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Unit of Study: Poetry as a Means to Promote Self-love and Acceptance in Teens

 The centerpiece of my unit of study will focus on the theme of self-love and acceptance. Teens are vulnerable in the world as they grow into adults and therefore need a great amount of assistance to guide them towards the path of self-love and acceptance. This unit of study is intended to provide young people, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, a venue to be introduced to canonical poetic works while simultaneously providing an introduction to the creative outlet of writing poetry. Not only does this unit of study intend to assist teens in emotional and personal discovery, but also in developing the essential motivation driven writing skills they will need as they continue in school and life.

The healthy development of self-love and acceptance are crucial in the successful growth from adolescence into adulthood. Although a student’s journey to reaching the full potential of loving and accepting his or herself is an arduous one, the difficulty of such an undertaking can easily be guided within the classroom. The importance of utilizing poetry as a means to self-reflect is an excellent tool for young adults to internalize their own personal issues and insecurities in such a way that enables them to grow beyond those difficulties.

I seek to receive my teaching credential in special education and because of that fact it is important to keep in perspective the limited intellectual abilities of the students on my future caseloads. Some of my students will likely not be on a diploma track within their series of studies, and with that in mind, I have tailored this unit of study to implement basic understanding of self-expression through the medium of poetry using model texts and templates as a means to guide students.

**Launch of the unit:** For the first day, the unit of study will be introduced as a direct look at particular insecurities that might afflict students. Although canonical poetry will not be included in the initial launching, it is essential that students with limited intellectual abilities are primed to be able to think critically about the difficulties or powerful experiences that come up for them in everyday life. The unit will be launched with the Youtube video [“The Self-Worth Project”](https://youtu.be/4KvmFrx1dRo) . This clip will be shown at the beginning of the first class day of the Unit. Students will watch the video and then use their in class journals to answer the following prompt:

 “What do you struggle with in your life? This could be something as simple as being ‘too short’ or ‘too tall’ or as complex as ‘grief from the loss of a parent or loved one.’ Discuss in your journal what feelings come up when you think about these aspects in your life. Use what we saw from the teens in the video to help you come up with ideas if you’re having trouble thinking of some. Write at least 5 sentences.”

Students will be given 10-15 minutes to write in their journals before being broken off into groups of 3 to go over and discuss either A.) What the student has written in his or her journal, or B.) Which person’s insecurity or problem from the video does the student feel like he or she can relate to and why. The reasoning for giving students two separate journal entry options is with the intention of providing a protected outlet where opening up about personal issues will at their own pace. Providing the student with options enables him or her to avoid feeling forced to read something very personal that he or she may be reluctant to initially share. The exit activity for the day will be for students to write 1 or 2 sentences on a 3x5 card in response to the following prompt:

How did it feel to share your feelings with your peers during the group activity?

The purpose of this final activity will be for the teacher to gauge where each student is at in terms of emotional vulnerability with his or her peers. As the unit proceeds forward, this will assist the educator’s awareness of what can reasonably be expected of each individual student.

**Centerpiece Activities**:

**Classroom Activity:** One activity surrounding this unit of study will include a discussion around Maya Angelou’s poem *Phenomenal Woman*:

“Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.

I’m not cute or built to suit a fashion model’s size

But when I start to tell them,

They think I’m telling lies.

I say,

It’s in the reach of my arms,

The span of my hips,

The stride of my step,

The curl of my lips.

I’m a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That’s me.

I walk into a room

Just as cool as you please,

And to a man,

The fellows stand or

Fall down on their knees.

Then they swarm around me,

A hive of honey bees.

I say,

It’s the fire in my eyes,

And the flash of my teeth,

The swing in my waist,

And the joy in my feet.

I’m a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That’s me.

Men themselves have wondered

What they see in me.

They try so much

But they can’t touch

My inner mystery.

When I try to show them,

They say they still can’t see.

I say,

It’s in the arch of my back,

The sun of my smile,

The ride of my breasts,

The grace of my style.

I’m a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That’s me.

Now you understand

Just why my head’s not bowed.

I don’t shout or jump about

Or have to talk real loud.

When you see me passing,

It ought to make you proud.

I say,

It’s in the click of my heels,

The bend of my hair,

the palm of my hand,

The need for my care.

’Cause I’m a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That’s me.”

 (Taken from <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/48985>>)

Class will begin with a handout of Angelou’s poem for each student’s visual reference. Afterwards, the youtube video of Maya Angelou reading her poem [*Phenomenal Woman*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=egrQH2UTaWE) will be projected for the entire class to view. It to be essential for students to hear the poem spoken aloud by Angelou herself so they can audibly experience her specific intention of how the poem is meant to sound from her own vocal inflections. After watching the video, students will be split into groups of 3 or 4 and asked what they noticed about the way Angelou spoke. A prompt question will be:

 “What did you notice about the way the author said certain words or lines in the poem? Pay attention to the way her voice changes at different points in the poem. For example: listen to the way Angelou pronounces the word ‘phenomenal.’ Why do you think that she chose to do this?”

Students will be given use of classroom electronics to be able to view the video again. They will then be asked to take 10-15 minutes to write a group journal entry of 5 or more sentences on what insights they came up with from the prompt question. Once each group has completed their journal entry, they will be asked to elect a speaker out of the group who will then share their collective insights with the class. Class will then end on a discussion of how poetry is often different when read aloud verses read silently. The educator will point out to the class that important parts of the poem, perhaps missed by silently reading, can often be illuminated through being spoken aloud.

**Assignment:** Students will be asked to write a poem of 7-10 lines using the handout of *Phenomenal Woman* as a reference and model. The poem topic will be on what they feel makes them “phenomenal.” Students will be informed that they will be reading their poems aloud in class the following day. Additionally, students will be asked to think carefully about in which parts of their poems they will mimic Angelou’s vocal inflection to depict the importance of these particular words or lines as they present to the class.

**Classroom Activity**: Initially students will read their “phenomenal” poems to the class while focusing on their vocal inflections as a means to infer importance in phrase. This activity will be centered around students utilizing a model poem taken from a teaching method found in *Teaching Writing Grades 7-12 in an Era of Assessment: Passion and Practice*(120). I have chosen to use this exercise because of it’s potential in guiding students to find their own voice as well as its ability to act as an introductory model and enable them to dig further into themselves.

The beginning of class will begin with the music video ["Who You Are" by Jessie J.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2WWrupMBAE)

“I stare at my reflection in the mirror

Why am I doing this to myself?

Losing my mind on a tiny error,

I nearly left the real me on the shelf.

No, no, no, no, no...

Don't lose who you are in the blur of the stars!

Seeing is deceiving, dreaming is believing,

It's okay not to be okay.

Sometimes it's hard to follow your heart.

Tears don't mean you're losing, everybody's bruising,

Just be true to who you are!

(Who you are)

Brushing my hair-do I look perfect?

I forgot what to do to fit the mould, yeah!

The more I try the less it's working, yeah

'Cause everything inside me screams

No, no, no, no, no, no, no no... yeah.

Don't lose who you are in the blur of the stars!

Seeing is deceiving, dreaming is believing,

It's okay not to be okay.

Sometimes it's hard to follow your heart.

But tears don't mean you're losing, everybody's bruising,

There's nothing wrong with who you are!

Yes, no, egos, fake shows, like whoa!

Just go and leave me alone!

Real talk, real life, good love, goodnight,

With a smile that's my home!

That's my home, no...

No, no, no, no, no, no, no...

Don't lose who you are in the blur of the stars!

Seeing is deceiving, dreaming is believing,

It's okay not to be okay...

Sometimes it's hard to follow your heart.

Tears don't mean you're losing, everybody's bruising,

Just be true to who you are!

Yeah yeah yeah” (Taken from [<https://youtu.be/HCpr\_10YzGg>](https://youtu.be/HCpr_10YzGg))

 Following the video, students will have a teacher-led class discussion about how the song “Who You Are” and Angelou’s poem *Phenomenal Woman* relate to one another. A prompt question for the discussion will be:

What is similar about about Angelou’s poem and Jessie J’s song in terms of what they are trying to convey through their words or lyrics?

 Students will then be prompted to compare and comment upon the similarity of messages within the lines “I don’t shout or jump about Or have to talk real loud. When you see me passing, It ought to make you proud. I say, It’s in the click of my heels, The bend of my hair, the palm of my hand, The need for my care.”(Angelou) and “Yes, no, egos, fake shows, like whoa! Just go and leave me alone! Real talk, real life, good love, goodnight, With a smile that's my home!”(Jessie J). The purpose of comparing these two segments is to help students draw the conclusion that these women are confident in who they are with or without the approval anyone else.

**Assignment:** As the model text I have chosen to use an “I am” poem template for students to create their own poem:

“I am (two special characteristics)

I wonder (something you are actually curious about)

I hear (an imaginary sound)

I see (an imaginary sight)

I want (an actual desire)

I am (the first line of the poem restated)

I pretend (something you actually pretend to do)

I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)

I touch (an imaginary touch)

I worry (something that really bothers you)

I cry (something that makes you very sad)

I am (the first line of the poem restated)

I understand (something you know is true)

I say (something you believe in)

I dream (something you actually dream about)

I try (something you really make an effort about)

I hope (something you actually hope for)

I am (the first line of the poem restated)”

(Taken from<<http://www.canteach.ca/elementary/poetry3.html>>).

Students will be asked to bring their completed poems the following day to present to the class. This will further assist students in public speaking skills as well as developing the ability to open up and share with peers about what they feel makes them unique.

**Extending the Unit:**

Both of the following poems are canonical works that relate to self-love, acceptance as well as identity. These are intended to be utilized to further extend the unit.

*Invictus* by William Ernest Henley

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul (Taken from <<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/invictus>>).

*Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I’ll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
‘Cause I walk like I’ve got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I’ll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don’t you take it awful hard
‘Cause I laugh like I’ve got gold mines
Diggin’ in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I’ll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I’ve got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history’s shame
I rise
Up from a past that’s rooted in pain
I rise
I’m a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that’s wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise (Taken from <<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/still-i-rise>>)

Works Cited

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