

LESSON PLAN TITLE: You'd Be Amazed If I Told You

Writer-in-Residence: John Freeman

Grade Level: 9th-12th

Model Works Used: "There Are Birds Here" by Jamaal May

Literary Learning objective(s): Students will be able to employ metaphors and vivid images to create a complex place-based poem.

Themes: Place, home, surprise

MDE/SEL Standards: MDE grades 9-10-3a, 3b, 3d

MDE grades 11-12-3a, 3b, 3d

Also SEL social awareness and self-awareness standards

Materials Needed: Pen & Paper or word processor, Internet access optional

Opening Activity

Google the town or city you're from and see what comes up. Make a mental note of particular facts about that place that you find surprising yourself, or that you think someone who isn't from there might find surprising.

Pre-Discussion

Create a list of facts outsiders might already know about the place where you're from or grew up. Next, create a list of the interesting facts about that place that only insiders who live there would know.

Model Poem Discussion

Read the attached poem by Jamaal May. Then answer the questions below.

What is significant about Jamaal May dedicating his poem to the city of Detroit?

What do you think Detroit represents for the country as a whole?

Why do you think May is trying to convince his readers that there are birds here? Why would that fact be surprising or interesting to emphasize given what people typically associate with the city of Detroit?

Prewriting

Spend five minutes free writing about what you discovered in your opening activity about where you are from.

Writing Prompt

Write a 1st-person poem about your hometown that incorporates a fact or set of facts that people not from there would find surprising and/or counterintuitive. Try to use this fact(s) as a metaphor for the spirit of the place. Be sure to use plenty of concrete visual images to allow the reader to visualize the place. An example of a concrete image would be when in Jamaal May's poem he writes, "The birds are here / to root around for bread / the girl's hands tear / and toss like confetti." This is a concrete image because it's something from the physical world that the reader can clearly visualize. Think about your memories or anecdotes about times you spent in your city that would help the reader understand the identity of the place,

Share / Reflect

Take between 3-6 pictures on your phone that you think would best accompany your poem. Upload those images to Youtube along with the text of your poem to create a slideshow that offers a unique combination of poetry and visual image. The way the text and images are laid out and sequenced is entirely up to you. If you don't have the technology to do this, create an old-fashioned collage that combines fragmented newspaper or magazine images with the text of your poem.

How did your research about your city make you feel about where you live? Are there things about your city you want to stand out more than others?

Supplemental Materials

Poem (attached)

["There Are Birds Here" Poem Video](#)

Check/Highlight all that apply

- Text by a contemporary/diverse author
- Translated text
- Visual Thinking Strategies
- Close reading or other analysis
- A step of the writing process
- Planning & Reflection Strategy

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- New device, concept or theme
- Social-Emotional Learning
 - Self-Management
 - Social Awareness
 - Relationship Skills
 - Responsible-Decision Making
 - Self-Awareness

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There Are Birds Here

by [JAMAAL MAY](#)

For Detroit

There are birds here,
so many birds here
is what I was trying to say
when they said those birds were metaphors
for what is trapped
between buildings
and buildings. No.
The birds are here
to root around for bread
the girl's hands tear
and toss like confetti. No,
I don't mean the bread is torn like cotton,
I said confetti, and no
not the confetti
a tank can make of a building.
I mean the confetti
a boy can't stop smiling about
and no his smile isn't much
like a skeleton at all. And no
his neighborhood is not like a war zone.
I am trying to say
his neighborhood
is as tattered and feathered
as anything else,
as shadow pierced by sun
and light parted
by shadow-dance as anything else,
but they won't stop saying
how lovely the ruins,
how ruined the lovely
children must be in that birdless city.