

Horizon Black History Month Poetry Contest

What is the purpose of the Black History Month poetry contest?

As we celebrate Black History Month, we want to expose students to the rich tradition of Black poetry and its ties to oral African traditions and music. Slave hymns and lyrics often had simple words or protest messages but were expressed with complex melodies and sophisticated rhythms. Just as slave hymns influenced Black poetry, in modern times Black poetry has inspired things like rap and hip hop.

We have compiled a few famous African American poets that used their poetry to express their unique and distinct experiences as an African American person.

Quick Overview:

What is poetry?

Poetry is a form of literature that evokes a specific emotional response through language chosen and arranged for its *meaning, sound, and rhythm*.

So, what is Black Poetry?

“Prior to enslavement in America, Africans lived in societies developed around a worldview [that included] an impressive oral communication style. “

“Culture was transmitted through this oral tradition. The peoples' cultural mores, values, histories and religions were transmitted from generation to generation by elderly individuals...who were known to be great storytellers.”

-Word! The African American Oral Tradition and its Rhetorical Impact on American Popular Culture by Janice D Hamlet

“Black poetry refers to poems written by African Americans in the United States of America. It is a subsection of African American literature filled with cadence, intentional repetition and alliteration. African American poetry predates the written word and is linked to a rich oral tradition. Black poetry draws its inspiration from musical traditions such as gospel, blues, jazz and rap. **Black poems are inextricably linked to the experience of African Americans through their history in America, from slavery to segregation and the equal rights movement.**”

A Reflection of Early Expressions of Black Poetry by Annie Nielson

Poetry Challenge:

Have your student write a short (2-3 stanza) poem about an aspect of their own life. It could be an accomplishment, something they are struggling with or a goal they are working to achieve. The options are endless! Encourage them to tap into some traditions of Black poetry like intentional repetition, alliteration and even cadence.

Example poems and discussions questions found on the back.

Make sure to put your NAME, TEACHER, and GRADE on your POEM.

Turn in your poem to the box in the front office by **Feb 23rd**. You can also email your poem to bhm.horizonpta@gmail.com

Participation prizes for each entry. Gift card and book prizes for top poems!

4th - 6th Grade Poem Examples

The Blues

By Langston Hughes

When the shoe strings break
On *both* your shoes
And you're in a hurry—
That's the blues.

When you go to buy a candy bar
And you've lost the dime you had —
Slipped through a hole in your pocket
somewhere —
That's the blues, too, and bad!

The finest poet of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes (1902-67) often writes about the lives of African Americans living in America, especially known for his insightful portrayal of Black life. He wanted to tell the stories of his people in ways that reflected their actual culture, including their love of music, laughter, and language itself alongside their suffering.

Questions:

What makes YOU feel “The Blues”?

Are there other colors that you associate with certain feelings?

THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPORTANCE

By Frederick Douglas Harper

It's not so important to be liked,
 But to like yourself;
It's not so important to be good,
 But to be better;
It's not so important to receive respect from others,
 But to earn respect for yourself;
It's not so important to spend money on a person,
 But to spend quality time with a person;
It's not important to be important,
 But to be appreciated.

Dr. Frederick Douglas Harper has authored both scholarly and creative writings about human improvement. He has authored more than 300 published poems. He has had a long-term interest in the welfare and growth of young people, publishing numerous articles and poems on children and teenagers.

Questions:

What makes YOU important? How will your importance have an impact on others?

Make sure to put your NAME, TEACHER, and GRADE on your POEM.

Kindergarten - 3rd Grade Poem Examples

H- Here we are

I- In the moment

S- Standing on the edge of something new

T- Try your best

O- On the edge

R- Reaching for the Stars

Y- You can try something new

U- Unless you ask, you don't know how someone feels.

N- Nothing can stop me from caring for others.

I- I will be a good friend to everyone!

T- Think how important your words and actions are.

Y- You have this superpower too!

Now it's your turn! Use the same words or come up with an acrostic poem of your own.

Make sure to put your NAME, TEACHER, and GRADE on your POEM.