



Los Angeles Unified School District Course Guideline

Course Title: Voices in Verse: Poetry, Identity, and Ethnic Studies	Prerequisite: None	Course Number: 230455
Semester Course: Grades 9-12	Text: Reading materials are teacher-selected and school funded	

LAUSD Definition of Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies is an interdisciplinary and comparative study of the social, cultural, artistic, political, historical, and economic expression and experience of race and ethnicity that primarily centers the studies of American Indians/Native Americans, Asian Pacific Islander Desi Americans, Black/African Americans, and Chicanx/Latinx.

Ethnic Studies centers holistic humanization and critical consciousness, providing every student the opportunity to enter the content from their own space, positionality, and perspective. Ethnic Studies affirms the student identity, experience, and the building of empathy for others. This includes the self-determination of those who have ancestral roots and knowledge who have resisted and survived settler colonialism, racism, white supremacy, cultural erasure, as well as other patterns, structures, and systems of marginalization and oppression. The discipline uses culturally and community-responsive pedagogical practices to empower students to become anti-racist leaders. Ethnic studies reconstructs and transforms the traditional narrative and curriculum by highlighting the contributions people of color have made in shaping US culture and society.

Course Description

Voices in Verse: Poetry, Identity, and Ethnic Studies is an immersive course rooted in the principles of Ethnic Studies, offering an interdisciplinary exploration of the social, cultural, and artistic expressions of race and ethnicity, with a central focus on American Indians/Native Americans, Asian Pacific Islander Desi Americans, Black/African Americans, and Chicanx/Latinx communities. Guided by the foundational tenets of Ethnic Studies, the course fosters critical consciousness and holistic humanization, providing students the opportunity to engage with content from their own perspectives. Students will utilize an inquiry and evidence-based approach to address ideas impacting marginalized communities, promoting self and collective empowerment. The course encourages cultural understanding of the struggles and expressions of disenfranchised groups, employing a cultural and critical lens from marginalized communities of color to analyze poetry and multi-genre texts. Through analysis, creation, and performance of poetry, students will synthesize historical context and biographical information, exploring the influence of systemic oppression on literary works. This course not only enhances students' literary skills but also cultivates public speaking, community and civic engagement, activism, as well as serves as a platform for meaningful dialogue and celebration of diverse stories. It aims to create a supportive space that fosters inclusivity, empathy, self-empowerment, and community actualization.

Objectives

Students will:

- Using an inquiry and evidence based approach, support and challenge ideas that impact marginalized communities.

- Promote self and collective empowerment in ways that provide students with a voice to articulate the disenfranchisement felt by their respective communities.
- Encourage cultural understanding of the ways different disenfranchised groups have struggled, worked together, and expressed concepts such as equality, justice, race, and ethnicity.
- Be sensitive to the needs of all by listening and speaking with an open mind and an aim for growth.
- Use a cultural and critical lens from marginalized communities of color to analyze Classic Poetry and other multi-genre texts and synthesize them in the context of ethnic studies.
- Analyze ideas, syntax, and word choice to reveal the author's purpose.
- Create poetry and expository writing and revise their work through both individual and collaborative honing of personal style and voice.
- Comment, critique, and coach peers on how to strengthen their writing, editing and performance through workshop and written feedback.
- Research historical context and biographical information in order to understand the ways that historical and life circumstances, counter-narratives, as well issues involving forms of systemic oppression, influence the work of the author.
- Compose in a variety of poetic forms, employing specific literary devices and language appropriate for diverse audiences and purposes.
- Work with other writers to create poetry that unifies many minds into one cohesive voice
- Improve public speaking skills in the areas of audience, body language, pacing, volume, and articulation.
- Progress from speaker to polished performer in terms of eloquence, engagement, and artistic interpretation.
- Learn how to produce, host, market, and organize public performances.
- Create and revise thematic pieces to meet the demands of purpose, audience, and context.
- Prepare and present spoken word poetry that speaks to relevant and urgent themes of ethnic studies, as well as the current zeitgeist, issues that highlight forms of hegemony and counter-hegemony, and cultural landscape.
- Use spoken word as a platform for community engagement and activism.
- Work toward greater inclusivity by cultivating empathy, community actualization, cultural perpetuity, self-worth, self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants, which centers the experiences of American Indians/Native Americans, Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders, Black/African Americans, and Chicanx/Latinx.
- Celebrate stories and counter-narratives, especially from communities of color, to reach for further understanding of community and self by recognizing intersectionality, promoting self-empowerment, and developing stronger interpersonal communication through literacy.

Course Syllabus

This first unit gives students the foundational language skills they need to engage in close reading, high-level academic dialogue, text-based analysis, and more. Students will define, identify, and employ basic poetic and literary devices, while they read, engage, and analyze a variety of poems that differ in form, language, and style. The scope of this beginning unit will utilize synthesis skills through the inquiry method. We will ask students not “What is poetry?” but “Why poetry?” and “Why now?” in an effort to extrapolate how ethnic studies connects with poetry. In this unit, students will be introduced to the Get Lit model of claiming a Classic Poem. Students will select poems written by poets with the following backgrounds: Native/Indigenous, Black and African American, Latinx/Latine, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Alaskan Native/Native Hawaiian, Jewish American, Mixed Race, LGBTQIA+, poets with disabilities, and neurodiverse poets.

After claiming a work that resonates with them, students will analyze, memorize, and perform their Classic

poem. Students will learn the key criteria of a strong performance, such as projection, enunciation, pacing, body language, eye contact, tonal dynamics, and authenticity, to give powerful performances. Students will then write their own spoken word response that connects to the Classic in terms of themes, subject, style, and structure to begin a dialogue between the Classic Poet and the student. Students will learn and apply the elements of strong writing, which include figurative language, sensory detail, organization, structure, clarity & cohesion, surprise, musicality, and originality. Students will perform both poems back to back as a cohesive dialogue that touches on issues that are at the center of ethnic studies and our current cultural landscape. Students will use poetry as a chance to speak back and speak up about the issues around ethnic studies that affect them and their community.

Enduring Understandings

- We have mutual respect and love for ourselves and each other, and we center the experiences and histories of Native Americans/American Indians, African Americans/Black Americans, Chicana/Latina, and Asian Pacific Islander Desi Americans have experienced, survived, and resisted settler colonialism, racism, white supremacy, cultural erasure, and other patterns, structures, and systems of marginalization and oppression.
- We understand that Ethnic Studies is interdisciplinary and comparative.
- We recover and reconstruct the counternarratives, perspectives, epistemologies, and cultures in a process of ongoing struggle for those who have been historically neglected and denied citizenship or full participation within traditional discourse and institutions, particularly highlighting the contributions people of color have made in shaping US culture and society.

Essential Questions

- In what way can an Ethnic Studies lens be used to foster a voice through poetry?
- How does the field of Ethnic Studies help students understand their identities and their positionality in the communities and society that they inhabit?
- Why is it important to recover and reconstruct counternarratives, perspectives, epistemologies, and cultures? What does this add to the national narratives of the United States?

Anchor Assignment

Students will perform their memorized Classic and Spoken Word Response poem and self-assess their writing and performance, outlining their strengths and their areas for improvement. They will also use our Uni(verse) web-based app to view, score, comment and critique their peers' poems, providing written feedback on celebrations, clarifications, and curiosities. They will use the performance rubric to analyze and assess projection, articulation, body language, tonal dynamics, authenticity, and more. They will use our written rubric to analyze and assess figurative language, sensory detail, clarity & coherence, originality, music, and surprise. Students will finish this unit with a full understanding of the elements of strong performance and writing, as well as the criteria for each.

Students will claim and read poems that focus on critical aspects of identity in regard to race, ethnicity, culture, and family as a means of supporting students' ability to grapple with how these concepts are influenced by systems of power and oppression. Students will examine and evaluate how they see themselves and how they are perceived by the world through the aforementioned lenses of identity. Students will use the Uni(verse) feedback scoring app to become targeted reflectors and evaluators of their performance and writing skills. During this unit, they will self-assess their strengths and areas of improvement. Students will evaluate past poetic performances, as well as themselves and their peers, with the writing and performance rubrics as a guide, to determine how they can refine both messaging and performance to clearly comprehend and express key factors of their identity through poetry. Students will learn and apply various literary devices and poetic forms to explore the various facets of identity. Students will use the four reads for student-led discussion and the analysis of their own poem. They will look at how a

poem can mimic the structure of a story with plot, characters, and setting, and notice the shift in these dynamics depending on genre. They will dive deep into subtext, and argue the thesis and implicit weight of a text in regard to surprise, musicality, clarity, cohesion, organization, originality, and more. Students will also research the historical context (through various media such as film, speeches, and primary documents) and biography of the author of the poem (the “Classic Poet”) they claimed during this unit to see how a biographical narrative can influence a literary voice.

Enduring Understandings

- We understand our racialized selves and the complexities, intersectionality and beauty associated with them.
- We embrace and understand cultural, historical roots, and indigeneity.
- We embark on a journey to decolonize as holistic human beings through critical consciousness, radical hope and self-love.
- We understand that the stories of people have shaped who they are.

Essential Questions

- What is identity?
- How do we define our own sense of identity while acknowledging that there are systems, external entities, and historical legacies that seek to shape it for us?
- What is race?
- What structural or systemic oppressions have marginalized communities, especially the four major groups in Ethnic Studies, experienced?
- Why does it matter for our marginalized communities to know of their pre-contact histories?

Anchor Assignment

Students will pick 5 of the 20 poems they have written to compile, revise, and produce a mini chapbook on the theme of identity. In addition, students will write a one-page introduction that presents an argument on how the collection sees identity and explains the role each poem plays (citing specific lines) to illustrate and argue the various facets of their identity and how that translates into the student’s relationship with and impact on the world around them.

During this unit students will read, analyze, discuss, and respond to poems that center around the themes of identity and place, both literal (country, language, immigration) and metaphorical (assimilation, class, etc). Students will use poetry to examine how immigration affects identity and how language shapes perception. Students will also explore the relationship between class and education and argue how each is shaped by the world around them. Students will continue to claim, memorize, perform, and write response poems with a heavy emphasis on biographical narrative. Students will read poems through the lens of place, asking questions like “How does place shape personal narrative?” and “How can place empower or disempower a voice?”

Students will claim a poem around the theme of place and research the life of their Classic Poet, as well as read, analyze, and reflect on 5 or more of their Classic Poet’s poems. Students will read in an effort to research and synthesize the author’s perspective on various themes of place (language, home, education, immigration). Students will create multimedia presentations on their Classic Poet with biographical information, visuals, and poems that illustrate and argue how place (literal and metaphorical) influences a poet’s work. Students will group themselves according to their Classic Poet’s literary movements. In groups, students will research and present the literary time period or movement in which their authors lived. Groups will be responsible for teaching the class about their literary movement, including the years of the movement, the definitive style, historical context, and significant events, as well as example poets and authors. Students will also perform their Classic and Response poems around the theme of place. Students will be scored

using the established Advanced Performance and Writing Rubrics. They will use this data to inform their personal poetry progress for the next unit.

Enduring Understandings

- We understand the impact settler colonialism, imperialism, genocide, and hegemony have had on the historical and contemporary experiences of our people through patterns such as immigration and assimilation.
- We understand and critique the relationship between white supremacy, racism, anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, xenophobia, patriarchy, cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism, ableism, ageism, anthropocentrism, and other forms of power and oppression.

Essential Questions

- In ways we are privileged, how can we be in solidarity with those who are oppressed?
- How does critical consciousness involving issues such as immigration and culture transform our learning?
- How has immigration been shaped by systems of power and hegemony?
- In what ways have communities of color impacted by national boundaries sought to resist their impacts?

Anchor Assignment

Anchor Assignment: Each student will create a podcast modeled after Get Lit Minute to show how place has shaped their Classic Poet's work. The podcast should be between 10-15 minutes and include synthesized research to show: how place and time influenced the poet's work, the poet's relationship to language in terms of both linguistics and style, how the poet perceived their place in both the world and the literary landscape (exploring education, class, and community). It will also include one of the Classic Poet's poems that provides deeper commentary for one of the guiding questions.

The podcast should also include a performance and analysis of one poem by the Classic Poet that creates a specific argument around place (literal or metaphorical). Students will be responsible for recording and sharing their podcasts, as well as listening and reviewing two other podcasts in their class. They will have to write a one-page reflection that explains their performance choices for the poem, the success and challenges of performing, what poets should consider when writing in this form, and whether or not they feel the form has improved or hindered the poem.

In this unit, students will examine the role the body plays in terms of identity and expression. Students will read poems that seek to define, understand, identify, and argue gender and its expression. They will explore how poets grapple with non-heteronormative sexuality and how they can use this aspect of identity to empower and embolden social change. This unit will also explore body image and dive into the complexities of the relationship between the body and self. We will look closely at neurodivergent poets and poets with disabilities to examine the relationship between the body, identity, and self. We will look at how poets view themselves, and how the rest of the world views them, through the lens of the body. Students will continue to claim, memorize, perform, and respond to Classic Poems around the theme of the body. During this unit, students will work to improve as writers and performers with a heavy emphasis on peer-to-peer feedback. Students will work on a personal progress project that targets two areas of strength in terms of writing and performance. They will use their performance of their Classic and Response poems, as well as their writing, to self-assess and demonstrate growth throughout the course of the unit.

Enduring Understandings

- We understand the importance of continuously analyzing and assessing the impact of systems of power and forms of oppression, including: empire, white supremacy, white supremacist culture, racism and its specific forms of anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, anti-Asian hate; xenophobia;

linguicism; patriarchy, cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism; misogyny, heterosexism, transphobia, classism; ableism; sizeism/anti-fatness; ageism; anthropocentrism; across race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and additional intersections of identity.

- We understand and challenge all forms of oppression and their manifestations by conceptualizing and enacting transformative projects of agency and resistance.
- We understand that while studying forms of oppression, it is critical to engage ourselves in developing critical consciousness, reclaiming hope and healing.

Essential Questions

- Given the intergenerational trauma carried by marginalized communities, what does healing look like?
- What is agency and how can poetry help us redefine our identities through expression?

Anchor Assignment

Students begin the unit by looking at the scores they received at the end of Unit Three to target an area of growth in both performance and writing. As students move through the unit, they will practice targeted skills with their feedback groups to score and comment on their progress in the determined area. The key components of performance will be: projection, enunciation, pacing, eye contact, body language, tonal dynamics, and authenticity. The key components for writing will be: figurative language, sensory detail, clarity & cohesion, organization, structure, originality, musicality, and surprise. For this assignment, students will write a one-page reflection at the beginning, middle, and end of their progress project. The beginning reflection will determine areas of need according to data and outline three specific steps they will implement to improve in both writing and performance. The middle reflection will include their mid performance and score, discuss the steps they have taken for growth, and assess where they have grown and where there is still room for improvement according to feedback. The end reflection will review their final score and reflect on how they have grown and how this growth as a writer and performer has impacted their identity.

During this unit students will transition from performance poets into community activists using art to affect change. This unit is a culmination of everything students have been focused on since Unit One. It will include research, analysis, writing, revising, filming, and producing. In groups, students will select a community issue tied to their research question. This could be anything from a social justice issue to the impact of silence in their community. The only criteria is that whatever they pick needs to be tied to a community outreach project. The subjects should be tied to larger conflicts like poverty, education inequity, destructive health habits, drug addiction, etc. Over a four-week time period, students will work in groups to curate their own poetry presentation on their chosen topic. Students are required to create a presentation that includes both an instructional presentation and five refined and performance-ready poems (group and individual) that act as manifestos, calls to action around their platform topic. Poets will be responsible for planning, producing, and curating a social media campaign to raise awareness about their specific topic.

Enduring Understandings

- We understand that change can only occur when marginalized people unite, organize, and mobilize social movements that fight systems of oppression, racism, and injustice.
- How are forms of resistance crucial to building a safe community?
- We understand that it is essential to analyze and study significant social movements and their impact on inequitable and oppressive systems.
- We understand that white supremacy and related power structures concede nothing without demand and resistance.
- We recognize the importance of agency and taking political stances against oppression and the impact this has on People of Color.

Essential Questions

- How can poetry help us explore the key components of successful social movements?
- In what ways can literary expression help us see how agency is instrumental in understanding the structures of oppression and liberation?
- “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”-Audre Lorde. What does this quote tell us about both collective and individual liberation and justice?

Anchor Assignment

In this unit, students will complete a one-person show in a focused area of course study that depicts how intergenerational trauma among marginalized communities has been shaped by issues such as gender, race, language, immigration, etc. Students will pick five of the poems they have written from the various prompts throughout the course; they will choose poems that are connected to a theme, but all approach it from a different angle whether it is tone, structure, form, or more. Students will choose five poems to revise and practice. The poems are a cohesive show with varied emotional and speaker arcs. Students will create a polished 15-20 performance which they will perform and upload to Uni(verse) as well as perform live in class.

Recommended Focus Standards

Historical Analysis	Chronological and Spatial Thinking: 1,2,3,4 and 5 Research, Evidence and Point of View: 1, 2, 3 Historical Interpretation: 1, 2, 3 and 4
Common Core State Standards >English Language Arts > History/Social Science	RH.9-10.1; CCSS.RH.9-10.2; RH.9-10.3; RH.9-10.4; RH.9-10.5; RH.9-10.6;RH.9-10.7; RH.9-10.8; RH.9-10.9; RH.9-10.10
Common Core State Standards > English Language Arts > Anchor Standards for Reading	RL. 11-12.1, RL. 11-12.2, RL.11-12.3, RL.11-12.4, RL. 11-12.5, RL.11-12.6, RL. 11-12.7, RL.11-12.8, RL. 11-12.10

Common Core State Standards > English Language Arts > Anchor Standards for Writing	W.11-12.1, W.11-12.2, W. 11-12.4, W.11-12.9
Common Core State Standards > English Language Arts > Anchor Standards for Listening and Speaking	SL. 11-12.1, SL. 11-12.2, SL.11-12.6
Common Core State Standards > English Language Arts > Anchor Standards for Language	L.11-12.1, L.11-12.2, L. 11-12.3, L. 11-12.4, L.11-12.5, L. 11-12.6
Social Justice Standards	Anchor Standards: Identity (1-5); Justice (12, 13, 14, 15); Action (16-20).

Text and Materials

Suggested course materials:

- ***A Different Mirror for Young People*** by Ronald Takaki
- Possible supplemental literary texts:
 - Cross connection sources that may provide a shared and common experience of diverse BIPOC marginalization includes the following but is not limited to:
 - *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* (Beacon Press, 2014)
 - *A People's History of the United States* (Harper Perennial, 2015)
 - *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Penguin Modern Classics, 2017)