



Using Poetry to Understand Place, Setting, and Tone

BY SHANNON EDWARDS

Place, others, and society are addressed in various forms of art, music, and literature, including slam poetry. This lesson introduces students to slam poetry as a specific type of performance poetry that explores a wide range of themes through wordplay, repetition, and emphasis. Using the AWARE framework (Assert, Wonder, Accept, Respect, Establish), students will analyze how language patterns in slam poetry reveal speakers' purposes while examining how people are shaped by the places they experience. Much like setting can affect the plot and characters in a story, students will explore the connection between place and identity through viewing poetry performances, engaging in guided discussions, and reflective journal writing.

Learning Objectives

- Utilize steps in AWARE to guide small and whole-class discussion
- Identify how patterns of language used to describe a place establish tone
- Analyze word choices and patterns in slam poetry that reveal the speaker's point of view and purpose
- Reflect on the role of place and how it relates to their own identity through journal writing

Essential Questions

- How do the places we come from influence our point of view?
- In what ways does place integrate with our identity?
- How can we use the AWARE framework to analyze an author's point of view about a place?

Suggested Materials and Media

- Art analysis opener (select 1 listed below)
 - Versailles (Google Arts and Culture)
 - Yosemite National Park (Google Arts and Culture)
 - The Art of Carnival and Masquerading (Google Arts and Culture)
 - Reading Portraits (Google Arts and Culture)
 - "Diego and I" by Frida Kahlo
- "Suburbia" by Phil Kaye
- Copies of the AWARE for Art Analysis graphic organizer
- Writing prompts about place (included in the Unit Overview)
- Student writing journal

Opening

STEP 1

Begin by introducing the essential questions. Ask students how setting and tone are connected and how authors establish tone in writing (word choice and description). Ask students how artists create tone in artwork (light and color).

STEP 2

Select an image to project to the class (see above under media) and use the AWARE art analysis questions outlined in the table below to guide the informal whole-class discussion.

	Aware prompts	Sentence stems
Assert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the elements (colors, subject, focal point) that stand out to you. • Consider how your own background influences your point of view. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I notice ____, ____, and ____, so I think the picture is ____. • One example that supports this is ____. • I agree with ____ because ____.
Wonder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to understand the viewpoints and experiences of both the artist and your classmate. • What idea or feeling is the artist trying to express? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wonder if the artist felt ____ about this topic because ____.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the artist's background influence the point of view expressed in the piece? • Why might you and your classmate view the artwork differently? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the artist is _____, maybe the picture is supposed to show _____. • I want to better understand ideas about _____ expressed in this artwork.
Accept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept that we have different viewpoints and remember that disagreement is OK. • How do your opinions differ from your classmate's opinion? • How is your background or opinion on the subject different from the artist's opinion? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I understand what you are saying about _____. However, I disagree with the idea that _____.
Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be open and calm when tensions arise. • Seek to learn about other people's ideas and viewpoints. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I appreciate hearing your viewpoints on _____. • Your idea about _____ is interesting even if I don't agree.
Establish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how your perspective or thinking changed after viewing the artwork and discussing it with your classmate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I hear you saying the most important idea in the picture is _____. • This conversation has shown me more about your perspective on _____. • I appreciate you listening to what I had to say about _____.

STEP 3

Call on 1 or 2 students for each question. Encourage students to elaborate on responses, but limit discussion time to 10–15 minutes.

SAY:

- Assert: What do you notice in this piece of art? What stands out?
- Wonder: How do you think the artist felt about this place? What clues let you know that?
- Accept: How many of you would like to go to this place? How many of you would not like this place? Ask for a nonverbal response, such as thumbs up or down from every student. Then, ask students to give reasons why they would like or dislike the place.

- Respect: Why might someone feel differently than you? What reasons would someone have to disagree with you?
- Establish: How might living in different places affect our point of view? (Revisit essential question.)

Learning Activities

STEP 1

Depending on the background of your students, you may want to show a picture of the suburbs and ask them what experiences they have had with the suburbs.

STEP 2

Have students view "[Suburbia](#)" by Phil Kaye on YouTube. You may want to have them read the transcript as well. Consider playing the video once for the whole class and then uploading a link for students to watch in small groups. If students do not have the ability to watch the video a second time, the teacher should play the video twice.

STEP 3

Ask students to work in small groups to answer AWARE questions in writing. Note: Assert questions should always express an individual student's opinion.

Question	My thoughts
Assert: What opinions do you have about the suburbs?	
Wonder: What is the speaker's opinion of the suburbs?	
Accept: What new perspectives about living in the suburbs did the poem address?	
Respect: How could living in the suburbs affect one's point of view?	
Establish: How can this poem influence your own writing or perspective?	

STEP 4

Have students use the writing from AWARE organizers to guide small-group or whole-class discussion. The teacher should vary the small-group configurations for writing and discussion activities. This ensures that students collaborate with different peers when sharing and analyzing their responses.

Closing

Students select a prompt from the “Writing About Place” journal prompts (outlined in the Unit Overview) and write a response in their journals.

Optional Extension Activity

Provide links for students to explore more slam poetry videos on their own. Have them analyze the role that place, setting, and tone play in a self-selected video.

- [Poetry Out Loud](#)
- [Youth Speaks](#)

Common Core State Standards

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1.d: Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.