

- Begin with you. Each of you is unique with specific passions, interests, relationships, combinations of personality traits, etc. You can explore your interior world when you write poetry. What makes you happy? Angry? Contented? Frustrated? The Romantics knew that the feelings are a treasure trove of topics for poetry.
- You can write about your unique past—think of a particularly memorable time in your life whether it was a dramatic moment (like when the bear chased me down the mountain in Alaska) or a specific moment that may seem ordinary but has some kind of meaning to you (like the Girl with the Pearl Earring to Vermeer).
- I would like to ask you to write a minimum of two poems about the content of the books we read—it could be a sonnet that expresses your gut feeling about a book's theme or a haiku attempting to express a key philosophical idea.

- You can play with different poetic techniques. Write an extended metaphor poem. Use personification, alliteration, or irony. If you're up for a challenge, try to write in a specific meter (iambic tetrameter) with a rhyme scheme.
- You can try to write in someone else's voice. Write a poem from the perspective of an old man who has lived for many years. Try to write with the voice of a famous person or a person with a certain accent. Pretend you are a character from one of the books we've read and write a poem from their perspective (Montag in *Fahrenheit 451*, Walter in *Raisin in the Sun*, etc.)

### **Warnings**

- Be respectful of others. Don't laugh or demean others' work.
- Poetry can be extremely personal. Please know, however, if your poetry hints at child abuse or drug use, I am required by the state to report it.
- Do me the favor of not writing what seems to be the obligatory poem about how you can't think of what to write or how you hate poetry writing.

### **Last Thoughts**

Please treat this as a personal search. There is a relationship between poetry and good writing. The best prose writers and speakers include a certain poetic element in their writing or speaking.

No one would have been impressed if Martin Luther King had said, "I have an idea that all people should get along." "I have a dream!" is much more poetic.

F. Scott Fitzgerald could have said, "There were lots of parties at Gatsby's house." Instead he said, "There was music from my neighbor's house through the summer nights. In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars."

The best novelists, reporters, politicians, screenwriters, sports announcers, etc. all have that ability to turn a phrase in a unique and colorful way. That is their voice. As you learn to think about each word you write and develop the skill of writing poetry, you have the opportunity to develop your unique voice.