

Poetry as a Strategy for Teaching English

Using Nikki Giovanni's Poetry in the English as a Second-/Foreign-Language Classroom

Maria Proitsaki

Abstract

This article explores ways to introduce and integrate poetry in English classes in the context of second-language education. My aim is to spark interest in contemporary poetry while addressing general perceptions by both teachers and students that poetry is difficult to engage with. I thus argue for an approach that centers on “easier” poems and involves aspects of contemporary popular culture to introduce poetry, help students appreciate it, and eventually engage in creative writing of their own. Furthermore, I suggest ways in which poetry can be integrated in English courses at large, via the inclusion of strings of poems, within their broader cultural contexts, and by linking them to different, more popular cultural forms of expression, such as songs, films, and cartoons. I exemplify this approach by focusing on two poems by African American poet Nikki Giovanni. “Knoxville, Tennessee” and “Nikki-Rosa” are autobiographical poems which offer first-person accounts of the poet’s African American cultural background. However, my intertextual approach interconnects these poems with other poems and cultural texts from different parts of the English-speaking world. Ultimately, I suggest that poetry, due to its brevity and open-endedness, can enhance the study of the English language and Anglophone cultures in a variety of ways beyond the close study of verse in terms of aesthetics.

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My interest in how poetry is used in the classroom springs from my personal experience as a humanities student and an English language and literature instructor in different educational contexts in two European countries, Greece and Sweden. As a high school and university student in Greece, I was exposed to poetry extensively. In school, the theoretical direction involved the study of poetry on a weekly basis, with scheduled in-depth analyses of a variety of poems from ancient to modern Greek. At university, literature courses had large poetry segments and there were specialization courses on the work of specific poets, such as a term-long women's poetry course on Adrienne Rich, Denise Levertov, and Sylvia Plath.

In contrast, in Sweden, poetry usually constitutes a small part of survey literature courses and individual poems receive little attention. Noting this absence of poetry and convinced of the importance of poems as objects of study from linguistic, literary, and cultural perspectives, as I started research on the work of Nikki Giovanni and Rita Dove, I would often mark poems that could be taught together, or used in different contexts and for different purposes. But when I started teaching, my efforts to include poetry collections in my courses met with obstacles, such as arguments over the cost of these slim volumes and questions about the rationale behind substituting great novels for poems. To make matters worse, students were rarely excited to deal with poetry. In an attempt to bypass administrative requirements and the students' general lack of enthusiasm to engage with poetry, I devised strategies to assign poetry, help my students learn to enjoy poems and, in some cases, even write verse of their own.

My aim in this paper is to discuss ways which facilitate and enhance the introduction and study of poetry in the English classroom. My pedagogical approach is similar to David Hanauer's in "Meaningful Literacy: Writing Poetry in the Language Classroom" (2012), in which he situates poetry in the second-language classroom "within a process of personal exploration of memory and the expression of personal understanding and insight," and seeks to reach a point at which "a second language ceases to be a tool and becomes a personal resource and an 'owned' language."¹ I focus on methodological aspects of using poetry in second-/foreign-language (EFL) courses, reading and writing, and introductory literature courses, thus leaving aside the larger theoretical discussion concerning the benefits of exposing students to the study of poems and having them practice creative writing.² In other words, my aim is to suggest ideas for the inclusion of poems in a rather broad sense, and focus on creative writing as part of diverse classroom activities by highlighting the importance of studying poetry and engaging in creative writing in the learning of the English language without aspiring to debate or add critical viewpoints about how or why poetry and creative writing may be beneficial. First, I address the issue that students do not "like" poetry in general and that teachers rarely incorporate poems in their lesson plans. In a second step, I explore how poetry can be introduced to English classes as well as used in creative writing projects. I focus primarily on American poets and in particular on Nikki Giovanni, but, of course, other poetry may be used instead. Similarly, while my work concentrates on university-level courses, including teacher education programs, in which working with poems has been part of lesson plan activities in both literary and linguistic contexts, my suggestions can also be of relevance for (upper) secondary school levels.

Unpopular Poetry

The idea that poetry is unpopular is widely accepted. "Contemporary poetry is, to put it mildly, unpopular, and that unpopularity may be increasing," writes David Orr in a review of Ben Lerner's *The Hatred of Poetry* (2016), adding that surveys of Americans' reading habits show that poetry readership has decreased by two-thirds since 1992.³ In his work, Lerner suggests a reason for people's negative attitude toward poetry: "Since language is the stuff of the social, and poetry the expression in language of our irreducible individuality, our personhood is tied up with our poethood." He notes that while verse is present in childhood and adolescence, adults tend to "fall away" from poetry and that there is a sense of embarrassment because "having to acknowledge one's total alienation from poetry chafes against the early association of poem and self."⁴ In an interview with Michael Clune, Lerner adds that due to the belief that one is a poet "by virtue of being human," not being a poet causes feelings of exclusion and resentment.⁵ According to Lerner, a disdain for poetry lies

within the art form itself.

On a similar note, during a November 2015 webinar conducted under the auspices of the Project on the History of Black Writing at the University of Kansas, the African American poet Jericho Brown discussed people's strange approach and relationship to poetry. People say they like music, Brown argued, although they are likely to enjoy only some kinds of music; they may be listening to music absentmindedly until a song they enjoy comes on the radio, but then this single song becomes a confirmation that they do, indeed, like music. In contrast, people claim they do not like poetry because they happen to have disliked some poems. In other words, they do not approach poetry as they do music and their attitude toward poems might be different if their expectations regarding poetry were more open.⁶

But poetry requires a higher degree of commitment and effort, and its accessibility is an issue to be considered. For poems to be enjoyed, the reader needs to pay attention and to have some general knowledge in order to relate to their content and form. Poetry is often challenging to readers "because it provides only minimal or indirect information through which to produce understanding," notes Hanauer.⁷ In educational settings, students perceive poetry to be "difficult, irrelevant, boring and out of date." This perception is reflected in the reaction of educators who refrain from engaging in poetry and argue that it is "difficult to read and so distant from the students."⁸

The perspectives that make teachers in Sweden hesitant to integrate poetry into their teaching of English are similar. In a paper including a very small qualitative survey addressing upper secondary school teachers in Halland, Kim Haraldsson examines the "diminishing role" of poetry in the classroom and sheds some light on why teachers choose to focus on poetry—or not. Haraldsson explains that the study of poems is less time-consuming and thus more suitable for language classes. Moreover, teachers have the opportunity to assign literary texts of their choice and nevertheless comply with the guidelines of Skolverket (the Swedish National Agency for Education), which prioritize fiction and drama. Most teachers refrain, however, from using poetry, according to Haraldsson, if they are not personally interested in it, often citing (but not problematizing) their students' resistant attitude to poems as affecting their choices.⁹

While Haraldsson's study points to the diminished attention paid to poetry in upper secondary level English classes, it also asserts that introducing poetry successfully to students depends on a teacher's "genuine interest" in poetry.¹⁰ Citing the research of Bill Overton, who has diagnosed a trend in higher education to downplay the value of teaching poetry,¹¹ Haraldsson acknowledges that students' resistance to poetry precipitates a similar resistance to introduce poetry when

they have become teachers. On the other hand, students who consider the study of poetry essential are the ones who later afford poetry its due space in their lessons.¹²

There is then a circular pattern whereby an education student's dismissive attitudes to poetry, when they remain unchallenged, are likely to foster even more persistent resistance to the study of poems and further contribute to perceptions of poetry as uninteresting, irrelevant, and unimportant. In fact, Overton speaks of "an increasing ignorance" when it comes to poetry, as teachers pass on their resistance to poetry to their students.¹³ Obviously, if interest in poetry is to be cultivated, challenging these negative attitudes is imperative. In my view, this can take place on any level, with the gradual introduction of the study of verse and via creative writing. After all, exploring poems in the classroom can occur by emphasizing a variety of possible "language and culture" aspects and adapting the critical approach to various educational contexts.

Alleviating Resistance

In view of anticipated student resistance, the introduction of poems to the classroom needs to be negotiated. By now, introducing poetry via song lyrics and audiovisual sources is a rather established method, since students are likely to respond more positively to texts and media they see as contemporary and exciting. Arguing that classroom activities should be "meaningful" to students, Hanauer recounts the experience of a teacher candidate who initially met little enthusiasm when she announced to her class that they would read poems, only to realize that when she tried to come to poetry more indirectly instead, via rap, she could capture the students' attention and their interest far more easily.¹⁴ Similarly, Haraldsson has found that in order to link poetry to students' lives, Swedish teachers who work with poems use relevant films and videos of poetry readings.¹⁵ Even Carol Jago, whose book *Nikki Giovanni in the Classroom* (1999) offers some insightful perspectives that I discuss below, writes about how intrigued her students are when they learn that Giovanni dedicated her *Love Poems* (1997) to rap singer Tupac Shakur (1971–1996) and how eager they become to get hold of the book, wondering who this woman who knew Tupac was.¹⁶

Sidetracking may be necessary in order to bring poems to a class so that students do not feel alienated, but accessing poetry via popular music is, in my view, not always viable. While there are many songwriters whose lyrics are poetry-like, these are often easier to use with older students. The poetic song lyrics of Nobel Laureate Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Neil Young, and Patti Smith, among others, are not very appealing to the young, while the popular culture songs they appreciate instead are often written in plain language. As much as they object to the idea of reading

a poem, younger students tend to be against listening to more complex songs. In my experience, even the texts of quite popular contemporary artists, such as Kendrick Lamar and Radiohead, fare poorly. Opting for song lyrics of the students' choice, on the other hand, generally results in banal and repetitive texts. A (non-academic) study comparing the word count of the songs of some of the most popular music artists in recent years has shown that the songs' textual complexity diminishes and their language often matches early primary school levels. The fairly straightforward lyrics are simply less complicated than standard poetry.¹⁷

Ultimately, in order to work with poems, one needs to demythologize the difficulty of poetry while encouraging and promoting the sense of achievement that arises when students have dealt with poems they initially perceived as inaccessible—after all, it is this sense of achievement that potentially propels further positive responses to poetry. In order to demythologize the difficult nature of poetry, teachers could start with readings of short and straightforward poems such as Gwendolyn Brooks's "We Real Cool" (1960) and Maya Angelou's "Harlem Hopscotch" (1971), which are easily accessible online, or begin with extracts from more challenging ones, such as T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922) and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915) and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" (1845), which exist in various popular culture formats (animation, comics, readings by famous actors or singers, etc.) and are readily available on YouTube. It is a good starting point to take advantage of the fact that verse is (or can be) integrated in many aspects of life and already exists in materials that are considered viable, and that poetry can be combined with other texts to give more personal perspectives.

Nikki Giovanni's Poetry in the EFL Classroom

Turning to Giovanni's work, I will discuss the use of her poetry in EFL teaching contexts, especially with a creative writing focus. Many of Giovanni's poems are fine examples of poetic texts to be studied by non-native students because they tend to be rather concise and accessible, while they afford specific perspectives on American life and culture in view of their thematic take on relevant social issues. They are, moreover, as Jago claims, appropriate models for creative writing exercises.¹⁸ I will exemplify how one can work with a couple of Giovanni's widely anthologized poems—her autobiographical "Knoxville, Tennessee" (1968) and "Nikki-Rosa" (1968). Jago's approach to these poems in *Nikki Giovanni in the Classroom* is situated in the context of poetry as an artform and addresses native speakers who are acquainted with African American culture. While based on some of Jago's insights, my approach is meant to be used in EFL learning contexts. In accordance with the core content guidelines set by the Swedish National Agency for Education,¹⁹ studying "Knoxville, Tennessee" may highlight its personal dimensions (regarding poet and reader) and/



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or its sociocultural conditions and intertextual references. In either case, instructors can integrate aspects of language and creative writing into their discussion of the poem.

“Knoxville, Tennessee” is one of several poems by Giovanni that has been turned into a children’s book, illustrated by Larry Johnson.²⁰ Moreover, there is a YouTube video which combines the poem with the song “Cruise” by Florida Georgia Line (2012) and pictures which provide helpful visual clues to the poem’s vocabulary. Introducing the poem in either of these formats is likely to make it more appealing to students.²¹ In addition, the city of Knoxville may be introduced by way of a short video in order to link the poem to its geographic setting—several travel destination videos about Knoxville are available on YouTube. Furthermore, the “Teach this Poem” initiative on the poets.org website provides a lesson plan which suggests reading the poem alongside the music video of “Wade in the Water” by The Blind Boys of Alabama (2002).²²

“Knoxville, Tennessee” is short and simple in its language and structure, but its word choice is exceptional, and it is rich in imagery and theme: childhood memories, family, food, leisure, summer, traditions, comfort, belonging, home, rural place, and place at large:

I always like summer
Best
you can eat fresh corn
From daddy’s garden
And okra
And greens
And cabbage
And lots of
Barbeque
And buttermilk
And homemade ice-cream
At the church picnic
And listen to
Gospel music
Outside
At the church
Homecoming
And go to the mountains with
Your grandmother
And go barefooted
And be warm²³

Some biographical information about the poet can help students contextual-

ize Giovanni's particular relation to Knoxville, as it is the city she grew up in with her maternal grandparents and the place she calls home. Giovanni addresses Knoxville's significance in *Gemini* (1971), especially in the volume's first essay, "400 Mulvaney Street," in which she narrates her return "home" to Knoxville, Tennessee. This is the place the poet also claims as a home for her son—so that he knows that they "come from somewhere," and "belong."²⁴ This background emphasizes the specificity of the African American kinship experience, with its fundamental and benevolent influence on the individual in the face of racial inequality and struggle, along with the importance of home and rural life as crucial sources of energy.

In the poem, Giovanni remembers her childhood as a summer day when she could enjoy fresh vegetables from her "daddy's garden" (fresh corn, okra greens, and cabbage), the food "at the church picnic" (barbecue, buttermilk, and homemade ice-cream), the sounds of gospel, wandering barefooted and feeling warm. In just a few lines, Giovanni weaves empowering references to a peaceful and pleasurable existence, which, historically, could never be taken for granted by African Americans, into the poem's textual body. The foods she lists are soul food, the definition of which links the nurturing of the body to the nurturing of the soul in community with others and which acknowledges the imperative of embracing one's heritage: "all soul food technicians usually listen to gospel music when they are preparing the meals," Michael Harriot explains. He adds that "[t]o qualify for soul food consideration, the cook must also be an aunt, uncle, grandfather or grandmother. It doesn't have to be a blood aunt, but there must be someone who refers to the cook as Aunt Wilma or Uncle Charles."²⁵ Between the lines, the poetic persona challenges the stereotypical association of African American men with violence and criminality. In the poem, "daddy's" soul food stands for sound familial bonds and celebrates collective survival in the face of the adversities that have always defined African American life. As such, the poem offers personal information and draws on cultural contexts and can thus be used to probe reflection, discussion, and writing on, for example, the life-sustaining dimension of linking personhood to the communal, or any other of the abovementioned topics.

Jago presents the way she works with "Knoxville, Tennessee" in a section titled "Turning Students' Own Lives into Art" and describes that she challenges students first to guess about the poet's life and then invites them to write "a poem of their own about something, someplace, or someone they like best."²⁶ Prior to this task, some preparatory work is required, I would argue. Here, Jago's approach to "Nikki-Rosa," another early childhood poem and perhaps Giovanni's most famous,²⁷ becomes relevant.

"Nikki-Rosa" is a more complex poem, as it problematizes what people might con-



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sider a “hard childhood” by juxtaposing daily hardships with memories of being happy and feeling loved. In the poem, Giovanni remembers holiday gatherings and everyday pleasures: “how happy you were to have / your mother / all to yourself” and also (in a house that did not have an indoor toilet) “how good the water felt when you got your bath / from one of those / big tubs folk in chicago barbecue in.” She then focuses on the importance of her family holding together, understanding and supporting each other, beyond hardships and poverty. Poverty, she notes, and her parents’ fights due to her father’s drinking are insignificant; instead, she highlights their togetherness and love, a love that is inexplicable to white people:

And though you’re poor it isn’t poverty that
concerns you
and though they fought a lot
it isn’t your father’s drinking that makes any difference
but only that everybody is together and you
and your sister have happy birthdays and very good
Christmases
and I really hope no white person ever has cause
to write about me
because they never understand
Black love is Black wealth and they’ll
probably talk about my hard childhood
and never understand that
all the while I was quite happy²⁸

“Black love is Black wealth” presents a powerful statement which summarizes the poet’s ideological standpoint through seemingly banal language. In the poem, Giovanni expands the personal, its immediacy denoted in the narrator’s “you,” toward the familial and the communal, highlighting the transformative potential of assertive will. Keith Leonard has accordingly argued that Giovanni’s exaltation of togetherness signals her eagerness “to redeem suffering or even to sublimate it.” The poet’s “Black love,” is, in this sense, “a principle of emotional health and affirmation that both motivates this necessary, chosen togetherness and is created and sustained by it.”²⁹

African American daily life is thus validated through the expression of a girl’s perspective, the perspective of the poet-to-be. Virginia C. Fowler has noted that Giovanni introduces “Nikki-Rosa” with anecdotes to show the kind of values her parents aspired to convey to their children. Although their house lacked modern plumbing facilities, “it contained hundreds of books as well as a piano,” and Giovanni’s parents succeeded in making their children “feel that whatever they had was best.”³⁰ The material conditions along with the strong family bonds she experienced as a child in an economically disadvantaged but emotionally rich domestic environment

shaped the poet's beliefs and her ethics later in her life. In the poem, however, these material conditions are backgrounded, as the poet claims the right to embrace her past and tell her story in the way she wants it to be remembered.³¹

The Center for Civic Reflection website suggests an approach to the poem which concentrates on the themes of “Diversity and Difference, Heritage and Tradition, Race, Ethnicity and Culture.”³² While addressing a wider public in the United States, the discussion questions provided can be used in EFL learning contexts to emphasize the poem's socio-historical and cultural dimensions, especially in relation to the students' own experiences. For example, the students may be asked to consider why childhood memories are “always a drag/if you're Black,” why white biographers are not expected to describe the speaker's happy childhood, and whether it is possible to “separate assumptions from the reality of another's background”—and how this may be achieved. Furthermore, students may be invited to discuss what knowledge about the background of someone might mean, whether sharing one's race is crucial to understanding their experiences, and whether there are factors beyond race which shape the understanding of others.

Jago uses “Nikki-Rosa” to have students reflect on their own “hard childhood” memories. As part of a “biography writing” task, she makes them interview each other about things they like or prepare to interview a famous person about things they like. Students note down questions they need to ask and their own reflections after having been interviewed themselves. Last, students write about each other either in prose or verse. The same process may also be applied to “Knoxville, Tennessee.”

Inspired by Jago's approach, my instructions to students include the following:

- (1) Explorations of the personal: Write a list of some things you have always liked or enjoyed doing. (Reflect on why.)
- (2) Happy childhood memories: Is there any personal experience that the poem made you think about?
- (3) Interview each other about things you like, or your memories: What questions would you ask to elicit meaningful responses?
Prepare a set of questions—ask and note down the answers.
Answer your peer's questions focusing on using well-chosen words. Explain your answers. (Reflect on: How much are you willing to share and why/why not? Do you expect your peer to understand?)
Report your peer's responses. (Reflect on the experience of being interviewed. Where your thoughts represented fairly?)
- (4) Return to your list of things you like and try to write down a short text, perhaps similar to Giovanni's poem, mentioning what you find enjoyable. Whether you wish to explain or simply list what you like is your choice.



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The first three tasks are guidelines that can be assigned for work with either of the poems. When a class has worked in pairs or groups, interviewing each other and writing about their peers' preferences, the task to reflect on and write about one's own circumstances can be nuanced and detailed. Students can be asked to think about places that are significant to them, events, situations, or experiences that have made an impression on them, foods and traditions they enjoy, or people that matter in their lives. The last task, however, applies best to "Knoxville, Tennessee." Following the poem's form, the students can try to express (and rationalize) their choices from within a range of alternatives, listing relevant and, as Jago advises, "exceptionally well chosen" words, or short phrases.³³ If some happen to share interests, they may engage in creating group or class poems by combining their individual contributions into a joint text.³⁴ While the primary focus of this writing task is communicative, in the process of composing their texts, the students could be encouraged to consider their vocabulary use and asked to provide alternative wording or to address sentence structure issues by focusing on instances of (desired) ellipsis in verse.

The resulting poems, predictably, vary in quality. Jago offers some examples of verse produced by her students, including the following: "I always like it when I see a pretty girl / You can look at her body / and smile / and legs / and breasts."³⁵ In an online presentation of such a class project based on "Knoxville, Tennessee," students describe their favorite places.³⁶ Most of the examples avoid mistakes commonly made by amateur poets: the layering of adjectives, the use of clichés, forced rhyme, and multi-syllabic words.³⁷ Exercises which I have conducted informally with Swedish students have yielded similar results.

Whether these poems are to be circulated or not among the students is a decision to be made in view of class dynamics. Jago has her students read the poems in class and discuss how it feels to share thoughts and details of one's life. In Swedish contexts, circulating texts anonymously at first and having students read random poems works better than reading one's own poems in class, which is often considered embarrassing. Students are, nevertheless, delighted when other students pay attention to their poems and their poems receive favorable feedback.

A poem such "Knoxville, Tennessee" may also be used to discuss and write about American culture, traditions, and food—and also to compare these dimensions with Swedish (or any other national) culture, traditions, and food. Likewise, the poem may be integrated into studies of these pillars of culture in order to add a more intimate perspective. The poem may, of course, be paired with similar poems, such as two childhood memory poems by Rita Dove, "Grape Sherbet" (1983) and "Crab Boil: (Ft. Myers, 1962)" (1989), which center on American holidays, Memorial Day and

Independence Day, respectively, or Maya Angelou’s “And still I Rise” (1978) and “Phenomenal Woman” (1978) to discuss African American history, identity, and race. Similarly, the activism of Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks may be used as an entry point to the poem. “Knoxville, Tennessee” may also be compared with June Jordan’s “Poem about Police Violence” (1974) or Lee Daniels’s film *Precious* (2009) to broach questions such as popular culture, current social issues, and activism in America. But “Knoxville, Tennessee” may also be considered in a larger, multicultural context. In combination with Seamus Heaney’s “Clearances” (1987), for example, the class may discuss childhood, home, family relations, and/or social conditions in different parts of the world.³⁸ But these are just some examples of the possible classroom uses of Giovanni’s poetry.

Conclusion

To sum up, I have suggested that introducing poetry in EFL classrooms does not need to be a challenging experience for either teachers or students. There are numerous accessible poems that can be used in English classes, Giovanni’s poetry being a good example. Moreover, studying a poem is a good starting point for creative writing. In fact, the move from background biography information and a poet’s first-person accounts to evoking the students’ own experiences and having them write about their own lives can be gradual and relatively effortless.

Notes

- 1 David Ian Hanauer, “Meaningful Literacy: Writing Poetry in the Language Classroom,” *Language Teaching: Surveys and Studies* 45, no. 1 (2011): 111–2, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444810000522>. Hanauer focuses more exclusively on writing poetry as part of second-language writing instruction and claims that his methodology “overturns the core aims of most language classrooms, moving from a decontextualized focus on code, communication and cognition to a focus on personal experience and expression” (114). In a Swedish secondary education context, the common core aims can be observed if focus is placed on poetry writing along with the study of poems. On the common aims in Sweden, see Skolverket [Swedish National Agency for Education], “English,” *Skolverket*, accessed March 25, 2019, <https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.4fc05a3f164131a74181056/1535372297288/EngEng-swedish-school.pdf>.
- 2 For a discussion of the benefits of using poetry in EFL teaching, see Carla Cariboni Killander, “Poetry in Second Language Teaching: Aspects of a Major Challenge,” in *Proceedings of the ICERI2011 Conference*, ed. I. Candel Torres, L. Gómez Chova, and A. López Martínez (Valencia: International Association of Technology, Education and Development, 2011), 18; Reena Mittal, “Teaching English through Poetry: A Powerful Medium for Learning Second Language,” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 19, no. 5 (2014): 21–2; Ingmar Bloemendal, “English Language and Culture: Education and Communciation” (MA thesis, Utrecht University, 2014). See also Timothy V. Rasinski, Wil-

liam H. Rupley, and William Dee Nichols, *Phonics & Fluency Practice with Poetry: Lessons That Tap the Power of Rhyming Verse to Improve Students' Word Recognition, Automaticity, and Prosody—and Help Them Become Successful Readers* (New York: Scholastic, 2012)—although this book does not address foreign language students in particular. On the role of creative writing in language learning, see, for example, Patrick T. Randolph, “Using Creative Writing as a Bridge to Enhance Academic Writing,” in “*New Horizons: Striding into the Future*”: *Selected Proceedings of the 2011 Michigan Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Conference*, ed. James M. Perren et al. (Kalamazoo, MI: MITESOL, 2011), 70–83, and Michaela Pelcová, “Using Creative Writing as a Tool for Teaching English as a Foreign Language” (MA thesis, Masaryk University, 2015). For insightful perspectives on the practice of haiku composition in the English classroom, see Atsushi Iida, “Developing Voice by Composing Haiku: A Social-Expressivist Approach for Teaching Haiku Writing in EFL Contexts,” *English Teaching Forum* 48, no.1 (2010): 28–34; Atsushi Iida, “Writing Haiku in a Second Language: Perceptions, Attitudes, and Emotions of Second Language Learners,” *Sino-US English Teaching* 9, no. 9 (2012): 1472–85; Bu Yong Lee, “The Practice of Haiku Writing in Second Language Classrooms,” *Komaba Journal of English Education* 2 (2011): 23–44.

- 3 David Orr, “Do People Hate Poetry? According to Ben Lerner, Yes,” review of *The Hatred of Poetry*, by Ben Lerner, *The New York Times*, August 26, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/28/books/review/ben-lerner-hatred-of-poetry.html>.
- 4 Ben Lerner, *The Hatred of Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 11.
- 5 Ben Lerner, “The Hatred of Poetry: An Interview with Ben Lerner,” interview by Michael Clune, *The Paris Review*, June 30, 2016, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2016/06/30/the-hatred-of-poetry-an-interview-with-ben-lerner>.
- 6 ProjectonHBW, “A Conversation with Jericho Brown,” *YouTube*, November 18, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q22WzupLW6Y>.
- 7 David Ian Hanauer, *Poetry and the Meaning of Life: Reading and Writing Poetry in Language Arts Classrooms* (Toronto, ON: Pippin Publishing, 2004), 12.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 7, 15.
- 9 Kim Haraldsson, “The Poetic Classroom: Teaching Poetry in English Language Courses in Swedish Upper Secondary Schools” (BA thesis, Halmstad University, 2011), 11.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 13.
- 11 Bill Overton, “‘People Have Forgotten How to Hear the Music’: The Teaching of Poetry and Prosody,” *English* 57, no. 219 (2008): 267, <https://doi.org/10.1093/english/efn016>.
- 12 Haraldsson, “The Poetic Classroom,” 6, 12.
- 13 Bill Overton, “Teaching Eighteenth-Century English Poetry: An Experiment,” *English* 40, no. 167 (1991): 137, <https://doi.org/10.1093/english/40.167.137>.
- 14 Hanauer, *Poetry and the Meaning of Life*, 7.
- 15 Haraldsson, “The Poetic Classroom,” 16.
- 16 Carol Jago, *Nikki Giovanni in the Classroom: “The same ol danger but a brand new pleasure”* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1999), 11.
- 17 Varun Jewalikar and Nishant Verma, “The Largest Vocabulary in Music: An Analysis of Vocabularies of Top Selling Musicians,” *MusixMatch*, June 2015, http://lab.musixmatch.com/largest_vocabulary.

- 18 Jago, *Nikki Giovanni in the Classroom*, 35.
- 19 The core content areas are to be “related to students’ education, and societal and working life; current issues; events and processes; thoughts, opinions, ideas, experiences and feelings; relationships and ethical issues” as well as “[l]iving conditions, attitudes, values and traditions, as well as social, political and cultural conditions in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used. The spread of English and its position in the world.” See Skolverket, “English.”
- 20 Nikki Giovanni, *Knoxville, Tennessee*, ill. Larry Johnson, III (New York: Scholastic, 1994).
- 21 Katelyn Horne, “Knoxville, Tennessee Nikki Giovanni,” *YouTube*, November 25, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIDDYjm_gAw.
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- 23 Nikki Giovanni, “Knoxville, Tennessee,” in *The Collected Poetry of Nikki Giovanni: 1968–1998* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 59.
- 24 Nikki Giovanni, *Gemini: An Extended Autobiographical Statement on My First Twenty-Five Years of Being a Black Poet* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), 12.
- 25 Michael Harriot, “The Difference Between Soul Food and Southern Cuisine, Explained,” *The Root*, December 12, 2018, <https://www.theroot.com/the-difference-between-soul-food-and-southern-cuisine-1825185046>.
- 26 Jago, *Nikki Giovanni in the Classroom*, 11.
- 27 In *The Black Arts Enterprise and the Production of African American Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), Howard Ramsby claims “Nikki-Rosa” to be Giovanni’s “signature poem” and notes its pairing with the gospel song “It Is Well” in Giovanni’s 1971 album *Truth Is On Its Way* (72–3, 90).
- 28 Nikki Giovanni, “Nikki-Rosa,” in *The Collected Poetry of Nikki Giovanni: 1968–1998* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 53.
- 29 Keith D. Leonard, “Love in the Black Arts Movement: The Other American Exceptionalism,” *Callaloo* 36, no. 3 (2013): 621, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cal.2013.0178>. Leonard points to the efforts of African Americans “to sustain an affirming communal emotional life.” He asserts that the poem is about togetherness which emerges from poverty but which is, at the same time, “not characterized at all by suffering.” He further offers insights on the choice of this communality, noting a willingness to “embrace the togetherness over the trouble . . . not through naiveté but through an empowering sense that the togetherness is validating” (621).
- 30 Virginia C. Fowler, *Nikki Giovanni* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 7.
- 31 See Virginia C. Fowler, *Nikki Giovanni: A Literary Biography* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2013), 52.
- 32 “Nikki-Rosa,” *Center for Civic Reflection*, accessed June 22, 2018, <https://civicreflection.org/resources/library/browse/nikki-rosa>.
- 33 Jago, *Nikki Giovanni in the Classroom*, 11.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 36–7.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 15.



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- 36 gaura, “Sensory Poems. Inspired by Nikki Giovanni’s ‘knoxville, tn,’” *SlideServe*, September 25, 2014, <https://www.slideserve.com/gaura/sensory-poems>.
- 37 Jago, *Nikki Giovanni in the Classroom*, 35.
- 38 As Hanauer explains, “Poetry . . . has particular value in promoting multiculturalism and the understanding of human diversity and can provide moments of contact among individuals living in diverse communities.” David Ian Hanauer, “Multicultural Moments in Poetry: The Importance of the Unique,” *The Canadian Modern Language Review/La Revue canadienne des langues vivantes* 60, no. 1 (2003): 71, <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.60.1.69>.

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