The Power of Poetry to Teach about Identity, Bias and Social Justice

April is National Poetry Month and for many schools and classrooms, is an opportunity to dedicate time to the study of reading and writing poetry.

Poetry uses vivid and descriptive language, beautiful imagery, unique sounds and rhythms, and diverse voices. It often evokes an emotional and empathetic response and can open doors to people and worlds for which we are unfamiliar. It can touch hearts and minds and motivate action and societal change. In this way, poetry is a useful way to talk and teach about identity, diversity, bias and social justice. Throughout history, those themes have inspired music, spoken word and poetry.
Below are K-12 lesson plans and children’s literature that use the power of poetry to teach those important themes.

**Lesson Plans**

**LESSON PLAN**

**Who Am I? Identity Poems**

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

Elementary students increase their understanding of personal and cultural identity through metaphors and writing acrostic poetry.

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**LESSON PLAN**

**Social Justice Poetry**

**MIDDLE SCHOOL, HIGH SCHOOL**

Students explore social justice and injustice through poetry and song and write poems from their own perspective about social justice.
LESSON PLAN

Understanding and Analyzing “The U.S. of Us” by Richard Blanco

MIDDLE SCHOOL, HIGH SCHOOL


Children's Literature (Includes discussion guides for educators and families)
Shaking Things Up: 14 Young Women Who Changed the World

This book introduces fourteen revolutionary young women—each paired with a noteworthy female artist—to the next generation of activists and trail-blazers.

The Undefeated

This book/poem is a love letter to Black life in the United States. It highlights the unspeakable trauma of slavery, the faith and fire of the civil rights movement, and the grit, passion, and perseverance of some of the world’s greatest heroes.
I Remember: Poems and Pictures of Heritage

From the joyous to the poignant, poems by a group of diverse and award-winning poets are paired with images by celebrated illustrators from similar backgrounds to pay homage to what is both unique and universal about growing up in the United States.

Amazing Places

This collection of original poems brings together fourteen selections that celebrate through poetic imagery some of the amazingly diverse people and places in our nation.
Pablo Neruda: Poet of the People

Pablo Neruda wrote poems about the things he loved—things made by his friends in the café, things found at the marketplace, things he saw in nature, and the people of Chile and their stories of struggle.

The Smallest Girl in the Smallest Grade

When Sally takes a chance and stands up to the bullying, she finds that one small girl can make a big difference.