

Curriculum Accompaniment:

Exquisite: The Poetry and Life of Gwendolyn Brooks

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Context

Gwendolyn Brooks is a beloved Kansas native that was born in Topeka and then moved the big city of Chicago where she was raised. She went on to become the first Black person to win the Pulitzer Prize. *Exquisite* is Gwendolyn's journey as a young girl daring to dream through the poetry that she found all around her. The book shares Gwendolyn's story from the lens of her expansive body of poetry and shows readers how to dream like she did to create an exquisite future.

Pre-Reading

To help the students gain new knowledge about Pulitzer Prize winner Gwendolyn Brooks and to encourage active listening, follow these steps before reading the story:

1. *Reflection:* Ask students about their favorite parts of the story. You can prompt them by asking questions about the poetry in the story, the illustrations, the timeline, and the determination, etc. Responses can be written or spoken in a quick discussion. Then ask the students what else they want to know about Gwendolyn. The overall goal of this activity is to get students thinking about the story of the Kansas native and curious about what they do not know / can learn.
2. *Vocabulary:* Term by term, ask students if they have heard of the word and what they think it means. After a quick discussion, tell students to give a signal queue when they have heard one of the terms during the reading— for example, touching their ear or snapping their fingers. This will keep them alert during the reading and build vocabulary recognition by encountering the terms in context.
 - a. Exquisite
 - b. Passionate
 - c. Rhythmic
 - d. Elegant
 - e. Rejected
 - f. Unpredictable
 - g. Ballad
 - h. Sonnet
 - i. Trembling
 - j. Publisher

Post-Reading

After reading *Exquisite*, there are several ways to expand the learning experience. We have provided follow-up assessment to ensure that education does not begin with the first page and end with the last.

Comprehension & Analysis Questions

Right after the book is read, revisit the key elements of the story, and reflect with comprehension questions to make sure students understand what happened. These questions can either be delivered through discussion or assessment.

1. Who read Gwendolyn Poetry each night?
2. Who was Gwendolyn's favorite poet and what did her mother say about how she would be like her favorite poet one day?
3. How old was the poet when she mailed her first poems to the newspaper?
4. What was the Great Depression?
5. What was the name of Gwendolyn's first book?

Timeline Activity

The back of the book contains a timeline of Gwendolyn's life. Once students have read the book, making a timeline of their own offers both a fun arts and crafts opportunity and a way to solidify their knowledge on the story and its historical backdrop. Students should research history from the early 1900's, including the great Depression to the present to add to the timeline provided by the author. This activity can either be a take-home activity or be run in the classroom. Students will need writing and drawing materials as well as paper; students can either make individual timelines or each oversee a single event, which will then contribute to a timeline when all are either posted or stapled together.

Research Report

In this activity, students will research a poet with Kansas heritage like Gordon Parks and Langston Hughes. They will write a short paper on the history of that person. The main goal is to establish preliminary research skills. This activity will help students understand the lives of Kansans that influenced the world through poetry.