

#teachlivingpoets Poetry of Identity

Overview

In this unit, you will read several poems written by living poets, noting what they say about the topic of identity and analyzing the kinds of techniques they use to create their meaning. Using their works as mentor texts, you will write four poems that explore ideas related to identity - either your own identity and/or what that concept means to you in general.

A mentor text is a work of literature that you can return to and reread for many different purposes. They are texts to be studied and imitated ... Mentor texts can help you take risks as writers so you can grow and improve in your voice and craft (<https://www.nwp.org/stories/>).

We must thank educators Scott Bayer and Melissa Smith for their time and energy devoted to highlighting these poets and their poems. Much of this work has been inspired by #teachlivingpoets via Twitter.

Learning Targets

- I can read and analyze a broad range of poetic texts that explore the poet's identity.
- I can articulate how those poems express the poet's identity.
- I can create expressive poetry around the theme of identity, intentionally using a variety of poetic techniques to create meaning for the reader.
- I can articulate how my poetry expresses and develops themes related to identity.

Requirements

- Write a total of four published poems that explore identity, each illustrated with an image. You may draw, photograph, or use a copyright free image to illustrate your poem. Here are some sources for copyright free imagery:
 - <https://unsplash.com/>
 - <https://pixabay.com/>
 - <https://www.pexels.com/>
 - <https://search.creativecommons.org/>
- Each poem should be a minimum of 15 lines.
- Compile your poems in a digital [chapbook](#).
- Create a cover for your chapbook that includes an overall title, imagery and 4+ appropriate hashtags to express the ideas of your poetry. See the [sample](#) cover.
- Share a poem or two with the class in a coffee house poetry reading.
- Reflect on the process.

Process

1. Choose four poems by four different living poets to use as mentor texts for your own poetry. Use Working With Mentor Texts to read closely and analyze your chosen poems.
2. For each day of writing poetry, select one poem you analyzed to use as a mentor text for your own writing. This doesn't mean that you have to follow the same exact format or address the same themes (though you can do this), but you should be writing as a personal response to one particular poem.
3. Once you've chosen a poem and decided on how you're going to respond, set a timer for 15 minutes and write in your journal to release your ideas and respond to the text without censoring your thoughts. Then construct your ideas into a poetic format.
4. Share with a peer/peers and get some feedback for revision.

- Write some notes on your poem for possible final revisions
- Start working on your [reflection](#) for that poem.

#LivingPoets Mentor Texts:

Rupi Kaur: Rupri Kaur, 27, is a New York Times bestselling author and illustrator of two collections of poetry. She was recently named the [writer of the decade](#) by the New Republic. She started drawing when she was five, and after completing college, published her first book of poems. Her poetry explores “ a variety of themes ranging from love. loss. trauma. healing. femininity. Migration”

(<https://rupikaur.com/about/>).

- [Of course I want to be successful](#)
- [The art of being empty](#)
- [Rupi Kaur on Instagram](#)

Naomi Shihab Nye: “Naomi Shihab Nye was born on March 12, 1952, in St. Louis, Missouri, to a Palestinian father and an American mother. During her high school years, she lived in Ramallah in Palestine, the Old City in Jerusalem, and San Antonio, Texas, where she later received her BA in English and world religions from Trinity University. Nye gives voice to her experience as an Arab-American through poems about heritage and peace that overflow with a humanitarian spirit”

(<https://poets.org/poet/naomi-shihab-nye>).

- [Hugging the Jukebox](#)
- [Collection on poets.org](#)
- [Collection on poetryfoundation.org](#)

Jose Olivarez: José Olivarez is a poet, educator, and performer. “[He] is the son of Mexican immigrants. His debut book of poems, *Citizen Illegal*, was a finalist for the PEN/ Jean Stein Award and a winner of the 2018 Chicago Review of Books Poetry Prize. It was named a top book of 2018 by NPR and the New York Public Library” (<https://joseolivarez.com/>).

- [February & my love is in another state](#)
- Selections from [Citizen Illegal](#)
- [Collection on poetryfoundation.org](#)

Clint Smith: “Clinton Smith III (born August 25, 1988) is an African American writer, poet and scholar. He is the author of *Counting Descent*, a 2017 poetry collection that was a finalist for the NAACP Image Awards and won Best Poetry Book from the Black Caucus of the American Library Association. Smith is also a doctoral candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He is a regular contributor to the Pod Save the People podcast, where he discusses the week's news with a panel of other activists”

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clint_Smith_\(writer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clint_Smith_(writer))).

- [Something You Should Know](#)
- [FaceTime](#)
- [The drone](#)
- [Scroll down this page for links to published poems](#)

Joy Harjo: “Joy Harjo is an internationally renowned performer and writer of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and was named the 23rd Poet Laureate of the United States in 2019” (<https://www.joyharjo.com/>). “Harjo draws on First Nation storytelling and histories, as well as feminist and social justice poetic traditions, and frequently incorporates indigenous myths, symbols, and values into her writing”

(<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/joy-harjo>).

- [Eagle poem](#)

- [Remember](#)
- [Collection on poets.org](#)
- [Collection on poetryfoundation.org](#)

Maggie Smith: “Maggie Smith is an American poet, freelance writer, and editor who lives in Bexley, Ohio. Smith's poem ‘Good Bones,’ originally published in the journal Waxwing in June 2016, was widely circulated on social media and read by an estimated one million people. PRI called it "the official poem of 2016" ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maggie_Smith_\(poet\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maggie_Smith_(poet))).

- [Good Bones](#)
- [Goldenrod](#)
- [Where Honey](#)
- [Collection on poets.org](#)
- [Links to poems on Maggie Smith's website](#)

Reginald Dwayne Betts: “Reginald Dwayne Betts is an American poet, memoirist, and teacher. As a result of a carjacking he committed at the age of sixteen, he was sentenced to over eight years in prison. He has since gone on to author several award-winning works, including poetry, a memoir, and legal scholarship” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reginald_Dwayne_Betts).

- [When I Think of Tamir Rice While Driving](#)
- [For the City that Nearly Broke Me](#)
- [Collection on poets.org](#)
- [Collection on poetryfoundation.org](#)

Eavan Boland: Eavan Boland was born in Dublin, Ireland. Over the course of her long career, Eavan Boland emerged as one of the foremost female voices in Irish literature. Throughout her many collections of poetry, in her prose memoir *Object Lessons* (1995), and in her work as a noted anthologist and teacher, Boland honed an appreciation for the ordinary in life. The poet and critic Ruth Padel described Boland’s “commitment to lyric grace and feminism” even as her subjects tend to “the fabric of domestic life, myth, love, history, and Irish rural landscape.” Keenly aware of the problematic associations and troubled place that women hold in Irish culture and history, Boland always wrote out of an urge to make an honest account of female experience.

- [Collection on poetryfoundation.org](#)
- [Collection on poets.org](#)

Warsan Shire: Poet and activist Warsan Shire grew up in London. According to Alexis Okeowo in the *New Yorker*, Shire’s work “embodies the kind of shape-shifting, culture-juggling spirit lurking in most people who can’t trace their ancestors to their country’s founding fathers, or whose ancestors look nothing like those fathers. In that limbo, Shire conjures up a new language for belonging and displacement.” Shire’s poems connect gender, war, sex, and cultural assumptions; in her work, poetry is a healing agent for the trauma of exile and suffering.

- [Backwards](#)
- [The House](#)
- [Collection on poetrysociety.org](#)

Safia Elhillo: Sudanese by way of Washington, DC, Elhillo earned a BA from NYU’s Gallatin School of Individualized Study and an MFA in poetry at the New School. Elhillo was a founding member of Slam NYU, the 2012 and 2013 national collegiate championship team, and was a three-time member and former coach of the DC Youth Slam Poetry team. Her work has been translated into several languages and commissioned by Under Armour and the Bavarian State Ballet. A Cave Canem fellow, she is the

co-winner of the 2015 Brunel International African Poetry Prize, and has been listed in Forbes "Africa's 30 Under 30."

- [From "Girls That Never Die"](#)
- [Modern Sudanese Poetry](#)
- [Ode to Gossips](#)
- [Collection on poetryfoundation.org](#)
- [Collection on poets.org](#)

Yrsa Daley-Ward: Yrsa Daley-Ward is a poet, a model, an actor, and an LGBTQ activist. Born in Lancashire, England, she was raised by her grandparents, who were strict Seventh Day Adventists. Daley-Ward spent years struggling to make ends meet as a model. Because of industry racism in England, she moved to South Africa to pursue work. While there, she began writing and performing her own poetry. As she told the Guardian, "In acting and modelling I was so busy expressing what somebody else wanted that I'd completely shut down my own voice. I didn't have any mirrors. When I was 20, I was in knots. I couldn't speak my reality to anybody. There's no cage now. Lots of people are afraid to tell the truth. But I don't care."

- [Poetry on Instagram](#)

#LivingPoets Poetry Portfolio Single-Point Rubric

Concerns <i>Areas that Need Work</i>	Criteria <i>Standards for This Performance</i>	Advanced <i>Evidence of Exceeding Standards</i>
	Requirements Guidelines are fully met. The number of poems, each 15 lines & focused on the topic of identity and supported by an image, are compiled into a digital chapbook that contains a clear title, effective imagery and appropriate hashtags to support ideas.	
	Content and Development The reader can draw clear parallels between each mentor text and the poem developed from it. Each poem is developed around the topic of identity and demonstrates creative control over and purposeful use of poetic language and techniques, rhythm, lineation, stanza breaks, and punctuation.	
	Reflection The reflections clearly articulate answers to each prompt and are thorough in addressing	

	how each mentor text inspired and informed the creation of each poem, using specific examples from both the mentor texts and the writer's own poems.	
	Presentation Each poem contained in the digital chapbook is error free and submitted with pride and attention to detail.	
0-79 points	80-94 points	95-100 points