

Unit 15

POETRY OF LIBERATION

Protest Movements and American Counterculture

Authors and Works

Featured in the Video:

Allen Ginsberg, *Howl*, “A Supermarket in California” (poems)

Adrienne Rich, “Diving into the Wreck,” “Power,” “Transcendental Etude” (poems)

Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), “Will They Cry When You’re Gone, You Bet,” “A Poem for Willie Best” (poems); *Dutchman* (play)

Discussed in This Unit:

John Ashbery, “And Ut Pictura Poesis Is Her Name,” “Illustration,” “Soonest Mended,” “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror” (poems)

James Wright, “The Minneapolis Poem,” “A Blessing,” “The Journey,” “With the Shell of a Hermit Crab” (poems)

Gary Snyder, “Beneath My Hand and Eye the Distant Hills. Your Body,” “The Blue Sky,” “Milton by Firelight” (poems)

Sylvia Plath, “Daddy,” “Lady Lazarus,” *Ariel* (poems); *The Bell Jar* (novel)

Audre Lorde, *Zami*, *The Cancer Journals* (prose non-fiction); “Coal,” “Black Mother Woman,” “Chain” (poems)

Joy Harjo, *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, “Call It Fear,” “White Bear,” “The Flood” (poems)

Lorna Dee Cervantes, *Emplumada*, “Visions of Mexico While at a Writing Symposium in Port Townsend, Washington” (poems)

Overview Questions

■ How do these authors broaden or complicate our concept of what it means to be American? What strategies do these authors use to express the predicament of marginalized peoples? How did civil

rights and protest movements reshape the notion of what it means to be an American? What connections do you see between the poetry in this unit and the civil rights struggle?

■ How would you describe the mood or abiding intentions of American literature during this period? How does the experience of the Vietnam War affect the poetry of this period? What other social or political forces shaped the poetry of this time? How does feminism influence the poetry of the period? Where do you see the influence of popular culture?

■ Along with the New York school poets, the Beat poets were deeply influenced by life in the city. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, writers like Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Lucien Carr, all of whom had connections to Columbia University, met and discussed their new, experimental vision for poetry. New York culture, with its bustling nightlife and hosts of adventurous students, musicians, and artists, offered much for young rebels struggling to find a literary voice. By the middle 1950s, San Francisco also featured a lively and unconventional artistic community. When Ginsberg moved to San Francisco in 1954, he soon became a center of attention in a book-loving, verse-loving North Beach neighborhood where bohemian and gay lifestyles were tolerated to an extent that few other American metropolises could match. Literary historians often regard Ginsberg’s first public performance of *Howl* on October 7, 1955, as the inauguration of a “San Francisco Renaissance” and a demonstration that “Beat” culture had truly arrived. For more than thirty years after that night, San Francisco and New York City were meccas for radical and experimental art in America, places where authors such as Kerouac, Gary Snyder, Ginsberg, Amiri Baraka, and Audre Lorde learned from one another and formed powerful communities of verse. How does their urban setting shape the nature and themes of their work?

■ Gary Snyder, James Wright, and Theodore Roethke are often referred to as nature poets. What relationship do you see between their work and nature poets of the American nineteenth century? Where are the key differences?

■ Many of these poets used travel as a metaphor for a spiritual journey, and works like Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* enjoyed astonishing popularity during the 1960s. What relationships do you see between this yearning for the open road and the sentiments of earlier American writers?

■ Describe some of the movements into which postwar poetry is classified. How did they develop? What interests and styles are identified with each school?

■ How does postwar poetry continue or transform the legacy of modernism? How do African American writers from this period build on ideas and politics inherited from the Harlem Renaissance?

■ How do the African American, Chicano, and Native American authors in this unit re-imagine American identity? How do they challenge the way history has been told and recorded? What other myths about America are challenged by the poets in this unit?

Learning Objectives

After students have viewed the video, read the headnotes and literary selections in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, and explored related archival materials on the *American Passages* Web site, they should be able to

1. discuss the political, historical, and social contexts of postwar poetry, particularly the counter-culture of the 1950s and 1960s;
2. discuss several different schools of poetry represented by poets in the unit, namely the Beat movement, the New York school, confessional poetry, feminism, and the Black Arts movement;
3. recognize and describe innovations in the poetry of the period;
4. describe ways in which these poets differ from their modernist predecessors and how postwar poets continue to challenge and expand our notion of American poetry and the American idiom;

5. describe postmodernism, discuss its causes and origins, and discuss ways in which the poetry in this unit responds to the postmodern condition.

Instructor Overview

After World War II, a complex and dynamic new chapter of American cultural history began, a chapter that in many ways is neither completed nor easily describable. After the worldwide depression and violence of the 1930s and 1940s, millions of people hoped for some kind of respite, a period of peace, prosperity, and stability. Forty million people had died in places whose very names, to the generation of the 1950s and 1960s, became a litany of massacre and catastrophe: Nanking, Coventry, Pearl Harbor, Bataan, Stalingrad, Omaha Beach, Guadalcanal, Cassino, Dresden, Tokyo, Berlin, Hiroshima, Nagasaki. But the peace treaties and agreements worked out among the Allies soon gave way to a forty-year “Cold War,” as the two nuclear superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, contended with each other for ideological control of the world.

Sorting out the various literary experiments, coteries, and insurgencies of the years between 1950 and the present would be a vast enterprise in itself, complicated by the interventions of commercialism, pop culture, fads and fashion, and the enormous expansion of the college and university system as a focus for youthful energy and as an arbiter of taste. If students are confused by the cacophony of monikers, slogans, and short-lived obsessions that can be lifted from the pages of postwar history, you might encourage them to think about long-term and conflicting characteristics of those decades. The American middle and upper classes experienced unprecedented comfort and prosperity, along with an unprecedented threat of apocalypse—that this new life of ease and gadgetry could be obliterated in a matter of minutes. Intercontinental nuclear weapons made the threat of annihilation very real from the late fifties onward. And even as the technological innovations and daily comforts of democracy seem to have eclipsed the potential enemy of the Cold War U.S.S.R., plenty of controversy remains as to whether the threat of nuclear war has subsided.

Television proliferated in the West during the 1950s and 1960s; a virtual explosion of loud, fast,

and lurid media brought news and spectacle into every corner of the United States, transforming nearly every aspect of American public life—including the social impact of the writer, and the nature and duration of literary celebrity.

The works in Unit 15 reflect numerous literary groups that responded to the vast social changes taking place, including the Beats (Ginsberg, Snyder), confessional poets (Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton), the Black Mountain poets (Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley), Black Arts (Audre Lorde, Amiri Baraka), the New York school (Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, and James Schuyler), feminist poets (Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath, Audre Lorde), Chicano nationalists (Lorna Dee Cervantes), and latter-day transcendental and pastoral poets (Gary Snyder, Robert Bly, James Wright, Galway Kennell, and W. S. Merwin). To help situate students with respect to this multitude of literary movements, you might present the Beats as a wellspring of many other movements, the first widely celebrated “bohemian” experiment after World War II. Centered in Greenwich Village and San Francisco, the Beats became known for many traits and preoccupations that showed remarkable durability. New communities of artists came together with an alternative lifestyle that included drug experimentation, a fascination with Eastern religions and personal spirituality, open homosexuality, and an “anti-establishment” demeanor. Beat poetry tends to blur the line between prose and poetry, mixes registers, draws copiously on popular culture, sounds both authoritative and hip, and glorifies the experience of living on the fringes of society.

Confessional poets, like Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath, also sought to astonish readers by exploring deeply personal experience such as mental illness, sexuality, and hostility within the immediate family. Poets who associated with American feminist thought, including Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath, and Audre Lorde, are often linked to other schools of poetry as well but are distinguished by verse fiercely dedicated to expressing the predicament of modern American women. The Black Arts movement was also ignited by political struggles, specifically those linked to the civil rights and black nationalist movements of the 1950s and 1960s. The Black Mountain poets, including Charles Olson and Robert Creeley, are remembered for the

short-lived experimental college in North Carolina where they taught for a while. These poets favored open forms, sudden, unexpected imagery and diction and remarkable freedom in prosody. Theirs was a verse in celebration of spontaneity. The New York school, including Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, and Kenneth Koch, distinguished itself by its close association with the experimental painting underway in the city and its environs. From abstract expressionism, these poets learned to perceive the work of art as what critic David Perkins calls a “chronicle of the creative act that produces it.” These writers were also influenced by composers dedicated to similar values, including John Cage and Igor Stravinsky.

This search for identity gave rise to the belief that the personal is political, a notion that formed in the 1960s as artists, poets, and activists used their personal lives to make political statements. In questioning American identity, these authors confront the problem of the divided self, whether it be Lorna Dee Cervantes's division between her Chicana heritage and her American life, Adrienne Rich's identification as both a lesbian and a mother, Amiri Baraka's personal variation upon doctrines of Black nationalism and American identity, or Joy Harjo's Native American heritage that highlights the tension between a native worldview and dominant American culture. The poetry of this time is also characterized by open form, conversational diction, candid subject matter, corporeal imagery and symbolism, political and social critique, and radicalism in both thought and lifestyle. Much of the poetry, with the exception of the meditative poets, also depends upon the belief that words and art should be used as political tools. The importance of poetry to so many of the political movements of this time illustrates a direct link between social environment and artistic creation.

The video, archive, and curriculum in this unit highlight intersections among art, politics, and culture. The key historical events and cultural upheavals include protest poetry, free verse, and sexual revolution. The materials also suggest ways that students might relate the authors and works to one another. Students should also be encouraged to consider the contemporary legacy of postwar poetry, including hip-hop, poetry slams, performance art, contemporary jazz, and experimental rock.

Student Overview

Not long after the devastation of World War II, Americans found themselves embroiled in the Korean War (1950–53) and the Vietnam War (1964–75). Both of these conflicts proved to be more ethically complicated than World War II, and in Vietnam guerilla warfare made the actual fighting more confusing as well. As a result, the U.S. government promoted traditional values, namely domesticity and political and cultural conservatism, to fight for stability on the domestic front in what seemed like an increasingly turbulent and threatening world. The new media, especially television, helped to enforce this domestic ideology in which family and home remained a central priority for women; indeed, the enormous subdivisions of suburban ranch houses became important symbols of American safety, pastoral happiness, and prosperity during this period. The 1950s, in many ways, marked the beginning of modern American popular culture as we now know it. By the mid-1960s, the political, social, and cultural climate had changed dramatically. With the rising popularity of rock and roll and the beginning of the sexual revolution, American youth culture seemed to diverge as never before from middle-aged, middle-class American life. Adolescence became a demographic, a separate cultural audience, a different state of mind. At the same time, undercurrents of discontent with racist, sexist, and economically inequitable American social and political practices grew into full-fledged movements, many of which skillfully exploited the media.

Led by Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, James Farmer, Shirley Chisholm, and many others, the civil rights movement became a center of national attention. Sit-ins, Freedom Rides, and other nonviolent demonstrations shared the spotlight with important court cases and national legislation to change the legal, economic, and social status of American minorities. The Vietnam-era draft took a heavy toll on black neighborhoods in major cities, and many downtown areas were devastated by riots in the years from 1965 through 1970. As anxiety and moral concern about the war spread to college campuses, thousands of schools became centers of political ferment and many forms of experimentation. A sexual revolution spread from these schools to mainstream American life, and at the same time the

rights and power of women underwent a transformation unprecedented in U.S. history. By 1972, with the end of the draft and a scaling-down of the American involvement in Southeast Asia, anti-war fervor slackened and many writers and artists drifted from a common cause into a kind of discontent that seemed fragmented and desultory by comparison. Nonetheless, in art, music, student culture, and “alternative” communities, a style took hold that remains strong and recognizable to this day.

Much of the poetry of the 1960s and 1970s reflects the political and social turmoil of the time. Flamboyantly experimental work from this era is sometimes classified as “postmodern,” a loose term suggesting a cultural and aesthetic break with the formal styles and values exemplified by authors writing earlier in the twentieth century. The continuing urge to “make it new” caused many artists to turn dramatically away from the long shadow of Eliot, Stevens, Auden, and even Pound himself, who had coined the phrase as a basic principle for writing in a transformed world. However, arguments persist as to whether “postmodernism” ever broke sufficiently with these traditions to define itself as something truly distinct from varieties of modernism. Characteristics of postmodernism include a spirit of alienation from an accelerating technological and materialist way of life, a willingness to blend voices and borrow from other world cultures and literary traditions, and a delight in reflexivity—in poems which echo or play with other poems, art which incorporates other art or found objects from the world beyond the gallery, drama which escapes the confines of the stage and the theater and mingles, one way or another, with all the media and noise reverberating in the boulevards.

Moving through *American Passages* chronologically may reveal a lot of “old” ideas in the “new” art of the Vietnam years and after, and these are to be valued. Creativity is often a process of adaptation and borrowing, and the drive for originality can take an individual artist deep into the world’s cultural past. Most of the poets in this unit share a distrust of received wisdom and authority and a faith in aggressive candor. Postmodern American poetry has favored open forms, vernacular diction, personal themes, political and social struggle, and a variety of radical perspectives.

Video Overview

- **Authors covered:** Allen Ginsberg, Adrienne Rich, Amiri Baraka
- **Who's interviewed:** Michael Bibby, associate professor of English (Shippensburg University); Maria Damon, associate professor of English (University of Minnesota); Anne Waldman, poet and co-founder of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics (Naropa University, Boulder); Crystal Williams, poet and assistant professor of creative writing (Reed College)
- **Points covered:**
 - Allen Ginsberg, Adrienne Rich, and Amiri Baraka lived for many years in alternative communities, and their poetry often reflects this alternative or contrarian lifestyle. They viewed poetry as intensely political and believed that verse could contribute to moral awakening and social change.
 - The postwar period is characterized by a host of movements, including civil rights, antiwar and disarmament, Black Arts, drug legalization, and feminism. The spirit of protest that shaped the 1960s and 1970s deeply influenced these poets. Poetry often played a part in these protest movements, as Ginsberg's performance in front of the Pentagon suggests.
 - In the wake of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War, America embraced capitalism and conformity. This was the era of the Red Scare, when people not only were afraid of the spread of communism but were actually blacklisting one another for sympathizing with the Soviet cause. The Beat poets rebelled against what they saw as dangerous conformity; they denounced capitalism and distrusted the government.
 - Like other Beats, Ginsberg used his poetry and his lifestyle to rebel against the American status quo. In 1954, Ginsberg moved to San Francisco, where he became active in the counterculture based in Haight Ashbury. He also performed *Howl* for the first time, sparking public awareness of the Beat movement. Ginsberg shares Whitman's penchant for lengthy lines, long lists, and authoritative voice. Like Whitman, Ginsberg wrote for the general public.
 - The Black Arts movement included a group of activist artists who used their work to evoke political change. Black Arts comes out of the civil rights and Black Power movements.
 - Amiri Baraka is the representative figure of Black Arts in this unit. Born Everett Leroy Jones, Baraka circulated with the Beats, but eventually left the circle to devote his attention to racial issues. After Malcolm X's death, Baraka became a black nationalist, and in

1968 he became a Muslim, a conversion that resulted in the changing of his name. Much of Baraka's work, including his important play *Dutchman*, is aggressively political and full of rage.

- Adrienne Rich is an important figure in the women's movement. Her poetry and prose explore her experiences as a woman and a lesbian, issues that until this time were socially taboo. Her work has challenged assumptions about women in North American society and given many women the vocabulary to talk about their oppression. Rich helped to popularize the idea that the personal is political, meaning that the way we live our personal lives has public consequences and social ramifications that affect and shape the world around us.

PREVIEW

- **Preview the video:** The 1960s and 1970s were characterized by political and social unrest in America. Protests became a part of 1960s culture. Various demonstrations and protest movements were motivated by the civil rights struggle, the war in Vietnam, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the deterioration of the environment, and a generalized fear that America was becoming a more conformist and materialist society. Poets like Ginsberg, Baraka, and Rich believed that poetry was intensely political, and they used literature to challenge the status quo.
- **What to think about while watching:** How did American poets respond to the political and social experience of the 1960s and 1970s? How do the poetry and lifestyle of these writers challenge mainstream American values? What legacy have these poets left for later generations? How did poetry and the public figure of the poets change during this period?
- **Tying the video to the unit content:** Unit 15 expands on the concepts explained in the video to explore further the changing social and literary traditions as they contributed to, and were affected by, the writings of the authors covered. The curriculum materials introduce students to many schools of poetry that emerged during this time, including the New York school, the Chicano movement, the feminists, Black Arts, Beats, meditative poets, and language poets. The unit also offers background on integral historical events, including the Vietnam War, the women's movement, and Black Arts, which shaped the literature and outlook of the postwar period.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE VIDEO

	<i>What is American literature? What are its distinctive voices and styles? How do social and political issues influence the American canon?</i>	<i>What characteristics of a literary work have made it influential over time?</i>	<i>How are American myths created, challenged, and reimagined through these works of literature?</i>
Compre- hension Questions	What are some of the characteristics of Beat poetry? How are the lifestyles of the Beat poets, like Allen Ginsberg, reflected in their art?	What does Adrienne Rich mean when she says that the personal is political? How does "Passage" enact this idea?	In <i>Dutchman</i> Lula calls Clay "Uncle Tom." What does she mean?
Context Questions	What is new about the poetry of this period? What kinds of values are the writers challenging?	Allen Ginsberg cited Walt Whitman as the single greatest influence on his own work. What do these poets share in terms of craft and personal style? Why would Ginsberg align himself with Whitman? How does Ginsberg represent Whitman in "A Supermarket in California"? What is this poem ultimately about?	Amiri Baraka was originally connected to the Beat movement, but he split from it to concentrate on racial issues. Compare the sections of <i>Howl</i> read in the video to "Will They Cry When You're Gone, You Bet." What similarities do you see between Baraka's poetry and Ginsberg's?
Exploration Questions	Poetry was often read at protest movements during this period. Why do you think poetry was given such high status? Is it awarded a similar place in political activism today?	How did these poets and activists change or influence what it means to be an American? What values did they help to create or promote? What would you say has been the cultural legacy of the 1960s?	While the 1950s are often associated with peace, prosperity, and homogeneity, the authors in this unit expose how the often racist, sexist, and inequitable society sustained by such rhetoric was subject to revolutionary criticism during the 1960s and 1970s. Why does the former image of the 1950s endure? How do the ideas of radical change and strict historical periodization circumscribe or expand the messages and impact of these writers?

TIMELINE

	Texts	Contexts
1950s	<p>Adrienne Rich, <i>A Change of World</i> (1951), "Storm Warnings" (1951), "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" (1958)</p> <p>Allen Ginsberg, <i>Howl</i> (1956), "Sunflower Sutra" (1956), "A Supermarket in California" (1956), <i>Kaddish</i> (1959)</p> <p>John Ashbery, "Illustration" (1956)</p> <p>Gary Snyder, "Milton by Firelight" (1959), "Riprap" (1959)</p>	<p>Korean War (1950–53)</p> <p>Heyday of McCarthyism (1953–54)</p> <p>U.S. Supreme Court bans school segregation in <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> (1954)</p> <p>Rosa Parks is arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus, sparks Montgomery bus boycott (1955)</p> <p>Supreme Court rules that bus segregation is illegal (1956)</p> <p>Voting Rights Bill passed by Congress (1957)</p> <p>President Eisenhower sends U.S. Army troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, to enforce desegregation in public schools (1957)</p> <p>The Soviet Union launches <i>Sputnik 1</i>, the first artificial satellite, into space (1957)</p>
1960s	<p>John Ashbery, "Europe" (1960)</p> <p>Allen Ginsberg, "To Aunt Rose" (1961)</p> <p>Sylvia Plath, <i>The Bell Jar</i> (1963), <i>Ariel</i> (1965)</p> <p>James Wright, "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio" (1963), "A Blessing" (1963), "To the Evening Star: Central Minnesota" (1963), "The Minneapolis Poem" (1968)</p> <p>Amiri Baraka, <i>Dutchman</i> (1964), "An Agony. As Now." (1964), "A Poem for Willie Best" (1964)</p> <p>Audre Lorde, "Coal" (1968)</p> <p>Gary Snyder, "Beneath My Hand and Eye the Distant Hills. Your Body" (1968), "The Blue Sky" (1969)</p> <p>Adrienne Rich, <i>Leaflets</i> (1969)</p>	<p>Greensboro sit-in protests begin (1960)</p> <p>Cuban Missile Crisis (1962)</p> <p>Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C. (1963)</p> <p>President John F. Kennedy assassinated (1963)</p> <p>Civil Rights Act (1964)</p> <p>Vietnam War (1964–75)</p> <p>Malcolm X assassinated (1965)</p> <p>Voting Rights Act (1965)</p> <p>Black Panther Party for Self Defense founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale (1965)</p> <p>Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated (1968)</p> <p>U.S. astronauts make first moon landing (1969)</p>
1970s	<p>John Ashbery, "Soonest Mended" (1970), "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" (1975), "And Ut Pictura Poesis Is Her Name" (1977)</p> <p>Audre Lorde, "Black Mother Woman" (1971), "Chain" (1978), "Harriet" (1978)</p> <p>Adrienne Rich, <i>The Will to Change</i> (1971), "Diving into the Wreck" (1972), "Power" (1974), <i>Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution</i> (1976), "Transcendental Etude" (1977), "Twenty-One Love Poems" (1978)</p> <p>James Wright, <i>Collected Poems</i> (1971), "A Centenary Ode: Inscribed to Little Crow, Leader of the Sioux Rebellion in Minnesota, 1862" (1971), "With the Shell of a Hermit Crab" (1977)</p>	<p>Watergate scandal (1972–74)</p> <p><i>Roe v. Wade</i>; Supreme Court rules abortion is legal (1973)</p> <p>President Richard Nixon resigns from office (1974)</p> <p>Moral Majority founded (1979)</p> <p>Iran hostage crisis (1979–81)</p>

AUTHOR/TEXT REVIEW

Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997)

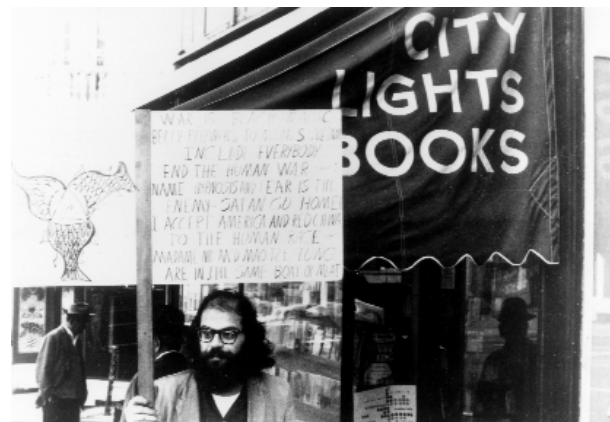
Allen Ginsberg was born in Newark, New Jersey, to Louis, a poet and high school teacher, and Naomi, who was of Russian descent. A graduate of Paterson public schools, Ginsberg developed an early friendship with the poet William Carlos Williams, who served as an important mentor during his early development. After leaving New Jersey to attend Columbia University, Ginsberg met the novelist William Burroughs, who encouraged not only his writing but also his questioning of social conformity.

After graduating from Columbia in 1948 (he was expelled twice, but did receive a degree), Ginsberg considered the following summer a turning point in his spiritual development. Feeling alone and isolated in New York City, Ginsberg reports having a vision in which he heard his own voice reciting William Blake's poetry. The hallucination became a moment of great insight for Ginsberg, and he refers to the experience as a revelation.

Perhaps the most crucial moment in Ginsberg's poetic career, however, was his decision to move to San Francisco, where a group of young writers, including Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, and Gregory Corso, were already living. Eventually, these writers were associated with the Beat movement, a term coined by Kerouac for its punning reference to "beaten down" and "beatified." Ginsberg credits Kerouac as one of his greatest influences. Through this prose writer, he came to appreciate the practice of automatic writing, in which the process of writing becomes as important as the final product; in fact, revision is discouraged. Kerouac also convinced Ginsberg to incorporate personal experience in his verse, a practice that opened the door for confessional poetry. Robert Lowell said that *Howl* forever changed how he would write poetry and made his book *Life Studies* possible. Ginsberg's poetry features colloquial language riddled with slang and obscenities, a prophetic tone, lengthy lines meant to be performed aloud, and a desire to capture the author's physical and emotional state at the time of creation.

Known for their alternative lifestyle, the Beat writers experimented freely with drugs, sex, and spirituality. Like Kerouac, Ginsberg traveled extensively, mostly during the early 1960s. His poetry is colored by this social freedom and wanderlust. Perhaps his most famous poem, *Howl* chronicles the Beat culture of the 1950s. A radical poem for its subject matter, straightforward exploration of alternative culture (particularly drug-induced experiences), and social commentary, *Howl* was in danger of being censored in 1957, but Judge Clayton Horn decided that the poem merited publication. The trial made *Howl* an instant success and brought the Beat movement new prominence.

Ginsberg, like many of the other Beat poets, was deeply interested



[5683] John Doss, *Allen Ginsberg at Madame Nhu Protest, 1963* (1963), courtesy of the Allen Ginsberg Trust and the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

GINSBERG WEB ARCHIVE

[4999] Anonymous, *Allen Ginsberg, Timothy Leary, and Ralph Metzger (Left to Right) Standing in Front of a Ten Foot Plaster Buddha* (1965), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-119239]. Beats preparing for a “psychedelic celebration” at the Village Theater in New York City. Beat writers looked to Eastern religions and traditions, finding European-American culture and religions empty of meaning. See Ginsberg’s poem “Sunflower Sutra” (“sutra” is Sanskrit for “thread” and refers to Buddhist religious texts).

[5682] Anonymous, *Ginsberg Typing* (1956), courtesy of the Allen Ginsberg Trust. Ginsberg typing *Howl* in kitchen. Ginsberg first unveiled *Howl*, one of his most famous and controversial poems, at a poetry reading in San Francisco at the Six Gallery.

[5683] John Doss, *Allen Ginsberg at Madame Nhu Protest, 1963* (1963), courtesy of the Allen Ginsberg Trust and the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries. Allen Ginsberg is pictured here in front of City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, after the anti-Madame Nhu demonstration of 1963. Madame Nhu, wife of the head of the Vietnamese secret police, was the official hostess of the U.S.-controlled South Vietnamese government. When a Buddhist monk immolated himself in Saigon as a protest against the government’s favoritism of Catholicism (the majority of South Vietnamese were Buddhist), Madame Nhu called the suicide a “barbecue” and offered to light the match for the next one. When she came to the University of California, Berkeley, campus in 1963, she was met with a wide variety of protests.

[7490] Dennis Cook, *Allen Ginsberg Reads Howl* (1994), courtesy of the Associated Press. In the 1950s, Ginsberg shocked America with his poetic manifesto *Howl*.

[7537] Anonymous, *Allen Ginsberg Uncensored Poetry Reading in Washington Square Park* (1966), courtesy of the Associated Press. Allen Ginsberg was born in New Jersey in 1926 and attended Columbia University; while a student, he was greatly influenced by William Burroughs.

in Eastern religions, particularly Buddhism, and studied it in India during the early 1960s. In 1965, Ginsberg returned from his travels throughout the East and began lecturing at universities around the country. He continued to hold radical beliefs and became a symbol of counterculture and intellectual freedom in the United States. He remained an avid opponent of war, consumerism, and the establishment until his death.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Beat poets were famous for their poetry performances; indeed, we might see them as precursors to currently popular “poetry slams.” Have students take turns reading passages from *Howl* (the first section of the poem works well). After several students have performed the poem, ask the class to discuss the performance choices each student made. What words did they emphasize? What was the tone of the performance? Did they change the dynamics of their voice? What was it like for the students to read this poem aloud? How does the meaning change with each performance?

■ Ask students to write their own poem in the style of Ginsberg. You might get them started by asking them to make a list of the defining characteristics of their generation. Students should also consider the formal features of Ginsberg’s work (long lines, blurred boundary between prose and poetry, use of many registers, including slang, erudite allusions, etc.), the often aggressive tone, the intimacy created between speaker and reader, and the political critique that drives his work. After the students have written their poems, they should write several paragraphs explaining what features or characteristics they were trying to capture. Then, have students break into small groups and share their poems. Each group should vote on the best poem. Groups should be prepared to defend their choices as they listen to all of the poems.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Why do you think Ginsberg chose the title *Howl*? What is the effect of the repetition of words at the beginning of lines (e.g., who, Moloch, I’m). To what does Moloch refer? Why does Ginsberg divide the poem into three parts?

Comprehension: In “To Aunt Rose,” Ginsberg refers to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Hitler, and Emily Brontë, a seemingly eclectic set of allusions. What is the significance of each reference? How is history treated here?

Comprehension: “Sutra” is the Sanskrit word for “thread.” It refers to Brahmin or Buddhist texts used for religious teaching. In Ginsberg’s poem “Sunflower Sutra,” what does the title mean? What does the sunflower symbolize?

Context: In “A Supermarket in California,” Ginsberg repeatedly addresses the nineteenth-century poet Walt Whitman. Why does he invoke this bard? What do these poets share? If Ginsberg is deter-

mined to forge a new poetry about life on the fringes of society, why does he invoke a traditional, canonized poet?

Context: Compare Ginsberg's interpretation of the Beats' philosophy to Gary Snyder's. What techniques do the poets share, and where do they diverge?

Exploration: Review the context on "Orientalism" in Unit 10. Many of the modernist poets, particularly Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, were fascinated by Asian art, architecture, and poetry. The Beat poets also share an interest in Asian culture, particularly Buddhism. How do these two generations of American poets differ in their treatment of Asian culture? What techniques do they share? Why do you think this fascination with the Far East continues throughout the century? You might consider Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" and "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter"; William Carlos Williams's "Willow Poem"; Ginsberg's "Sunflower Sutra"; and Gary Snyder's "The Blue Sky."

Exploration: Ginsberg begins "Ego Confession" with the line, "I want to be known as the most brilliant man in America." How does that beginning affect the reader? What is the tone? What is the portrait of the poet represented here? How does Ginsberg's notion of the poet differ from that of his modernist predecessors, like T. S. Eliot (see *The Waste Land*) and William Carlos Williams (consider *Paterson*)?

Exploration: Like William Carlos Williams, Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, and a host of other writers, Ginsberg struggles to create a uniquely American poetry. What does it mean to be an American to Ginsberg? What does he value most? How does his poetic voice differ from that of other poets you've read? How is it similar?

John Ashbery (b. 1927)

John Ashbery was born in Rochester, New York, and he earned his B.A. from Harvard University. He also received an M.A. from Columbia, where he wrote his thesis on English novelist Henry Green, who is known for his detached and witty style. Ashbery studied as a Fulbright scholar in France from 1955 to 1957 and returned there in 1958. He earned a living by writing art criticism for *Art News* and the European edition of the *New York Herald Tribune*. Upon returning to America in 1965, Ashbery continued to work as editor of *Art News* for the next seven years. Since 1972, he has continued his work as art critic while also teaching at Brooklyn College.

Associated with the New York school of poetry, Ashbery is known as an experimental poet, whose impersonal, clever style is often difficult and opaque. The New York School was a group of poets including Frank O'Hara, Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler, and Ted Berrigan, among others, who knew each other well, made references to each other in their work, and were deeply influenced by avant-garde artists such as Jackson Pollock. Under the influence of abstract art, these writers became interested in the creative process itself. Unlike many of their contemporaries, they did not write about the social and



[4526] Joan Miro, *The Farm* (1921–22), courtesy of the National Gallery of Art and Artist Rights Society: 1987.18.1./PA: Miro, Joan, *The Farm*, Gift of Mary Hemingway, Photograph © 2002 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington; © 2002 Successio Miro/Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

political issues of their time. Ashbery's interest in visual art, particularly the New York school of abstract painters prolific in the 1940s and 1950s, influences his verse. Like many of these painters, Ashbery explores the relationship between nature and life, but rather than using nature as a blueprint for life, Ashbery chooses not to emphasize realism. Instead, his poems examine the creative process itself, as a poem like "And Ut Pictura Poesis Is Her Name" illustrates. Like the high modernists, Ashbery uses juxtaposition, verbal playfulness, and wit, and he rarely offers the reader commentary or analysis in his poems, instead leaving the meaning open to interpretation.

Like many other American poets, Ashbery composes his work in a conversational style reminiscent of dialogue, though the diction is rarely colloquial.

His work is characterized by sudden changes in register and tone, and he often blurs the boundaries between prose and poetry. The mixture of erudite language with the discourse of popular culture also shows the influence of mass culture in modern life. Interested in different voices, he often imitates or incorporates fragments from newspapers, advertisements, business memos, scientific articles, and textbooks. In addition, Ashbery uses clichés frequently to show our inability to escape the hackneyed confines of language itself. While many poets, particularly the modernists, rely on fragmentation in their poetry, Ashbery differs because he leads the reader to expect sequence and continuity. For example, he frustrates our grammatical expectations by beginning a line with standard grammar only to use the inappropriate verb tense or referent later on. He also confuses syntax by omitting punctuation and piling up relative clauses and parentheses. Influenced by W. H. Auden, Laura Riding, and Wallace Stevens, Ashbery writes decisive, yet lyrical verse, and he considers the musicality of his verse most important. Regarded as one of the most important modern poets, Ashbery has had a profound influence on a younger generation of authors known as the language poets.

ASHBERY WEB ARCHIVE

[4022] Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase* (No. 2) (1912), courtesy of Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, and Artist Rights Society; © Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/Estate of Marcel Duchamp. American audiences criticized and ridiculed this abstract painting when it was exhibited at the Armory Show in New York in 1913. It is a clear example of cubism, fragmentation, and the use of geometrical shapes, all of which are hallmarks of modernist painting.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Because Ashbery's poetry is difficult, David Perkins offers two helpful approaches to reading his work. Ashbery's early work, through the 1950s, can be read in the context of modernism because it relies on the same collage technique typical of Eliot, Pound, and Williams. Also influenced by surrealism in the 1950s, Ashbery writes poems that depend upon juxtaposition, fragmentation, swift changes in register, and syntactical disruption. His later poetry seems to share more with Stevens and Auden because it is characterized by a meditative sensibility. Interested in the movement of the mind and the impossibility of representing reality, Ashbery's poems develop new techniques to broach similar problems of the nature of reality.

■ Ashbery's use of the collage technique links him to earlier modernists. Have your students construct their own poems using magazine fragments.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Ashbery's poem "Illustration" could be read as a character sketch of the figure of the "novice." What happens to the "novice . . . sitting on a cornice"? Who is she? What does she symbolize? How does the title help us better understand the poem?

Comprehension: How does Ashbery's interest in abstract painting influence his poetry?

Comprehension: Like many of Ashbery's poems, "Soonest Mended" is inspired by a painting. What is the tone of "Soonest Mended"? Line 14 seems to mark a shift in the poem. What changes here? What is the speaker's "ambition"? What does he mean by this?

Context: Ashbery is known for writing collage-like poems, a technique also practiced by many of the high modernists, including T. S. Eliot. Like Eliot, Ashberry writes in a range of registers, experimenting with what he calls "prose voices." Compare *The Waste Land* to "Soonest Mended," looking particularly at how these poets make transitions, link material, and jump between images and registers. What technical similarities and differences do you notice?

Context: Ashbery peppers his poetry with scores of erudite allusions. In "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," for example, each page contains several footnotes explaining these references to readers. Why do you think he includes so many allusions? To whom or what does he allude? Can you make generalizations about these references? What does this tell us about his intended audience?

Exploration: In *Laocoön; an Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, Gotthold Lessing argues that the sister arts of poetry and painting achieve their effects through the nature of the medium (words, paint), and to succeed, each must exploit the potential of that medium while keeping in mind its limitations. Poetry, for example, works best when representing human action, but it lacks visual vividness. In contrast, painting best adapts to the representation of idealized human beauty in repose. Owing to the nontemporal character of words and paint, neither painting nor poetry easily represents the body in action. Only by selecting the "critical" or "fruitful" moment, which simultaneously preserves physical beauty and concentrates within itself the suggestion of past and future action, can the painter or poet even indirectly represent a sequence of events in action. How does Ashbery's poetry reflect this struggle and the desire to blend media? You might consider "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" in particular.

Exploration: Ashbery's poetry has been described as meditative because he rarely describes events or people; instead he is interested in representing the inner workings of the mind, especially as involved in the creative process. Like his modernist predecessors, Auden and particularly Stevens, Ashberry struggles with the

[4525] Joan Miro, *Shooting Star* (1938), courtesy of the National Gallery of Art and Artist Rights Society: 1970.36.1.(2546)/PA: Miro, Joan, *Shooting Star*, Gift of Joseph H. Hazen, Photograph © 2002 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington; © 2002 Successio Miro/Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris. Surreal painting illustrating the emphasis on geometric shapes and human forms in abstract art. Modern art initially centered in Europe and met with hostility from American audiences.

[4526] Joan Miro, *The Farm* (1921–22), courtesy of the National Gallery of Art and Artist Rights Society: 1987.18.1./PA: Miro, Joan, *The Farm*, Gift of Mary Hemingway, Photograph © 2002 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington; © 2002 Successio Miro/Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris. Spanish artist Miro moved to Paris to be at the center of modern art. This painting is of his family's farm in Catalonia and represents a merging of realism and cubism.

[4528] René Magritte, *La Condition Humaine* (1933), courtesy of the National Gallery of Art and Artist Rights Society: 1987.55.1./PA: Magritte, René, *La condition humaine*, Gift of the Collectors Committee, Photograph © 2002 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington; © 2002 C. Herscovici, Brussels/Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York. Painting of window and easel showing landscape. This work explores the divisions between realism and representationalism.

[5303] Arthur Bowen Davies, *Dancers* (1914), courtesy of The Detroit Institute of Arts: *Dancers*, 1914/1915. Arthur Bowen Davies. Gift of Ralph Harman Booth. Photograph © 1985 The Detroit Institute of Arts. An example of cubism. This painting uses geometric forms to represent human bodies. A major exhibition of modern art was held at the Armory in New York City in 1913.

problem of representing a reality that can never be truly grasped. As critic David Perkins notes, Ashbery, like Stevens, writes about the “mind forming hypotheses about reality in general, about the ultimate truth of nature of things.” While Stevens tried to represent the “supreme fiction,” however, Ashbery finds it futile to seek order or structure in reality. Despite this seemingly cynical and hopeless outlook, however, Ashbery’s poetry is usually positive and curious, upbeat and hopeful. Look at the surrealist paintings in the Web archive. How do these paintings compare to Ashbery’s poetry? How do these visual images influence the way you read his work?

James Wright (1927–1980)

James Wright grew up in Martins Ferry, Ohio, a small midwestern town hit hard by the depression. Wright’s father worked in a factory to make ends meet, and the financial hardships endured by the family influenced Wright deeply, as later evidenced by his poetry about the poor and marginalized in American society. Wright received his undergraduate degree from Kenyon College, a center for creative writing at the time led by John Crowe Ransom. Wright later served in the army during the American occupation of Japan. After returning from overseas, he earned an M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of Washington, where he was a pupil of Theodore Roethke. After studying in Vienna on a Fulbright scholarship, Wright returned to the United States, where he has taught at universities and colleges across the country.

Wright’s early poetry shares a sense of seriousness of subject matter characteristic of Thomas Hardy, Edwin Arlington Robinson, and Robert Frost. Like Frost and Hardy, Wright focuses on outsiders in his poems—figures like escaped convicts, grieving widows, and convicted murderers. Many of his subjects also experience intense poverty, as “The Minneapolis Poem” suggests. Poems like “A Blessing” also illustrate Wright’s affinity with nature, a feature that renders this poem reminiscent of Frost. Wright feels conflicted about America, a land filled with both promise and racism. The tensions between the beautiful natural world and a cruel, industrialized world mirror this internal struggle. Wright’s anger at his social **alienation** allows him to empathize with other marginalized people, and his poems often bear an elegiac, mournful tone as he envisions the promise and opportunity that could have been.

Wright’s poetry changed markedly, however, after he translated the work of Pablo Neruda, Cesar Vallejo, and Georg Trakl. He learned from them a form of surrealism in which the connections between images seem absent. Like other poets writing in the 1960s, Wright also began to reject the traditional poetic form he had embraced earlier in his career. This later poetry reflects his continued interest in portraying outsiders, however, particularly the poor and oppressed. In 1971, his *Collected Poems* won the Pulitzer Prize.



[9149] Anonymous, *Federal Wire & Steel Co.’s Plant, Cleveland, Ohio* (c. 1920), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Detroit Publishing Company Collection [LC-D4-72257 DLC].

TEACHING TIP

■ Like Gary Snyder, James Wright seeks an alternative to modern, industrialized society, a sentiment fueled in part by his childhood in an Ohio factory town. He looks to nature as a refuge, as poems like “To the Evening Star: Central Minnesota” and “A Blessing” suggest. His work often shows glimpses of the transcendentalism characteristic of other poets in this unit. Ask your students to read the poems mentioned above and then write a prose description of the landscape evoked in the verse. Their versions will probably be longer than Wright’s poems, so ask them how they came to their conclusions. As they share their work with their classmates, notice the different interpretations that arise.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Poets often use titles as a way to suggest something gently to the reader. What is the significance of the title “A Blessing”? What or who is being blessed? What does the speaker mean by the last two lines?

Comprehension: As it is for the work of many poets in this unit, particularly the Beats and the transcendent poets, the image of the journey is central to Wright’s work. Who or what is the “she” referred to in the third stanza of “The Journey”? What is the journey the speaker describes?

Comprehension: An elegy is a poem written to honor the dead. As might be expected, traditional elegies usually evoke a somber tone, employ ornate and elevated language, and offer a generally flattering portrait of the deceased. In “With the Shell of a Hermit Crab,” Wright satirizes the elegy form. What is the tone of this poem? How is the reader meant to respond? Toward the end, the poem begins to sound a little more sincere. How do you account for this shift? What is the purpose of the epigraph?

Context: Both Wright and Snyder are, in many ways, poets of nature. How do their attitudes toward the natural world differ? What techniques, if any, do they share?

Exploration: James Wright’s poetry often shows an awareness of working-class suffering, and his landscapes often reflect a sympathy and compassion for rural life and its hardworking inhabitants. How does his work compare to that of other poets, particularly Genevieve Taggard and Gwendolyn Brooks, who write about the working classes? While Taggard and Brooks often focus their poems on the people, Wright’s poems are frequently more indirect, projecting sentiments and feelings onto a landscape instead. You might compare “Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio” to some of Genevieve Taggard’s work (“A Middle-aged, Middle-class Woman at Midnight,” “Mill Town”) and Brooks’s “kitchenette building” and “The Bean Eaters.”

Exploration: James Wright’s poetry has often been described as elegiac. Elegies are usually short poems written in a formal tone upon

WRIGHT WEB ARCHIVE

[4528] René Magritte, *La Condition Humaine* (1933), courtesy of the National Gallery of Art and Artist Rights Society: 1987.55.1./PA: Magritte, René, *La condition humaine*, Gift of the Collectors Committee, Photograph © 2002 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington; © 2002 C. Herscovici, Brussels/Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York. Painting of window and easel showing landscape. This work explores the divisions between realism and representationalism. Poet James Wright learned from Pablo Neruda, Cesar Vallejo, and Georg Trakl a form of surrealism in which the connections between images seem absent.

[7397] Anonymous, *Happy Hooligan It Is to Laugh: Nothing But Fun* (1902), courtesy of the Library of Congress [POS-TH-1902. H36, no. 3]. *Happy Hooligan*, a cartoon by Frederick Burr Opper, featured a jobless character with a small tin can hat. Anthropologists have noted that traditionally powerful groups often use humor to restore and reinforce jeopardized hierarchies and power relations. Poet James Wright, writing in the mid-twentieth century, often focused on U.S. class issues.

[8618] Various, *National Vietnam Examination* (1966), courtesy of Special Collections, Michigan State University Libraries. Exam distributed by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Inter-University Committee for Debate

on Foreign Policy. The SDS was a major force in organizing protests and other forms of opposition to the Vietnam War. Many American poets protested the war, including Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, Robert Bly, Robert Lowell, Adrienne Rich, James Wright, and Galway Kinnell.

[9149] Anonymous, *Federal Wire & Steel Co.'s Plant, Cleveland, Ohio* (c. 1920), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Detroit Publishing Company Collection [LC-D4-72257 DLC]. James Wright was born in Martins Ferry, Ohio, across the river from Wheeling, West Virginia, where his father worked in a glass factory. Wright's poetry is saturated with images of, and commentary on, the impact of industrialization on the natural landscape.



[4312] Anonymous, *Adrienne Rich* (c. 1975), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-103575].

the occasion of someone's death. However, elegiac can also refer to poetry of meditation, usually on love, death, or expansive philosophical topics. Some of the most famous elegies by modern American poets include Wallace Stevens's "The Owl in the Sarcophagus," Robert Lowell's "For the Union Dead," Anne Sexton's " Sylvia's Death," and Allen Ginsberg's *Kaddish*. Elegies are generally characterized by a ceremonial tone, expressions of grief and loss, praise for the deceased, an attempt to continue their memory, and consolation in natural surroundings or religious values. Many poets of the twentieth century, however, reflect modern cynicism by undermining or satirizing the traditional conventions of the elegy. Although Wright's poems are not necessarily elegies for or to specific people, they do seem to mourn the loss of a particular way of life and landscape. How do these poems fit the characteristics of a traditional elegy? Which poems seem more elegiac than others? How does Wright's work diverge from the traditional genre?

Adrienne Rich (b. 1929)

Born in Baltimore, Adrienne Rich describes her mother and grandmother as "frustrated artists," whose talents were denied expression by culture and circumstance. Perhaps their example, along with her father's encouragement, sparked her desire to become a writer at a time when women were still trying to prove themselves in a male-dominated arena. After graduating from Radcliffe in 1951, Rich was recognized for her poetry in the same year by W. H. Auden, who selected her first book, *A Change of World*, for the coveted Yale Younger Poets series. Rich's early poetry was influenced primarily by male writers, including Frost, Thomas, Donne, Auden, Stevens, and Yeats. For many young women, these men were the poets studied in high school and university classes, talked about in magazines and journals, and invited to speak at universities. Young women were exposed to relatively little poetry written by other women, and as such were taught implicitly that to write well meant to write as well as a male poet. For writers like Rich, Plath, and Sexton the struggle to find female role models and express female experience was beginning with their own work. Of course, there were examples of women poets mentoring one another; most notably the mentorship of Elizabeth Bishop by Marianne Moore, but this proved to be the exception rather than the rule. By the end of the 1950s and early 1960s, however, Rich's poetry had changed markedly as she began exploring women's issues and moving away from formal poetry toward a **free verse** that she saw as less patriarchal and more in tune with her true voice.

In the late 1960s, Rich, along with her husband, became active in radical politics, especially protests against the Vietnam War. In addition, she taught minority students in urban New York City, an experience that began her lifelong commitment to education, a subject that would return in her essays. Not surprisingly, her poetry reflected this intense interest in politics. This later verse features fragmented lan-

guage, raw images, and looser form. At this time, Rich also began identifying herself and her work with the growing feminist movement; she also identified as a lesbian. This lesbian consciousness led to the development of poems such as “Transcendental Etude” and “The Floating Poem” that dealt explicitly with lesbian love and sex. In the 1970s, Rich began exploring feminism through essay writing. Her most famous collection of prose, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, combines personal accounts, research, and theory to reveal her thoughts on feminism. In the 1980s, Rich wrote a number of dialogue poems, the best-known of which is her “Twenty-One Love Poems.” This series modernizes the Elizabethan sonnet sequences written by men to idealized women by directing the poems to an unnamed female lover. Other poems, penned to women like Willa Cather, Ethel Rosenberg, and the poet’s grandmothers, explore further aspects of Rich’s identity, including her experience as a Jewish woman.

Rich’s work is known for its political radicalism and candid exploration of motherhood, feminism, lesbianism, and Jewish identity. Her role as poet, essayist, and critic has earned her an important place in contemporary feminism.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Adrienne Rich’s use of free verse can seem deceptively simple to students. Type out one of the poems in paragraph form and ask students to break the lines where they feel they should be broken. Emphasize that there is not a right answer “here,” but rather that you are curious about what their rationale will be for where lines should be broken. Have students compare their versions of the poem to the original, and have them hypothesize about why Rich broke the lines where she did.

■ In “Diving into the Wreck” Rich uses the underwater exploration of a shipwreck as a metaphor for the exploration of the self or unconscious. Like many of her poems, this work seems to be about the struggle to form an identity. Ask students to paraphrase the poem, thinking particularly about Rich’s use of the first person and the symbol of the diver. What are the main points about identity in this poem? Is Rich making an argument here? Then, ask students to consider the speaker in some of Rich’s other poems, like “Transcendental Etude” and “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law.” How do the speakers in these poems differ? What is Rich saying about identity here? This activity should help students discover that women are not neatly packaged, unified selves, as often imagined by patriarchal society; Rich’s poetry gives voice to an often-fractured sense of self.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law” is filled with allusions, but one of the most telling is the quotation in section 7 from

RICH WEB ARCHIVE

[1617] Anonymous, *Emily Dickinson* (n.d.), courtesy of Amherst College Library. Portrait of Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) sitting at table. Until recently, this was the only known image of Dickinson, a recluse who rarely left her home in Amherst, Massachusetts. Dickinson influenced many twentieth-century poets, including Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich.

[4312] Anonymous, *Adrienne Rich* (c. 1975), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-103575]. A feminist poet and activist, Rich challenges assumptions of gender and sexuality in her work and questions the nature of power. In “Planetarium,” she writes, “I am an instrument in the shape / of a woman trying to translate pulsations / into images for the relief of the body / and the reconstruction of the mind.”

[6932] Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in S.E. Asia, *Pull Him Out Now: Join with the Hundreds and Thousands of Students, GI's, Women, Unionists, Puerto Ricans, Gay People . . .* (c. 1970), courtesy of the Library of Congress. Political poster protesting U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. The antiwar movement linked and encouraged a number of other movements, including the civil rights movement, the Chicano movement, and the farm workers' movement. Many American poets protested the war, including Adrienne Rich, Robert Lowell, and Allen Ginsberg.

[7361] Anonymous, *Vietnam War Protesters* (1967), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration [NRE-21-KANSWICHCR-CR928-WICH1895]. Wichita, Kansas, protest against the Vietnam War. Antiwar protests were major cultural events in the 1960s and early 1970s. Many writers and artists participated, including Adrienne Rich, whose work became more explicitly political during this time.

Mary Wollstonecraft, an early feminist who fought for equality and suffrage at the turn of the eighteenth century. What is the significance of this allusion? Why does Rich refer to this early feminist?

Comprehension: Postmodern poets often pay particular attention to the way the poem looks on the page. Look at Rich's “Power.” Why does she choose to space the words as she does? What is the effect on the reader? How do her formal choices shape our reading of the content?

Comprehension: Rich appropriates lines from Emily Dickinson and John Donne in her poems “I Am in Danger—Sir—” and “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning.” Why does she invoke these poets? Is she claiming to be similar to or different from these authors? How do the titles affect our expectations as readers? What significance do these literary allusions hold?

Context: The transcendental poets were interested in connections between spirituality and nature. How does Rich's “Transcendental Etude” fit into this context? How does her poem differ from Snyder's “The Blue Sky”?

Context: As an active feminist, Rich was interested in raising consciousness about all kinds of women's issues, from sexual freedom to emancipation from the domestic sphere. How might “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law” be viewed as a feminist, consciousness-raising poem? What symbols are characteristic of feminist poetry? How does Rich represent the female body in this work?

Context: Compare the form of “Storm Warnings” with that of “Power.” How has Rich's work changed from the early poem, written in 1951, to the later 1974 poem?

Exploration: During the first and second waves of feminism, female poets mined the resources of Greek and non-Western mythologies for ways to rewrite cultural history. What mythological figures do poets like H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) use to tell their stories? Which mythological figures do Rich and her cohort (Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Audre Lorde) choose? What power does using these figures add to Rich's work?

Exploration: The women's movement brought myriad issues to the forefront and gave women the vocabulary and forum to discuss their experiences honestly. For instance, the difficult and frustrating sides of mothering and marriage became topics of conversation. Many of the female poets in this unit reflect this liberated atmosphere as they explore the experience of motherhood and childbearing with candor and objectivity. Compare some of the poems about motherhood written by Sexton (“Little Girl, My String Bean, My Lovely Woman”), Lorde (“The Woman Thing,” “Black Mother Woman”), and Plath (“Morning Song”). How do they represent mothering? What is new about this poetry? What seems surprising?

Exploration: Adrienne Rich has said that poetry must “consciously situate itself amid political conditions.” How does her poetry reflect

this idea? How might this statement be seen as descriptive of this period of poetry more generally? How does Rich's stance on poetry and politics compare to that of other writers in this unit, particularly Baraka and the Beats?

Gary Snyder (b. 1930)

Gary Snyder was raised on a dairy farm in the Pacific Northwest. He graduated with a B.A. in anthropology from Reed College and worked as a logger in the Pacific Northwest before going to Berkeley to study Asian languages from 1953 to 1956. During this time, he also met Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and many of the other writers identified with the Beat movement. After spending three years in California, Snyder moved to Japan for roughly eight years. Although he returned to America briefly to teach at Berkeley, he returned to Japan to study Buddhism, an experience that deeply influenced his poetry.

As his life suggests, Snyder is fascinated by travel and ancient cultures, and the metaphor of the journey appears often in his poetry. His educational background in anthropology also shapes his investigation of rituals and history. Snyder's training in Zen Buddhism seems to unite his interest in foreign cultures, ancient ritual, and the serenity of nature; Asian influences in his work align him with Pound and Williams. Unlike Romantic poets, who used nature to mirror their emotions, Snyder does not use natural images to reflect his inner feelings, but rather appreciates the serene otherness of nature. Experimental language, conversational diction, unconventional line breaks and visual spacing, and abundant dialogue also characterize Snyder's poetry. The juxtaposition of American landscapes, particularly of the Pacific Northwest, with Eastern images and allusions, makes Snyder's poetry unique and powerful.

Like Robert Bly, James Wright, and W. S. Merwin, Gary Snyder turns to nature as an antidote to the problems of modernization and industrialized civilization. His poetry celebrates the Pacific Northwest as an alternative to the fast-paced modern world that seems impossibly separated from nature, simplicity, and manual labor. Snyder looks to the American Indians and to ancient Buddhism out of a genuine desire to learn wisdom from these traditions and rituals. Nature and meditation, he believes, are windows to the self. As might be expected, Snyder's interest in nature and the Orient aligns him with imagism and Pound. His affinity with nature led him to become active in the ecological movement, and his own lifestyle, which included growing his own vegetables, cutting wood, and hunting, made him virtually independent from



[7377] Lee Russell, Grant County, Oregon. Malheur National Forest. *Lumberjack Hitching Cable on Log which Will Be Loaded onto Trucks* (1942), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-073482-D DLC].

SNYDER WEB ARCHIVE

[4999] Anonymous, *Allen Ginsberg, Timothy Leary, and Ralph Metzger (Left to Right) Standing in Front of a Ten Foot Plaster Buddha* (1965), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-119239]. Beats preparing for a “psychedelic celebration” at the Village Theater in New York City. Beat writers looked to Eastern religions and traditions, finding European-American culture and religions empty of meaning. See Ginsberg’s poem “Sunflower Sutra” (“sutra” is Sanskrit for “thread” and refers to Buddhist religious texts).

[7126] Eisen, *Asakusa Temple in Winter* (c. 1810), courtesy of the print collection of Connecticut College. “One must have a mind of winter / To regard the frost and the boughs / Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;”—Wallace Stevens, “The Snow Man” (1931). Japanese woodcut of temple in wooded winter scene. Modernist poets were drawn to Asian religious and artistic themes, particularly emphasizing simplicity and nature.

[7377] Lee Russell, *Grant County, Oregon. Malheur National Forest. Lumberjack Hitching Cable on Log which Will Be Loaded onto Trucks* (1942), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-073482-D DLC]. Picture of a Pacific Northwest lumberjack. Beat poet Gary Snyder went to Reed College in Portland, Oregon, and worked as a logger in between his undergraduate and graduate studies in anthropology.

[8110] Hopi, *Crow Mother and Polik Mana Kachina Carving* (c. 1940), courtesy of the Portland Art Museum, Elizabeth Cole Butler Collection. Kachina is a Pueblo word meaning “spirit father” or “life.” Kachinas are divine spirits who personify aspects of nature such as clouds, sky, storms, and trees. Paula Gunn Allen’s (Laguna Pueblo) retelling of a Yellow Woman story features a kachina. The Hopi will make kachina dolls for tourists, but Zuni kachina dolls are not sold. These dolls are made from cottonwood, paint, and feathers.

[8119] Pomo Tribe, *Gift Baskets* (c. 1900–1940), courtesy of Portland Art Museum, Elizabeth Cole Butler

modern civilization. Snyder has published numerous books of poetry, as well as many translations of ancient and modern Japanese poetry. In 1975, he received the Pulitzer Prize.

TEACHING TIP

■ Gary Snyder’s poetry is deeply concerned with nature and with creating a visual picture of landscapes. Ask several students to come to the chalkboard and draw what they “see” in a poem (“Riprap” works well). How do the drawings differ? What have students left out? How closely does their memory of the poem resemble the original text?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Poets often refer to their literary ancestors, usually to align themselves with a particular tradition or to provide context for their work. Why does Snyder refer to Milton in “Milton by Firelight”?

Comprehension: Snyder uses quotation marks in a curious manner in “Beneath My Hand and Eye the Distant Hills. Your Body.” What is the effect of the unconventional grammar and syntax? What is the purpose of the spacing, line breaks, and other visual techniques on the page?

Comprehension: What is the speaker’s attitude toward nature in “Ripples on the Surface”? What is the effect of the unconventional punctuation toward the end of the poem?

Context: How would you describe Snyder’s treatment of nature in his work? How does he broaden our concept of the American landscape?

Context: Snyder’s poetry rarely confronts political and social issues like Vietnam or civil rights. Why do you think he chooses to avoid these hot-button issues? Are there ways in which his poetry could be described as politically and socially radical?

Context: The figure of Kokopelli, the ancient Hopi god of fertility, appears frequently in Snyder’s poetry. What might Snyder’s purpose be in using Kokopelli, particularly in “The Blue Sky”?

Exploration: “The Blue Sky” seems to unite Snyder’s interest in Buddhism, India, and Native American culture. What is the effect of blending all these influences? How do the unconventional line breaks affect the meaning of the poem?

Exploration: Snyder’s reverence for physical labor aligns him with Robert Frost. Compare Snyder’s “Milton by Firelight” to Frost’s “Mowing” or “After Apple-Picking.” What do these poets share in technique and theme? Where do they diverge? How does this respect for work and the outdoors connect to American identity?

Exploration: Snyder’s interest in the Far East, particularly Zen Buddhism, along with his knowledge of the Chinese language and culture, connect him to the high modernists, particularly Ezra

Pound. Snyder's concrete, economical imagery is also reminiscent of imagism. How does Snyder's work both continue and revise these central themes of modernist poetry?

Sylvia Plath (1932–1963)

Sylvia Plath spent most of her childhood in Wellesley, Massachusetts, where she lived close to her maternal grandparents. Her father, Otto Plath, was an entomology professor at Boston University, where he was known for his pioneering work on bumblebees. In 1940, when Plath was eight years old, her father died, which forced her mother, Aurelia, to enter the workforce. Despite her efforts, however, money was tight in the Plath household. Even in light of these hardships, Plath was a precocious child who enjoyed writing, reading, and the outdoors.

To the outside world, Sylvia Plath seemed to represent the 1950s ideal. Tall, slim, and outgoing, Plath made friends easily and excelled in extracurricular activities. Always a talented student, Plath attended prestigious Smith College on a scholarship, and she quickly became known on campus as a gifted writer. Behind the social exterior, however, Plath was a perfectionist, whose drive for success proved intense. She enjoyed many accolades, placing fiction in national magazines and winning first prize in the *Mademoiselle* Fiction Contest in 1952. Despite her success, Plath suffered from depression, and after her junior year at Smith, she attempted suicide, an experience that appears metaphorically in her later poems. After graduating *summa cum laude* from Smith, she won a Fulbright to study at Cambridge University in England, where she met and married poet Ted Hughes. Plath was instrumental in helping Hughes begin his successful writing career, and their influence on one another is notable. As Plath's poems about domesticity and motherhood suggest, becoming a wife and parent brought many difficult issues to the forefront of her life. Raised with 1950s middle-class values, Plath struggled with the tensions between those domestic ideals and her own feminism, and her poetry bears the mark of the conflict between her role as artist and her role as wife/mother. Plath's struggle to represent women's issues has earned her an important place in feminism. Hughes and Plath separated in the fall of 1962, and Plath was left to raise their two children alone. During what turned out to be one of the coldest British winters on record, Plath again suffered from depression, and she committed suicide at the age of thirty.

As a student in Robert Lowell's writing workshop in the late 1950s, Plath met Anne Sexton, who was to become an important influence on her poetry. Plath admired both Lowell's and Sexton's liberating verse, in which they tackled taboo subjects like mental illness, suicide, and family relationships with candor and intensity. Known as confessional poetry, the verse pioneered by

Collection. Baskets play important roles in spiritual and medicinal rituals. Mabel McKay, a Pomo weaver, wove baskets under the guidance of a spirit who taught her healing songs and imbued her baskets with spiritual power. The baskets here are made from willow, sedge root, dogbane, clam shell, abalone shell, magnesite beads, and meadowlark, quail, bluebird, mallard, oriole, and flicker feathers.



[9154] U.S. Office of War, Housewife Preparing Dinner in Compact Kitchen in Greenbelt, Maryland (c. 1942), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-94034].

Sexton, Lowell, John Berryman, and Theodore Roethke exposed the raw emotion and intimacy of personal experience. Although Plath's poetry is often described as confessional, her poetry proves less autobiographical than that of her friends. While she often begins her poems with what seems like autobiographical material, her genius lies in her ability to turn that autobiography into myth and metaphor. One of the great metaphor-makers of the century, Plath uses brilliant imagery to move her poetry far beyond the personal. In addition, much of what reads like autobiographical detail in poems like "Daddy" and "Lady Lazarus" is actually a dramatized performance based only loosely on her own life.

Plath is best known for her last book of poems, *Ariel*, which was published posthumously in 1965. Most of the poems in the volume were written in the fall and winter of 1962–63 in what appears to have been an amazingly creative period. Writing during the "blue hours" of the morning, or between 4 A.M. and 7 A.M. before her children awoke, Plath penned her finest work, characterized by a distinctive poetic voice, daring subject matter, colloquial diction, and brilliant metaphor. Plath told friend and critic A. Alvarez that these poems were meant to be heard rather than read, and the cooing rhymes of "Daddy" and repetition in "The Applicant" capture this sentiment. Although Plath had carefully arranged the sequence of *Ariel* before her death, Ted Hughes, the executor of her estate, rearranged the material, leaving out some of the more "aggressive" poems. He has been widely criticized for what many readers and critics consider the mismanagement of her work. Plath's journals and letters were later published, and her *Collected Poems* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1981. She also wrote dozens of short stories, a semi-autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar*, and two children's books.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Students often have difficulty separating the poet from the speaker in Plath's poems. A productive discussion of Plath's work must consider her relationship to confessional poetry and the place of biography within that context. While it is indisputable that Plath draws on her personal life in her poems, many of the details are purposely exaggerated or misrepresented. In other words, biography is often a starting place, but Plath's genius lies in the ability to transform the personal into something more general, or as some readers and critics have put it, into something mythical.

■ Introduce your students to the idea of a dramatic monologue by having them read Emily Dickinson's "I heard a fly buzz when I died." How does the speaker in Plath's "Daddy" perform in a similar manner? How might this also be read as a dramatic monologue? Try to avoid discussion of sensationalized stories about the poet's life.

■ Readers often overlook the wit and cleverness in Plath's poetry. Often quite funny and refreshingly honest, Plath is one of the great metaphor-makers in modern poetry. Begin your study of Plath with

poems like “Morning Song” and “Child,” which show the tender and witty side of Plath as she writes about the wonder, joy, confusion, and fear of motherhood.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Plath’s poems about motherhood are often surprising for their objectivity. In “Morning Song,” why does the speaker say “I’m no more your mother . . .”? What does she mean here? What is the significance of the image of the museum? How does this mother feel toward her new infant? Does the tone change in the poem?

Comprehension: Like many of Plath’s poems, *Lady Lazarus* begins “*in medias res*,” or “in the middle.” In other words, the reader does not immediately understand the context or situation of the poem. In “*Lady Lazarus*” the speaker announces, “I have done it again.” What is the *it*? Who is the peanut-crunching crowd?

Comprehension: Authors carefully consider their titles, often choosing them to set the tone of the work. Why do you think Plath chose the title “Daddy”? Why didn’t she use “Father,” or some other epithet, instead? What tone does this create? How does it fit with the content of the poem?

Context: What is the tone of “The Applicant”? Who is the speaker? To whom is he or she speaking? What is the role of repetition in this poem? How might this poem be connected to 1950s culture?

Context: Like other feminist works, Plath’s poetry frequently uses the symbol of the body. How does the body in poems like “*Lady Lazarus*” or “*Metaphors*” compare to that by other poets in this unit? You might consider Audre Lorde’s “*Black Mother Woman*” and Lorna Dee Cervantes’s “*The Body as Braille*.”

Context: Many of Plath’s poems seem to engage the theme of transcendence; often, the speaker leaves or sheds the physical body (the end of “*Lady Lazarus*” is a good example); and frequently, her speakers commune with nature in interesting ways. “*Ariel*” is ostensibly about the speaker’s ride on a horse, but it seems to take on mythic qualities by the end of the poem. Is the ride a metaphor for something else? What images seem particularly strange or unique? What is the “red / Eye, the cauldron of morning”? How might this be considered a poem of transcendence?

Exploration: The cultural critic Theodor Adorno was famous for saying that there could be no poetry after Auschwitz, and indeed, many poets remained silent on the subject for many years. Plath has been widely criticized for her use of Holocaust imagery in “*Lady Lazarus*” and “*Daddy*.” Why do you think she uses these images? What is the effect of the references to the Holocaust in these poems?

Exploration: Sylvia Plath has become an icon in feminism since her death in 1963. Some people argue that her sensationalized life accounts for her large following, but other critics and readers agree

PLATH WEB ARCHIVE

[1617] Anonymous, *Emily Dickinson* (n.d.), courtesy of Amherst College Library. Portrait of Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) sitting at table. Until recently, this was the only known image of Dickinson, a recluse who rarely left her home in Amherst, Massachusetts. Dickinson influenced many twentieth-century poets, including Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich.

[9153] Fred Palumbo, *Betty Friedan* (1960), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-115884]. In 1963, Betty Friedan’s groundbreaking *Feminine Mystique* changed American society by heightening awareness of what she termed “the problem that has no name,” the desperation that many women felt, confined to their homes and families.

[9154] U.S. Office of War, *Housewife Preparing Dinner in Compact Kitchen in Greenbelt, Maryland* (c. 1942), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-94034]. Women’s roles were largely confined to homemaking until the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Poet Sylvia Plath’s work, much of it published posthumously in the mid-1960s, chronicles her struggle for a creative identity apart from the confines of domesticity.

[9181] Anonymous, *Hitler*, from “The Year 1945” newsreel (1946), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration. Sylvia Plath’s poetry often draws on Holocaust imagery. In both “*Lady Lazarus*” and “*Daddy*,” Plath identifies with the Jews who suffered under Nazi rule. The speaker of “*Daddy*” rails against the memory of a father whose influence, even in death, is oppressive. Plath writes: “Not God but a swastika / So black no sky could squeak through.”

[9182] Anonymous, *Jews Freed from Concentration Camp*, from “The Year 1945” newsreel (1946), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration. In Plath’s poem “*Daddy*,” the speaker identifies with the plight of the Jews under the Nazi regime and characterizes her father as a Nazi. Plath has been criticized for her use of Holocaust imagery.

that her poetry appeals to a wide audience for different reasons. Perhaps one explanation is that Plath's poetry often articulates the struggle outlined by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*. In other words, many of Plath's speakers seem unhappy, even desperate, in a domestic space that seems to offer few outlets for creative or intellectual expression. What other reasons can you point to for Plath's popularity among both scholars and general readers? How does her work embody many of the concerns of feminism?



[2254] Abbie Rowe, *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom* (1963), courtesy of the National Park Service, Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement.

LORDE WEB ARCHIVE

[2254] Abbie Rowe, *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom* (1963), courtesy of the National Park Service, Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, many groups, including African Americans seeking greater equality and civil rights, used marches and nonviolent protests to make their voices heard. The sight of thousands of protesters marching in front of the White House had a powerful impact.

[3042] Anonymous, *Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C. [A Young Woman*

Audre Lorde (1934–1992)

The daughter of West Indian parents, Audre Lorde was born in Harlem. She graduated from Hunter College in 1961 and earned a Masters in Library Science from Columbia University. For the next decade, she worked as a librarian and teacher. Lorde was also poet in residence at Tougaloo College, Mississippi, and taught at a number of colleges in New York City. Although she is known primarily as a poet, her “biomythography,” *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982), is an important and influential prose work that chronicles her life from her childhood in Harlem to her “coming out” as a lesbian. In addition, Lorde recounts her battle with cancer in her poignant book *The Cancer Journals* (1980). These works, along with many of her poems, offer Lorde’s readers personal glimpses into her life and experience, a trait that aligns her with confessional writers like Adrienne Rich, with whom she enjoyed a long and artistically fruitful relationship, and also with Sylvia Plath.

As Lorde has acknowledged, she is not an easy poet to categorize. Often associated with the Black Arts movement, her poetry, like that of Amiri Baraka, is frequently fiercely political; rage and violence are not tempered in her verse. In many ways, though, her verse, like that of Nikki Giovanni and June Jordan, falls into the feminist expansion of the Black Arts movement. In the late 1960s Lorde created poems like “Coal” and “Black Mother Woman” that celebrate blackness and seek to instill a sense of pride and self-love in the African American community. She draws inspiration from African history and myth, and many readers consider her best poetry to be those works that deal most closely with myth. Lorde’s poems are not just directed at her own race; indeed, much of her work, often termed **protest poetry**, is laced with social criticism meant to call all readers to action. Poems like “Chain,” for example, originate from current events and their journalistic origins force readers to confront social travesties in modern society. Known for her political commitment, Lorde is widely considered one of the most powerful and radical poets of our time.

TEACHING TIP

■ Read within the context of the Black Arts movement, the political undertones of Lorde’s poetry are clearly visible. The message “Black Is Beautiful,” one of the hallmarks of the movement, was a

radical call for the black community to nurture itself and to recognize its own self-worth. Using the archive, study the visual images that reflect the idea that “Black Is Beautiful.” Alternatively, instructors could show the class representations of black Americans from the early twentieth century. Examples might include Aunt Jemima, Bojangles, minstrel shows, Uncle Ben, and the “lawn jockey.” In small groups, students should consider each image, identify the stereotype the image is based on, and explain how and why a poet like Lorde chose to counter such derogatory stereotypes with her work. Is it easy for students to recognize the original stereotypes black writers were trying to challenge? If so, what does that suggest? If not, what might that suggest? Then have your students read “Coal.” How does looking at the images in the archive change the way they read this poem? What new elements do they notice in the text?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Lorde often writes about differences between generations, particularly of women. In “Black Mother Woman,” what is the speaker’s relationship to her mother? What has she learned from her? What does this poem have to say about identity? What is the significance of the title?

Comprehension: Many of Lorde’s poems explore the issue of being black and female. Why does Lorde title a poem “Coal”? What is the effect of isolating the pronoun “I” on the first line? What is the tone of the poem? How does Lorde portray language in this poem? What is she saying about words and their meanings? What is she saying about blackness in this poem?

Context: How is Lorde’s poetry a feminist response to Black Arts poetry, such as that by Baraka? You might compare “Coal” or “Black Mother Woman” with Baraka’s “An Agony. As Now.” and “A Poem for Willie Best.”

Context: Audre Lorde talks about using poetry to break the silence. How does her poetry push the boundaries of the genre’s traditional subject matter? How might that align her with confessional poets? What differences do you see between her writing and that of confessional poets like Sexton and Plath?

Exploration: Lorde’s poetry, like Baraka’s, often expresses rage and violence. Discuss Lorde’s intended audience. How might her poetry affect different groups of people? How does Lorde challenge conventional concepts of what it means to be an American?

Exploration: Lorde’s interest in African tradition, and particularly in oral traditions, deeply influenced her work. How does oral tradition manifest itself in her poems? How does her use of the oral tradition connect her to earlier African American writers, like those of the Harlem Renaissance, or perhaps to authors of slave narratives? What techniques do these writers share?

at the March with a Banner] (1963), courtesy of the Still Picture Branch, National Archives and Records Administration. Basic constitutional rights were denied to African Americans for well over the first 150 years of the United States’s existence. “I have come to believe over and over again,” poet Audre Lorde said, “that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.”

[5460] Courier Lithograph Company, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin—On the Levee* (1899), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Theatrical Poster Collection [POS-TH-1899.U53, no. 3]. Poster for a theater production showing happy slaves dancing. Post–Civil War Uncle Tom Shows were often performed by whites in blackface. By presenting blacks as subservient, without physical, intellectual, moral, or sexual power, such shows gave the term “Uncle Tom” its current derogatory meaning.

[6237] Gemini Rising, Inc., *Clenched Fist on Red, Green, and Black Background* (1971), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-4389]. The Black Arts movement of the 1960s and 1970s was closely related to the Black Power movement. Leaders of the Black Arts movement, such as Amiri Baraka, argued that ethics and aesthetics were inextricably linked and that black art ought to be politically focused and community-oriented.

[7138] Anonymous, *LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) Leads the Black Arts Parade Down 125th Toward the Black Arts Theater Repertory/School on 130th Street, New York City* (1965), courtesy of *The Liberator*. Influenced by civil rights activism and black nationalism, Baraka (Jones) and other African American artists opened the Black Arts Theater in Harlem in 1965.

[7652] Anonymous, *Jim Crow Jubilee* (1847), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-37348]. Jim Crow laws took their name from a character in minstrel shows that featured racist stereotypes about African Americans, depicting them as lazy and as less intelligent than whites.

Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) (b. 1934)

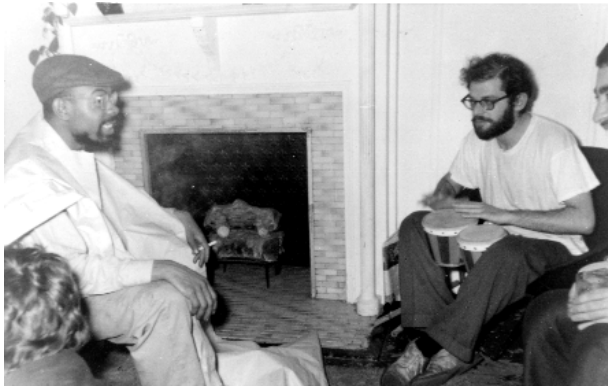
Amiri Baraka was born Everett Leroy Jones in Newark, New Jersey. A creative child, he enjoyed cartooning and creative writing, particularly science fiction. Also gifted academically, Jones graduated from high school two years early and attended Howard University, where he was disappointed by what he saw as the school's attempt to train black students to be white. It was during his undergraduate years that Jones changed the spelling of his name to the more Africanized LeRoi. His later stint in the U.S. Air Force as a weatherman and gunner also proved demoralizing, as he realized the extent of white prejudice and, perhaps more disconcertingly, the prevalence of the belief that mistreatment of blacks was justified. These experiences surface in his later writing. While a graduate student at Columbia, Jones knew some

of the Beat writers, with whom he shared an impulse toward living on the fringes of American society. In the late 1950s, Jones was visible on the literary scene; he and his first wife, Hettie Jones, published *Yugen*, a poetry magazine. In 1961, he helped start the American Theater for Poets. Until this point, Jones was known mostly for his poetry, through which he sought a solution to racism in American society.

However, after the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, Jones's views changed dramatically. From that point on, Jones considered racial harmony in America impossible and urged blacks to find other

alternatives. The 1960s proved a turning point in his art. Jones became increasingly interested in drama, and his most successful play, *Dutchman*, premiered on March 24, 1964, at the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York, with Jennifer West and Robert Hooks starring in the lead roles.

As racial tensions heightened in the mid-1960s, Jones became a committed activist, leaving his family to move to Harlem, where he quickly became known as a black nationalist. His commitment to the arts strengthened, and in 1965 he founded the Black Arts Repertory Theater, which produced militant drama meant for black audiences. For Jones, art was a vehicle for political change, in particular for the liberation of blacks. In 1967 Jones was arrested during the summer riots, but the charges against him were eventually dropped. In 1968 he founded the Black Community Development and Defense Organization. The members wore traditional African dress, conversed in both Swahili and English, and dedicated themselves to Islam. To mark this new political and spiritual transformation, Jones changed his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka. His controversial and radical politics have earned him an important place in the black community, and he has been influential in developing relationships between black Americans and black Africans. Identified with the Black Arts movement, Baraka's work is characterized by an angry voice that frequently calls for violence as a means to achieve liberation for blacks.



[6262] Anonymous, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Allen Ginsberg and John Fles (1959), courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Choose one of the longer speeches in Scene II of *Dutchman*. Practice performing the excerpt. What choices have you made about delivery? What have you chosen to emphasize? Why? What gestures, pauses, or inflections make sense to you? Why?

■ Baraka's work has been controversial because it often calls for violence. Whether or not readers accept the anger and vengeance expressed in these works, it seems important to talk about audience. Have students imagine that they have been asked to do the publicity for a production of *Dutchman*. Whom do they imagine attending the play? What text would be on the flyers and in the program notes? Whom is Baraka trying to reach? Why does he feel violence and anger are successful tools? How have different groups of people responded to his work? Does his militancy affect his credibility as a thinker and artist?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Why does Baraka choose the subway as a setting for *Dutchman*? What is significant about his choice?

Comprehension: Were you surprised by the ending of *Dutchman*? Why do you think Baraka chose to end the play this way? What do you take away from the play? How might it be read as a politically charged drama?

Comprehension: In "A Poem for Willie Best," who is Willie Best? Why did Baraka dedicate a poem to him? Baraka uses numerous parentheses in this poem. What is the effect of this stylistic choice? Why are some of the parentheses left open?

Context: Both Amiri Baraka and Langston Hughes wrote with political agendas, though Baraka's philosophy tended to be more militant and separatist than Hughes's. Both poets also wrote about both the average black man and the black artist. Compare Hughes's "Note on Commercial Theatre," "The Weary Blues," and "Song for a Dark Girl" to Baraka's "A Poem for Willie Best," a poem about a black character actor. What techniques do these poets share? How are their works different?

Exploration: Using drama as a way to incite public action is not a new concept. Indeed, in 1907, John M. Synge's production of *Playboy of the Western World* at the Abbey Theater incited riots in Ireland because audiences felt it was offensive. Why is it that drama seems able to stir people to action? Along with Baraka and Synge, you might also consider W. B. Yeats (*Catherine Ni Houlihan*) and Arthur Miller (*The Crucible*).

Exploration: Although the Black Arts movement has waned, there are still artists and audiences who believe in black separatism. How has Baraka influenced contemporary culture? Do you see evidence of his teachings and practices today? You might consider rap music, hip-hop, and film in your answer.

BARAKA WEB ARCHIVE

[4314] Leroy McClucas, *Imamu Amiri Baraka, Formerly LeRoi Jones, Head-and-Shoulders Portrait, Facing Right* (1965), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-115116]. In 1965, after the assassination of Malcolm X, Amiri Baraka divorced his white wife, changed his name, and moved to Harlem, where he became a prominent figure in the Black Arts movement. Since then, Baraka has revised his black nationalist views in favor of Marxism and dropped "Imamu" (a Muslim word which means "spiritual leader") from his name.

[6262] Anonymous, *LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Allen Ginsberg and John Fles* (1959), courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries. Jones (Baraka) and Ginsberg seated in living room with drums. Jones was originally associated with the Beat movement, but with the growth of the Black Power movement, he changed his focus to political civil rights.

[7138] Anonymous, *LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) Leads the Black Arts Parade Down 125th Toward the Black Arts Theater Repertory/School on 130th Street, New York City* (1965), courtesy of *The Liberator*. Influenced by civil rights activism and black nationalism, Baraka (Jones) and other African American artists opened the Black Arts Theater in Harlem in 1965.

[7430] Anonymous, *Beat Poet Allen Ginsberg's Former Companion, Peter Orlovsky, Left, and Black Activist Poet Amiri Baraka Speak with Each Other* (1997), courtesy of the Associated Press. While a graduate student at Columbia, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) knew some of the Beat writers, with whom he shared an interest in living on the fringes of American society. However, after the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, Baraka considered racial harmony in America impossible. Much of Baraka's work reflects this more militant perspective. His "Civil Rights Poem" was written during a homophobic period, though earlier he had been friends with a number of the gay members of the Beat Generation, and here he is featured with Ginsberg's ex-lover.

[7432] Anonymous, *Imamu Amiri Baraka, the Former Poet-Playwright LeRoi Jones* (1974), courtesy of the Associated Press AP. This photo of Imamu Amiri Baraka was taken when he announced in Trenton on Wednesday, January 9, 1974, that the New Jersey Black Political Assembly would meet in New Brunswick, New Jersey, January 26, to select delegates to the National Black Political Convention.

[7495] Herman Hiller, *Malcolm X at Queens Court* (1964), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-119478]. Portrait of Malcolm X. Malcolm X's assassination prompted Amiri Baraka to emphasize race in his art.



[7382] Duncan, *Chitto Harjo or Crazy Snake, Head-and-Shoulders Portrait, Facing Front* (1903), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-111977].

Joy Harjo (b. 1951)

The daughter of a mixed Cherokee, French, and Irish mother and a Creek father, Harjo was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma. As a student and poet, Harjo has remained in touch with her Native American roots. She left Tulsa as a teenager to attend the Institute of American Indian Arts, a high school in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She earned an undergraduate degree from the University of New Mexico and an M.F.A. from the University of Iowa. Her career as an educator has led her all over the Southwest; she has held positions at Arizona State University, the University of Colorado, the University of Arizona, and the University of New Mexico.

The Harjo family has a prominent place in the history of the Creek Indians. As the great-great granddaughter of the leader of a Creek rebellion against their **removal** from Alabama to Oklahoma, Harjo comes from a people with a painful history. Still, her poetry often emphasizes the positive aspects of Native American heritage. Harjo uses words to begin the healing process and to explain the ruptures in current society. She is interested in questions of gender and ethnic identity and her work devotes special attention to the struggles of Native American women. Her poetry is rich with myth, and she draws inspiration from nature, as well as the oral tradition and culture of her Creek heritage. She often refers to herself as a wanderer, and her poetry explores the experience of movement, relocation, and journey, both physical and spiritual.

Joy Harjo travels widely throughout the United States, playing saxophone with her band. Her poetry also resonates with the rhythms and sounds of music, particularly jazz, blues, country, and Native American dance songs. Harjo's works include *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* (1994), *A Map to the Next World* (1991), and *How We Became Human* (2002). She co-edited *Reinventing the Enemy's Language* (1998), an anthology that celebrates the experience of Native American women. The most comprehensive anthology of its kind, it includes poetry, fiction, prayers, and memoir from Native American women, representing nearly fifty Indian nations.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Harjo's poems borrow from the Native American oral tradition and have a sense of rhythm that makes them even more powerful when read aloud. Have students read one of her poems aloud. How does the performance change the way they originally thought about the poem?

■ Harjo is a saxophonist in a jazz band that combines Native American drums and instrumentals with the jazz of the American South, the geographic homelands of the Creek Indians. Though twenty-first-century American youth may associate jazz with "easy listening," it is important to consider jazz's revolutionary influence on literature and aesthetics during the twentieth century. For American writers, jazz referred not only to a musical style, but also to a style of dance, litera-

ture, dress, and art. Jazz's rebellion could be felt in the freedom of improvisation, as well as the ability to take old melodies, split them apart, and make them fit a new rhythm and worldview. Harjo borrows from jazz in her poetry both in terms of the syncopated rhythms of her work and in her affinities for improvisation, call and response, and collage. Ask students to explore the importance of jazz for Harjo's verse.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Poets often use repetition for emphasis and to create a pattern when writing in free verse. Often the repetition is slightly different in each rendition, making the reader think about the subtle shades of meaning in language. In "Call It Fear" Harjo repeats phrases like "walk backwards," "talk backwards," "breathe backwards." What does she mean here? What is the significance of these repeated images? What is the "edge" to which she keeps referring?

Comprehension: Animals in poetry are often representative of a wilderness damaged or forgotten in the chaos of the modern world. What is the significance of the white bear in "White Bear"? What is the tone of this poem? What is the role of nature?

Comprehension: "Summer Night" is filled with beautiful, delicate imagery. What is the effect of the line breaks on the page? How does the visual pattern of the poem affect its meaning?

Context: In *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, Harjo relates Native American myth to contemporary life. How does her use of myth compare to that of the feminist poets in this unit, particularly Adrienne Rich ("Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law") and Sylvia Plath ("Ariel")?

Context: Memory is an important theme in Harjo's work. Assimilation and the ever-decreasing number of people who can speak tribal languages threaten the preservation of the cultures of Native Americans, who have traditionally relied on oral tradition to transmit their heritage. Thus, it is not surprising that memory is so central to Harjo's work. How does she represent memory, both personal and collective? You might look at "The Flood" and "White Bear."

Exploration: The relationships and understanding among different generations of women are central to many women poets. This seems particularly true of writers in the women's movement. How do these poets represent the differences among generations of women? In what ways is the tone of their poems political? Consider poems by Lorde, Harjo, and Rich in your answer.

Exploration: Many of Harjo's poems bear the influence of jazz, using call and response, repetition, and visual patterns in a way reminiscent of that genre. Compare Harjo's "Summer Night" to Langston Hughes's "The Weary Blues," also influenced by jazz. What similarities or differences in technique do you notice?

Exploration: Travel is an important theme in Harjo's work. How does this theme relate to the experiences of Native Americans, both in

HARJO WEB ARCHIVE

[3708] Jesse Logan Nusbaum, *Entryway of House Near Guadalupe from Under Porch, Santa Fe, N.M.* (1912), courtesy of the Denver Public Library/Western History Department. Creek poet Joy Harjo attended high school in Santa Fe. One of her goals has been to make poetry and prose that is more inclusive of the experiences of people of color.

[7382] Duncan, *Chitto Harjo or Crazy Snake, Head-and-Shoulders Portrait, Facing Front* (1903), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-111977]. Photograph of Creek chief Chitto Harjo, leader of dissident Creeks who opposed land allotments that violated earlier treaties. Joy Harjo is part Creek and an enrolled member of the Muscogee tribe. Harjo's work ties Native American heritage, including oral traditions, to contemporary themes.

[8313] Joy Harjo, Interview: "Native Voices and Poetry of Liberation" (2003), courtesy of *American Passages* and Annenberg Media. Writer Joy Harjo discusses the staying power of oral tradition.

[8314] Joy Harjo, Interview: "Native Voices and Poetry of Liberation" (2003), courtesy of *American Passages* and Annenberg Media. Writer Joy Harjo discusses the power of the spoken word.

terms of a connection to the land and with regard to Native American spiritual images that often involve flight and journey? How does recent Native American history, particularly forced removal to Oklahoma, relate to these images of travel in Harjo's poetry? How does she use this theme to bring closure to the past?

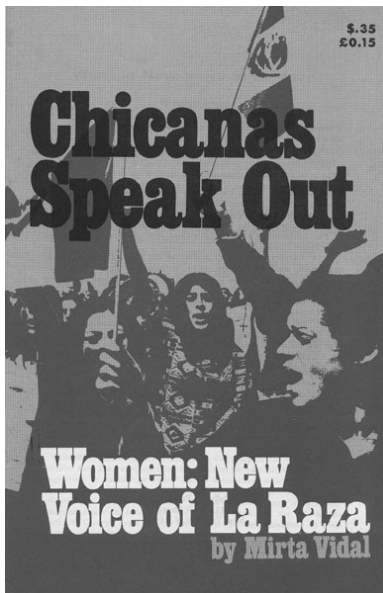
Lorna Dee Cervantes (b. 1954)

Cervantes was born in San Francisco and is of Mexican descent. Sensitive to the racial and ethnic prejudice she might encounter growing up in San Jose, her parents insisted that she speak only English both in and outside the home. She graduated from San Jose State College and for many years supported herself by writing and publishing. Cervantes founded and published a journal, *Mango*, which featured the work of Latino poets; she also wrote two volumes of poetry. Currently, she teaches at the University of Colorado at Boulder and is co-editor of *Red Dirt*, a cross-cultural poetry journal.

Both her Mexican heritage and her feminism inform Cervantes's writing. Her poetry celebrates her Mexican heritage, but it is also harshly critical of machismo and male dominance in Chicano culture and celebratory of specifically female oral traditions. She sometimes implicitly compares Euro-American dominance of Chicano people and lands with Chicano men's domination of women. Just as men and women are often at odds in her bilingual poems, English and Spanish words seem to battle on the page for space and prominence. Some poems imagine fantastical escapes from such conflict—an entirely female family, for example, or an uninhabited land. Images of birds and migration appear often in her work, particularly in her first book, *Emplumada* (1981), the title of which is a play on Spanish words connoting a bird's plumage and a writer's pen. In *From the Cables of Genocide: Poems on Love and Hunger* (1991), Cervantes uses symbols from nature to explore romantic and familial love. Her affinity for nature and landscape lend her work a unique delicacy and beauty that sometimes belie its political and social messages.

TEACHING TIP

■ Students will probably find Cervantes's poetry very accessible. Building the discussion around the idea of a dual identity will help them recognize the complicated aspects of her work. What does it mean for an American poet to write about a dual heritage? How does a poet like Cervantes explore what it means to be an American? Consider the ways in which this contemporary American poet incorporates Spanish in her work. Have your students choose one of Cervantes's poems and translate the Spanish (they can use a Spanish/English dictionary or the internet) into English. Then have them rewrite the poem completely in English. How does this translation change the poem? What effects are lost? You might consider using "Visions of Mexico While at a Writing Symposium in Port Townsend, Washington" or "The Body as Braille" for this activity.



[7084] Mirta Vidal, Cover of *Chicanas Speak Out* (1971), courtesy of Duke University.

CERVANTES WEB ARCHIVE

[5615] Anonymous, *Disturnell Map of Mexico* (c. 1850), courtesy of Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. Although the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo officially ended the Mexican-American War in 1848, disputes continued between the Mexican and United States governments concerning, among other issues, the border of Texas.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: How do you interpret the uncle's dream in "Uncle's First Rabbit"? What is the effect of his first hunting experience? What is the tone of this poem?

Comprehension: In "For Virginia Chavez," Cervantes alludes to a string of famous poets, including Lord Byron, the Romantic poet, John Donne, the seventeenth-century poet, and popular Victorian poets Robert and Elizabeth Browning. Why would an author like Cervantes refer to canonical British writers? How is she continuing or transforming the work of those earlier authors?

Comprehension: In "Visions of Mexico While at a Writing Symposium in Port Townsend, Washington," Cervantes divides the poem into two parts, titled "Mexico" and "Washington." What is the speaker's attitude towards each place? What is the tone of the poem? Does it change? What images are associated with each place? What does that tell us about the speaker's state of mind? What is the effect of the long title?

Context: The theme of migration appears often in Cervantes's poetry, and is frequently connected to the prominence of migration within Latino history. This theme might also be seen as a reflection of Cervantes's personal migration between Mexican and American cultures. Trace Cervantes's use of migration, as both symbol and theme, in the poems in this unit. (You might look specifically at "Uncle's First Rabbit," "Visions of Mexico While at a Writing Symposium in Port Townsend, Washington," and "Emplumada.") What generalizations can you make about her treatment of this theme? How is it represented in each of the poems?

Context: The Black Arts movement is defined by a commitment to bringing the arts and community together, raising consciousness about black experience, using art to gain political and social equality for black Americans, and building a sense of pride and awareness of history in the black community. After reading Cervantes's work, think about what a Chicano aesthetic might look like. What goals might it share with the Black Arts movement?

Exploration: Like Cervantes, the Beats draw on ideas related to travel in their work. You might look specifically at Kerouac's *On the Road* and Snyder's "The Blue Sky." How does Cervantes's use of the concept of the "journey" differ from that of the Beats? What do her poems about migration have in common with works by the Beats, as well as by transcendent poets?

Exploration: Birds are a common poetic symbol for the soul, in part because of their ability to move between the sky and the earth. In other poems, birds, usually songbirds, are symbols of the poet. Some important poems that use this trope are Paul Laurence Dunbar's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus," and John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale." Images of birds appear throughout Cervantes's work. How do you interpret this? How do these images change in different poems? What kinds of

[6133] Anonymous, *Young Hispanic Woman* (c. 1969), courtesy of the Denver Public Library, Western History Collection. In the 1960s and 1970s, a number of Chicana women protested definitions of womanhood and American identity that excluded Chicana heritage and life.

[6710] Judith F. Baca, *La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra* (2000), courtesy of the Social and Public Art Resource Center, © Judith F. Baca, *La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra*, Colorado, 2000. Judith Baca is an acclaimed muralist who believes that art can be a forum for social dialogue, as well as a tool for social change. In this sense her work shares much with the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Lorna Dee Cervantes, and Helena Maria Viramontes.

[7084] Mirta Vidal, *Cover of Chicanas Speak Out* (1971), courtesy of Duke University. Chicana authors, including Cherrie Moraga and Lorna Dee Cervantes, protested exclusive definitions of womanhood and American identity that did not include Chicana heritage and life.

[7605] Anonymous, *Unidentified Woman Finishes Defiant Message* (1973), courtesy of the Denver Public Library. A young woman with long hair, wearing bellbottoms, scrawls out a message which reads, "We are not beaten . . . and we do not intend to be beaten or driven as such. . . . What has happened here is but the sound before the fury of those who are oppressed." The building pictured was damaged in an explosion that followed a shootout between Denver police and people of the Chicano community on March 16, 1973.

[8756] Eliot Young, Interview: "Exploring Borderlands" (2003), courtesy of *American Passages* and Annenberg Media. Elliot Young, professor of history at Lewis and Clark College, discusses Chicano and Chicana literature.

birds appear? What specific cultural dimension do these birds have?

Exploration: Many of the poets in this unit have a keen sense of place; particular places and landscapes figure prominently in their poetry. Ginsberg, for example, writes about San Francisco and large urban areas, Harjo writes about landscapes central to Native American lore, and Wright's poems are often about rural Ohio. Similarly, Cervantes envisions the landscapes of Mexico and America in her work. Why does the land seem so important to all these poets? Are there particular historical or cultural reasons that might make them feel tied to the land? How might an interest in the land relate to ideas of transcendence and liberation?

Suggested Author Pairings

LORNA DEE CERVANTES AND AUDRE LORDE

Both these writers explode the notion that female identity is uniform and continuous. Cervantes's poetry is characterized by her dual heritage, and she frequently juxtaposes locations, languages, and imagery. Similarly, Lorde's poetry features candid speakers struggling with their experiences as outsiders because of race, gender, and sexual orientation. Comparing the way these poets use standard English alongside Spanish or black vernacular dialect also raises useful questions about what it means to connect two worlds and what it means to be an American. Both writers also recognize the political force behind poetry. Cervantes has been instrumental in creating and developing a Chicano aesthetic, just as Audre Lorde has been an important presence in Black Arts. Despite these similarities, these writers differ widely, particularly in the tone of their poems. Lorde's use of the first person creates an intimacy with the reader, whereas Cervantes's writing has a more narrative feel. How do these authors redefine what it means to be American? How does their ethnic heritage influence their ideas about America and its national values?

JAMES WRIGHT AND JOY HARJO

Both of these poets share an affinity with nature, and both write in a meditative style. While Wright looks primarily to nature as an antidote to the modern, Harjo expresses a desire to unite the past (her Native American heritage) with the present (modern times), and she uses nature as a means to connect the two. Wright and Harjo, however, do share a desire for transcendence, and might be described as meditative poets. Both poets remember and long for nature and landscapes destroyed or threatened by civilization, and both poets write with a sense of loss and reverence. In what ways can their poems be read as elegies, not for people, but for landscapes and locations? How do the different backgrounds of these poets influence their views of nature? How do they complement and diverge from one another?

**AMIRI BARAKA, GARY SNYDER,
AND ALLEN GINSBERG**

These poets recognize the political power behind their poetry, and they use words to shock audiences, critique government institutions, and question traditional American values. Although he later became a leader of the Black Arts movement, Baraka was connected to the early Beat movement, and he knew Ginsberg and the other New York-based writers of the movement. Like the Beats, Baraka was interested in living on the fringes of society, exploding conventional ways of thinking, and using poetry for political rebellion. By the mid-1950s, however, Baraka had separated from the Beats to pursue racial themes in his poetry, and his work became increasingly militant. He also began spending more time on drama and dedicated himself to bridging the gap between the community and artists. While the Beat poets considered themselves outsiders, they did write poetry that appealed to the masses. Just as Baraka shocked audiences with his dialect, obscenities, and violence, so the Beat poets shocked their readers with similar breaches of tradition, using obscenities, slang, and references to illegal drugs. Ginsberg became the voice for the Beat movement, and Baraka, in a similar fashion, became the figure most associated with Black Arts. Both poets had lifestyles that matched their vibrant, radical, and confrontational poetry. Gary Snyder, however, joined the Beat movement later, after many of the writers had moved to San Francisco. His interest in nature and ecology set him apart from Baraka and Ginsberg. Snyder's work is also decidedly more meditative. Still, he shares their radical use of diction and subject matter, and he, too, lives on the fringes of society. Like Ginsberg, who was interested in the Far East, and Baraka, whose poetry reflects a fascination with Africa, Snyder's work also shows some marks of primitivism. Interested in the Far East, particularly China, and Native American culture, Snyder explores transcendence and spirituality in his work. How do these poets deepen our understanding of the Beat movement and its complexity? How does each poet use politics differently in his work? How have these men changed our perception of the poet as a cultural figure?

SYLVIA PLATH AND ADRIENNE RICH

These writers are considered among the most important feminist poets of our century. Both women struggle to represent female experience, and they shatter conventional notions of poetic subject matter in the process. They write openly about the female body, intimate relationships, sex, and motherhood. For both authors, questions of identity are central to their work, and readers are often struck by the conflicted sense of self represented by these poets. How do these authors challenge society's treatment of women and **sexuality**? What is experimental or innovative about their writing? Why are they so important to the feminist movement?

JOHN ASHBERY AND ALLEN GINSBERG

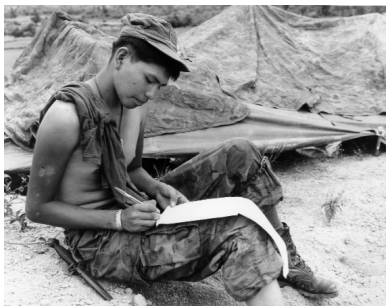
Both of these poets are interested in the discourse of popular culture and they both explore the boundaries between prose and verse. In addition, both Ginsberg and Ashbery avoid writing about specific events and people, choosing instead to concentrate on the workings of the mind or a representation of the creative process. But Ginsberg uses an authoritative, sweeping voice reminiscent of Whitman, whereas Ashbery's poetic voice seems detached, erudite, and witty. Ginsberg looks to jazz, Eastern religion, and drugs for poetic inspiration, whereas Ashbery draws on visual art and is particularly influenced by avant-garde painters like Jackson Pollock. Ginsberg's poetry is highly political, whereas Ashbery seems disconnected from the political turmoil of the 1960s. How do these poets represent American experience? How do they incorporate elements of popular culture? What do they envision as the goal of poetry and art?

CORE CONTEXTS

The War in Vietnam: The War at Home

America emerged from World War II as a superpower with a dramatically transformed foreign policy. The United States became, in historian Mary Sheila McMahon's words, "a more activist and outward-looking state" as it purported to defend democratic ideals. The government felt that to protect American self-interests, defend itself against the Stalinist Soviet Union and Maoist China, and promote capitalistic democracy worldwide, it had to abandon its tradition of isolationism. With the onset of the Cold War, the perceived threat of Soviet and Red Chinese aggression strengthened the government's resolve to protect its interests everywhere. This resolve led to interventions in the autonomy of other nations and increased anxiety at home about "subversive" political and social movements. After the escalation of the Vietnam War in the mid-1960s, the conflict and its heavy casualties divided the country dramatically. U.S. involvement in Vietnam killed more than 50,000 Americans and lasted longer than the fighting in both world wars combined.

The Vietnam War was a protracted struggle in jungles, swamps, and other difficult terrain, a war with no front lines and two adversaries: the North Vietnamese Army, a well-trained, well-equipped force with decades of experience in guerrilla warfare, and the Vietcong, a South Vietnamese army of dedicated irregulars, genius in the tactics of hit-and-run, and adept at blending in with a civilian population whose loyalties were always in doubt. By the middle of 1968, promises of a quick conclusion had melted away, and a series of catastrophic engagements—the Tet Offensive, the siege of Khe Sanh, the battle for Hue, which nearly destroyed the second largest city in the Republic of Vietnam—brought many Americans to the sobering recognition that



[3043] John A. Gentry, LCpl, Vietnam . . . Private First Class Joseph Big Medicine Jr., a Cheyenne Indian, Writes a Letter to His Family in the United States (1969), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

the war could continue for a very long time, and that the prospects of a real victory were dim. Another source of moral conflict in the United States was the configuration of the American Armed Forces, and of American casualties, as a result of provisions of the draft. Because college students before 1970 were deferred from conscription, campuses became places of temporary and uneasy refuge, where male students were keenly aware of a countdown to graduation and a coming forfeiture of protection; meanwhile, the front-line forces in Southeast Asia were filled with young men from working-class, inner-city, and minority backgrounds, men who lacked the money and the connections to spare them from military service. As the reasons for continuing the war grew more and more confused in the minds of troops abroad and Americans at home, the resistance to the war grew exponentially in 1968 and 1969; demonstrations in Washington, D.C., New York, and other cities drew hundreds of thousands of people.

When Richard Nixon took office in January 1969, the American government implemented two strategies to cool the domestic resistance and find a way out of the conflict: (1) a “Vietnamization” of the combat forces, which meant that American troops would be gradually moved away from direct combat, and (2) a draft lottery, which ended the college deferment and determined eligibility for conscription on the basis of randomly chosen birth dates. For a while, these changes did have some of the intended effect, but the May 1970 killing of student protesters by National Guard troops at Kent State and Jackson State, two college campuses, brought about a nationwide student strike. With the support of faculty and administrators, many campuses shut down almost completely until the end of the academic year.

Many of the poets writing during this period responded directly to the Vietnam conflict or expressed a heightened distrust of authority. Repelled also by the general assumption that America could fight a major war and indulge itself materialistically at the same time, some poets looked to leftist politics for an alternate vision of what the United States could be. The Vietnam conflict and the protests against the war were also, in a sense, media events. For the first time in history, television crews could send full-color videotape quickly home from a battlefield halfway around the world, and domestic TV crews could bring violent confrontations with police and National Guardsmen directly into the living room. Not surprisingly, depictions of the human body as a site of suffering, resistance, and sacrifice turn up frequently in literature written during and about these years.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What are some of the reasons Americans protested against the Vietnam War? Why did this conflict raise such opposition at home?



[7360] Frank Moffit, SPC 5, Vietnam . . . A Sky Trooper from the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) Keeps Track of the Time He Has Left on His “Short Time” Helmet (1968), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.



[7361] Anonymous, Vietnam War Protesters (1967), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration [NRE-21-KANSWICHCR-CR928-WICH1895].

"WAR IN VIETNAM"
WEB ARCHIVE

[3043] John A. Gentry, LCpl, *Vietnam . . . Private First Class Joseph Big Medicine Jr., a Cheyenne Indian, Writes a Letter to His Family in the United States* (1969), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration. Soldier from Company G, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, on a clear, search and destroy mission near An Hoa. U.S. military destruction in Vietnam encouraged antiwar protesters and distrust of the government. Writer Grace Paley, who described herself as a "combative pacifist and cooperative anarchist," was deeply involved in the antiwar movement.

[6217] Cameron Lawrence, *It Is a Sin to Be Silent When It Is Your Duty to Protest* (1971), courtesy of the Library of Congress. Feminist and activist poet Adrienne Rich's work provokes readers to see the connections between the struggle for women's rights and other movements, including that against the war in Vietnam.

[7360] Frank Moffit, SPC 5, *Vietnam . . . A Sky Trooper from the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) Keeps Track of the Time He Has Left on His "Short Time" Helmet* (1968), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration. Soldier, part of Operation Pershing, near Bong Son. By 1968, many Americans were ambivalent about the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. Most of the soldiers drafted after 1965 were troubled by their role in what they saw as a morally ambiguous conflict. A variety of American poets protested the war, including Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, Robert Bly, Robert Lowell, Adrienne Rich, James Wright, and Galway Kinnell.

[7361] Anonymous, *Vietnam War Protesters* (1967), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration [NRE-21-KANSWICHCR-CR928-WICH1895]. Wichita, Kansas, protest against the Vietnam War. Antiwar protests were major cultural events in the 1960s and early 1970s. Many writers and artists participated, including Adrienne Rich, whose work became more explicitly political during this time.

Comprehension: How did the Vietnam protest movements change American culture? What values are associated with the Vietnam era? How did the Vietnam War change the public's attitude towards the government?

Context: Although *Howl* was written in 1954, there are several references to capitalism and at least one reference (line 32) to communism. What is Ginsberg's attitude toward American capitalism and Soviet communism? Based on what you know of his lifestyle and the Beat movement, how do you think Ginsberg responded to the Vietnam War?

Context: Although the Vietnam War was a defining event for a generation of poets, few of the poems in this unit directly address the conflict. Why? Do you see more subtle evidence of the war's influence?

Exploration: During the height of the Vietnam protests in the late 1960s, many men and women donned Vietcong uniforms in order to make a dramatic political statement. Why do you think protesters dressed in Vietcong uniforms? What statement were they trying to make?

Exploration: Literary critic and poet Peter Sacks has argued that elegies not only memorialize the dead, but seek to take the reader and poet through a mourning process, thereby helping the reader recover from fears of mortality and move beyond loss. Some critics have argued that in the era following Hiroshima and the Holocaust, the appropriate mourner would not recover from her "melancholia," but would mourn the loss of the dead in perpetuity. Compare elegiac poems on Vietnam (e.g., Denise Levertov's "What Were They Like?") to Lowell's "For the Union Dead" and Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead." What sources of consolation does each poet provide? What role does language play in this consolation? Do any of these poems seem to see an end to mourning?

The Beat Generation: Living (and Writing) on the Edge

"I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix . . ."

When Allen Ginsberg performed these first lines of *Howl* in the crowded Six Gallery in San Francisco, the 150 people in the audience began cheering. As Kenneth Rexroth remembers, Americans were feeling oppressed by what he called "an undeclared military state," a government that seemed out of control, and a culture that seemed more interested in mass consumerism than morals or aesthetics. Ginsberg's voice immediately became a voice of hope and change. Poet Michael McClure describes the immediate visceral response to *Howl*: "Everyone knew at the deepest level that a barrier had been broken, that a human voice and body had been hurled against the harsh wall of America and its supporting armies and navies and academies and

institutions and ownership systems and power-support bases.” By the time Ginsberg reached the end of *Howl*, the cheers were so loud that it was difficult to hear him read, but when he had finished, history had been made. The Beat movement had become an officially recognized force in the literary and cultural landscape.

The Beat Generation, as it came to be called, claims a number of well-known writers, including Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the founder of City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco. The Beat authors covered in this unit include Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, and Amiri Baraka (Baraka dropped his allegiance to the Beats as he began to emphasize the African American roots of his poetic voice). These writers looked to unconventional role models, or “Secret Heroes” as Ginsberg labeled them, like Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Arthur Rimbaud, and Dylan Thomas. What all these earlier artists shared was noncanonical status, experimental artistic style, and a fast-paced, unorthodox lifestyle. The word “beat” was a slang term used by postwar jazz musicians to mean down and out, or poor and exhausted. It also suggested “dead beat” or “beat-up.” The adoption of the word “beat” to describe this generation of poets is generally credited to Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, who claimed that the word meant “exhausted, at the bottom of the world, looking up or out, sleepless, wide-eyed, perceptive, rejected by society, on your own, streetwise.” Kerouac later credited the term with a philosophical dimension, meaning beatitude or beatific. Proclaiming themselves the Beat Generation ironically helped these writers gain a sense of identity as outsiders. Although Ginsberg, Kerouac, and other early members of the group met in New York City, San Francisco eventually became the hub of the Beat movement. San Francisco, even more than New York City, was home to a thriving alternative culture, where radical ideas and lifestyles were welcomed.

When Ginsberg’s *Howl* was eventually published in a collection, a court trial over its alleged obscenity only heightened its popularity, and the publicity it generated along with the publication of Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957) brought word of the movement into the American heartland. The Beat Generation became synonymous with counterculture, rebellion, and bohemian living. These writers refused to conform to traditional middle-class values; they rejected materialism and organized religion, and searched instead for alternative ways to find spiritual understanding. The Beats looked to Eastern religion, with its emphasis on meditation and communion with nature. Some of them experimented with mind-altering drugs. Many of the Beat poets were openly homosexual, and their candor on the taboo subject of same-sex relationships helped pave the way for the gay rights movement in the 1970s.

Beat literature is characterized by a vigorous rejection of traditional social, sexual, political, and religious values. Although much writing of the time could be described as experimental, Beat writing shares a set of recognizable features, including spontaneity, a penchant for surreal imagery, juxtaposition, long lines, aggressive individualism, an interest in the writing process, the practice of automatic

[7362] Phil Stanziola, *800 Women Strikers for Peace on 47th St. near the UN Building* (1962), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-128465]. Women protest for peace. Antiwar sentiment grew throughout the 1960s as some Americans became more critical of the Cold War mentality. Throughout the Cold War, the United States became increasingly involved in international conflicts that had high American death tolls and no apparent resolution, such as the Korean and Vietnam wars.

[8619] Various, *Don’t Mourn, Organize: SDS Guide to Community Organizing* (1968), courtesy of Special Collections, Michigan State University Libraries. Students for a Democratic Society’s *Guide to Community Organizing*. Some of the articles in this guide address organization and resistance to the war beyond draft dodging, the original focus of SDS actions. One article discusses the various responses of poor whites to black rebellion and violence during the ghetto uprisings in the summer of 1967. Michael Harper’s poem “A Mother Speaks: The Algiers Motel Incident, Detroit” was inspired by the Detroit riot of 1967.



[5681] Anonymous, *Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Jack Kerouac & Peter LaFecadio, Mexico City* (n.d.), courtesy of the Allen Ginsberg Trust.



[6254] Anonymous, *Ginsberg with Hal Chase, Jack Kerouac & William Burroughs* (c. 1944), courtesy of the Allen Ginsberg Trust.

"THE BEAT GENERATION" WEB ARCHIVE

[5681] Anonymous, *Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Jack Kerouac & Peter LaFadio, Mexico City* (n.d.), courtesy of the Allen Ginsberg Trust. The Beat Movement arose at the height of 1950s conservatism and eventually gave birth to the more broad-based counterculture movements of the 1960s. The Beats looked to non-traditional role models like jazz artists Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, and the French symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud.

[5683] John Doss, *Allen Ginsberg at Madame Nhu Protest, 1963* (1963), courtesy of the Allen Ginsberg Trust and the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries. Allen Ginsberg is pictured here in front of City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, after the anti-Madame Nhu demonstration of 1963. Madame Nhu, wife of the head of the secret police in Vietnam, was the official hostess of the U.S.-controlled South Vietnamese government. When a Buddhist monk immolated himself in Saigon as a protest against the government's favoritism of Catholicism (the majority of South Vietnamese were Buddhist), Madame Nhu called the suicide a "barbecue" and offered to light the match for the next one. When she came to the University of California, Berkeley, campus in 1963, she was met with a wide variety of protests.

[6254] Anonymous, *Ginsberg with Hal Chase, Jack Kerouac & William Burroughs* (c. 1944), courtesy of the Allen Ginsberg Trust. Photograph taken near Columbia University, where many

writing, a fascination with drug-induced states, and a general interest in life on the edges of society.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What are some of the features that characterize Beat poetry?

Comprehension: What kinds of values did the Beat Generation uphold?

Context: Ginsberg's poem *Howl* is often taken as a kind of manifesto for the movement. What features, formal and thematic, seem to characterize both this poem and the Beat movement as a whole?

Context: What does Baraka's poetry share with the Beat movement? How does race complicate his association with this group?

Context: How does Snyder's attitude toward nature fit in with the Beat Generation's outlook?

Exploration: William Carlos Williams was an American modernist poet known for celebrating everyday American speech and writing poems about ordinary subjects. In some ways, his compressed verse seems antithetical to the fluid, lengthy lines typical of much Beat poetry. However, Williams was an early admirer of Ginsberg's poetry. What might Williams have found attractive about this younger man's work?

Exploration: Beat writers express a strong connection to physical places and locations. America's cities and landscapes are often crucial to their work. How do these writers treat physical space? You might consider looking at Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, Gary Snyder's "August on Sourdough, A Visit from Dick Brewer," and Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*. With what aspects of America do these writers identify? Why is traveling so important to these poets?

Black Arts: A Separate Voice

The Black Arts movement arose alongside the Black Power movement in the 1960s. The movement flourished from 1965 to about 1975, and though it was short-lived, its legacy was long. Artists typically associated with Black Arts include Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, Ed Bullins, Harold Cruse, Adrienne Kennedy, Larry Neal, and Sonia Sanchez. Black Arts, according to writer Larry Neal, was an ethical movement, meaning that the artists, from poets and playwrights to painters and musicians, believed that art must have a political purpose and that it must be experienced by the masses. Rather than writing modernist poetry with racial themes, as poets like Gwendolyn Brooks and Robert Hayden had done in the 1940s and 1950s, the Black Arts poets worked to express a distinctly black aesthetic derived from black experience and a long African American oral tradition. Black Arts authors sought a new kind of audience; they wrote for the masses in the American ghettos, and they wrote to bring this vast community together.

However, the Black Arts movement was controversial because it

was characterized by an impulse toward separatism and militancy. In the late 1960s, a great deal of anger characterized the outlook of many African Americans. Catchphrases like “Black Pride,” “Black Power,” and “Black Is Beautiful” caught the attention of the black community (as well as the rest of America). Powerful symbols and images, like the Afro or the raised black fist silk-screened on shirts and posters, reinforced this new sense of racial pride. Afro-American studies departments were founded in universities across America, and English departments began to include literature by black writers on their syllabi.

The Black Arts movement had a profound impact on the poetry of the period, including poetry that emerged out of the Chicano movement, the Asian American movement, and the Native American Renaissance. Literature was judged first and foremost by its political message. Did the poetry incite action? Did the verse further the political cause for blacks? This shift in focus from aesthetics to politics was a radical moment in African American art, but in many ways, this poetry was similar to much of the other verse being written at the time by the Beats and feminists. They, like their counterparts, were protesting a whole range of societal problems. As critic David Perkins argues, the Black Arts movement “had many characteristics of an avant-garde movement. It was anti-establishment, continually self-dividing into factions, preoccupied with defining itself and its aims, prolific of manifestos and enormously confident of its own vitality and importance.”

The movement lost energy in the 1970s as the political and social climate improved for blacks, thanks to the civil rights movement, and the imperative to be political and to appeal to the masses grew wearisome for many artists who wanted to grow and find new readers. The legacy of the Black Arts movement, however, remains important to current literature. The poets of the 1960s deserve much credit for changing the way the black community and the rest of society view blackness; indeed, they helped to instill a sense of pride in blacks everywhere with poems like “Coal,” “Black Mother Woman,” and “The Woman Thing.” Their work inspired black poets to use realistic dialect and speech in their poetry, and they also urged them to express black experience more honestly than ever before. This paved the way for black poets to write in a more confessional manner, incorporating intimate personal experience into their work.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What are the features of the Black Arts movement? What relationship did poets and writers see between art and politics?

Comprehension: How would you describe the political and social climate within which the Black Arts movement developed?

Comprehension: What relationship do you see between the values and styles of the Black Arts movement and those of rap, hip-hop, or other musical forms in American popular culture? What is achieved

Beat poets and writers were students. Beat writers expressed their disenchantment with American conformity.

[6505] Anonymous, *The Howl Trial, San Francisco Municipal Court, 1957* (1957), courtesy of City Lights Books. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, arrested for publishing Ginsberg’s poem, comments on the *Howl* obscenity trial: “The prosecution put only two ‘expert witnesses’ on the stand—both very lame samples of academia—one from the Catholic University of San Francisco and one a private elocution teacher, a beautiful woman, who said, ‘You feel like you are going through the gutter when you have to read that stuff. I didn’t linger on it too long, I assure you.’ The University of San Francisco instructor said: ‘The literary value of the poem is negligible. . . . This poem is apparently dedicated to a long-dead movement, Dadaism, and some late followers of Dadaism. And, therefore, the opportunity is long past for any significant literary contribution of this poem.’”

[7537] Anonymous, *Allen Ginsberg Uncensored Poetry Reading in Washington Square Park* (1966), courtesy of the Associated Press AP. Allen Ginsberg was born in New Jersey in 1926 and attended Columbia University; while a student, he was greatly influenced by William Burroughs.

[8911] Michael Bibby, Interview: *American Passages: Poetry of Liberation* (2003), courtesy of *American Passages* and Annenberg Media. Professor Michael Bibby discusses Ginsberg’s attitude toward the government and society.



[7138] Anonymous, *LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) Leads the Black Arts Parade Down 125th Toward the Black Arts Theater Repertory/School on 130th Street, New York City* (1965), courtesy of *The Liberator*.



[7140] Emory, *One of Our Main Purposes Is to Unify Brothers and Sisters in the North with Our Brothers and Sisters in the South* (c. 1970), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-10248].



[6714] Romaré Bearden, *The Family* (1976), courtesy of the Romaré Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

"BLACK ARTS" WEB ARCHIVE

[3011] Austin Hansen, *Eartha Kitt Teaching a Dance Class at Harlem YMCA* (c. 1955), courtesy of Joyce Hansen and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library. Eartha Kitt came to New York as a child and grew up in a vibrant Harlem. An acclaimed dancer, singer, international cabaret performer, and

when politicized art gains a mass audience? What can be lost in the process?

Context: What do you think attracted Baraka and other Black Arts writers to the Beat movement in the 1950s and 1960s? What characteristics of Beat poetry continued in the work of these African American writers?

Context: How does Audre Lorde's poetry fit into the Black Arts movement? What features does her poetry share with this new direction in poetry?

Exploration: We live in a time when entertainment and popular culture industries quickly notice, adapt, and exploit trends in alternative communities and "countercultures," to the extent that it can be difficult to tell the original or the radical from the commercial copy. In the late 1960s, rock FM radio stations sprang up across the country, and "Blaxploitation" films were produced by Hollywood to reflect and profit from the race consciousness that had grown strong in African American communities. If you are interested in the history of popular music, consider the recordings of African American groups of the late 1960s and early 1970s: Funkadelic; Sly and the Family Stone; Earth, Wind and Fire. Consider also the dramatic changes in the sound of Motown artists who were already well established by the late 1960s: The Temptations, The Supremes, Marvin Gaye, and others. If you are interested in film, sample some of the Blaxploitation films that have enjoyed a long life on video: *Shaft*, *Superfly*, *Blackula*, *Putney Swope*, *Sweet Sweetback's Baad-asssss Song*. Such films are often grouped together at rental outlets. As you look and listen, speculate about these works as cultural artifacts. Do they show us the sensibility of the Black Arts movement? An exploitation or caricature of that sensibility? Or some mingling of the two?

Exploration: Social historians have sometimes suggested that the ideology of the Black Arts poets was essentially counter to the values of Martin Luther King Jr., who emphasized nonviolent protest and harmony among races in America and the world. Where do you see affinity between works from the Black Arts movement and the values of King and the civil rights movement? What debt might the Black Arts movement owe to King?

Exploration: In light of what you've learned about the Black Arts movement, reread the selections from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. In the 1960s, Ellison was often vilified by younger African American writers for being too "literary" in the white sense, for emulating forms and styles of Faulkner, Joyce, Emerson, Mark Twain, and other white authors. Does Ellison nonetheless qualify as a subversive or revolutionary writer? Compare the resistance of *Invisible Man* to the resistance of the Black Arts movement. What are the strengths and limitations of each as political art?

EXTENDED CONTEXTS

The Women's Movement: Diving into the Wreck

Adrienne Rich's poem "Diving into the Wreck" encapsulates the spirit of the women's movement in the 1960s. Fighting for a voice, women, from artists to housewives, joined together and demanded to be heard. Rich's poem speaks to this sense of inclusion in the first line, where she uses the first-, second-, and third-person to address the reader, signaling that both as individuals and as a community women need to fight for their equality. In this poem, however, the battle begins with finding a voice and making sure that the "book of myths in which our names do not appear" is rewritten to include the experience of women. The intimacy between artist and reader in this poem characterizes the art produced by feminist writers like Anne Sexton, Audre Lorde, and Sylvia Plath.

Although Second Wave Feminism, or "Women's Lib," didn't gain national attention until the late 1960s, women across America were voicing protest much earlier. The prevailing domestic ideology of the 1950s not only told women that their place was in the home caring for the family, but also tried to convince them that, unless there was something wrong with them, they should find complete fulfillment in that role. For many women, these societal standards proved stifling, and as the decade progressed, some women were becoming increasingly frustrated by the standards imposed upon them and the lack of choices they could make in a culture that perceived women who were unmarried or pursuing careers as socially aberrant. In addition, with the growth of the advertising industry and a new influx of consumer products, many families wanted both spouses to earn wages in the hopes of increasing their buying power. But as women went out in search of jobs, they quickly realized that their options were limited. Although society seemed to encourage women to stay home, more women than ever before were attending college. It was not uncommon for women to receive degrees from prestigious colleges only to be told that their single option was to become housewives. By revising fairytales and myths, poets such as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton satirized the constrictive roles forced upon women, thereby laying the groundwork for later feminist work.

These cultural standards were so ingrained that many women either felt guilty for wanting to break the mold or found it difficult, if not impossible, to articulate their feelings of alienation and frustration. When Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* hit the shelves in 1963, American society changed as Friedan's articulation of the desperation women felt resonated with women across the country. At the end of the first chapter of this radical work, Friedan outlines her argument poignantly:

If I am right, the problem that has no name stirring in the minds of so many American women today is not a matter of loss of femininity or too much education, or the demands of domesticity. . . . It may well be

1950s sex symbol, Kitt began her dance career with the Katherine Dunham Dance Troupe at age seventeen. Kitt was blacklisted for almost a decade after speaking out against the Vietnam War in 1968.

[6714] Romare Bearden, *The Family* (1976), courtesy of the Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Romare Bearden gained international recognition for the powerful visual metaphors and probing analysis of African American heritage in his collages, photomontages, watercolors, and prints. He was a member of the Harlem Artists Guild and had his first solo exhibition in 1940 at the age of twenty-nine. He had many literary friends, including James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, and Albert Murray.

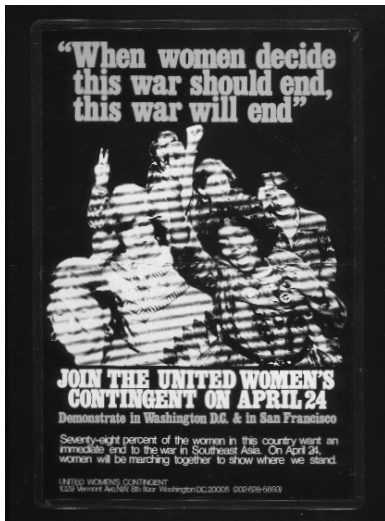
[7138] Anonymous, *LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) Leads the Black Arts Parade Down 125th Toward the Black Arts Theater Repertory/School on 130th Street, New York City* (1965), courtesy of *The Liberator*. Influenced by civil rights activism and black nationalism, Baraka (Jones) and other African American artists opened the Black Arts Theater in Harlem in 1965.

[7140] Emory, *One of Our Main Purposes Is to Unify Brothers and Sisters in the North with Our Brothers and Sisters in the South* (c. 1970), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-10248]. Political poster for the Black Panthers. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Black Panthers and black nationalist writers emphasized the need for solidarity among African Americans and people of African descent throughout the world.

[7234] Anonymous, "The Evil System of Colonialism and Imperialism Arose and Throve with the Enslavement of Negroes and the Trade in Negroes, and It Will Surely Come to an End with the Complete Emancipation of Black People" (c. 1970), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-995]. This poster shows the power of action and demonstration in effecting change for disenfranchised, marginalized, and persecuted peoples. It draws on and is titled after a quotation from Mao Tse-tung.



[7362] Phil Stanziola, *800 Women Strikers for Peace on 47th Street near the UN Building* (1962), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-128465].



[6180] United Women's Contingent, *When Women Decide This War Should End, This War Will End: Join the United Women's Contingent on April 24* (1971), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-6882].

the key to our future as a nation and a culture. We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: "I want something more than my husband and my children and my home."

Friedan's landmark book raised consciousness about women's roles and changed many Americans' view of how a household should be structured.

Despite the dominant ideology of the time, there were many women, particularly college students, who were active in what scholar Alice Echols has termed the "climate of protest." These women took part in marches, sit-ins, and speak-outs during the civil rights movement and anti-Vietnam protests. Like the earlier alliance between the abolitionist groups and suffragists, the feminist movement shared much with the other movements of the 1960s. While these female activists did not find much support for gender issues among these other groups, their participation in various movements prepared them well for their later struggle for women's liberation. They learned tactics of civil disobedience, gained practice speaking publicly, and began to see their bodies as sites of resistance. Likewise, the women's movement shared some of the philosophical underpinnings of the wider protest movement. The women's movement of this era has, however, been criticized for espousing middle-class, white values and for assuming that all female experience is similar. In fact, many groups, including the poor and African Americans, felt that the women's movement excluded them, and feminists have remained divided on issues of audience and inclusion.

Labeled Second Wave Feminism because it followed the Suffragist movement earlier in the century, the women's movement rattled American society. While this new feminism fought hard against the values forwarded by 1950s society, the liberation movement also took on more specific battles. Central to these new feminists was the fight to gain control over their own bodies. With new advances in medical technology, the birth control pill became available for the first time in 1961. For feminists, the ability to control their reproductive fate was necessary to liberation, and they fought for the right to choose abortion, to have access to birth control, and to educate women about their bodies and their sexuality. In a society that often refused to discuss sexuality or even female anatomy with any degree of candor, the feminist movement's resolve to raise consciousness about the workings of the female body itself proved radical.

Feminists also fought to change society's perceptions of women. They did not simply want to open thousands of childcare facilities, but rather they wanted to change the perception that childcare is the sole responsibility of the woman and mother. As many feminists argued, the battle for liberation had to begin at home, where women had traditionally been expected to shoulder the domestic burdens. Domestic chores and responsibilities would have to be shared by men if women were to gain equal opportunity in other spheres. Feminists also raised awareness about the objectification of women, particularly the damaging effects of unattainable standards of beauty

heralded by the media and popular culture. For example, Sylvia Plath's poem "The Applicant" critiques the ways in which American culture, and particularly the world of advertising and women's magazines, objectifies women and forces them (and men) into confining roles. The women's movement struggled to expose the often painful and uncomfortable lengths women were encouraged to go to in pursuit of beauty. In protest, feminists burned bras, girdles, high-heeled shoes, and other items which they perceived as symbolic of their objectification. One of the most publicized protests occurred in September 1968 when a large group of feminists demonstrated at the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City. Their witty slogans and fierce criticism of the event as degrading and sexist sparked debate around the country and did much to raise awareness of the movement's growing intensity.

Poetry proved important to the women's movement, in part because it helped to build solidarity and a shared set of images among women of the time. In fact, poetry readings were often integral parts of rallies and protests during this time. As literary critic Michael Bibby argues in his work on poetry in the Vietnam era, the feminist poetry written in the 1960s is characterized by a radical openness about the personal experience of women, and the poetry openly celebrates the female body and sexuality. For the first time, female poets were writing literature about menstruation, childbirth, and eroticism. The immense popularity of poets like Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton illustrates the profound relationship between the personal and political. Although Plath's best-known poems were written before the women's movement really took off, her work was published posthumously from the mid-1960s on, and her defiant voice, unforgettable images, and struggle for a creative identity separate from the confines of domesticity made her work an icon of the movement. The poetry of Rich and Sexton was celebrated for the same reasons. Rich also contributed hosts of essays that have become central to feminist theory today, and her identity as a lesbian became a political statement that seemed to mark a new direction in feminism. Rich's notion of the lesbian continuum, in which sexuality is not either/or, but rather is better understood as a range, remains one of the key concepts in queer theory.

Feminist poets also responded to literary currents perceived as predominantly male. Nikki Giovanni and Audre Lorde, for example, represent female voices in the Black Arts movement, and poems like "The Woman Thing" and "Coal" offer a feminist view of the new black aesthetic. Other women of color, including Joy Harjo and Lorna Dee Cervantes, also helped to broaden the representation of women in feminist poetry. There were also several female poets associated with the Beat movement, notably Diane DiPrima. The university was also an important instrument of change. Women's studies departments emerged, syllabi were gradually broadened to include female authors, and female scholars were changing the face of literary criticism. Critics like Elaine Showalter (*A Literature of Their Own*) and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (*The Madwoman in the Attic*) were forc-

"WOMEN'S MOVEMENT" WEB ARCHIVE

[3010] Austin Hansen, *Woman and Baby Evicted from Their Harlem Apartment, 1950s* (c. 1950s), courtesy of Joyce Hansen and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library. This photo's echoes of the traditional iconography of the Madonna and Child comment ironically on life in inner-city New York. Gwendolyn Brooks's work addresses the struggles of raising children in poverty.

[3296] Dick DeMarsico, *Protesting A-Bomb Tests* (1962), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-126854]. Demonstrators protesting U.S. testing of atomic weapons. The use of nuclear weapons in World War II prompted a variety of responses from U.S. citizens, including fear, protest, and feelings of alienation.

[6180] United Women's Contingent, *When Women Decide This War Should End, This War Will End: Join the United Women's Contingent on April 24* (1971), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-6882]. Protest poster against the Vietnam War. The antiwar, civil rights, women's rights, and gay liberation movements were connected politically and artistically. In 1961, writer and activist Grace Paley founded the Greenwich Village Peace Center, which was integral to draft resistance during the Vietnam War.

[6181] Peg Averill, *When Women Become Massively Political the Revolution Will Have Moved to a New Level . . .* (1976), courtesy of the Library of Congress [CN POS 6-U.S., no. 39 (C size) <P&P>]. Poster of a woman in whose flowing hair is pictured a setting sun and silhouettes of soldiers. The woman's movement was closely allied to the peace movement. The National Organization for Women's 1966 statement of purpose began as follows: "We, men and women who hereby constitute ourselves as the National Organization for Women, believe that the time has come for a new movement toward true equality for all women in America, and toward a fully equal partnership of the sexes, as part of the world-wide revolution of human rights now taking place within and beyond our national borders."

[6182] Ivy Bottin, *Woman Power* (1965), courtesy of the Library of Congress [POS 6-U.S., no. 548 (C size) <P&P>]. Members of the women's movement sought to change the dominant perception that all women could be satisfied by lives as homemakers. Many feminists argued that the fight for liberation must begin at home, where men should share in domestic chores.

[6190] Marcia Salo, *I Am a Woman Giving Birth to Myself* (1973), courtesy of the Library of Congress [CN POS 6-U.S., no. 306 (C size) <P&P>] and the Times Change Press. For many of the women involved in the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s, there was an intense connection between the personal and the political. Central to these new feminists was the fight to gain control over their bodies, as a woman's control of her reproductive fate was necessary for true liberation. The feminists' resolve to increase education about female anatomy and reproductive health was, at the time, radical.

[6932] Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in S.E. Asia, *Pull Him Out Now: Join with the Hundreds and Thousands of Students, GI's, Women, Unionists, Puerto Ricans, Gay People . . .* (c. 1970), courtesy of the Library of Congress. Political poster protesting U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. The antiwar movement linked and encouraged a number of other movements, including the civil rights movement, the Chicano movement, and the farm workers' movement. Many American poets protested the war, including Adrienne Rich, Robert Lowell, and Allen Ginsberg.

[7362] Phil Stanziola, *800 Women Strikers for Peace on 47th St. near the UN Building* (1962), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-128465]. Women protest for peace. Antiwar sentiment grew throughout the 1960s as some Americans became more critical of the Cold War mentality. Throughout the Cold War, the United States became increasingly involved in international conflicts that had high American death tolls and no apparent resolution, such as the Korean and Vietnam wars.

ing scholars, students, and readers not only to recognize women's literature, but also to rethink the canon as a whole.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What was the relationship of the women's movement to other protest movements of the time?

Comprehension: What roles does the female body play in the women's movement?

Context: Scholar Wayne Booth has famously noted the rhetorical power of metaphors. By making comparisons, metaphors have influence on symbolic and emotional levels, in addition to literal ones. In "Daddy," Sylvia Plath compares the oppression of women by their fathers to the treatment of Jews by the Nazis. What is gained by this comparison? What is lost? What allusions and comparisons does Plath make in her other poems? You might look at "The Applicant," "Lady Lazarus," or "Morning Song."

Context: Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich both identified themselves as lesbians. How does sexual orientation influence their poetry? How do you see the relationship between the personal and the political? Is there a sense in which identifying oneself as lesbian might be seen as a political statement? Why or why not?

Exploration: Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich are feminist poets whose work is characterized by a memorable voice, an intimate connection between reader and poetic speaker, and an honest, often raw portrayal of female experience. What is the poetic legacy of writers like Plath and Rich? Can you think of any poets writing today that seem similar to or indebted to these authors?

Exploration: Feminists saw the female body as a site of political struggle and suffering, and that vision was intensified during the Supreme Court's hearing of *Roe v. Wade* in the early 1970s. These women battled to gain reproductive rights, educate women about their bodies, raise awareness about rape and domestic violence, and encourage women to value their natural beauty. How does the body function as a symbol in feminist poetry of this period? You might look at Audre Lorde's "Black Mother Woman," Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus," Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck," or Anne Sexton's "Little Girl, My String Bean, My Lovely Woman."

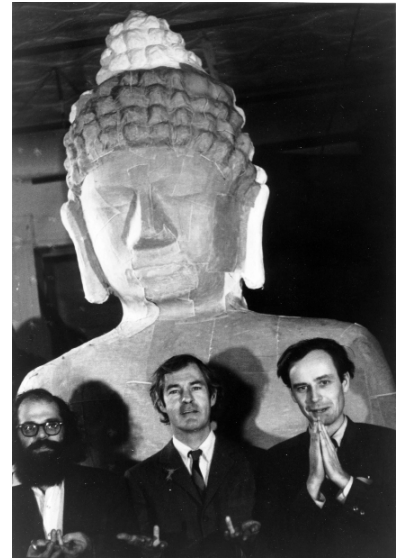
Poetry of Transcendence: Poets Look to the American Landscape

The postwar period was in many ways imbued with an atmosphere of spiritual searching. The younger generation in particular, which included many of the poets in this unit, was desperately seeking what they termed transcendent experience. Native American culture and religion, as well as the rise of the New Age movement, provided one answer to this spiritual searching. Poets like Gary Snyder and James

Wright were particularly drawn to Native American culture, an interest probably prompted in part by the rise of the American Indian movement, which insisted on the power of traditional ways even as it sought to make real political changes. Indian tradition, which featured sweat lodges, sun dance revivals, and other rituals, became popular during this time. Peyote, also central to Native American religion and culture, held particular interest for the Beat poets, who experimented with a wide array of hallucinogens. Peyote is a flower on a cactus that contains the drug mescaline, which is similar to LSD. As a rite of passage into manhood, Indian boys would take the drug and go on a “vision quest,” during which they would wander around the wilderness for several days, experiencing drug-induced visions. Such rituals were appealing to a generation that yearned for transcendent experience and believed that the mind harbored fascinating and meaningful abilities untapped by the “normal” mode of living. Likewise, the New Age movement encouraged people to believe in alternate states of reality, to believe in crystals and visions, and to look inward for spiritual meaning.

In addition to their interest in Native American culture and New Age practices, the meditative poets were also inspired by nature and the outdoors. Alongside the fiercely political poetry written during this period, poets like James Wright, Robert Bly, and Galway Kinnell were writing verse that seemed defiantly silent on social issues. Instead of tackling the political and social shortcomings of mainstream America head-on, this group of “meditative” poets protested the state of society by turning away from civilization and looking instead to nature and the land as a source of inspiration. In an era in which mankind was not only slowly poisoning itself, but seemed also to be toying with its newfound power to destroy itself and the world, these poets saw technology as extremely dangerous. They lamented the urbanization that seemed to be creeping outward from the cities, as suburbia spread over the American landscape. During the 1950s, the government undertook the largest highway expansion program in American history, and road construction, with all its noisy machinery, unfurled across the country. The environment seemed to be under siege as reports of oil spills, strip mines, and increased pollution filled the newspapers. Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* announced the devastating effects of DDT on the environment, and its publication triggered growing awareness about environmental and ecological problems plaguing the country and the globe. The list of endangered species grew steadily. Indeed, to many of these poets, civilization was threatening nature and the environment like never before. In the face of this modernization and a burgeoning global economy, these poets looked to nature and the wilderness as an escape and as a source of inspiration.

Drawing on the Romantics and the American Transcendentalists,



[4999] Anonymous, Allen Ginsberg, Timothy Leary, and Ralph Metzner (Left to Right) Standing in Front of a Ten Foot Plaster Buddha (1965), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-119239].



[7341] Arthur Rothstein, *Strip Mining Operations with a Thirty-Two Cubic Yard Steam Shovel. Cherokee County, Kansas* (1936), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection [LC-USF34-004274-D DLC].

**"POETRY OF
TRANSCENDENCE"
WEB ARCHIVE**

[4999] Anonymous, *Allen Ginsberg, Timothy Leary, and Ralph Metzger (Left to Right) Standing in Front of a Ten Foot Plaster Buddha* (1965), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-119239]. Beats preparing for a "psychedelic celebration" at the Village Theater in New York City. Beat writers looked to Eastern religions and traditions, as they found European American culture and religions empty of meaning. See Ginsberg's poem "Sunflower Sutra" ("sutra" is Sanskrit for "thread" and refers to Buddhist religious texts).

[6245] Anonymous, *Ginsberg at 19 in the Merchant Marine* (1945), courtesy of Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries and the Allen Ginsberg Trust. Allen Ginsberg felt an allegiance to Walt Whitman. He was compelled by their shared experience as homosexuals and fascinated by their different perspectives on American culture. Ginsberg shocked America with his manifesto *Howl*.

[6505] Anonymous, *The Howl Trial, San Francisco Municipal Court, 1957* (1957), courtesy of City Lights Books. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, arrested for publishing Ginsberg's poem, comments on the *Howl* obscenity trial: "The prosecution put only two 'expert witnesses' on the stand—both very lame samples of academia—one from the Catholic University of San Francisco and one a private elocution teacher, a beautiful woman, who said, 'You feel like you are going through the gutter when you have to read that stuff. I didn't linger on it too long, I assure you.' The University of San Francisco instructor said: 'The literary value of the poem is negligible. . . . This poem is apparently dedicated to a long-dead movement, Dadaism, and some late followers of Dadaism. And, therefore, the opportunity is long past for any significant literary contribution of this poem.'"

[6783] Edward S. Curtis, *Altar Peyote with Rattle* (Osage) (1930), courtesy of the Library of Congress [E77. C97]. Poets seeking transcendence—particu-

like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, poets like Gary Snyder, Joy Harjo, and James Wright sought out a simpler life, where they could escape the encroachment of civilization. Their transcendental philosophy, in which humans' connection to the land becomes a source not only of peacefulness but also of artistic inspiration and spiritual renewal, is founded on quintessentially American ideals. Like Thoreau and Emerson, these poets of the 1960s saw transcendental living and writing as a way to practice American ideals like self-reliance, resourcefulness, and individualism. Snyder actually managed to live almost self-sufficiently in the mountains of Oregon and California, growing much of his own food and chopping his own wood. This connection to an earlier, yet deeply American culture explains his interest in myth, folklore, and the theme of the journey in his poetry. Although Joy Harjo's poetry seems quite different from Snyder's, her search for spirituality in nature, as well as her connections to the land and American Indian culture, aligns her with the poetry of transcendentalism. These poets were, like their predecessors, reacting against what they perceived as an intrusive and morally suspect government. In looking to nature, they were enacting an anti-establishment sentiment. Part of this interest in the land also meant an interest in non-Western cultures.

Although the confessional poets did not draw their inspiration from Native American culture or the ecological concerns characteristic of the meditative poets, they did share an interest and belief in the idea of the poet as a visionary. Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath all believed in a transcendent state, often induced by mental illness (mania or depression) that sparked brilliant poetry.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What are the features of poetry of transcendence?

Comprehension: Why were the meditative poets attracted to Native American culture and religion? What did it offer them that mainstream American culture did not?

Comprehension: How might confessional poetry be described as transcendence?

Context: Transcendental poetry features the idea of the poet as a visionary. How do Gary Snyder ("The Blue Sky"), Joy Harjo ("Eagle Poem," "The Flood"), and Sylvia Plath ("Ariel") represent this idea? What is the relationship between the poet and the creative process in these poems?

Context: How do the heritages of Harjo and Cervantes complicate their treatment of nature? Can they be classified as meditative poets?

Context: Reread Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience. How does Wright's poetry capture the flavor of civil disobedience as defined by Thoreau?

Exploration: Using the archive, look at the Hopi images and the Zen Buddhist artifacts. Why would very different traditions appeal to

the same group of writers? What historical, political, or cultural events might have led to their fascination? How does this type of primitivism differ from that of the high modernists, like Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot?

Exploration: The poets mentioned in this Extended Context appreciated and revered Native American culture. They believed deeply in ecological preservation. They practiced traditionally American ideals like self-reliance, freedom of thought and speech, and strong individuality. Yet, many Americans considered them outsiders, or strange, misguided youth. How did these poets perceive American identity? What values did they uphold? What perceptions were they trying to change? How do their poetry and lifestyles reflect these ideas?

ASSIGNMENTS

Personal and Creative Responses

1. *Poet's Corner:* Reread Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*. Think about the values you associate with your generation. How would you describe the current youth culture? What are the defining moments in your generation? Write your own poem in which you strive to define your generation and its place in American culture and identity. If you wish, use Ginsberg's phrase, "I saw the best minds of my generation . . .," to get you started.
2. *Journal:* Imagine that you are Sylvia Plath, but still alive today, and have recently come across some reviews of your work that are sharply critical of your use of Holocaust imagery in poems such as "Lady Lazarus" and "Daddy." How do you respond to such criticism? How do you justify your use of these images? What do you think your poems gain by invoking the Holocaust?
3. *Doing History:* Native Americans have preserved their history and heritage for hundreds of years by telling stories and using rituals to create a collective tribal memory. As the language and culture of many tribes threatens to disappear, many Native American writers feel compelled to write down these oral traditions. Using the archive, compare the oral (transcribed) and written histories of removal. How do the versions differ?
4. *Multimedia:* You have been asked to speak at a local women's college or high school. Using the archive and the poetry in this unit, develop a slideshow in which you highlight important moments in the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Be sure to leave your audience not only with a sense of how far women have come, but also with an idea of what might come next.

larly Gary Snyder and James Wright—were drawn to Native American belief systems and to the use of peyote.

[7341] Arthur Rothstein, *Strip Mining Operations with a Thirty-Two Cubic Yard Steam Shovel*. Cherokee County, Kansas (1936), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection [LC-USF34-004274-D DLC]. Heavy machinery at mining site. Meditative poets found inspiration in nature and were alarmed by increasing environmental destruction in the United States.

[8314] Joy Harjo, Interview: "Native Voices and Poetry of Liberation" (2003), courtesy of *American Passages* and Annenberg Media. Writer Joy Harjo discusses the power of the spoken word.

[8608] Native Alliance for Red Power, *NARP Newsletter* (June/July 1969), courtesy of the Special Collections, Michigan State University Libraries. The Native Alliance for Red Power (NARP) was a Canadian organization similar to the American Indian Movement (AIM). Both were part of tribalism and the Pan-Indian movement of the 1970s. Organizations like AIM, NARP, and the Black Panthers called for changes in the treatment of minorities and were more willing to use physical confrontation than their predecessors in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and early 1960s.

Problem-Based Learning Projects

1. You have been asked to design a retrospective of 1960s America. Using the archive and literature in this unit, choose around ten items (a poem or a single image or soundclip might count as an item) that you feel are representative of the decade. Write a few paragraphs explaining your choices. How did you decide on these items? What values seem most important in this decade? How do your chosen items reflect those? What did it mean to be an American in the 1960s?
2. You work for a standardized test company, and your team has just been asked to write a test unit on postwar America. Compose an essay exam for your students. Write three or four questions that you would like to have the students explore. What themes seem important to the period? What symbols or images have remained influential? What knowledge should a group of students be expected to have about postwar America?
3. You are a reporter for the *New York Times*, and you've been asked to write a series on the legacy of the Black Arts movement. What concepts or values from that movement are still alive? How has the perception of African Americans changed? What kinds of changes do you see? What elements of popular culture are indebted to the Black Arts movement?

GLOSSARY

alienation The experience of feeling outside mainstream culture. Most of the poets and movements in this unit explore a sense of alienation from society that has compelled them to search elsewhere for meaning. The emphasis on Eastern religion, alternative states of reality, hedonism, and nature suggests that these poets were seeking to redefine themselves and their generation through art.

free verse Poetry that does not have a regular rhyme scheme or meter. Some of the features of free verse include enjambment, visual patterning, and varying line lengths. Most poets in this unit write in free verse.

protest poetry Poetry that strives to undermine established values and ideals, particularly those associated with the government and other bodies of authority. Protest poetry often aims to shock readers into political action by discussing taboo subject matter, using unconventional and often profane language, criticizing popular beliefs, and shunning formal poetic conventions.

removal A term that refers to the American policy, spearheaded by President Andrew Jackson, which forcibly relocated major southeastern Indian tribes to Oklahoma. The Creek Indians, along with most of the other large southern tribes such as the Cherokee and Choctaw, were removed to Oklahoma during the 1830s. The Cherokee

were forced to march to Oklahoma along what became known as the Trail of Tears, as over one-third of the tribe died en route.

Roe v. Wade A controversial Supreme Court case from 1973, in which the Court ruled that abortion was legal. This was a turning point in American history because it gave women more authority over their bodies. The decision met with immediate resistance from Catholic groups and Christian fundamentalists. As the decade progressed, the courts gradually qualified the decision, making more stringent rules about the time frame and circumstances under which abortions can be performed.

sex(uality) The sexual revolution was characterized not only by openness about the body and sex, but also by a willingness to engage in sexual activity outside marriage. Suddenly, the moral constraints placed on sexual activity were challenged, and sex became not just a more accepted and talked-about part of life, but also an area of experimentation and a symbol of the counterculture's rejection of mainstream values. The attitude towards sex in the 1960s revolutionized American culture and illustrates another example of the body being used as a site of radicalism and protest. This new candor about sex also ushered in the gay rights movement, which took off in the 1970s.

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