

Free Workshop: The Writing of Poetry as Historical Understanding

Come spend a couple hours in beautiful Door County and explore the possibilities of enhancing student understanding of history through creative expression.

Attendees will:

- Create a mind map using background knowledge on the Vietnam War
- Read “Revolutionary Road” (*Smithsonian Magazine*) as a prelude to writing a poem
- Explore the ways teachers can extend the idea of social-studies-based poetry into other forms of creative expression, such as art and dance
- Understand ties between poetry as historical understanding and The Wisconsin Standards for Social Studies

Date

June 21, 10:00-12:00

Location

Old Gibralter Town Hall
4176 Maple St.
Fish Creek, WI

To register for this free workshop, [please click here](#)

Rationale

Just as in the discipline of history, poetry involves making connections between things. Poetry also represents a powerful way for students to express an understanding of historical sources. Asking students to respond poetically to primary sources, in particular, allows students to engage their creativity and even their own personal narratives in exploring what voices from the past have to tell us.

There is a tradition of historically based poetry. The poet Frank X Walker wrote a collection of poems, *Buffalo Dance: The Journey of York*, which describes the Lewis and Clark expedition from the perspective of Clark’s personal slave, York. Wisconsin poet laureate, Margaret Rozga, has published *Pestiferous Questions: A Life in Poems*, based on the life of Jesse Benton Fremont, wife of explorer John Charles Fremont.

Poetic response to historical content is a good culminating activity for an inquiry-based unit. This workshop will allow participants to analyze and process the Vietnam War from the perspective of Vietnamese people who lived and worked on the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The main text for the workshop will be “Revolutionary Road,” from *Smithsonian Magazine*. The article is a secondary source, written by a journalist who covered the war, and who returned to Hanoi to interview those who worked and fought on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The article is filled with rich personal perspectives on the War and Trail from Vietnamese people.

The workshop will also introduce mind mapping as a prelude to writing poetry. Mind mapping involves synthesis of historical content that is expressed visually and verbally.

The inclusion of student-composed poetry as an aspect of inquiry-rich units supports engagement with the following Wisconsin Standards for Social Studies:

SS.BH3.a: Social Interactions

SS.BH2.b: Cultural Patterns

SS.Geog4.a: Characteristics of Place

SS.Hist3.b: Perspective

SS.Hist4.a: Historical Context

SS.Hist4.d: Point of View

PS2.c: Asserting and Reaffirming of Human Rights

INQ2.a: Gather Diverse Sources Applicable to the Inquiry

INQ2.b: Evaluate Sources

INQ4.a: Communicate Conclusions

The interdisciplinary nature of poetry writing in social studies is supported by the following Wisconsin Standards for Literacy in All Subjects:

Reading Standards for Literacy: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing: Text Types and Purposes and Range of Writing

Finally, student composed poetry is supported by the following Information and Technology Literacy Standards:

KC2.a: Produce Creative Artifacts

KC2.b: Build Knowledge by Actively Exploring Real World Issues and Problems

CC2.a: Publish and Present Content

A Kohl Fellow, *Sylvia Cavanaugh* teaches social studies at Sheboygan North High school. She prefers an inquiry-based approach to the study of history, and her students participate in the National History Day program. Cavanaugh is also a Pushcart Prize nominated poet and has published two collections of poetry. She is a contributing editor for *Verse-Virtual: An Online Community of Poets* and is a Frequent Contributor for *Songs of Eretz Poetry Review*. She is the North High Poetry Club advisor and her students are active participants in the Sheboygan chapter of 100 Thousand Poets for Change. She believes that the integration of the arts into the social studies curriculum deepens students' understanding of content and allows them to engage with the material through personal creative expression.

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