

FURIOUS FLOWER II

Regenerating the Black Poetic Tradition

A Teacher's Guide

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[Introduction to African American Poetry](#)

African American poetry is the aesthetic chronicle of a race struggling to lift "its face all unashamed" in an alien land. From the earliest attempts of African American poets in the eighteenth century to express lyrically their adjustment to existence in a society that debated their humanity to their intense exploration of their voice in the waning years of a racially charged twentieth century, they have built an aesthetic tradition that affirms them, using a language and literary models adapted to meet their cultural purposes. From the very beginning, these poets had a challenging set of problems: the selection of subject matter, themes, and forms to express their thoughts and feelings; the cultivation of a voice expressive of their racial consciousness; the reception of the desired audience; the support of a publishing and critical infrastructure; the nature of their relationship with other literary traditions; and the identification of the soul and purpose of their literary efforts. By revealing two significant, intertwining developments—one radical and the other aesthetic -- African American poetry is metaphorically the furious flower of Gwendolyn Brooks's poem "**Second Sermon on the Warpland**" (1968).

The turn of the twentieth century witnessed African American poets adopting popular literary traditions and with varied and eclectic approaches joining other poets as the new American poetry burst upon the scene. Poets such as Vachel Lindsay, Edgar Lee Masters, Carl Sandburg, Amy Lowell, Hilda Doolittle, and Robert Frost ushered in a respect for ordinary speech, freedom of choice in subject matter, concentration on vers libre and imagism, an unembarrassed celebration of American culture, and irreverent experimentation. African American poets were influenced by these experiments with local color, regionalism, realism, and naturalism and joined other American poets in a mutual rejection of sentimentality, didacticism, romantic escape, and poetic diction. By the 1920s, it was clear that an unprecedented flowering of black literary expression was in full bloom. Called alternately the New Negro Renaissance and the Harlem Renaissance, this literary movement, according to Alain Locke, its major promoter and interpreter, was the first opportunity for group expression and self-determination.

A growing racial awareness among African American writers prompted self-discovery -- discovery of the ancestral past in Africa, discovery of folk and cultural roots reaching back to colonial times, and discovery of a new kind of militancy and self-reliance that Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, and Sterling Brown exhibit in their poems. During this period, African American poetry began to flower because of a greater exploration of the black voice as it consciously recognized and mined black folklore. African American poets in varying degrees engaged in a kind of literary tropism by turning away from Western cosmology and mythology in preference for expressing their own cosmology and cultural myths. In their attempt to find a voice, they turned to cultural tropes abounding in the universe of folk parlance and discovered the vernacular resources of the blues, spirituals, proverbs, and tales. *Furious Flower: Regenerating the Black Poetic Tradition* explores the vernacular and its impact on the poets under the theme "Roots and First Fruits."

Stretching Boundaries

The next three decades, 1930 - 1960, traced the continuing careers of Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown and marked the ascendancy of Melvin B. Tolson, Robert Hayden, Margaret Walker, and Gwendolyn Brooks. These major voices joined a growing list of poets who brought African American poetic expression to new heights of competence and maturity. They cultivated their individual voices by synthesizing elements from the Western literary tradition and their own vernacular tradition. They explored history as a riveting subject matter for their poetry, and they stretched the boundaries of language to hold the depth and complexity that the new poetry required. These poets, in keeping with the continuing development of the radical and political strain in African American poetry, also pursued a brand of social justice that emphasized integrationalism and a sensitivity to

international connections and socialistic movements. Their work influenced the Negritude movement in Africa and in the Caribbean and responded to a nation in the throes of political change in its mounting Civil Rights Movement. *Furious Flower II* examines these connections under the rubric "Cross-Pollination in the Diaspora."

Political and Social Action

In 1965, the assassination of Malcolm X galvanized the rage and imagination of a group of younger poets and acted as the catalyst for the Black Arts Movement and the furious flowering of African American poetry that it produced. Three poets inspired by the example of Malcolm X emerged as the visionaries of the Black Arts Movement in the late 1960s: Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal, and Askia M. Touré. Several forces converged to create the outpouring of poetry from these and other poets who began writing in the 1960s. The political and social upheavals brought about by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s ushered in a dramatic change in the legal and social status of African Americans. With its non-violent strategies of sit-ins, marches, freedom rides, boycotts, and voter registration drives, the movement united two generations of poets around the dream of freedom and equality and supplied them with a wealth of cultural heroes, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Medgar Evers. In the wake of the urban riots and fires that were the people's response to King's assassination came the Black Power Movement with its bold language of racial confrontation, cultural separation, and insistence upon self-defense, self-reliance, and black pride. With their iconoclastic attacks on all aspects of white middle-class values, it is not surprising that the poets who shaped the Black Arts Movement rejected unequivocally Western poetic conventions. Their poetic technique emphasized free verse; typographical stylistics; irreverent, often scatological, diction and linguistic experimentation. In addition to Baraka, Neal, and Touré, prominent among these poets were Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, Haki Madhubuti, Etheridge Knight, A. B. Spellman, Calvin C. Hernton, Mari Evans, June Jordan, Jayne Cortez, Henry Dumas, Carolyn M. Rodgers, and Quincy Troupe.

Literary Possibilities

The cultural movement of the 1960s and 1970s not only changed the way African Americans thought about their political and social status as American citizens, for the poets it also planted the seeds for a truly liberated exploration of literary possibilities. Poets such as Lucille Clifton, Ishmael Reed, Audre Lorde, Jay Wright, Michael Harper, and Rita Dove created with more personal and individualized goals in mind. Rita Dove, acknowledging her own debt to the Black Arts Movement, said that if it had not been for the movement, America would not be ready to accept a poet who explored a text other than blackness. She is representative of a group of poets who published their first poems during the late 1970s and 1980s: Yusef Komunyakaa, Cornelius Eady, Dolores Kendrick, Toi

Derricotte, and Sherley Anne Williams. Elizabeth Alexander is emblematic of the promise and wide range of variegated voices that sprang forth during the 1990s. In a poem called "The Dark Room: An Invocation," she hails talented young poets who made up the Dark Room Collective: Thomas Sayers Ellis, Sharan Strange, Kevin Young, Major Jackson, and Natasha Trethewey. These poets are now winning awards and making their mark on the field during the first years of the 21st century. They show the great value of literary incubators like the Dark Room Collective, Cave Canem, and the numerous poetry associations that have sprung forth with the purpose of providing poets with an opportunity to cultivate their craft in a supportive environment. Like the poets who have come before them, they are wrestling with images and language to express contemporary life; they face the increasingly difficult challenge of utilizing the available technology to communicate their work; and they welcome the opportunity to strengthen the influence of African American poetry in the world. *Furious Flower: Regenerating the Black Poetic Tradition* explores these trends under the theme "Blooming in the Whirlwind."

Interpretive Approach

Episode 1 - *Roots and First Fruits*

An important interpretive approach for *Furious Flower: Regenerating the Black Poetic Tradition* is to explore the extent of the indebtedness to the folk tradition in the poetry of some of the major voices in African American poetry in the 20th century. The anthology brings folkloristic references and theoretical discourse into the center of the literary criticism of African American poetry. The influence of folklore on black poetry is widely acknowledged and documented. In Joanne Gabbin's critical biography *Sterling A. Brown: Building the Black Aesthetic Tradition*, she established the black vernacular tradition as the single most pervasive influence on his literary career. Brown pursued the study of black folk songs, folk tales, proverbs, and folk speech for the sheer pleasure of revelation. The stuff of human social drama, the vigorous character traits, the vibrant speech and striking poetry, the patterns of spiritual struggle, the highly creative imagination brought Brown time and again to this folk source. He was the first poet/critic to explore fully and consistently the inexhaustible possibilities of the folk tradition for the writer. As he made the necessary connection between the vernacular tradition and the self-conscious writer, he identified in his own poetry and the writings of others their debt to the folk tradition. The poetry of Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Sterling Brown, Margaret Walker, Melvin Tolson, Robert Hayden, Gwendolyn Brooks, among others, may be explored in this light.

Houston A. Baker, Jr., who provided the keynote speech for the 2004 Furious Flower Poetry Conference, addressed whether the blues vernacular theory is still viable in discussing African American poetry. He writes "that any future concept of expressive culture in the

space constituted by AMERICA in the New World will be informed by vernacular inscriptions that qualitatively alter an idea that has prevailed since 1492", that "rather than being a nation of strangers in search of Anglo-male domestication, AMERICA has no strangers." In his book *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* (1984), he approaches the study of African American literature and culture through what he calls the "anthropology of art", the contextualization of a work of expressive culture, from the perspective of the anthropology of art, is an "interdisciplinary" enterprise. Rather than ignoring or denigrating the research and insights of scholars in natural, social, and behavioral sciences, the anthropology of art views such efforts as positive attempts to comprehend the multiple dimensions of human behavior. Such efforts serve the investigator of expressive culture as guides and contributions to an understanding of symbolic dimensions of human behavior that comprise a culture's literature and verbal art.

It is a goal of **Furious Flower II** to view African American poetry in the broadest of contexts, those inspired by African philosophical perspectives and those that reveal other international connections and frames of reference. Critic Anand Prahlad, in his article "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: Folklore, Folkloristics, and African American Literary Criticism," (*African American Review*, 1999), sees literary approaches based upon vernacular exploration as viable theoretical strategies in their own right. He writes,

One cannot, for example, do justice to Ishmael Reed's writing without having a solid grounding in and understanding of the African-derived religion of Vodou, and one cannot gain such a knowledge without extensive reading of ethnographic and folkloristic materials. The critic who approached Mumbo Jumbo should be as versed in the mythology and practices of Vodou and other New World African religions as the Western critic is in Greek and Christian mythology; otherwise, the meaning of rhetorical strategies such as signifying cannot be fully comprehended. Ignorance about elements of African, European, African American, and European American folklore leads to an inability to conceptualize African American literature in its broadest context, or to develop theoretical models that will be the most illuminating.

Episode 2 - Cross-Pollination in the Diaspora

Another focus of the anthology is to gauge the shared ideologies that impact black poetry in the diaspora, to discuss the challenges of language in multi-lingual societies, and to explore the ways these shared concerns are communicated. The richness of African American poetry is evident in the ability of poets to synthesize diverse traditions at hand. Sterling Brown called this process of synthesis "cross-pollination" and credits it with the creation of some of his best poetry. For example, in the comic ballad "Slim in Hell," Brown crosses the ancient legend of Orpheus and Eurydice with the elaborate lore of the folk

trickster and presents them in the socio-historical context of twentieth-century Dixie. The result is a vigorous product that maintains the strength of both traditions, while simultaneously exhibiting vital new combinations and varieties. Cross-pollination is also a major factor in the influence of African American poetry in an international context. During the 1920s and 1930s, the New Negro intellectuals participated in an unprecedented outpouring of creative energy in art and literature called the Harlem Renaissance, which made Harlem the black cultural and intellectual center of the world. From there the messages of African pride, racial equality, political activism and militancy in the pages of *Opportunity* and *Crisis* reached thinkers and writers in Africa and the Caribbean. Leopold Sedar Senghor, one of the architects of the Negritude movement, attributes to Sterling Brown, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes and other writers of the Harlem Renaissance the inspiration for this cultural movement whose concepts fostered identity among black people in Africa and the diaspora. In Paris, which was emerging as another important site of black intellectual life, African expatriates Leopold Senghor and David Diop and the West Indian intellectual Aime Cesaire pressed for worldwide unity among blacks and the end of colonialism in the pages of Negritude journals.

This kind of cross-pollination was furthered by the Pan-Africanism in support of which W.E.B. Du Bois played a decisive role in organizing the Second International Pan-African Congress in 1919. He and others such as Marcus Garvey advocated the idea of one African people involved in a global struggle to unite around a core culture and a singular political destiny -- liberation. This idea has served to connect African American poets with poets in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa and countless other countries in Africa, Brazil, and the Caribbean. Gwendolyn Brooks preferred the term "Black" over "African American" when referencing her poetry because it connected her with the parts of the family that live in Brazil, Haiti, France, or England.

Wole Soyinka, winner of the Nobel Prize in 1986, is emblematic of African poets who have excelled at using the conventions of poetry in English to reveal the riches of African cultural and mythic associations. In his poetry, Soyinka speaks out so directly that he often incurs the wrath of politicians in power. He exemplifies the idea of the poet in the oral tradition who is the literal spokesman for the common people in the courts of the powerful. Derek Walcott, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992, sees himself as a living testimony to the dilemma of those of African descent in the New World. In his poem "A Far Cry," he writes, "I who am poisoned with the blood of both, where shall I turn, divided to the vein?" This poignant question connects him with so many black poets in the world who wrestle with diasporic double consciousness and its literary consequences.

Issues in the Creation of Poetry

The second theme explored in **Furious Flower II** is the use of technology and its impact on the nature and dissemination of poetic expression as it reaches wider and more diverse audiences. The explosion of performance poetry, for instance, has taken spoken art to new and enthusiastic audiences, as all that is needed is an open microphone. Kalamu ya Salaam asks, "What could be more Afrocentric than poetry in performance given our strong oral/aural traditions?" However, he recognizes that critics see the performance phenomenon as a fast track to the debilitation of the quality of poetry. In *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and Twentieth Century American Poetry*, consultant Lorenzo Thomas says,

The United States has been enjoying a sort of poetry renaissance. Currently the poetry slam, an event where drunken audiences hoot down sensitive poems about dying grandmothers or inevitable divorces and bestow twenty-dollar prizes on scatological doggerel, is sweeping the nation. It's an amusement that seems to be a gold mine for saloonkeepers too sophisticated for Hot Buns contests. It has recently been possible to find at least three such events every week at different venues-even in a city like Houston.

There are other critics who see performance poetry as a more egalitarian form. Slam poet and literary activist Guy LeCharles Gonzalez says, "Slam has opened poetry to an entire generation that had no use for it thanks to our educational system. It is the America of the poetry world-the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free." Slam has invaded videos, movies, nighttime television, CDs, and the internet.

Furious Flower II will chart the trends in this development to explore their impact over the next quarter century. This interest in poetry was energized when, in 1997, 18,000 people used the internet to share their favorite poems through Robert Pinsky's Favorite Poem Project and were able to access a collection of short audio and video documentaries of people reading their favorite works. The Web also provides publishing access to those who could not dream of publishing a poem before as well as expanded capabilities through database searches and links to other sites.

Episode 3 - *Blooming in the Whirlwind*

This anthology also addresses the continuing challenge among African Americans and black poets abroad to merge the political and the literary into the "furious flower".

Gwendolyn Brooks in the final lines of her poem "The Second Sermon on the Warpland" captures a signature theme in black poetry-liberation is a legacy that will require great courage and heroism of those who dare to inherit it. She ends the sermon as she began it, with an imperative and a prayer:

It is lonesome, yes. For we are the last of the loud.

Nevertheless, live.

Conduct your blooming in the noise and whip of the whirlwind.

Black poetry reflects the condition of the people who create it. As long as they have struggled for liberation, their poetic expression has been political. Scholar Manohar Samuel asks, "Can poetry be political, didactic and art?" Clarence Major, in the introduction of his anthology *The Garden Thrives: Twentieth-Century African-American Poetry* (1996), uses Jayne Cortez's poetry as one example of how it can:

Jayne Cortez with her improvisational free form, in her struggle to define the black female in the context of family, class, body, spirit, and moral self, proves that it's possible to focus on these social issues--as well as drug addiction, persecution, rape, war, sexism, racism-- and create poems that stand on their own as works of solid art.

Finally, who will inherit this challenge? A major issue discussed in the video series is incubators that are providing a safe space in which younger poets can develop their craft and workshop their ideas. One such space is Cave Canem, a community for African American poets and writers, founded in 1996 by Toi Derricotte and Cornelius Eady. Since that time more than 180 students have taken part in a series of summer workshops taught by Sonia Sanchez, Michael Harper, Nikki Finney, Elizabeth Alexander, Harryette Mullen, Marilyn Nelson, Lucille Clifton, Al Young, and Afaa Michael Weaver, among others. In 1994, the first Furious Flower Poetry Conference highlighted The Dark Room Collective -- a writers' community based in Boston. Since that time, poets such as Natasha Trethewey, Major Jackson, Sharan Strange, Thomas Sayers Ellis, and Kevin Young have launched impressive careers as poets and teachers of creative writing. Kevin Young, whose image is on the cover of the January-February 2003 issue of *Poets & Writers*, describes the experience: "We started gigging around, and people started publishing, and we'd barnstorm. Pile in a car, read as the Collective for not very much money, split up the money. It was like being in a band, really. We did that all over the Northeast. I think that's where everyone learned their chops -- learned how to read, mix it up." The video anthology revisits the Dark Room Collective poets ten years later, as well as provides a venue for the reunion discussion of Cave Canem poets.

Episode 1: Roots and First Fruits

Houston A. Baker, Jr.

Houston A. Baker, Jr. is a native of Louisville, Kentucky. He received his B.A. from Howard University and his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from UCLA. He has taught at Yale, the University of Virginia, and the University of Pennsylvania. Currently, he is the Susan Fox and George D. Beischer Professor of English at Duke University. He is the editor of *American Literature*, the oldest and most prestigious journal in American literary studies. Baker has published or edited more than twenty books. He is the author of more than eighty articles, essays, and reviews. His most recent books include *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism*, *Re-Reading Booker T* and *Critical Memory: Public Spheres, African American Writing and Black Fathers and Sons in America*. He is a published poet whose most recent title is *Passing Over*. In 1992 Baker was President of the Modern Language Association of America. His honors include Guggenheim, John Hay Whitney, and Rockefeller Fellowships, as well as eleven honorary degrees from American colleges and universities.

Selected Bibliography

Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism, Re-Reading Booker T

Critical Memory: Public Spheres, African American Writing and Black Fathers and Sons in America

Passing Over

Workings of the Spirit: The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing

Afro-American Poetics: Revisions of Harlem and the Black Aesthetic

Additional Reading and Resources

Power Surge: Houston Baker's Vernacular Spectacular. Bérubé, Michael. *Village Voice Literary*

Supplement, 109 (1992 October), pp. 15-17.

Reclaiming the Southern Experience: The Black Aesthetic 10 Years Later. Gayle, Addison, Jr. *Black World*, 23:11 (1974), pp. 20-29.

From the Shadows: Houston Baker's Move Toward a Postnationalist Appraisal of the Black Aesthetic. Napier, Winston. *New Literary History*, 25:1 (1994 Winter), p. 159(16).

Who Reads Here?: Back Talking with Houston Baker. duCille, Ann. *Novel*, 26:1 (1992 Fall), p. 97(9).

Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series. Volume 14. Detroit: The Gale Group, 2000.

Dictionary of Literary Biography. Volume 67. Detroit: The Gale Group, 1988.

Duke University English Department

<http://fds.duke.edu/db/aas/English/faculty/bakerh>

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Explore Houston Baker's redefinition of the black literary tradition through the study of autobiographical themes in black poetry.

Discuss Baker's use of the term "the poetry of impulse" and how it is related to the blues aesthetic.

Nikky Finney

Nikky Finney is associate professor of creative writing at the University of Kentucky. She published her first book of poems in 1985, *On Wings Made of Gauze*. Her other books include *The World is Round*, *Heartwood*, and *Rice*. She is widely published in anthologies and journals including *Meridians:feminism, race, transnationalism*, *Role Call*, *The Bluelight Corner*, *Spirit and Flame*, and *Chain, Chain, Change*. She wrote the script for the 1995 PBS documentary *For Posterity's Sake: The Story of Morgan and Marvin Smith* chronicling the African-American twins from Lexington, Kentucky who became noted photographers in New York in the 1930s and 1940s. Finney is a founding member of the Affrilachian Poets, a collective of Appalachian writers of African descent. Finney has received the Pen American Open Book Award, the Kentucky Foundation for Women Artists Fellowship Award, the Kentucky Arts Council Al Smith Fellowship, and the Kentucky Arts Council Artist's Fellowship Award.

Selected Bibliography

The World Is Round: A Collection of Poems and Prose

Heartwood

Rice

On Wings Made of Gauze

Additional Reading and Resources

The World Is Round: A Conversation with Nikky Finney. Thompson, Kyle. *Obsidian III*, 4:2 (2002 Fall), pp. 11-26.

Mobile Images: Myth and Resistance in Nikky Finney's *Rice*. Kraver, Jeraldine. *The Southern Literary Journal*, 34:2 (2002 Spring), p. 134(14).

Reading Rice: A Local Habitation and a Name. Dawes, Kwame. African American Review, 31:2 (1997 Summer), p 269(11).

Coal Black Voices

<http://www.mwg.org/production/documentary/voices/index.shtml>

FemmeNoir: A Web Portal for Lesbians of Color

<http://www.femmenoir.net/Leaders-Legends/NikkyFinney.htm>

The Affrilachian Poets

<http://athena.english.vt.edu/~appalach/writersA/affrilachian.html>

Sojourners Magazine (Article on the Affrilachian Poets)

http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=magazine.article&mode=printer_friendly&issue=soj0009&article=000931

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Explore the way Nikky Finney uses photographs in Rice to construct the mythology of the family as institution and contrast the images in the photos with the images in the poetry.

Discuss the influence of Finney's Gullah tradition on her poetry.

Research the Affrilachian poets, and discuss how the movement has empowered African American poets in the Appalachian region.

Askia Touré

Askia Touré was a founding architect of the Black Arts Movement, a black aesthetics theorist, and among the first cadre of scholars to pioneer Africana studies at a major U.S. university. As an activist and political theorist, he co-authored Black Power Position Paper limning out a new movement. Touré has served as a co-editor of two black arts journals, Black Dialogue, and the Journal of Black Poetry. He was also a cultural theorist for the Liberator, an internationally focused Pan African magazine. His theoretical essays are published in Black Nationalism in America, and recently, African American Mosaic. His poetry volumes are Juju, Songhai!, From the Pyramids to the Projects, and Dawnsong! His poetry has been published internationally, including Paris, Rome, India, and in Peoples Republic of China.

Selected Bibliography

From the Pyramids to the Projects: Poems of Genocide and Resistance!

Juju: Magic Songs for the Black Nation

Dawnsong!

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Poets Background and Bio

Additional Reading and Resources

Dawnsong!: The Epic Memory of Askia Touré. Smethurst, James. *African American Review*, 36:2 (2002 Summer), p. 343(3).

The Furious Flowering of African American Poetry. Gabbin, Joanne, Ed. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1999.

Askia Muhammad Touré: Crying Out the Goodness. Thomas, Lorenzo. *Obsidian: Black Literature in Review*, 1:1 (1975), pp. 31-49.

Reclaiming the Southern Experience: The Black Aesthetic 10 Years Later. Gayle, Addison. *Black World*, 12:11 (1974), pp. 20-29.

Dictionary of Literary Biography. Volume 41. Detroit: The Gale Group, 1985.

Askia Touré Home Page
<http://www.askiatoure.com/>

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Explore Sun Ra's mystical visions as inspiration in the poetry of Askia Touré.

Research the precepts of the Black Arts Movement, and discuss Touré's role in their legacy.

Rita Dove

Rita Dove was Poet Laureate of the United States from 1993 to 1995. She has received numerous literary and academic honors, among them the 1987 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry, the 2001 Duke Ellington Lifetime Achievement Award, the 1996 Heinz Award in the Arts and Humanities, and the 1995 National Humanities Medal. She has published the poetry collections *The Yellow House on the Corner*, *Museum*, *Thomas and Beulah*, *Grace Notes*, *Selected Poems*, *Mother Love*, *On the Bus with Rosa Parks*, a book of short stories, *Fifth Sunday*, the novel *Through the Ivory Gate*, essays under the title *The Poet's World*, and the play *The Darker Face of the Earth*, which was produced at several theatres, including the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. and the Royal National Theatre in London. She edited *Best American Poetry 2000* and from January 2000 to January 2002 she wrote a weekly column "Poet's Choice" for *The Washington Post*. Her latest book of poems is *American Smooth*. Dove is the Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia.

Selected Bibliography

American Smooth: Poems

The Darker Face of the Earth

On the Bus with Rosa Parks
Mother Love

Additional Reading and Resources

American Smooth: A Profile of Rita Dove. Shea, Renee. *Poets & Writers Magazine*, 32:5 (2004 September October), pp. 38-43.

Conversations With Rita Dove. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2003, 198 pp.

Geometry and Music: Rita Dove's Fifth Sunday. Righelato, Pat. *Yearbook of English Studies*, 31 (2001), pp. 62-73.

Moving Through Color: Rita Dove's Thomas and Beulah. Pellegrino, Joe. *Kentucky Philological Review*, 14 (1999 March), pp. 27-31.

Rooted Displacement in Form: Rita Dove's Sonnet Cycle Mother Love. Steffen, Therese. *The Furious Flowering of African American Poetry*. Gabbin, ed. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999.

The Darker Face of the Earth: A Conversation with Rita Dove. Steffen, Therese. *Transition*, 74 (1998), pp. 104-23.

Abduction and Other Severe Pleasures: Rita Dove's Mother Love. Booth, Alison. *Callaloo: A Journal of African-American and African Arts and Letters*, 19:1 (1996 Winter), pp. 125-30.

Rita Dove: An Interview. Cavalieri, Grace. *The American Poetry Review*, 24:2 (1995 March-April), pp. 11-15.

Scars and Wings: Rita Dove's Grace Notes. Costello, Bonnie. *Callaloo: A Journal of African-American and African Arts and Letters*, 14:2 (1991 Spring), pp. 434-38.

Contemporary Poets. Volume 7. Detroit: St. James Press, 2001.

Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series. Volume 42. Detroit: The Gale Group, 1994.

Dictionary of Literary Biography. Volume 120. Detroit: The Gale Group, 1992.

Rita Dove Home Page
<http://www.people.virginia.edu/~rfd4b/>

The Academy of American Poets
<http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?45442B7C000C070D01>

Voices from the Gaps: Women Writers of Color
<http://voices.cla.umn.edu/newsite/authors/DOVErita.htm>

Norton Poets Online

<http://www.nortonpoets.com/dover.htm>

Library of Congress Poet Laureate Page

<http://www.loc.gov/poetry/laureate.html>

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Discuss the ways in which Rita Dove weaves African American experience into the broader perspective of international culture.

Research the impact of Dove's appointment as the first black Poet Laureate of the United States on literary diversity in America.

Explore the ways Dove takes historical events and broadens them into poetic stories about human nature.

Major Jackson

Major Jackson won the Cave Canem Poetry Prize in 2000 for his first book of poetry, *Leaving Saturn*, which was nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award. His poems have appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *Boulevard*, *Callaloo*, and *The New Yorker*. Jackson has received fellowships from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. His honors include a Pew Fellowship in the Arts and a Whiting Writers' Award. Jackson is associate professor of English at the University of Vermont, a member of the MFA Creative Writing Program at Queens University of Charlotte in North Carolina, and a Witter Bynner Fellow for the Library of Congress.

Selected Bibliography

Leaving Saturn

Additional Reading and Resources

An Interview with Major Jackson. *Green Mountain Review*, 17:1(2004), pp. 114-18.

Cave Canem Poetry Prize

<http://www.cavecanempoets.org/pages/winners/jackson.html>

Major Jackson Home Page

<http://www.uvm.edu/~english/mjackson.html>

The Painted Bride Reading Series

http://www.pbq.rutgers.edu/issues/63/ott_jackson.html

Pew Fellowships in the Arts

<http://www.pewarts.org/95/Jackson/>

Ploughshares

<http://www.pshares.org/issues/article.cfm?prmarticleID=7535>

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Discuss Major Jackson's poetry as a portrait of Black Philadelphia.

Discuss how the Dark Room Collective was an incubator for Jackson's poetry and the poetry of the Collective poets.

Lucille Clifton

Lucille Clifton is the Distinguished Professor of the Humanities at St. Mary's College of Maryland. She was Poet Laureate of Maryland from 1975-1985 and has received many fellowships and awards for her poetry collections and children's books, including the Shelley Memorial Prize, a Charity Randall Citation, an Emmy Award from the American Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, selection as a Literary Lion by the New York Public Library, and a Lannan Achievement Award in Poetry. Her work has also earned her recognition as a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. Clifton has published ten collections of poetry, nineteen children's books, and an autobiographical prose work. *The Terrible Stories* was a finalist for the National Book Award, the Lenore Marshall Prize, and the Los Angeles Times Book Award. Clifton is a 1999 Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award recipient. She serves on the Board of Chancellors of the Academy of American Poets and was recently elected as a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Her newest books are *Blessing the Boats: New and Selected Poems* and *Mercy*.

Selected Bibliography

Mercy

Blessing the Boats: New and Selected Poems, 1988-2000

The Book of Light

The Terrible Stories

Additional Reading and Resources

Black Names in White Spaces. Holladay, Hilary. *The Southern Literary Journal*, 34:2 (2002 Spring), p. 120(14).

Recovering the Black Female Body: Self-Representations by African American Women. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001, pp. 123-40.

Sifting Legacies in Lucille Clifton's Generations. Wall, Cheryl. *Contemporary Literature*, 40:4 (1999 Winter), pp. 552-74.

Our Lives Are Our Line and We Go On. Holladay, Hilary. *Xavier Review*, 19:2 (1999), pp. 18-29.

Sleeping With One Eye Open: Women Writers and the Art of Survival. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999, pp. 80-85.

Song of Herself: Lucille Clifton's Poetry about Womanhood. Holladay, Hilary. *The Furious Flowering of African American Poetry*. Gabbin, ed. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999.

Blackness Blessed: The Writings of Lucille Clifton. Lazer, Hank. *The Southern Review*, 25:3 (1989 Summer), pp. 760-770.

Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series. Volume 97. Detroit: The Gale Group, 2001.

Dictionary of Literary Biography. Volume 41. Detroit: The Gale Group, 1985.

The Academy of American Poets

<http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?prmlID=80>

Modern American Poetry

http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a_f/clifton/clifton.htm

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Discuss the importance of women's survival skills and "woman pride" to the ultimate affirmation of the black woman's world in Lucille Clifton's poetry.

Explore the poetic metaphor of the quilt as a technique for establishing a sense of journey in the lives of black women.

Clifton said that her purpose for writing children's books was to provide children with windows and mirrors - windows through which to see the world and mirrors to see themselves. Discuss how her poetry achieves this purpose for adults.

Episode 2: Cross-Pollination in the Diaspora

Velma Pollard

Velma Pollard is a retired senior lecturer in language education at the University of the West Indies at Mona. She has taught in high schools and universities in Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana and the United States. She has always written. She won her first prize for a poem at the age of seven, but none of her work went beyond her desk until 1975 when encouraged by her sister Erna Brodber and others, notably Jean D'Costa who sent one of her stories to Jamaica Journal, she started sending pieces to journals in the region. Her poems and stories have been published in regional and international journals and anthologies. She is the author of a novel, two collections of short fiction, and three books of poetry, *Crown Point and Other Poems*, *Shame Trees Don't Grow Here*, and *The Greatest Philosophers I Know Can't Read or Write*. Her novella, *Karl*, won the Casa de las Americas prize in 1992.

Selected Bibliography

The Best Philosophers I Know Can't Read or Write

Crown Point and Other Poems

Homestretch

Shame Trees Don't Grow Here

Considering Women

Additional Reading and Resources

A Conversation with Velma Pollard. Dance, Daryl. CLA Journal, 47:3 (2004 March), pp. 259-298.

The Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature. Buck, Claire, ed. New York: Prentice Hall, 1992.

The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present. Blain, Patricia, et al. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

Peeple Tree Press

http://www.peepaltreepress.com/author_display.asp?au_id=63

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Crown Point and Other Poems has been described as the words of a black woman on a

permanent journey. Discuss the themes of cultural resistance, how the journey is the same or different for black men and how the journey symbolizes the larger black experience.

Investigate the way in which Velma Pollard uses the tradition of call and response to construct Gran. How does this construct fit into and add to the theme of the poem?

Show how Pollard's poetry on women uses the trope of "coming out of chrysalis" explored widely in Caribbean literature.

Kwame Dawes

Kwame Dawes has published eight collections of poetry including *Progeny of Air*, winner of the Forward Poetry Prize for Best First Collection, *Resisting the Anomie*, *Prophets*, *Jacko Jacobus*, *Requiem*, and *Shook Foil*, a collection of reggae-inspired poems. His most recent collection, *Midland*, was recently awarded the Hollis Summers Poetry Prize by the Ohio University Press. Dawes received the Pushcart Prize for the best American poetry of 2001. Dawes' poetry has appeared in such journals as the *London Review of Books*, *Bomb Magazine*, *Doubletake Magazine*, *Poetry Review*, *Obsidian III*, *Callaloo*, *Shenandoah*, *the Mississippi Review*, *Caribbean Writer*, and *Poetry London*. He is an actor, playwright and producer and was the lead singer in Ujamaa, a reggae band. He is professor in English at the University of South Carolina where he is Distinguished Poet in Residence and director of the South Carolina Poetry Initiative.

Selected Bibliography

Bruised Totem

Progeny of Air

Bob Marley: Lyrical Genius

A Place to Hide

Selected Poems

Additional Reading and Resources

Contemporary Authors. Volume 195. Detroit: The Gale Group, 2002.

Kwame Dawes Home Page

<http://www.kwamedawes.com/>

Peepal Tree Press

http://www.peepaltreepress.com/author_display.asp?au_id=16

British Council on Contemporary Writers

<http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth02A4P155412626349>

FURIOUS FLOWER II

Poets Background and Bio

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www.newsreel.org

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Examine the influence of Reggae music on the constructs of Kwame Dawes' poetry.

Discuss the themes of spiritual connection between Africa and the Africans who left their home continent, whether willingly or unwillingly, and came to the Caribbean.

Explore the legacy of political activism that imbues Dawes's poetry.

Brenda Marie Osbey

Brenda Marie Osbey is the author of *All Saints: New and Selected Poems*, which received the 1998 American Book Award, *Desperate Circumstance*, *Dangerous Woman*, *In These Houses*, and *Ceremony for Minneconjoux*. Her poems have appeared in *Callaloo*, *Obsidian*, *Essence*, *Southern Exposure*, *Southern Review*, *Early Ripening: American Women's Poetry Now*, *The Made Thing: An Anthology of Contemporary Southern Poetry*, *Literature of the American South: A Norton Anthology*, *Epoch*, *The American Voice*, and *The American Poetry Review* among others. Osbey received the 2004 Camargo Foundation Fellowship and is working on a new manuscript, the first Afro-Francophone volume by a New Orleanian since 1845.

Selected Bibliography

All Saints: New and Selected Poems

Desperate Circumstances, *Dangerous Woman*

In These Houses

Ceremony for Minneconjoux

Additional Reading and Resources

An Interview With Brenda Marie Osbey. Lowe, John. *The Future of Southern Letters*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

An Interview With Brenda Marie Osbey. Lowe, John. *The Southern Review*, 30:4 (1994 Autumn), pp. 812-23.

An Interview With Brenda Marie Osbey. Bryan, Violet Harrington. *Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Culture*, 40:1 (1986-1987 Winter), pp. 33-45.

Contemporary Authors. Volume 197. Detroit: The Gale Group, 2002.

Dictionary of Literary Biography. Volume 120. Detroit: The Gale Group, 1992.

Creative Nonfiction Interview

<http://osbey.tripod.com/id29.html>

Brenda Marie Osbey Home Page
<http://osbey.tripod.com>

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Explore Brenda Marie Osbey's preference for the individual voice narration as a defining feature of her poetry.

Discuss the ways in which Osbey's interpretation of New Orleans' richly diverse culture in *All Saints* leads the reader into unknown realms.

Discuss the symbolism of the healer mother figure in *In These Houses* in the larger context of the African American family experience.

Haki Madhubuti

Haki Madhubuti is an award winning poet, publisher, editor, and educator. He has been a pivotal figure in the development of a strong black literary tradition, emerging from the era of the sixties and continuing to the present. He has published twenty-four books and is one of the world's best-selling authors of poetry and nonfiction. Selected titles include *Claiming Earth: Race, Rage, Rape, Redemption*, *GroundWork: New and Selected Poems 1966-1996*, *HeartLove: Wedding and Love Poems*, and *Tough Notes: A Healing Call For Creating Exceptional Black Men*. His most recent book of poetry is *Run Toward Fear: New Poems and a Poet's Handbook*. Madhubuti is a recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities fellowships, and Illinois Arts Council Awards. In 1991 he received an American Book Award and was named Author of the Year by the Illinois Association of Teachers of English. Among his other many honors are the Gwendolyn Brooks Significant Poets Award and the Paul Robeson Award.

Selected Bibliography

Developmental Manual for Young Black Males
Run Toward Fear: New Poems and a Poet's Handbook
Tough Notes: Letters to Young Black Men
Heart Love: Wedding and Love Poems
Groundwork: New and Selected Poems

Additional Reading and Resources

Cheikh Anta Diop, Malcolm X, and Haki Madhubuti: *Claiming and Containing Continuity in Black Language and Institutions*. *Journal of Black Studies*, 33:2 (2002 November), pp.126-44.

Haki Madhubuti: The Measure of a Man. Ards, Angela. Black Issues Book Review, 4:2 (2002 March-April), p.42(6).

New Directions from Don L. Lee. Mosher, Marlene and Davis, Arthur P. Hicksville, NY: Exposition, 1975.

Some Black Thoughts on Don L. Lee's Think Black! Thunk by a Frustrated White Academic Thinker. Miller, Eugene E. College English, 34:8 (1973 May), pp. 1094-102.

The Relevancy of Don L. Lee as a Contemporary Black Poet. Shands, Annette O. Black World, 21:8 (1972), pp. 35-48.

From a Black Perspective: The Poetry of Don L. Lee. Giddings, Paula. Amistad: Writings on Black History and Culture, 2 (1971), pp. 297-318.

Contemporary Literary Criticism. Volume 6. Detroit: The Gale Group, 1976.

Dictionary of Literary Biography. Volume 41. Detroit: The Gale Group, 1985.

The Academy of American Poets

<http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?45442B7C000C030508>

African American Literature Book Club

<http://aalbc.com/authors/haki.htm>

The History Makers

<http://www.thehistorymakers.com/biography/biography.asp?bioindex=1&category=artMakers>

Third World Press

<http://www.thirdworldpressinc.com/>

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Explore Haki Madhubuti's use of street language to achieve authenticity in his poetry.

Discuss Madhubuti's prescription for social change. How is it explored in his poetry?

Elizabeth Alexander

Elizabeth Alexander is the author of three books of poems, *The Venus Hottentot*, *Body of Life*, and *Antebellum Dream Book*. Her collection of essays on African American poetry, painting, and popular culture, *The Black Interior*, was published in 2004. Her poems, short stories, and critical prose have been widely published in such journals as *Signs*, *American Literary History*, *Callaloo*, *The Paris Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *The Kenyon Review*,

The Village Voice, The Women's Review of Books, and in many anthologies. Her verse play, *Diva Studies*, was produced at the Yale School of Drama in May 1996. Alexander has taught at the University of Chicago, where she won the Quantrell Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, New York University's Graduate Creative Writing Program, and Smith College, where she was Grace Hazard Conkling Poet-in-Residence, first director of the Poetry Center at Smith College, and member of the founding editorial collective for the feminist journal *Meridians*: feminism, race, transnationalism. She teaches courses on African American poetry, drama, and 20th century literature at Yale University.

Selected Bibliography

The Venus Hottentot: Poems

The Black Interior

Body of Life

Antebellum Dream Book

Additional Readings and Resources

An Interview with Elizabeth Alexander. Phillip, Christine. *Callaloo: A Journal of African-American and African Arts and Letters*, 19:2 (1996 Spring), pp. 493-507.

The Far Deep Things of Dreamland: An Interview with Elizabeth Alexander. Trethewey, Natasha. *Poets & Writers Magazine*, 29:6, p. 28(6).

Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series. Volume 112. Detroit: The Gale Group, 2003.

The Academy of American Poets

<http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?45442B7C000C040100>

The University of Chicago Chronicle

<http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/970529/qalexander.shtml>

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Compare the themes in Elizabeth Alexander's and Lucille Clifton's poems of motherhood.

Discuss the use of memory in Alexander's exploration of race and gender.

Discuss the preoccupation with black body image in the poems of Elizabeth Alexander and Audre Lorde.

Yusef Komunyakaa

Yusef Komunyakaa has authored numerous books of poems including *Pleasure Dome: New & Collected Poems*, *Talking Dirty to the Gods*, *Thieves of Paradise*, which was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, *Neon Vernacular: New & Selected Poems 1977-1989*, for which he received the Pulitzer Prize and the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award, *Magic*

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City, Dien Cai Dau, which won The Dark Room Poetry Prize, I Apologize for the Eyes in My Head, winner of the San Francisco Poetry Center Award, and Copacetic (1984).

Komunyakaa's prose is collected in *Blues Notes: Essays, Interviews & Commentaries*. He also co-edited *The Jazz Poetry Anthology* and co-translated *The Insomnia of Fire* by Nguyen Quang Thieu. His honors include the William Faulkner Prize from the Université de Rennes, the Thomas Forcade Award, the Hanes Poetry Prize, fellowships from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, the Louisiana Arts Council, and the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Bronze Star for his service in Vietnam, where he served as a correspondent and managing editor of the *Southern Cross*. In 1999 he was elected a Chancellor of The Academy of American Poets. Yusef Komunyakaa is a professor of poetry at Princeton University.

Selected Bibliography

Taboo, Part I: The Wishbone Trilogy

Pleasure Dome

Talking Dirty to the Gods: Poems

Thieves of Paradise

Blue Notes: Essays, Interviews, and Commentaries

Neon Vernacular: New and Selected Poems

Additional Reading and Resources

Race, Human Empathy, and Negative Capability: The Poetry of Yusef Komunyakaa. Salas, Angela. *College Literature*, 30:4 (2003 Fall), pp. 32-53.

Komunyakaa's Facing It. Thomas, Marvin. *The Explicator*, 61:4 (2003 Summer), p. 242(6).

Yusef Komunyakaa. Suarez, Ernest. *Five Points: A Journal of Literature and Art*, 4:1 (1999 Fall), pp. 15-28.

Song of Herself: Lucille Clifton's Poetry about Womanhood. Holladay, Hilary. *The Furious Flowering of African American Poetry*. Gabbin, ed. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999.

Still Negotiating With the Images: An Interview With Yusef Komunyakaa. Baer, William. *Kenyon Review*, 20:3-4 (1998 Summer-Fall), pp. 5-29.

Interview with Yusef Komunyakaa. Johnson, Thomas C. *Worcester Review*, 19:1-2 (1998), pp. 199-27.

On Yusef Komunyakaa. Fabre, Michael. *Southern Quarterly: A Journal of the Arts in the South*, 34:2 (1996 Winter), pp. 541-61.

Vietnam and the "Voice Within": Public and Private History on Yusef Komunyakaa's Dien Cai Dau. Stein, Kevin. *Massachusetts Review: A Quarterly of Literature, the Arts and Public Affairs*, 36:4 (1995-1996 Winter), pp. 541-61.

Lines of Tempered Steel: An Interview with Yusef Komunyakaa. Gotera, Vicente. *Callaloo: A Journal of African American and African Arts and Letters*, 13:2 (1990 Spring), pp. 215-29.

Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series. Volume 83. Detroit: The Gale Group, 2000.

Contemporary Literary Criticism. Volume 94. Detroit, The Gale Group, 1996.

Dictionary of Literary Biography. Volume 120. Detroit: The Gale Group, 1992.

The Academy of American Poets

<http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?45442B7C000C0406>

Internet Poetry Archive

<http://www.ibiblio.org/ipa/komunyakaa/index.html>

Modern American Poetry

http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/g_l/komunyakaa/komunyakaa.htm

Ploughshares

<http://www.pshares.org/authors/authorDetails.cfm?prmAuthorID=847>

The Pulitzer Prizes

<http://www.pulitzer.org/>

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Compare the themes in Yusef Komunyakaa's Vietnam War poems with those of W. D. Ehrhart.

Discuss the way Komunyakaa explores folk ideas in terms of blues and jazz.

Yusef Komunyakaa described poetry as "a kind of distilled insinuation...a way of expanding and talking around an idea or a question" in which more gets said than in a "full frontal assault." Find examples of this approach in Komunyakaa's poetry.

Episode 3: Blooming in the Whirlwind

Sharan Strange

Sharan Strange teaches English and creative writing at Spelman College. She is also a contributing and advisory editor of *Callaloo*, a journal of African Diaspora arts and letters. Her first book of poetry, *Ash*, received the Barnard New Women Poets Prize and was published by Beacon Press in 2001. From 1988 to 1998, she was the co-founder and co-curator of The Dark Room Collective and Reading Series, a highly influential forum for emerging and established African American writers that helped nurture and shape a new generation of black writers. Her recent work has appeared in *Callaloo* and in the South African journal, *Agenda*. She has also contributed poems to the exhibition "Off the Record" at the Skylight Gallery in Brooklyn, and to the catalogue for "Black President: The Art and Legacy of Fela Kuti" at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York.

Selected Bibliography

Ash

Additional Reading and Resources

An Interview With Sharan Strange. Derricotte, Toi. *Callaloo: A Journal of African-American and African Arts and Letters*, 19:2 (1996 Spring), pp. 291-98.

The Dark Room Collective: Thomas Sayers Ellis, Trasi Johnson, John Keene, Janice Lowe, Carl Phillips, Sharan Strange, Natasha Trethewey, Kevin Young. *Callaloo: A Journal of African-American and African Arts and Letters*, 16:3 (1993 Summer), pp. 511-55.

Painted Bride Quarterly

<http://www.webdelsol.com/pbq/issues/60/strange.html>

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Discuss Sharan Strange's importance and contribution to emerging African American poetry as an advocate of creative writing incubators such as the Dark Room Collective.

Discuss the ways in which the world presented in *Ash* borders on oddity. Compare Natasha Trethewey's vision of ordinary life with Strange's view of the same.

Examine the use of language in *Ash*. How does Strange capture and juxtapose the audible qualities of language alongside literary tools such as alliteration? What does this juxtaposition contribute to the poems?

Kevin Young

Kevin Young is Ruth Lilly Professor of Poetry at Indiana University. His first book, *Most Way Home*, was selected for the National Poetry Series and won the John C. Zacharis First Book Award from Ploughshares. His second book of poems, *To Repel Ghosts* was a finalist for the James McLaughlin Prize from the Academy of American Poets. Young's poetry and essays have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Paris Review*, the *Kenyon Review*, *Paideuma*, *Callaloo*, *Fence*, and *Verse* and have been featured on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered." The *Village Voice* named Young a *Writer on the Verge* in 2001. Young's latest book of poems, *Jelly Roll: A Blues*, a new collection of blues-based love poems, was named a finalist in the National Book Award for Poetry and the 2003 Los Angeles Times Book Prize in Poetry.

Selected Bibliography

Jelly Roll: A Blues

To Repel Ghosts: Five Sides in B Minor

Most Way Home

Blues Poems

Additional Reading and Resources

A Short Distance to the Blues: A Conversation with Kevin Young. Whitehead, Colson. *Poets & Writers Magazine*, 31:1 (2003 January-February), pp. 30-37.

A Conversation With Kevin Young. *Indiana Review*, 23:1 (2001 Spring), pp. 27-36.

An Interview With Kevin Young. Rowell, Charles, H. *Callaloo: A Journal of African-American and African Arts and Letters*, 21:1 (1998 Winter), pp. 43-54.

The Dark Room Collective: Thomas Sayers Ellis, Trasi Johnson, John Keene, Janice Lowe, Carl Philips, Sharan Strange, Natasha Trethewey, Kevin Young. *Callaloo: A Journal of African-American and African Arts and Letters*, 16:3 (1993 Summer), pp. 511-55.

The Academy of American Poets

<http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?45442B7C000C020701>

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Discuss the ways Young uses the theme of home as a metaphor for a collective African American retrospection in *Most Way Home*.

Research the major elements of the blues musical tradition, and compare them to the poetry in Young's *Jellyroll: A Blues*.

Cornelius Eady

Cornelius Eady is the author of six books of poetry: *Kartunes*, *Victims Of The Latest Dance Craze*, winner of the 1985 Lamont Prize from the Academy of American Poets, *The Gathering Of My Name*, nominated for the 1992 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry, *You Don't Miss Your Water*, *The Autobiography Of A Jukebox*, and *Brutal Imagination*, a National Book Award finalist. He is co-founder of Cave Canem, a summer workshop and retreat for African American poets. He is the recipient of an NEA Fellowship in Literature, a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship in Poetry, a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Traveling Scholarship, a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship, and The Prairie Schooner Strousse Award. His work appears in many journals, magazines, and the anthologies *Every Shut Eye Ain't Asleep*, *In Search Of Color Everywhere*, and *The Vintage Anthology Of African American Poetry*, (1750-2000). In June 1997, an adaptation of *You Don't Miss Your Water* was performed at the Vineyard Theatre, in New York City. In April 1999, *Running Man*, a music-theatre piece co-written with jazz musician Diedre Murray, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama and awarded a 1999 Obie for best musical score and lead actor in a musical.

Selected Bibliography

Brutal Imagination

Autobiography of a Jukebox

Victims of the Latest Dance Craze

You Don't Miss Your Water: Poems

The Gathering of My Name

Additional Reading and Resources

Cornelius Eady's "You Don't Miss Your Water": It's Womanist/Feminist Perspective. Peters, Erskine. *Journal of African American Men*, 2:1 (1996 Summer), pp. 15-31.

Cornelius Eady. Jones, Patricia Spears. *Bomb*, (2002 Spring), p. 48(7).

About Cornelius Eady. Trethewey. *Ploughshares*, 28:1 (2002 Spring), p. 193(5).

Contemporary Authors. Volume 204. Detroit: The Gale Group, 2003.

The Academy of American Poets

<http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?prmlID=57>

Poets on Poetry: Poet Chat

http://www.writtenet.org/poetschat/poetschat_ceady.html

Ploughshares

<http://www.pshares.org/Authors/authorDetails.cfm?prmAuthorID=432>

Cave Canem

<http://www.cavecanempoets.org/>

FURIOUS FLOWER II

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Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Examine the ways in which Eady uses language to hear music.

Research the Susan Smith child murder case, and discuss the themes of the black male threat as a product of white racist imagination in *Brutal Imagination*.

Become acquainted with Cave Canem, founded by Cornelius Eady and Toi Derricotte, and identify three new African American poets who were Cave Canem Fellows.

Marilyn Nelson

Marilyn Nelson authored *For the Body*, *Mama's Promises*, *The Homeplace*, *Magnificat*, *The Fields of Praise: New and Selected Poems*, and *Carver: A Life in Poems*. Her honors include two Pushcart Prizes, two creative writing fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the 1990 Connecticut Arts Award, an A.C.L.S. Contemplative Practices Fellowship, and a fellowship from the J.S. Guggenheim Foundation. *The Fields of Praise* was a finalist for the 1997 National Book Award, the PEN Winship Award, the Lenore Marshall Prize, and it won the 1998 Poets' Prize. *Carver* won the 2001 National Book Award, The Boston Globe Horn Book Award, was named a Newbery Honor Book, and a Coretta Scott King Honor Book, and won the Flora Stieglitz Straus Award. Nelson is emeritus professor of English at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, Poet Laureate of Connecticut, and founder and director of Soul Mountain Retreat.

Selected Bibliography

A Wreath for Emmitt Till

The Cachoeira Tales and Other Poems

Fortune's Bones: The Manumission Requiem

The Fields of Praise: New and Selected Poems

Carver: A Life in Poems

Down the Dark Pine Green

Additional Reading and Resources

Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series. Volume 51. Detroit: The Gale Group, 2003.

Dictionary of Literary Biography. Volume 282. Detroit: The Gale Group, 2003.

Marilyn Nelson Home Page

<http://web.uconn.edu/mnelson/mainframe/index.html>

The Academy of American Poets

<http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?prmlID=98>

Connecticut Poet Laureate

<http://www.ctarts.org/poetlaureate.htm>

National Endowment for the Arts: Operation Homecoming

<http://www.nea.gov/national/homecoming/authorbios/nelson.html>

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Explore Marilyn Nelson's use of spiritual themes as a context for black self-awareness.

Explore the Danish poet Thorkild Bjørnvig, and discuss how his themes of animal rights and environmental issues influenced Nelson's "Still Faith."

Research the Tuskegee Airmen, and discuss how Nelson uses poetry to tell their history and the stories of other African Americans.

Tony Medina

Tony Medina is the author of eleven books, including *No Noose Is Good Noose*, *DeShawn Days*, *Love to Langston*, *Bum Rush the Page: A Def Poetry Jam*, and *Role Call: A Generational Anthology of Social and Political Black Literature & Art*. His poetry, fiction, and essays appear in over twenty anthologies and two CD compilations. A college English professor, Medina is always on the lookout for opportunities to reach out to the community and help foster a love for literature. He is committed to using his children's books to promote literacy and solidarity among urban youth. His children's book, *Langston Hughes, Love to Langston* is written from Langston Hughes' point of view and offers an overview of key elements and themes in Hughes' life. Medina has taught English at several prestigious universities and earned his M.A. and Ph.D. in poetry and American and African American Literature from Binghamton University. He is currently an Assistant Professor at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

Selected Bibliography

Committed to Breathing

DeShawn Days

Bum Rush the Page: A Def Poetry Jam

Memories of Eating

No Noose is Good Noose

Additional Reading and Resources

Tony Medina Takes a Deep Breath: Poet, Teacher and Activist Walks the 'Hood and Tell BIBR About His Latest Work. Coralin, Jane E. Alberdeston. *Black Issues Book Review*, 5:4 (2003 July-August), p. 32(2).

The Poetry of the Nuyorican Experience; Writers Following in the Literary Tradition of Miguel Piñero Thrive in a Poets' Café. Navarro, Mireya. The New York Times, Late Edition, Section E, Page 1, Column 2.

New York Public Library

<http://www.nypl.org/chat/medina.html>

horizon: people and possibilities

<http://www.horizonmag.com/2/tony-medina.asp>

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Explore the actual and symbolic ways that the themes of *Committed to Breathing* are reflected in Tony Medina's life.

Discuss the socio-political themes in Medina's children's books and whether their importance is veiled or enhanced.

Become acquainted with the Nuyorican Poets, and explain how Medina's performance style reflects the movement.

Amiri Baraka

Amiri Baraka published his first volume of poetry, *Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note*, in 1961. He followed with more than twenty books of poetry, the two most recent being *The Essence of Reparations* and *Somebody Blew Up America and Other Poems*. His play, *Dutchman*, won an Obie Award and was made into a film. Baraka's numerous literary prizes and honors include fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, the PEN/Faulkner Award, the Rockefeller Foundation Award for Drama, the Langston Hughes Award from The City College of New York, and a lifetime achievement award from the Before Columbus Foundation. He has taught poetry at the New School for Social Research in New York, literature at the University of Buffalo, and drama at Columbia University. He has also taught at San Francisco State University, Yale University, and George Washington University. Since 1985 he has been professor of Africana studies at the State University of New York in Stony Brook. He is co-director, with his wife, of Kimako's Blues People, a community arts space.

Selected Bibliography

Somebody Blew Up America and Other Poems

The Essence of Reparations

Beginnings and Other Poems

Funk Lore: New Poems, 1984-1995

Transbluency: The Selected Poems of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones (1961-1995)

Reggae or Not!

In the Tradition: For Black Arthur Blythe

It's Nation Time

A Poem for Black Hearts

Preface to a Twenty- Volume Suicide Note

Additional Reading and Resources

The Aesthetics of Politics/The Politics of Aesthetics: Amiri Baraka's 'Somebody Blew Up America'. Gwiazda, Piotr. *Contemporary Literature*, 45:3 (2004 Fall), pp. 460-85.

Somebody Blew Off Baraka. Harris, William J. and Nielsen, Aldon Lynn. *African American Review*, 37:2-3 (2003 Summer-Fall), pp. 183-87.

LeRoi Jones, Larry Neal and The Cricket: Jazz and Poets' Black Fire. Funkhouser, Christopher. *African American Review*, 37:2-3 (2003 Summer-Fall), pp. 237-44.

Politics, Process, & (Jazz) Performance: Amiri Baraka's 'It's Nation Time'. Jones, Meta DuEwa. *African American Review*, 37:2-3 (2003 Summer-Fall), pp. 245-52.

Baraka's Bohemian Blues. Gennari, John. *African American Review*, 37:2-3 (2003 Summer-Fall), pp. 253-60

'Pat Your Foot and Turn the Corner': Amiri Baraka, the Black Arts Movement, and the Poetics of a Popular Avant-Garde. Smethurst, James. *African American Review*, 37:2-3 (2003 Summer-Fall), pp. 261-70.

Sometimes Funny, but Most Times Deadly Serious: Amiri Baraka as Political Satirist. Davidson, Jiton Sharmayne. *African American Review*, 37:2-3 (2003 Summer-Fall), pp. 399-405.

The Paradox of Experience: Black Art and Black Idiom in the Work of Amiri Baraka. Roney, Patrick. *African American Review*, 37:2-3 (2003 Summer-Fall), pp. 407-27.

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The Academy of American Poets

<http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?45442B7C000C020001>

The Black Collegian

<http://www.black-collegian.com/african/baraka-a1299.shtml>

Modern American Poetry

http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a_f/baraka/baraka.htm

Amiri Baraka Web Page

<http://www.amiribaraka.com/>

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Become familiar with the history of Amiri Baraka's political stances, and discuss his impact during each of these periods on black self-awareness and racial justice.

Discuss the ways in which Baraka's political positions may have eclipsed his claims to literary recognition.

A prominent critic of black music, Baraka uses blues and jazz as referents in his own poetry. Discuss the ways he elevates the art of his poetry by using musical techniques.

Sonia Sanchez

Sonia Sanchez is the author of more than 16 books including *Homecoming*, *We a BaddDDD People*, *Love Poems*, *I've Been a Woman: New and Selected Poems*, *A Sound Investment and Other Stories*, *Homegirls and Handgrenades*, *Under a Soprano Sky*, *Wounded in the House of a Friend*, *Does Your House Have Lions?*, and most recently, *Shake Loose My Skin*. She is a contributing editor to *The Black Scholar* and the *Journal of African Studies* and has edited two anthologies: *We Be Word Sorcerers: 25 Stories by Black Americans*, and *360° of Blackness Coming at You*. Sanchez is the recipient of numerous awards including the Lucretia Mott Award, the Outstanding Arts Award from the Pennsylvania Coalition of 100 Black Women, the 1985 American Book Award for *Homegirls and Handgrenades*, the Governor's Award for Excellence in Humanities, and the Langston Hughes Poetry Award. *Does Your House Have Lions?* was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. She is the Poetry Society of America's 2001 Robert Frost Medalist and received an Otto Award in 2001. Her poetry appeared in the movie *Love Jones*. Sanchez was the first presidential fellow at Temple University, and she held the Laura Carnell Chair in English at Temple University.

Selected Bibliography

Shake Loose My Skin: New and Selected Poems

Like the Singing Coming Off the Drums: Love Poems

Does Your House Have Lions?

Wounded in the House of a Friend

I've Been a Woman

Under a Soprano Sky

Homegirls and Handgrenades

Additional Reading and Resources

The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry. Frost, Elizabeth. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2003.

The History of Southern Women's Literature. Perry, Carolyn, et al. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002.

Sonia Sanchez and the "Small World Phenomenon" or "How Does Your Garden Grow?" DeLancey, F.E. BAM: The Sonia Sanchez Literary Review, 6:2 (2001 Spring), pp. 189-212.

Discipline and Craft: An Interview with Sonia Sanchez. Kelly, Susan. African American Review, 34:4 (2000 Winter), pp. 679-87.

360 Degrees of Black Art Comin' At You: Sista Sonia Sanchez and the Dimensions of a Black Arts Continuum. Alim, H. Samy. BMA: The Sonia Sanchez Literary Review, 6:1 (2000 Fall), pp. 15-33.

Traveling Conversation: India Dennis-Mahmood Interviews Sonia Sanchez. Dennis-Mahmood, India. Feminist Teacher, 12:3 (1999 Spring), p. 198(5).

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The Academy of American Poets
<http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?prmlID=282>

Voices from the Gaps: Women Writers of Color
<http://voices.cla.umn.edu/newsite/authors/SANCHEZsonia.htm>

Suggestions for Additional Discussion

Research the 1985 Philadelphia police bombing of MOVE and discuss Sanchez's poem "Elegy: For MOVE and Philadelphia" both in the context of the 1985 incident and as a larger symbol of racial injustice.

Discuss the themes of both public and private betrayal found in Wounded in the House of a Friend. Does Sanchez leave us with hope? Why or why not?

Sonia Sanchez has been called the Poet Laureate of the Universe, is one of the most prolific African American writers in America, past or present, and is one of the most widely recognized names in modern African American poetry. Yet, the body of criticism on her work is small and inconsistent with her contribution. Discuss the possible reasons for this.