



Essential Words: LTAB Online 2020

Lesson plans and writing prompts for teens



Summer Somewhere

by Charles Dalton, Jr

DURATION: 1.5 hours

GRADE LEVEL: High School

WRITING LEVEL: Developing Writers

FOCUS: death, form

EXAMPLE POEM

[summer somewhere](#)
by Danez Smith

FOR TEENS, BY TEENS
A lesson plan from InsideOut's Youth Advisory Board

Check in | 15 minutes

What is in your imagined heaven?

Resource Building | 15 minutes

Make a few lists:

- 3 things that make you smile and why
- 3 core parts of your identity
- 3 stories you've heard about what happens after death (Example: From the Bible: heaven; from TV: we become ghosts; from my cousin: We get eaten by worms, etc.)
- 3 rituals related to death and dying

Close Reading | 20 minutes

[summer somewhere by Danez Smith](#)

& Summer Somewhere, after Danez Smith by Charlays Chips

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What ideas and themes do you see in these poems?
- How are these ideas affected by form? (Example: every stanza has 2 lines/couplets, or these sentences/phrases continue through lines a.k.a. enjambment)
- What are some differences and similarities between these poems?
- How can one summer tell an entire history?
- Is summer the same as paradise?



Essential Words: LTAB Online 2020

Lesson plans and writing prompts for teens



Writing Prompt | 20 minutes

Write a poem that takes up the whole page in a creative way.

OR **Write about your paradise.** What season is it in your paradise? What happens there?

OR **Write a poem where one season tells an entire personal, familial, or cultural history.**

Share Out | 15 minutes



Essential Words: LTAB Online 2020

Lesson plans and writing prompts for teens



summer somewhere by Danez Smith

somewhere, a sun. below, boys brown
as rye play the dozens & ball, jump

in the air & stay there. boys become new
moons, gum-dark on all sides, beg bruise

-blue water to fly, at least tide, at least
spit back a father or two. I won't get started.

history is what it is. it knows what it did.
bad dog. bad blood. bad day to be a boy

color of a July well spent. but here, not earth
not heaven, boys can't recall their white shirt

turned a ruby gown. here, there is no language
for officer or law, no color to call white.

if snow fell, it'd fall black. please, don't call
us dead, call us alive someplace better.

we say our own names when we pray.
we go out for sweets & come back.

•

this is how we are born: come morning
after we cypher/feast/hoop, we dig

a new boy from the ground, take
him out his treebox, shake worms

from his braids. sometimes they'll sing
a trapgod hymn (what a first breath!)

sometimes it's they eyes who lead
scanning for bonefleshed men in blue.

we say congrats, you're a boy again!
we give him a durag, a bowl, a second chance.

we send him off to wander for a day
or ever, let him pick his new name.

that boy was Trayvon, now called RainKing.
that man Sean named himself I do, I do.

O, the imagination of a new reborn boy
but most of us settle on alive.

•

sometimes a boy is born
right out the sky, dropped from

a bridge between starshine & clay.
one boy showed up pulled behind

a truck, a parade for himself
& his wet red gown. years ago

we plucked brothers from branches
unpeeled their naps from bark.

sometimes a boy walks into his room
then walks out into his new world

still clutching wicked metals. some boys
waded here through their own blood.

does it matter how he got here if we're all here
to dance? grab a boy, spin him around.

if he asks for a kiss, kiss him.
if he asks where he is, say gone.



Essential Words: LTAB Online 2020

Lesson plans and writing prompts for teens



•

no need for geography
now that we're safe everywhere.

point to whatever you please
& call it church, home, or sweet love.

paradise is a world where everything
is a sanctuary & nothing is a gun.

here, if it grows it knows its place
in history. yesterday, a poplar

told me of old forest
heavy with fruits I'd call uncle

bursting red pulp & set afire,
harvest of dark wind chimes.

after I fell from its limb
it kissed sap into my wound.

do you know what it's like to live
someplace that loves you back?

•

here, everybody wanna be black & is.
look — the forest is a flock of boys

who never got to grow up, blooming
into forever, afros like maple crowns

reaching sap-slow toward sky. watch
Forest run in the rain, branches

melting into paper-soft curls, duck
under the mountain for shelter. watch

the mountain reveal itself a boy.
watch Mountain & Forest playing

in the rain, watch the rain melt everything
into a boy with brown eyes & wet naps —

the lake turns into a boy in the rain
the swamp — a boy in the rain

the fields of lavender — brothers
dancing between the storm.

•

if you press your ear to the dirt
you can hear it hum, not like it's filled

with beetles & other low gods
but like a mouth rot with gospel

& other glories. listen to the dirt
crescendo a boy back.

come. celebrate. this
is everyday. every day

holy. everyday high
holiday. everyday new

year. every year, days get longer.
time clogged with boys. the boys

O the boys. they still come
in droves. the old world

keeps choking them. our new one
can't stop spitting them out.

•

ask the mountain-boy to put you on
his shoulders if you want to see

the old world, ask him for some lean
-in & you'll be home. step off him



Essential Words: LTAB Online 2020

Lesson plans and writing prompts for teens



& walk around your block.
grow wings & fly above your city.

all the guns fire toward heaven.
warning shots mince your feathers.

fall back to the metal-less side
of the mountain, cry if you need to.

that world of laws rendered us into dark
matter. we asked for nothing but our names

in a mouth we've known
for decades. some were blessed

to know the mouth.
our decades betrayed us.

•

there, I drowned, back before, once.
there, I knew how to swim but couldn't.

there, men stood by shore & watched me blue.
there, I was a dead fish, the river's prince.

there, I had a face & then I didn't.
there, my mother cried over me

but I wasn't there. I was here, by my own
water, singing a song I learned somewhere

south of somewhere worse. that was when

direction mattered. now, everywhere

I am is the center of everything.
I must be the lord of something.

what was I before? a boy? a son?
a warning? a myth? I whistled

now I'm the God of whistling.
I built my Olympia downstream.

•

you are not welcome here. trust
the trip will kill you. go home.

we earned this paradise
by a death we didn't deserve.

I am sure there are other heres.
a somewhere for every kind

of somebody, a heaven of brown
girls braiding on golden stoops

but here —
how could I ever explain to you —

someone prayed we'd rest in peace
& here we are

in peace whole all summer

[summer somewhere by Danez Smith, The Poetry Foundation](#)

AUDIO IS AVAILABLE FOR THIS POEM



Essential Words: LTAB Online 2020

Lesson plans and writing prompts for teens



Summer Somewhere by Charlays Chips

after Danez Smith

They say the grass is greener on the other side

But what happens when the grass is only stained green

Yet the blood shines through

What happens when the other side is both sides

What happens when there is no another side

When the sides aren't side just figments of our imagination

They say Everybody dies in the summer so I pray to God the other side doesn't have a summer

If I could enter the heart of summer

I could
She could
We could

Remake the world
So that summer is called her true name

When death comes she knocks
Once
Twice
Or as many times as it takes to crack a dome

Faith
Strength
Walls
Bullets break through all

knock
Knock

Knock

Summer is knocking
And she won't stop
Till she breaks down the door
Life built
You thought you were safe inside

But I told y'all bullets break through all