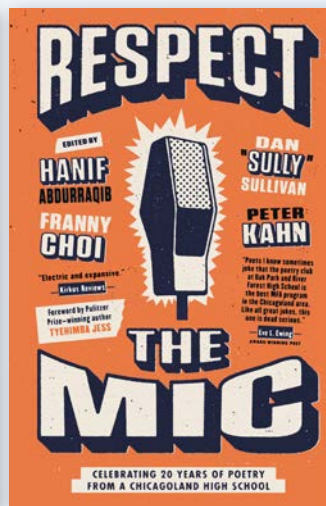
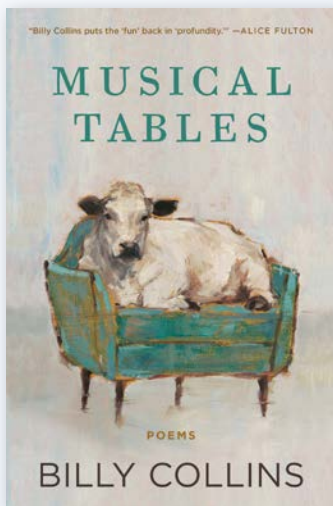


THEMATIC GUIDE

Teaching Poetry  
HIGH SCHOOL



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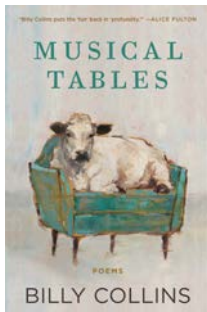
## ■ INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to his MasterClass on poetry, former U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins says, “When you read something back that has your mark on it, no one could have written that but you. This voice is yours and yours alone.” Poetic voice, according to former U.S. Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman, is an “artistic choice,” and in her 2019 TED-Ed Talk, she compels high school students to “speak up.” The immense popularity of poetry slams, open mic nights, and other spoken word poetry events attests to the power of poetry to provide a platform for social commentary, and today’s youth voices are being heard louder than ever.

The activities in this guide are framed around an overall line of inquiry for high school students: *How do poets use poetry to establish voice and promote social justice?* The suggested strategies generate possible answers to this essential question while providing the critical reading, writing, and thinking required of today’s students. Teachers may choose to assign any combination of these activities as their students seek to find personal and collective voice within the power of poetry.

## ■ ABOUT THE TITLES IN THIS COLLECTION

Listed below are brief summaries of the books in this guide:



### Musical Tables

Poems

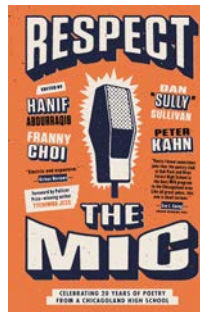
BILLY COLLINS

978-0-399-58978-2

Hardcover | Random House  
176 pages | \$26.00

Also available: E-BOOK, AUDIO DOWNLOAD

In his collection *Musical Tables*, former U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins demonstrates how voice can be established even in the shortest of poems. His quirky micropoems serve as snapshots for small but meaningful life moments.



### Respect The Mic

Celebrating 20 Years of Poetry from a Chicagoland High School

PETER KAHN, HANIF ABDURRAQIB, DAN "SULLY" SULLIVAN and FRANNY CHOI; Foreword by TYEHIMBA JESS

978-0-593-22682-7

Paperback | Penguin Workshop  
176 pages | \$9.99 | Lexile: NP

Also available: E-BOOK, AUDIO DOWNLOAD

*Respect the Mic* is a collection of poetry from current and former students in the Spoken Word Club at Chicago's Oak Park and River Forest High School. As editor Peter Kahn explains, the curated poems amplify these students' "experiences and voices ... loudly, proudly, and clearly."



### Illumination

Poetry to Light Up the Darkness

TYLER KNOTT GREGSON

978-0-593-19136-1

Hardcover | TarcherPerigee  
160 pages | \$18.00

Also available: E-BOOK, AUDIO DOWNLOAD

Tyler Knott Gregson's personal photography and art combine with his writing in *Illumination*, an assemblage of poems that offer inspiration and hope for finding light within life's darkness.



### Poukahangatus

Poems

TAYI TIBBLE

978-0-593-53460-1

Hardcover | Knopf  
96 pages | \$27.00

Also available: E-BOOK, AUDIO DOWNLOAD

Tayi Tibble's *Poukahangatus* explores the connection and disconnect between the poet's Maori past and millennial present. Tackling issues of race, gender, and perception, Tibble's poetry is an examination of colonization and its impact on culture and identity.



### Measure for Measure

An Anthology of Poetic Meters

ANNIE FINCH and ALEXANDRA OLIVER

978-0-375-71248-7

Hardcover | Everyman's Library  
256 pages | \$14.95

*Measure for Measure: An Anthology of Poetic Meters* celebrates the musical and performative qualities that date back to the earliest of poems. Including brief explanations about multiple meters, this compilation of poems is "poetry for the ear."

## ■ CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The following classroom strategies engage students in reading, writing, and talking about poetry:

### Themes Tracker

Ask students to keep a “themes tracker” for patterns and topics they uncover as they read poetry, including issues of social justice. As students read and begin noticing a theme develop in one or more collections of poetry, they create a new entry in their tracker. Possible themes for *Respect the Mic* and *Poukahangatus* include gender, racial identity, and voice. In *Illumination* and *Musical Tables*, themes may include the beauty in small moments and the passage of time. *Measure for Measure* incorporates a variety of themes around nature, love, and war, to name a few. Provide time for students to share their ideas with each other and add new entries from classmates’ trackers. If students need help getting started, choose one theme and model how to track its development. As students begin writing their own poems and developing a personal poetry portfolio, they can look to their themes tracker for topics, issues, and lines of inquiry. For an example tracker, see <https://prhlink.com/themestracker>.

### Media Moments with Master Poets

To borrow a quote from the poetry teacher John Keating in the film *Dead Poets Society*, Billy Collins’s *Musical Tables* is about simple things “with the stuff of revelation.” Keating declares that “the most beautiful poetry can be about simple things like a cat, or a flower, or rain.” (*Musical Tables* includes poems about each of these.) Show students the well-known scene in *Dead Poets Society* (<https://prhlink.com/dpsvideo>) where Mr. Keating quotes Walt Whitman and encourages students to “sound their barbaric yawp over the rooftops of the world.” Discuss how the student in the video must engage in self-revelation in order to find his poetic voice. Invite students to peruse *Musical Tables* and select a poem that speaks to them. Using the “think, pair, share” thinking routine, students should read their chosen poem aloud to a partner and take turns discussing the revelation within the poem’s simplicity. This activity provides practice in analysis and performing poems aloud—skills needed as students continue their study of poetry. To extend the exercise, show students Collins’s MasterClass trailer (<https://prhlink.com/masterclassbillycollins>), a lighthearted invitation into the mind of a poet. Discuss: What does Collins mean when he says “poetry is sort of a diary without a lock”? How does Collins’s voice present itself in his poetry? What voice do you hope to portray as a poet?

### Flipgrid

In her 2019 TED-Ed Talk, “Using your voice is a political choice,” Amanda Gorman tells her student audience that “the choice to be heard is the most political act of all,” and that if “I choose not to speak out of fear, there’s no one that my silence is standing for.” Show students Gorman’s TED-Ed talk (<https://prhlink.com/gormanvideo1>) and ask them to take note of the evidence she provides when she calls poetry “political.” Students should note the poet’s discussion of the types of stories we tell, the people who tell them, and the forces at work to silence them. After watching, ask students: What does Gorman mean when she says, “Poetry is at the pulse of the most dangerous and daring questions”? Why does she say, “Using your voice is a political choice”? Next, read with students Tayi Tibble’s poem “Sensitivity” in *Poukahangatus* (p. 21). Ask the class: What dangerous or daring question is Tibble asking? What does she stand for? How do we know? How is this poem about the Maori people a “political choice”?

Finally, challenge students to use their voice for social commentary by answering Gorman’s question, “What do you stand for?” Provide time for students to brainstorm and select a one-word answer that illustrates a personal passion project or social justice issue. Students will then use [flip.com](https://flip.com) to record a quick video where they answer this question. For example, students might select the word “equity.” Their Flip video will show them saying, “I stand for equity.” Students can provide context and elaboration, if desired. The resulting product is a grid full of faces that can be clicked individually, providing a voice for every student and promoting a sense of community. Because Flip videos can be rerecorded, students need not worry about “messaging up.” Later, the issue they select in Flip can be developed in a spoken word or written poem, or it can become the theme for the personal poetry portfolio they build during the unit.

### Open Mic Fridays

In *Respect the Mic*, teacher and poet Peter Kahn explains how he utilizes the open mic, spoken-word format to elevate student voices. Show students the PBS News Hour video “How Spoken Word Poetry Amplifies Students’ Voices” (<https://prhlink.com/pbspoetry>), which includes clips of his students’ weekly poetry slams. Discuss Kahn’s belief that writing and performing poetry provide students a place to explore and voice their personal narrative. Encourage students to write and perform poetry using the process Kahn outlines in the book. Ask students to write at least three poems a week, either original style or poems that mimic the poetical form of a published poet. Poems can be drafted in a poetry journal or notebook, which students can personalize with original or found art and photographs. Students can choose which poems to share with classmates, seeking feedback and revising their work before selecting one to perform on open mic day. Before each performance day, set the stage with curtains, stools, microphone, and spotlight. Remind students that when classmates have the floor, there should be no sounds other than encouragements that meet the pre-established norms. In other words, “*Respect the Mic*.”

### Micropoems

Micropoetry is a genre of poetic verse characterized by its short length and humorous or profound meaning. Billy Collins’s collection *Musical Tables* is a celebration of this form. Ask students to listen to Collins’s interview with National Public Radio (<https://prhlink.com/nprbillycollins>) upon the release of this collection. As students listen, they should read along with the transcript, annotating anything they find informative, interesting, or illuminating, particularly about the writer’s craft. As Collins discusses poems from the collection, stop and ask students to reread and reflect.

For example, Collins discusses “Reflections on an Amish Childhood,” which reads, “I was a little square in a round hat.” Ask students: How does the poet use “a little square” to generate multiple meanings? What does Collins mean in the interview when he says, “It’s just basic geometry”? As a class, consider how multiple meanings give small poems “big” impact. Discuss Collins’s characterization of the micropoet as a “masked man” who “says something profound about life and death.” Ask students: What is the poet “unmasking”? How is his profound message a reflection of his voice?

Next, ask students to write their own micropoem. Using Collins as inspiration, students might choose to write about something funny, sad, simple, or profound. Provide time for brainstorming or suggest students keep a journal of observations over the course of a week, then select one to turn into a micropoem. Invite students to publish their poem on Twitter, which has popularized the genre with the hashtag #micropoetry.

### Song Scansion

*Measure for Measure* invites students to engage in complex poetry analysis through a study of metrical patterns. Before reading examples of trochees, anapests, and iambs, show students Shmoop’s “Scansion 101” (<https://prhlink.com/schmoopvideo>), a video about poetic meter that answers the question, “Why should we care about scansion?” Discuss with students the video’s claim that with scansion, “we get a peek into the poet’s brain at the syllables and words he or she wanted to emphasize.” Next, ask students to read *Measure for Measure*’s explanation of iambic meter, dubbed “the magnificent mainstay of metrical poetry in English” (p. 114). Play for the class a popular song that utilizes iambic meter, such as Taylor Swift’s “Shake It Off.” Ask students to practice scanning lines in the song with the wand, cup, and boundary symbols seen in the Scansion 101 video.

Now, ask students to scan a poem, such as the excerpt of Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” found in *Measure for Measure* (p. 119). Discuss how the iambic meter in Rossetti’s poem creates a mesmerizing rhythm that underscores the addictive quality of the goblin fruit. Ask: What does the poet wish to emphasize? How does the trance-like, iambic meter of “Goblin Market” contribute to its themes of femininity and desire? As an extension, ask students to read Tayi Tibble’s “LBD” in *Poukahangatus* (p. 35). Ask: How does Tibble create rhythm to elevate themes of femininity and desire? What social justice issues are highlighted in both Rossetti’s and Tibble’s poems? How does rhythm support meaning in poetry of any era?

### Golden Shovel

In *Respect the Mic*, Grace Fondow honors poet Lucille Clifton with a “golden shovel” poem. Like erasure or cento poems, golden shovel poetry is a type of verse where writers celebrate existing poems written by poets they admire. Specific to golden shovel poems, words from the original verse appear in order as the last word in each of the new poem’s lines. Read with students the first golden shovel poem, written by Terrance Hayes as homage to the Gwendolyn Brooks poem, “We Real Cool” (<https://prhlink.com/goldenshovel>). Ask: What big ideas run through both poems? Among other topics, students should note the theme of black men dying young. Discuss how in honoring Brooks’s poem, Hayes elevates a social justice issue, which is still very relevant, and that Hayes titles his poem “Golden Shovel” to illustrate the rich material found when poets dig into predecessors’ work. Next, read “Lessons: A Golden Shovel after Lucille Clifton” in *Respect the Mic* (p. 100). Ask students, what social justice issues are central to Fondow’s poem? Students should note the topics of single motherhood, domestic violence, and the desire to rise beyond expectations.

Now, ask students to select an existing poem and use it to create a golden shovel. Students should select one word from each line of the published poem to place at the end of each line of the new poem. The words from the original poem can come from anywhere in the line as long as a word from each line is used in order. Explain that, like Terrance Hayes and Grace Fondow, students can expand on the original poet’s themes. For instance, students might choose “Clouds” from *Measure for Measure* (p. 175) or “You” from *Illumination* and write a new poem expanding on the mental health crisis. Alternatively, students can select a different topic or social justice issue, perhaps from their themes tracker, detailed earlier in this guide. For more information on golden shovel poetry, see <https://prhlink.com/masterclassgoldenshovel>.

### TPCASTT

In both *Illumination* and *Poukahangatus*, poems are often written in a stream-of-consciousness style with no poetical form. Encourage students to dive in and access these complex poems by applying the close-reading tool TPCASTT analysis method in which students use a chart to perform a rhetorical analysis of a poem. First, they examine the title and paraphrase the poem. Then, students analyze connotation, attitude or tone, shifts, title (again), and theme. For example, students can analyze Tayi Tibble’s “Identity Politics” (p. 73). Students should note the political overtones of the title and the repetition of “Tell me, am I navigating correctly?” The line appears four times, signifying a shift in the poet’s evolving voice as she navigates the multiple aspects of her identity. Students can synthesize their analysis with a summary statement at the bottom of the TPCASTT chart. In it, they might answer the compelling question: How do the poet’s stylistic choices support the poem’s overall purpose, theme, or aesthetic beauty? A sample TPCASTT summary statement might read, “In ‘Identity Politics,’ the poet navigates her way through her coexisting Maori and millennial identities.”



As an extension, students can analyze a second poem with the TPCASTT method and then compare the two texts. For instance, students might next read a poem from Tyler Knott Gregson's *Illumination*. Students should note that the poem beginning "New days mean new roads" has no title (like many in the collection), and they might predict that the lack of title suggests something that cannot be pinned down. Students should also notice shifts due to the repetition of "time" and "say," signifying an openness to inevitable change and a willingness to speak one's truth. After students have completed TPCASTT on two poems, discuss similar themes or significant differences. In the case of "Identity Politics" and Gregson's poem about new roads, discussion could focus on the theme of voice. In both poems, the writer asserts the idea that voice is formed by constantly evolving experiences. Discuss with students: How does applying the TPCASTT analysis on two poems deepen our understanding of each one? For more information on TPCASTT analysis, see <https://prhlink.com/readwritethinkanalysis>.

### Rhythm and Poetry (RAP) Analysis

In the preface to *Measure for Measure*, editor Annie Finch discusses the popularity of performance poetry, calling it "poetry for the ear" and welcoming readers "back to the roots of poetry" (pp. 13–14). Peter Kahn echoes the connection between meter and meaning in his introductory notes to *Respect the Mic*, reminding readers that "rap" stands for "rhythm and poetry" (p. 6). Ask students to read the *New York Times Style Magazine* article "The Artists Dismantling the Barriers Between Rap and Poetry" (<https://prhlink.com/nythiphop>). Discuss the article's claim that "poetry is art and rap is entertainment." Discuss: What does the writer mean when she says, "These opinions are rife with bias—against the young, the poor, the Black and brown, the self-educated, the outspoken and sometimes impolite voices." How is silencing these voices or dismissing rap a form of bias?

Next, ask students to read Beyoncé and Kendrick Lamar's song "Freedom" (<https://prhlink.com/freedomlyrics>). While reading, students should mark any lyrics that are particularly evocative, metrical, or about social justice in nature. Discuss: What experiences and voices are being heard here? What social justice issues are highlighted? Students should notice references to slavery and systemic racism. As an extension, ask students to identify metrical patterns in the song using *Measure for Measure* as a reference. Students might also look in *Respect the Mic* for poems with similar social justice themes, such as "Identity, Black" (p. 12) and "Colors Are Heavy" (p. 149).

### Poetry Pairings

Like other popular “instapoets,” *Illumination*’s author Tyler Knott Gregson often pairs his poems with photographs and art. Ask students to select a poem and image pairing from *Illumination*. Using the “lenses” image analysis routine, ask students to turn and talk with a partner about what they notice as they study the poem and accompanying image. After each partner discusses what they see through their unique “lens,” have students wrap up the conversation with the question, “What issues or themes did your ‘lenses’ conversation invite you to think about?” Here, students can broaden their analysis and make connections to topics of personal interest or social justice. For instance, Gregson’s poem “Here’s What I Think,” along with its accompanying photograph, might initiate a discussion on gender and identity. Details on the “lenses” protocol can be found at <https://prhlink.com/dialogueharvard>.

Poetry pairings can also be made between poems and current news. Show students some sample pairings from *The New York Times*, where news stories are linked to published poems (<https://prhlink.com/nytpoetrypairings>). Ask students to select a poem from one of the books in this set, then pair it with a news article or essay. For example, students might pair *Respect the Mic*’s “Blood Money” (p. 141) with the *U.S. News & World Report* article “How Inflation Impacts the Pink Tax and the Period Product Industry” (<https://prhlink.com/usnewsinflation>). Both texts focus on gender and class issues within the feminine product industry. Students can post their pairings, along with a brief explanation, on [Padlet.com](https://padlet.com) or Jamboard. Classmates can read each other’s pairings and share their reactions.

### Crowdsourced Poem

Crowdsourced poems have become popular vehicles for uniting voices and social causes. Show students the NPR crowdsourced poem “This is Our Dream” and ask students to listen to the accompanying podcast about its creation (<https://prhlink.com/nprdream>). In the poem, contributors start verses with Langston Hughes’s line, “I dream a world.” Discuss with students how multiple voices unite in the poem to illuminate social justice issues such as race, equity, environmental stewardship, and mental health. Next, challenge the class to create their own crowdsourced poem based on Tyler Knott Gregson’s poem “I Have Walked Dark Roads” in *Illumination*. After reading and discussing Gregson’s poem, explain to students that together, the class will create a poem using Gregson’s line, “I sing the songs of ...” as a sentence starter for each verse. Using Gregson’s poem and sentence-starter as a template, encourage students to write several verses based on their lives or on social issues significant to them. As a class, select and arrange verses and discuss the themes that emerge once the poem is complete. Publish the finished work on the class or school website.

### Poetry Portfolio

As a culminating project for their study of poetry, ask students to look back at their work for pieces they would like to include in a multimedia poetry portfolio. The portfolio should address the line of inquiry, “How do poets use poetry to establish voice and promote social justice?” In other words, students can choose to use their portfolios to amplify their personal narrative or to elevate an issue of social justice. Explain to students that poems need not be “perfect” because voice is established in stages, and the portfolio is more authentic with evidence of growth. As they review their writing, ask students to look for common themes. Students can look to the theme tracker mentioned earlier in this guide for help with topics, themes, and issues. Students may need to revise poems, or they may even write new material to address their focus. Once poems have been selected, invite students to pair poems with music, artwork, or photographs from their personal collection or curated from artists online. Using a multimedia tool such as Adobe Spark ([spark.adobe.com](https://spark.adobe.com)) or [Flipsnack.com](https://flipsnack.com), students can combine text, social graphics, video, and audio to showcase multiple writing samples. The digital portfolio might include separate tabs for different types of poems, including recordings from open mic days, spoken word performances, or poetry slams. Publish the student portfolios in a single-class collection using Padlet.com, Jamboard, Google Classroom, or another digital space open to an audience.

### ■ RESOURCES

The following resources provide more information and ideas for teaching with poetry:

- “Spoken Word: A Cultural History” by Joshua Bennett (Penguin Random House): <https://prhlink.com/joshuabennett>
- “The Power of Rap and Hip-Hop in the Classroom” by Edutopia: <https://prhlink.com/edutopiahiphop>
- “How to Bring Spoken Word Poetry into the Classroom” by Facing History and Ourselves: <https://prhlink.com/facinghistoryspokenword>
- “Poetry 180: List of All 180 Poems” by Library of Congress: <https://prhlink.com/poetry180>
- “Heritage and Identity: Poems for Teens” by Poets.org: <https://prhlink.com/poetsorgteens>
- “‘Pop Sonnets’ Finds Hidden Shakespeare In Top 40 Tunes” by NPR: <https://prhlink.com/nprshakespeare>
- “Poems of Protest, Resistance, and Empowerment” by Poetry Foundation: <https://prhlink.com/protestpoems>

## ■ ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

Laura Reis Mayer is an instructional coach and consultant from Asheville, NC. Laura develops content and leads professional learning for national education organizations. A twice-renewed National Board Certified Teacher, she taught middle school, high school, and college English, speech, drama, and literacy. She has written more than thirty teacher guides for multiple publishers.

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