

Contemporary American Poetry

| Learning Targets | Reading Literature |
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| | Determine and retell central ideas and key details; demonstrate understanding of themes. |
| | Vocabulary analysis; figurative and connotative language; how word choices affect meaning or tone. |
| | Point of view and its effect; author’s purpose; understanding difference between narrator’s and reader’s point of view. How does author develop the perspective? |

Read each of the poems in the Contemporary American Poetry packet. Select one poem and write a thoughtful response (one page). Responses should focus on why this poem speaks to you more than the others, how it makes you feel, connections you make to other literary pieces and/or your own experiences, etc. Also include anything about the poem that confused you or that you want to learn more about. Keep your response in the Writing section of your notebook with your journals.

“Messenger” ~ Mary Oliver

My work is loving the world.
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird—
 equal seekers of sweetness.
Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.
Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?
Am I no longer young, and still not half-perfect? Let me
 keep my mind on what matters,
which is my work,

which is mostly standing still and learning to be
 astonished.
The phoebe, the delphinium.
The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.
Which is mostly rejoicing, since all the ingredients are here,

which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart
 and these body-clothes,
a mouth with which to give shouts of joy
to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up clam,
telling them all, over and over, how it is
 that we live forever.

“I Cry” ~ Tupac Shakur

Sometimes when I'm alone
I Cry,
Cause I am on my own.
The tears I cry are bitter and warm.
They flow with life but take no form
I Cry because my heart is torn.
I find it difficult to carry on.
If I had an ear to confide in,
I would cry among my treasured friend,
but who do you know that stops that long,
to help another carry on.
The world moves fast and it would rather pass by.
Then to stop and see what makes one cry,
so painful and sad.
And sometimes...
I Cry
and no one cares about why.

“You Fit Into Me” ~ Margaret Atwood

you fit into me
like a hook into an eye

a fish hook
an open eye

“With Sincerest Regrets” ~ Russell Edson

for Charles Simic

Like a monstrous snail, a toilet slides into a living room on a track of wet, demanding to be loved.

It is impossible, and we tender our sincerest regrets. In the book of the heart there is no mention made of plumbing.

And though we have spent our intimacy many times with you, you belong to an unfortunate reference, which we would rather not embrace ...

The toilet slides away ...

“Words are Birds” ~ Francisco X. Alarcon

words
are birds
that arrive
with books
and spring

they
love
clouds
the wind
and trees

some words
are messengers
that come
from far away
from distant lands

for them
there are
no borders
only stars
moon and sun

some words
are familiar
like canaries
others are exotic
like the quetzal bird

some can stand
the cold
others migrate
with the sun
to the south

some words
die
caged—
they're difficult
to translate

and others
build nests
have chicks
warm them
feed them

teach them
how to fly
and one day
they go away
in flocks

the letters
on this page
are the prints
they leave
by the sea

“I Will Keep Broken Things” ~ Alice Walker

I will keep
Broken
Things:
The big clay
Pot
With raised
Iguanas
Chasing
Their
Tails;
Two
Of their
Wise

Heads
Sheared
Off;

I will keep
Broken
things:
The old
Slave
Market
Basket
Brought
To my
Door

By Mississippi
A jagged
Hole
Gouged
In its sturdy
Dark
Oak
Side.

I will keep
Broken
things:
The memory
Of
Those
Long
Delicious
Night
Swims
With
You;

I will keep
Broken
things:
In my house

There
Remains
An

Honored
Shelf
On which
I will
Keep
Broken
Things.

Their beauty
Is
They
Need
Not
Ever
Be
'fixed.'

I will keep
Your
Wild
Free
Laughter
Though
It is now
Missing
Its
Reassuring
And
Graceful
Hinge.

I will keep
Broken
Things:

Thank you
So much!

I will keep
Broken
Things.

I will keep
You:

Pilgrim
Of
Sorrow.

I will keep
Myself.

