Civil Discourse Through Slam Poetry

Overview

This unit guides students through an exploration of personal identity through the lenses of place, others, and society using the AWARE framework (Assert, Wonder, Accept, Respect, Establish). Through structured civil discourse activities, poetry analysis, and reflective journaling, students will examine how external factors shape their sense of self while developing their writing skills. By engaging with slam poetry, artwork, and guided discussions, students will answer essential questions about identity formation, civil discourse practices, and literary analysis.

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Learning Objectives

- Understand and apply principles of civil discourse to small-group and whole-class discussions
- Use the AWARE framework to organize writing and participate in academic discussions
- Apply principles of civil discourse to analyze authors' purpose and point of view in slam poetry
- Reflect on the role of place, others, and society and how it relates to their own identity through journal writing

Essential Questions

- How do place, others, and society contribute to our identity?
- What is civil discourse, and how does it apply to our classroom?
- How do repetition, tone, and other patterns of language reveal the author's purpose and point of view?

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Materials

- Writing prompts (see the "Writing Journals" section for suggestions)
- Selected YouTube videos (preview before showing to students)
    - "Totally Like Whatever, You Know" by Taylor Mali
    - "Like Totally Whatever" by Melissa Lozada Oliva
    - "Suburbia" by Phil Kaye
    - "Brave Seventh Grade Viking Warrior" by Taylor Mali
    - "Poem for the First Day of the Poetry Unit in Language Arts Class" by Kyle "Guante" Tran Myhre
    - "Vincent" by Don McLean
    - "Mayda del Valle at the White House Poetry Jam"
    - "The Sound of Silence" by Simon and Garfunkel
    - Paper People" by Harry Baker
- Selected graphic organizers (available in lesson PDFs)
- Electronic or physical writing journals
- Selected artwork
    - Versailles (Google Arts and Culture)
    - Yosemite National Park (Google Arts and Culture)
    - The Art of Carnival and Masquerading (Google Arts and Culture)
    - Reading Portraits (Google Arts and Culture)

Introduction to Civil Discourse

- Begin the first 3 class periods by guiding students through the memory-circles lesson. The memory-circles exercise introduces the unit topics and gives students an opportunity to participate in a semi-formal academic conversation. The memory-circles slides include prompts and a timer for each question. However, teachers should also provide a hard copy of the questions to students. If students use the full time for each question, then each memory-circles lesson takes about 30 minutes. Teachers can adjust the discussion time to fit the needs of their students and schedule.
- The Introduction to Civil Discourse notes are also designed to be recorded and revised over 3 class periods. Students individually record definitions of civil discourse and then collaborate with small groups to analyze vocabulary words. Students work together to identify morphology, synonyms, and related words. Using the information from the

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slides and the vocabulary words, student groups collaborate to create their own definitions of civil discourse.

Writing Journals

- Writing journals need to be introduced after the civil discourse notes and memory-circles lessons. Students should either keep an electronic journal or a physical notebook in the classroom. Each topic—place, others, and society—is explored over multiple class periods. Students should be encouraged to respond to prompts in prose or poetry/song lyrics. Each day, students select a prompt from the list and write for at least 20 minutes.
- The goal of the writing journal is for students to collect their ideas for a final product, such as a personal narrative. Teachers should make students aware of the expectations for the final product at the beginning of the unit so that students can select prompts that will best help them meet the requirements of the rubric. Consider setting a daily objective based on the rubric. For example, students could be directed to select a prompt that allows them to show dialogue or pacing.
- Writing journals should emphasize the drafting and revision steps of the writing process; it is recommended that teachers focus on feedback rather than grades for writing journals.
- Students should select their best writing from the writing journal to revise and submit for a product. This can be done once for each topic or for the writing journal as a whole. Teachers should build in time for revision and editing throughout the unit. For example, after a mini-lesson on a grammar skill, students could revise a previous entry for that skill.
    - Notes:
        - Grammar and usage standards should be assigned depending on the needs of your class.
        - Students' final products should meet grade-level standards for narrative writing.

Student Journaling Questions

The following prompts are intended to be used as opportunities for students to explore and engage with the ideas of this unit. See the section above for suggestions about how to use these prompts in the classroom.

Place Journal Prompts

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- Describe the place you grew up. How has it shaped you?
- Reflect on how it feels to be a teenager in the United States today.
- Describe a memorable event that took place in your hometown. How did the setting contribute to the significance of the event? Use sensory details to bring the place and the event to life.
- Reflect on a location where you feel most at peace. Why does this place offer you comfort? Include descriptions of the surroundings and your feelings when you are there.
- Explain a historical event that occurred in a specific place. Write a narrative from the perspective of someone who experienced it. How did the location influence the event and the individuals involved?
- Describe a place that is culturally significant to you or your community. Describe a tradition or celebration that occurs there. How does the place enhance the cultural experience?
- Reflect on a place you visited that had a profound impact on you. Describe your journey, your experiences there, and how it changed your perspective or behavior.
- Describe an imaginary place that is important to your story's protagonist. Describe this place in detail and explain why it holds significance for the character. How does it shape their actions and decisions?
- Explain the differences between living in an urban area versus a rural area. Write a narrative that showcases the differences in daily life, interactions, and opportunities in these settings.
- Describe a time you visited a natural wonder (like a waterfall, mountain, or forest). How did the environment make you feel? Use vivid descriptions to illustrate the beauty and majesty of the place.
- Reflect on a place where you learned something valuable outside of the traditional classroom. What did you learn, and how did the place itself contribute to this learning experience?
- Describe how a familiar place changes with the seasons. Write a narrative that includes your personal experiences and observations during different times of the year.
- Reflect on how your identity changes depending on the setting. For example, many people have one identity at home and another at work or school.

Others Journal Prompts

- Explain your role in the family. What are your responsibilities? Explain your interactions with others in your family.

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- Describe your favorite family memory in detail.
- Describe an unusual family tradition of yours that continues today. What are its origins and significance? Why is it important for your family to do it every year? Will you carry on the tradition?
- Imagine you must describe your family to someone who's never met them before. Describe what you most love about them and what frustrates you the most about them.
- Explain how each member of your immediate family has helped to shape your life.
- Explain the power structure in your family. Is age a factor in who has power? How are decisions made at the family and community levels?
- Describe a person who has had a significant influence on your life. What characteristics or actions of this person impacted you the most? Use specific examples to illustrate their influence on you.
- Reflect on a time when your opinion of someone changed. What caused this change in perception? Describe the initial opinion you had, what events or interactions led to the change, and what you learned from the experience.
- Describe a situation where you formed an opinion about someone based on first impressions. How accurate was your initial judgment? Use details to explain how your opinion evolved over time, if at all.
- Reflect on a time when you felt judged by others. How did their opinions affect you, and how did you respond? Include details about the situation and your emotions during that time.
- Describe a role model you look up to and how they have influenced your personal goals or values. What qualities do they possess that you admire, and how have they inspired you?
- Reflect on a time when you influenced someone else's opinion or behavior. What did you do or say that impacted them? Describe the situation and the outcome.

Society Journal Prompts

- Explain how a group or community you belong to has shaped your views on certain issues. What specific influences from this group have impacted your opinions and beliefs?
- Explain how media (such as movies, social media, or news) influences your perception of people from different backgrounds. Provide specific examples to support your explanation.

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- Explain how cultural or familial expectations have influenced your views on relationships and social interactions. Use specific examples to illustrate these influences.
- Describe an experience where you worked with a diverse group of people. How did this diversity impact your perspective and interactions with others? Include details about the challenges and benefits you encountered.

Art and Music Analysis

When analyzing art and/or music, consider using the AWARE framework and graphic organizers in the following ways:

- Print organizers with sentence stems for students with language challenges.
- Project the AWARE framework for the class to guide whole-class discussions.
- Have students use the AWARE framework as a note-taking tool to prewrite analysis paragraphs.

Slam Poetry Analysis

When conducting slam poetry analyses with students, consider the following tips and tricks:

- Play the slam poetry video once for the whole class and then upload a link for students to watch in small groups. If students do not have the ability to watch the video a second time on their own, play the video twice.
- Have students work in small groups to answer AWARE questions in writing. Note that the "Assert" questions should always express an individual student's opinion.
- Use student responses on the AWARE graphic organizer to guide whole-class discussions.

Optional Extension Activities

To extend students' learning, offer the following activities:

- Students create a poster, social media post, or slide defining civil discourse for an audience of peers.
- Students can find their own media to analyze using AWARE.
- Students can use writing from the AWARE organizer to write a higher-level analysis of one of the poems.
- Students can adapt final drafts of writing prompts into poetry.

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Suggested Pacing

This is just 1 example of how to pace the unit. Important components of this unit are:

- Maintaining student writing notebooks for both journal writing and note-taking.
- Guiding students through an exploration of the role of place, others, and society through art, music, poetry, and discussion.
- Consistently using the AWARE framework as a guide for both writing and discussion.

Suggested Pacing Guide

Suggested Pacing Guide

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Introduction to Civil Discourse • Day 1 Civil Discourse Notes • Memory Circles: Society (teacher needs to record notes on topics) • Introduce writing about place prompts	Civil Discourse Notes and Memory Circles • Day 2 Civil Discourse Notes • Memory Circles: Others • Writing about place prompts: Day 1	Civil Discourse Notes and Memory Circles • Day 3 Civil Discourse Notes • Memory Circles: Place • Writing about place Prompts: Day 2	Introduction to Slam Poetry • Slam Poetry notes and videos • Writing about place prompts: Day 3	Writing about Place • Music Analysis: "Welcome to the Jungle" • Art analysis with AWARE • Revise writing prompts; select best writing prompt to submit for a grade

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Poems About Place • Art analysis with AWARE • "Suburbia" by Phil Kaye with AWARE	Writing About Others • Music analysis: "Vincent" by Don McLean • Learning to Look-Google Arts and Culture • Introduce writing about others prompts: Day 1 prompt	Poems About Others • Poem Analysis: "Brave Seventh Grade Viking Warrior" or "Poem for the First Day of the Poetry Unit in Language Arts Class" by Kyle "Guante" Tran Myhre • Writing about others prompts: Day 2 prompt	Poems About Others • Writing about others prompts: Day 3 prompt • Poem Analysis: "Mayda del Valle at the White House Poetry Jam"	Writing About Society • Music Analysis: " The Sound of Silence" by Simon and Garfunkel • Introduce writing about society prompts: Day 1
Poetry About Society • Poetry Analysis: "Paper People" • Writing about society prompts: Day 2	Class Discussion • Class discussion of essential question: How do places, others, and society contribute to our	Optional Extension Activity • Students work in small groups to create a social media post, poster, or slide defining civil discour		

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	identity? • Writing about society prompts: Day 3	se for an audience of peers		

Common Core State Standards

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1.d: Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3.a: Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3.b: Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

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