

## **Praise the Rain: Strengthening Kinship with the External World**

Designed by Kinsale Drake, In-Na-Po Fellow

**Goals:** Strengthening connections between the internal and the external is an important exercise in understanding relations to the world around us. This lesson is a practice in close-reading and analysis of praise poetry devices, like repetition and use of prayer structure, and also an exercise in creative expression and celebration. The objective of this lesson is to facilitate close reading and sharing between students to support their skills and confidence in writing/storytelling.

**Activity Summary:** In this activity, students (Grades 6-7) will learn about U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo, engage with Harjo's poem "Praise the Rain," analyze poetic devices, do a brief simile exercise inspired by Glenis Redmond, connect praise poems to traditions of oral storytelling, and experiment with writing their own poems. Students will then share their words in smaller groups to practice storytelling and, if comfortable, share about the experience with the class. This exercise is useful for any writing-centered course.

The visual materials (slides) will help to engage students with photos of Harjo, visually represent the poems, outline goals/objectives of the workshop, display questions for analysis, and help to guide students with tips and questions during free-write. They should be useful for organizing the lesson for the instructor, strengthening engagement through visual and multimedia resources, and guiding students.

**Assessment:** Students should be able to incorporate elements of observation, metaphor/simile, and descriptive language through some form of creative work. Students should feel comfortable sharing their writing with one another, or at least what they experienced while writing by the end of the activity. Group discussions about what students experienced while writing and any questions they have is useful for both feedback and creative reflection.

*Link to the slides for the lesson [here](#).*

***Step-by-step slideshow accompaniment***

1. Introduce the workshop (7 mins):
  - a. (Slide 1) Practicing and reciting poetry is a form of oral storytelling, which has existed long before other means of storytelling. These stories help us understand our place in the world, relationships to non-human beings, and allow us to practice kinship through gratitude and sharing. Storytelling is a means of communicating through telling and speaking, and transmits cultural traditions, histories, and stories of important relationships. Poetry is an important vehicle for understanding ourselves, how we tell stories, and how we can engage with the world all around us, whether in big or small ways.
  - b. (Slide 2) Introduce praise poetry.
  - c. (Slide 3) Introduce Joy Harjo.
2. Listen & read (5 mins)
  - a. (Slide 4) Ask students to pay attention to how the poem sounds, how repetition makes certain images stick out, or if they've heard something similar from their families or at home, in terms of song or prayer. Encourage them to write down small parts of the poem they enjoyed.
  - b. (Slide 5) Ask two different students to read the poem two separate times.
3. Inquire (5 mins)
  - a. (Slide 6) Have students reflect, journaling, on the following questions:
    - i. How does Harjo praise all parts of nature and why do you think she does this?
    - ii. How does she position herself as a speaker?
    - iii. How can poems point out the "small" and celebrate them?
    - iv. How can gratitude connect us to the external world? How is it a part of kinship?
      1. Take a moment to meditate on kinship, asking students for their definitions of kinship, or good relations to one another—ie., What are ways we can be good relatives to the non-human world and express gratitude?
4. Read the model (3 mins)
  - a. (Slide 7) Read Glenis Redmond's poem to the class. This will be the model for how students can connect things from the external world to their internal lives.
5. Warm-up time! (7-10 mins)
  - a. (Slide 8-9) Draw a brainstorm box on the board with columns and rows. Label the top of each column with a category (animals, jewels, nature, places, roles/professions). Have students shout out nouns that fall under each category and write them down on the board in the columns until the box is full.
  - b. (Slide 10) Explain how linking words in the brainstorm box can create interesting pairings, and how we can use them to create similes and metaphors to express ourselves (on the slide).
6. Writing praise poetry! (10 mins)

- a. (Slide 11) Show students how to bring the two exercises together (Harjo's and Redmond's) to begin writing their poems. If they get lost, they can look at the list of themes on the slides to figure out how to shape their metaphors and word pairings. They can structure their poems in free verse, like Redmond's, or using "Praise the \_\_\_\_" to begin their poem, or be more repetitive, like Harjo.
7. Sharing (5-10 mins)
- a. (Slide 12) Encourage students to share with small groups of 3-4 what they wrote, if they're comfortable. Encourage them to share what inspired their writing, how they felt while writing, and their word pairings (on the slide). At the end of the lesson, if students are willing, they should share at least one thing from each group, whether a poem or an experience they had while writing. Encourage students to bring their work to you after class or to share their thoughts with you.