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## The Prodigy of Existence: An Essay on Identity and Its Constraints with Original Poems

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## **The Prodigy of Existence:**



Self-Sourced Photo, 2019

## **An Essay on Identity and Its Constraints**

**with**

## **Original Poems**

Azariah Butler-Ruthford

Senior Capstone

Subject Matter Preparation in English, Creative Writing and Social Action

Research Essay and Creative Project

Dr. Maria Villaseñor

Division of Humanities and Communication

Spring 2020

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**HCOM 475: SENIOR CAPSTONE  
PROJECT PROPOSAL  
RESEARCH AND CREATIVE PROJECT OPTION**

1. **My name is Azariah Butler – Ruthford. My concentrations are Subject Matter Preparation in English (ESMP) and Creative Writing and Social Action (CWSA)**
  
2. **Project Description:** While focusing on the theme of oppressed identities surrounding race, ethnicity, class, and gender, I will write a research essay, specifically analyzing Beloved, by Toni Morrison. I will also include a collection of poetry to highlight the identities that I encounter. Focusing on race and sexuality, I will produce a manuscript that allows the reader to see the perspective of a black, homosexual male. These identities are regularly confronted, and through poetry I will challenge the readers to understand my realities. I will hinge on the novel, Beloved, to show the limitations that are a result of certain identities. I will use the technique of free-verse and response poetry, as well as critical analysis.
  
3. **Alignment with Common Theme:** Social identities are very important in today’s social climate, and one of the most influential ways to begin the journey of understanding and compassion is through hearing the story of individual experiences. I will produce work that focuses on the identity and perspective of a black, homosexual man in America and tell my story. I will combine this with a critical analysis of the stories of Sethe and Denver in the novel, in hopes that it will shift ill-informed perspectives some may have regarding certain identities by exposing the constraints that many black, enslaved females faced in the late 1800s.
  
4. **Purpose:** The primary purpose of this project is to engage the reader by providing a palpable mode in which they can encounter lived experiences (both literally and fantastically). I aspire to succinctly provide the unaware with the necessary tools to comprehend differences in perspectives and bring them closer to understanding the limitations attached to individual identities. I also aspire to voice my experiences to contribute to the many voices that make people, like myself, feel safe and comfortable in their skin.
  
5. **Format Rationale:** The format of free verse poetry will be used in this project. As free verse challenges the necessity of structure, my poems will challenge the structure of society and the structure of oppressive institutions. I will also use response poetry. This format will act as a dialogue between the speaker and the text in question. These poems will be

inspired and influenced by popular books, articles, and ideas that challenge the notions of identity discourse in society.

The research essay will critically analyze Toni Morrison's thematic choices proposing the question: How does Morrison convey the idea that one's identity (e.g. being an enslaved African American) influences or limits the choices one can make? I will specifically focus on how the identity of being a/an former enslaved/enslaved person forces many of the characters to make choices a free individual may not be challenged with. To what extent do certain identities (particularly social identities) limit the choices of an individual in various social situations?

6. **Capstone Title:** "Prodigy of Existence"
7. **Working Summary:** This research essay and collection of poems will highlight key moments in coming to terms with identity. For myself, these identities include race, sexuality, and gender. I have found an expressive outlet through poetry in which I can deduce experiences and make them more approachable for the audience from the perspective of a black, homosexual man. Similarly, Toni Morrison tasks the readers to understand the ways in which identities propose limitations on individuals in her novel, Beloved. The pieces included in this selection will illustrate how life experiences often dictate ones' identity, and how exploring these differences can inspire both individual and societal revolution. Both works will beg the question *to what extent may our identities haunt us?*
8. **Expectations:** With this project, I intend to create and polish poems that will eventually be publishable alongside others. I presume they will inspire more creative pieces as a result of this exploratory project. With my research, I intend to form a greater understanding of the relationship between theme and the world outside of the text. I plan to create a unit plan that will support my research, as well as prepare me for creating lesson plans that will fit the standards of English literature for high school students.
9. **Specific Skills Required:** Poetics and Prose Writing – My extensive background in both free verse and classically formulated poetry have prepared me for an exploratory and creative project such as this. My writing skills were polished in the following courses: Introduction to Creative Writing, taught by Dr. Debra Busman, and Poetry Writing Workshop, taught by Professor Angel Dominguez. My understanding of identity was expanded in courses such as Latina Life Stories, taught by Dr. Maria Villaseñor, and Introduction to Latinx Creative Writing, also taught by Professor Dominguez. These

courses have prepared me to be able to apply the necessary steps of the writing and editing process. They have also introduced me to different methods of viewing and understanding the implications of identity. In all of the courses I have taken at CSUMB, specifically courses such as British Literature and Multicultural and Adolescent Literature studied with Dr. Jennifer Fletcher, has allowed me to practice the skill of critically analyzing literary works and bringing in outside research in order to fully support a claim.

10. **Next Steps:** To start writing and creating is step one. I will re-read Beloved and use the work of Tongo Eisen-Martin's *Heaven is All Goodbyes*, as well as Ronaldo V. Wilson's *Lucy 72*, and Raquel Salas-Rivera's *Lo Terciario* to influence the art of storytelling regarding race and sexual identity. I will be producing 7 pieces of poetry alongside an 8-page research essay. Once I have written the pieces, the next step will be organizing them into a document in a manner that allows the pieces to flow and work together. Lastly, I will need to proofread and edit to ensure all the choices I made have stylistic importance, and that every detail obtains necessary attention.

11. **Timeline:**

**February 29** Completed list of sources

**March 1 – March 20** Complete research essay

**March 6** I will submit my final project proposal

**March 16** Meet with Capstone Advisor

**March 25** Complete organization of the work

**March 26** Complete Poetry

**March 27** Submit Draft

**March 30** Begin Unit Plan

**March 27 – April 15** Finalize work. Meet with Capstone Advisor.

**May 8** Submit Final Draft

## **Essay**

## **Introduction: What Brought Me to the Page**

During the fall semester of 2019, I conducted an oral history project comparing the response from African Americans to law enforcement during the era of the Civil Rights Movement versus their response during the era of the Black Lives Matter movement. For this project, I sat and had a conversation with the leader of my family's church, and a close family friend that lived through both eras and was either a child or raising children amongst public discourse. The two-hour long conversation brought forth revelations about certain behaviors I present subconsciously because of what I was taught as a child at home. She spoke of lessons she gave her children when they were off to school, and these lessons were very similar to lessons my brothers and I were taught. She said:

“I watch that mirror, you know, to see if flashing lights are coming. And um, we should not be afraid of the police. We should not be afraid of sheriffs. We raised our kids, we raised our boys especially, ‘don’t give the appearance of a crew or gang’ and ‘just you guys come home together. You don’t have to walk home with a whole lot of kids.’ You know? It’s crazy because, why do we have to tell our kids that? How come because all of you are black, and all of you are male, ‘you can’t walk home with your friends,’ and, ‘I don’t want you in a big group. Don’t be combative. If they ask for your license, just hand them your license.’ You know, and white parents don’t tell their kids that. So that fear is there. That fear is there.”

When she stated this, I began to think of my childhood and the ways in which I had to adhere to similar responses when engaging with law enforcement. As we will explore later in this essay, the presence of stereotypical threats exists amongst both groups. Let us take the example of a Black man getting pulled over for speeding. For that Black man there is the imminent threat



of incarceration, and even death that comes to mind. While for the police officer, the threat of being viewed as a threat can inspire certain, subconscious reactions based on the premise of social racism. I believe that this is one of the main reasons that the Black Lives Matter movement exists today. That it is perhaps a continuation of the Civil Rights Movement and serves as evidence that the oppression of black people has not ended, but it has simply changed its form.

However, this systemic issue of race and racism is one that has been argued time and again. One of the main reasons being that this issue comes with limitations. For Black men and women, they have certain choices that they are limited to situations. In the brief example given above, that Black man encountering the police has the option of cooperating with the police officer or not cooperating, either way there will be a consequence often to the disliking of the man stopped.

Our identities define the constraints of our choices. They either limit or expand the opportunities allotted to the individual. In the novel Beloved, Toni Morrison explores some of the limitations aligned with the identity of enslaved people that had run away, and the limitations that decision places on their children. The novel addresses the choices many were confined to in their fight for freedom, and how their decisions loomed over generations. Morrison tasks the readers to understand the ways in which identities propose limitations on several characters in her novel, begging the question: to what extent do our identities haunt us?

### **Identities, Choices, and Limitations: Brief Literary Analysis on Beloved**

Beloved was published in 1987 and was written to critique American history through fiction. Toni Morrison approaches historical oppression through a narrative that explores the long-term effects of racism and slavery. Morrison uses flashbacks to narrate the story of Sethe's

life on the plantation as a slave, and as a means of justifying her actions and responses. However justified Sethe's actions may seem, there are some lingering consequences she and her family cannot avoid. Sethe made the choice to run away from the plantation, Sweet Home. Life as a slave was not fitting for any human, and as Sethe and her husband planned to runaway together only she and her children would make it out. After being at Baby Suggs for about a month, Sethe was faced with the possibility of having to return to the plantation with her children. She made a choice to kill her oldest daughter while harming her other two sons to save them from becoming enslaved. Schoolteacher, upon seeing the mess in the shed, realizes that there is nothing worth taking back to Sweet Home. Sethe's choice would affect her daughter, Denver greatly, and it will be a main factor in the disappearance of her sons. The novel deals with themes such as the importance of community and the destruction of identity. Through Morrison's use of flashbacks, symbolism, and her inclusion of the supernatural, she conveys the impacts of slavery and how it damages the characters' identities and ultimately impacts the outcome of future situations.

The style Morrison uses is very complex forcing the reader to search for the answers rather than allowing a simple and direct meaning for them. Sethe, the protagonist, is portrayed as a character who is struggling to keep her family together. This challenge is hinged on her traumatic experiences from an early life of enslavement. Take for instance, the moment when Paul D arrives and watches Sethe as she undresses. Morrison writes, "And when the top of her dress was around her hips and he saw what the sculpture had become, like the decorative work of an ironsmith too passionate for display, he could think but not say, 'Aw, Lord, girl.' And he would tolerate no peace until he had touched every ridge and leaf of it with his mouth" (21). Paul D "examines" her scars, rather than just noticing or looking at them because they represented more than a memory. The scars served as a representation of a life of suffering. Sethe was beaten

for not giving her breast milk away when she lived on the plantation, and in this encounter with Paul D, the narrator says, “What she knew was that the responsibility for her breasts, at last, was in somebody else’s hands” (21). Not only did Sethe feel powerless when it came to be keeping her body protected, but her scars become a focal point for Paul D which can be perceived as a way of sexualizing her. The slight tone of genderism at work shows that women of this time found safety and comfort when protected by a man, and men found bodily scars to be distractive to a woman’s appeal to beauty. Morrison continues, “Now *there* was a man, and *that* was a tree. Himself lying in bed and the ‘tree’ lying next to him didn’t compare” (26). Being a woman, Sethe was dehumanized by the men around her. Sethe was forced to give her breast milk away at Sweet Home, and she was forced to withstand the silent scrutiny and judgement as Paul D looks at her naked body. She was objectified because she was a woman, and Schoolteacher takes advantage of her because of it. Her appearance and experiences were influenced by this identity which becomes destructive rather than empowering.

During a flashback moment in the story, the reader encounters the point at which Sethe’s former master, Schoolteacher, visits town in effort to reclaim his property. To save her children, she takes them to the back shed and decides that death would keep them from ever being enslaved. Sethe says, “I stopped him... I took and put my babies where they’d be safe” (193). The purpose of Sethe running away to Baby Suggs home was to get her children to safety and as far away from slavery as possible. Her identity as a runaway meant that no matter how far she went, if she were found she would be taken back to Sweet Home, and beaten, if not killed, for running away. Morrison writes, “... and it occurred to [Paul D] that what she wanted for her children was exactly what was missing in 124: safety” (193). Morrison continues:

“‘It worked,’ she said.

‘How? Your boys gone you don’t know where. One girl dead, and the other won’t leave the yard. How did it work?’

‘They ain’t at Sweet Home. Schoolteacher ain’t got em.’...

‘What you did was wrong, Sethe.’

‘I shouldn’t have gone on back there? Taken my babies back there?’” (194)

At this point we see Sethe at a crossroads where she feels as though she had limited options if she were to save her children. In the moment she had only killed one of her babies before Schoolteacher left, but somehow, she still believes she made the right choice. This opens the door for Morrison to bring in the supernatural aspect of the story, *Beloved*.

*Beloved* is the name written on the gravestone for Sethe’s deceased daughter, but it was not the daughter’s name. The ghost in the story takes on the name of *Beloved*, and haunts 124 using Denver and Sethe to fulfill her needs. Morrison writes, “[Sethe] sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while *Beloved* ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it” (295). This is one of the two climaxes of the narrative as *Beloved* begins to overpower Sethe and nearly kills her. *Beloved*, the ghost, represents more than just the supernatural. *Beloved* serves as a symbol of the struggles and destruction of Sethe’s humanity. She “ate up her life”, consuming her with horrendous memories of her life on the plantation and reminding her of the deceased daughter whom she was responsible for killing.

Toni Morrison takes the reader on this fantastical journey in which they are often encountering flashbacks to understand the plot. The flashbacks as a whole reveal that Sethe, however far away she was from Sweet Home, was trapped there mentally and living in fear due to the trauma she experienced. The flashbacks can also serve as a representation of the character

suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder being haunted by her past. There are symbols throughout the novel allowing the reader to hinge to certain characters or characteristics that exploits the inhumanity of slavery, and its generational affects such as Sethe's scars, both physical and mental, Denver's inferiority to the ghost, and Paul D's inability to save the family. Overall, Morrison uses the characters to show that the affects of slavery are not limited to one outcome, and that identity alters the individual perspective of reality.

## Poetry

## **Creative Work: An Exploration of Identity**

During this section you will be introduced to a collection of creative, free-verse poems that I have written. The first two pieces, *Closets* and *Quiet Space*, were written as a response to hiding my sexuality. Growing up my family thought homosexuality was disgraceful. We practiced Christianity, so my family was not very open to having homosexual children. After coming out, things changed, but the experiences of hiding and feeling as though I could not be myself are feelings I would continue struggling with today.

The next two pieces, *Don't Be* and *D.W.B.*, were written as a response to some of the advice I received growing up. As a Black male, my family always warned us of the dangers we faced in our daily lives. I grew up in South Central Los Angeles and caught the bus to and from school since I entered the second grade. Both my mother and grandmother would always make me pray for God's protection before leaving the house. Though the prayers were of regularity, I could sense fear in those women who wanted nothing more than for us to return home that night.

The final three pieces, *Socialization...*, *Black Minds Matter*, and *I Am Not Yo N\*gga*, are pieces that were written in response to my college experiences. Upon arriving to CSUMB, I feared that I would feel displaced. After entering the classroom, I still felt as if I did not belong. There were not many students that looked like me, or professors. This was something I had to overcome, and those feelings of misplacement became feelings of pride and joy. I have learned the value that all my collective identities hold, and I wish to share them with anyone who will listen.

\*Note: Some of these creative pieces may include explicit language and/or profanity.

## Closets

Hush! Don't make a sound.  
Condemned unintentionally  
Crimes you claimed to not know.

Wait! Don't move.  
Let your eyes do the walking for you  
Don't give them a reason to \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_.

Just lay there! Close your eyes.  
Wander the fantasy of fancy  
It will all be over soon.

Come.

Sleep here.  
The discomfort of darkness and quiet  
You'll learn to love.

Don't be frightened.  
Here it's just you, me,  
And the darkness.

In this twilight  
There are no vampires.  
Sleep easy.

Stay.

Until the sun returns.



## Quiet Space

I feel it most in solitary.  
A quiet prison doesn't exist.  
My thoughts racing  
Yet trapped by the need to be sane.  
Look sane.  
Act.  
Sane.

What does silence sound like to you?  
Cause the whistles of the wind,  
the crackles of dead leaves hitting the ground  
Breaks my peace of mind.

What does meditation feel like for you?  
Cause the urgency to *just breathe*,  
and the continuous *let it be*  
Brings rage to my spirit.

forced into silence for so long  
No.  
No More  
will you speak for me.

## **Don't Be**

You was doing' good  
Seconds from being' out the hood  
Missed a step and tumbled back to the bottom

They didn't even reach for you  
No one was there with  
A helping hand

Even God was blindfolded

Blackness        missed step  
Poverty         missed step  
Homosexuality        missed step  
Mistaken misogynist missed step  
                    Why try?

You was doing good bro.  
You was conquering the  
Unconquerable,

the Impossible  
Yet you're still stoppable.  
"Don't be the easy target"

They say,  
"Cause the Black Bunnies  
always die young"

**D.W.B.**

Don't let them catch you.

Both hands on the wheel, nowhere to go.  
You've done everything right.  
Complete stops. Speed limit 40,  
Shit. Oh, I'm at 37.

6:42 am, on the way to the first job \*whoop-whoop\*

2:56 pm, on your way to that third class \*whoop-whoop\*

11:11 pm and you make a wish

Both hands on the wheel  
Nowhere to run.  
Don't move!  
Your skin is the weapon.

Don't move! *Don't scratch your nose*  
DWB can cost you your life.

Jail or Hell  
decipher which is the latter.

I'm trying to piece together why you're gone, bro  
I wonder which one of us is next.

*Just don't let 'em catch you.*

Socialization often feels like a mistake.  
I step out of my comfort zone to speak and walls begin to fall around me.  
Maybe that's my fault for saying all the wrong things.  
I was taught that some things are better left unsaid, and yet I ignored the lesson.  
But if things occur around me, and I speak of them, why do I feel guilty?  
Why do I feel afraid to speak again?

## **Black Minds Matter**

I've been dreaming for the past few weeks of a  
Life filled with love and happiness.  
The simpler things.  
Dreaming of a life where I carry no baggage.  
Where the world is only sunshine and rainbows.

Reality quakes every time I open my eyes.  
I remember that the world is on my shoulders.  
I try to let them down, but it isn't in my nature.  
I try to beat around it, but my conscience won't allow it.

I represent equilibrium.  
Balancing wise and otherwise.  
They know that I'll never quit, nor fail.  
I never quit, nor fail.

I believe that everyone exists for a reason,  
Everything happens for a reason.  
My life is no burden, my love is not strained.  
I'll give away my all and never in vain.

When dreaming I must come to terms with reality.  
The burden of life will never leave me.  
So, I must fight on.  
For Me.            For Us.  
'Cause when the world is on your shoulders,

Failure is not an option.

## **I'm Not Yo Nigga!**

When you hear me speak to  
my brothers issa love language

We speak      We hear      We soothe  
our wounds with our words

The songs we sing are  
the psalms of the spirit

So, I am NOT your Nigga!

When you see me salute my  
sisters here lies trust, a closeness

Our Asses      Our Hair      Our Language  
an expression of culture. uprooted identity

That rhythm and flow is  
not yours      not yours      NOT

So, I am NOT your Nigga!

I'm not your Nigga when we are friends  
I'm not your Nigga when we disagree

I'm not your Nigga at the house  
I'm not your Nigga in the streets

I'm nobody's Nigga, and you don't understand  
So, don't ever call me Nigga then reach for my hand.

## Annotated Bibliography

Acevedo, Elizabeth. *The Poet X*. HarperCollins, 2018.

This novel which is told in verse and reminds the reader to understand individuality by telling the story of adolescence. This novel engages the struggles of identity as it pertains to Xiomara's family, religious beliefs, and sexuality. The novel highlights the ways in which individual values may conflict with cultural and traditional values. However, this compelling coming of age story is creatively designed to introduce poetry, while focusing on the common themes of expressing individuality, love, and creativity.

Butler-Ruthford, A. "*Law Enforcement Overtime*" Final Oral History Research Essay, 19 Dec. 2019.

In exploring the historical and present-day role of law enforcement in the U.S. it is safe to say that there are many comparisons when considering the impact on Black communities. For this research project, Butler interviewed a woman who has lived to see many changes in United States history. Who, over the course of her childhood, traveled from coast to coast, New York City to Los Angeles. She was merely a child during the rise of the Civil Rights Movement and recalls seeing much of what she remembers on the television, and in the newspaper. When she became a teenager, she began participating in local marches herself. Most of her life has been spent in the church, which she states was more political during the civil rights movement era. We examined the similarities in the treatment of Black people in America, and through our examination of history, we can conclude that there have been many progressions, but there have also been many setbacks. Though the world seems to be moving forward on the racial issues in the U.S., there are still many

similarities as to how law enforcement has responded to Black communities in the 1960s, and to how they respond now.

Eisen-Martin, Tongo. *Heaven Is All Goodbyes*. City Lights Books, 2017.

This book of poetry provides excellent imagery and an examination of oppression and social discourse. Eisen-Martin encounters various life altering moments and asks the reader to step into his shoes. The recurring symbols of colors and the idea of heaven aid in providing insight on common social, political, and spiritual challenges Eisen-Martin experiences. This text is revolutionary as it challenges common standards of poetry and critiques the current social environment.

Minor, C. *We got this.: Equity, access, and the quest to be who our students need us to be*.

Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2019.

In this book, Cornelius Minor addresses one of the major issues that students face in the classroom; the fact that they cannot directly relate what they are learning to their everyday lives. Minor points out that teachers get so caught up in trying to prepare students to complete scholastic tasks that are not necessarily interesting or relatable for the student. But through active listening, practiced more so on the teacher side, there can be a major change in the student's world and worldview. Students usually feel powerless/inferior to the instructor and often feel as though their needs as human beings are not being fulfilled through the typical "teacher says, student does" system. But Minor focuses on exploring the ways in which building those connections and listening to students would aid them in being successful both academically, and in their personal lives. In the text Minor addresses many inequities students face based on race, sex, class, etc. in their



daily lives. He also points out that the work of addressing such inequities is messy, but nonetheless necessary.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. York Press, 2002.

The novel *Beloved* tells the story of a former enslaved, black woman who is challenged to confront her issues that have left an ever-present scar on the life of their family. Sethe, a runaway slave, finds safety and security at Baby Suggs. As remnants of Sethe's past continue to terrorize her, she is forced to make an uncomfortable decision for her children. Her decisions impact her children physically, mentally, and emotionally. As Denver, Sethe's youngest daughter, is challenged with the task of ridding their home of a ghost, the reader is taken into Sethe's past to uncover the source of the issues the family dealt with presently.

Salas-Rivera, R. *Lo Terciario*. Small Press Distribution, 2019.

This collection of poetry is translated in both English and Spanish. It examines the crisis in Puerto Rico as it pertains to the economy. This work of literature is a reminder of the challenges the country faced with violence and colonialism. Salas-Rivera works to describe experiences in a narrative-style of poems. They challenge the readers to encounter aspects of identity, specifically race, sexuality, and gender. Salas-Rivera proposes that the best way to encourage others to understand one's personal identities and values is to be vulnerable in both sharing and listening to the identities and values of others. They remind us to stay hopeful through this creative and engaging piece of literature.

Wilson, Ronaldo V. *Lucy* 72. 1913, 2018.

This book of poetry discusses challenges of oppression in what may be considered as an alternate universe. Lucy, the main speaker in the poems, exposes the reader to some of her inner most thoughts and begs for an empathetic response to her presumed challenges of being white. Wilson uses various aspects of figurative language to enhance the experiences of Lucy and describes a story of oppression that is creative and socially provokes action through an undertone of encouraged mindfulness.

## Poetry, Identity, and Figurative Language Lesson Plan

**Lesson Title: Exploring Identity through Poetry Lesson Duration: 2-3 weeks**

<b>Name: Azariah Butler-Ruthford</b>	<b>Subject: Reading &amp; Language Arts</b>
<b>School: CSUMB</b>	<b>Grade: 10-11</b>

<b>Class Description</b>	This lesson is an introduction to reading and writing poetry with a focus on identity and diversity. This lesson includes a review section on figurative language.
<b>Background Knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of the term “Identity”</li> <li>• Understanding of the term “Privilege”</li> <li>• Self-awareness (racial/cultural background, sexuality, economic class, and ability)</li> </ul>
<b>Standards:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content Domains</li> </ul>	<b>1.1 Literary Analysis</b> <b>1.2 Literary Elements</b> <b>2.1 Human Language Structures</b> <b>3.1 Written Composing Process (Individual and Collaborative)</b> <b>3.3 Rhetorical Effects of Grammatical Elements</b> <b>4.4 Creative Writing</b>
<b>Central Focus/Learning Target</b>	Identity, Justice, Diversity, Creativity
<b>Lesson Learning Objective/Target</b>	Students will be able to identify types of poems (such as sonnets, rhymes, free verse). Students will be able to identify the elements of poetry (such as lines, stanzas, meter, rhyme schemes) that collaborate to create meaning. Students will construct their own poetry writing. Students will engage with and analyze works of poetry.

<p><b>Academic Language Objective</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Demands</li> <li>● Functions</li> <li>● Forms</li> </ul>	<p>Students will orally justify their interpreted meaning of poems during small group/class discussion.</p> <p>Students will summarize in writing the meaning of poems.</p> <p>Students will collaborate in small groups to determine the meaning of a literary work.</p> <p>Students will create two original poems modelled after classroom texts.</p>	
<p><b>Assessment Plan, Rubric, and Feedback Procedures After Student Work Analysis</b></p>	<p>Students will be assessed based on daily classroom journals throughout the unit.</p> <p>Students will receive pre- and post- unit quizzes (of which only the post-unit quiz will be graded).</p> <p>Students will receive credit for their annotations on readings for homework.</p> <p>Students will receive participation credit based on class discussions.</p> <p>Students will receive points for exit quizzes.</p>	
<p><b>Materials</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Composition Notebooks (Journal)</li> <li>● <i>The Poet X</i>, by Elizabeth Acevedo (Novel)</li> <li>● Parent-approved excerpts from <i>Lucy 72</i>, Ronaldo V. Wilson, <i>Lo Terciario</i>, Raquel Salas-Rivera, and <i>Heaven Is All Goodbyes</i>, Tongo Eisen-Martin</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Instruction and/or Practice Activity</b></p> <p><b>(Identify necessary supports/scaffolding/modifications)</b></p> <p><i>[Time Allotted: 1 hour, 30 minutes]</i></p>	<p>Teacher’s tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Journal: What is poetry? What makes something a poem?</li> <li>● Distribute pre-unit questionnaire</li> <li>● Intro to <i>The Poet X</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ About the author</li> <li>○ What is slam poetry?</li> <li>○ Setting the scene: New York</li> <li>○ Class Reading: pgs. 1-10</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Introduction to Poetry PowerPoint <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Brief Overview</li> <li>○ Historical Examples</li> <li>○ Modern-day examples</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Students’ tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Answer journal prompt in the composition notebook.</li> <li>● Complete the pre-unit questionnaire to the best of your ability.</li> <li>● Take notes on lessons: Intro to <i>The Poet X</i> and Intro to Poetry.</li> <li>● Write down homework</li> <li>● <i>Remember, your journal is for your eyes only. I will be doing a brief check for completion. If there is something you do not want me to read, put an “X” on the page and I will respect your requests.</i></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homework: Read and annotate pages 1-47</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Formative (Informal) Assessment</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exit Quiz: Name one poet we discussed today.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Instruction and/or Practice Activity</b></p> <p><b>(Identify necessary supports/scaffolding/modifications)</b></p> <p><i>[Time Allotted: 1 hour, 30 minutes]</i></p>	<p>Teacher’s tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journal: What are some different examples of poems? Take a guess. What would you write a poem about?</li> <li>• Introduction to Poetry PowerPoint (cont.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Types of Poems (Lyrical, Limerick, Free-verse, Haiku, Narrative)</li> <li>○ What do poems consist of?</li> <li>○ Verse, Stanza, Rhythm, Metric, and Rhyme</li> <li>○ Example: <i>Sonnet #18</i>, Shakespeare</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Journal Check</li> <li>• Homework: Read and annotate pages 48-92</li> </ul>	<p>Students’ tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Answer Journal prompt in the composition notebook.</li> <li>• Take notes on lesson: Introduction to Poetry (cont.)</li> <li>• Group activity: What is the meter of <i>Sonnet #18</i></li> <li>• Write down homework</li> <li>• <i>Remember, your journal is for your eyes only. I will be doing a brief check for completion. If there is something you do not want me to read, put an “X” on the page and I will respect your requests.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Formative (Informal) Assessment</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exit Quiz: What is iambic pentameter?</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Instruction and/or Practice Activity</b></p> <p><b>(Identify necessary supports/scaffolding/modifications)</b></p> <p><i>[Time Allotted: 1 hour, 30 minutes]</i></p>	<p>Teacher’s tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journal Question: Define the term “identity”. Name some examples.</li> <li>• Presentation: Where Poetry and Identity Meet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Review Figurative Language.</li> <li>○ Group Activity: View excerpts from <i>Lucy 72</i>, <i>Lo Terciario</i>, and <i>Heaven is All Goodbyes</i> (must get signed approval from all parents).</li> <li>○ Class Discussion: What was your group’s poem about? Why do you think that poem is important to the author, to you, or to the world?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Journal Check</li> <li>• Homework: Read and annotate pages 300-357.</li> </ul>	<p>Students’ tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Answer Journal prompt in the composition notebook.</li> <li>• Take notes on lesson: Poetry, Identity, and Figurative Language</li> <li>• Participate in group activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Annotate/ Dissect the poem with your group.</li> <li>○ What is the poem about? How does the author show you what the poem means? What devices of figurative language do you notice? Is this poem important? Why/Why not?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Write down homework</li> <li>• <i>Remember, your journal is for your eyes only. I will be doing a brief check for completion. If there is something you do not want me to read, put an “X” on the page and I will respect your requests.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Formative (Informal) Assessment</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exit Quiz: (you are not turning this in, write this in your journal) Recall a memory that is important to you. Using figurative language devices, we discussed, write 1-2 stanzas of a poem describing your memory. <i>*optional homework assignment</i></li> </ul>	

<p><b>Closure with Outcomes Assessment</b></p> <p><i>[Time Allotted: 1 hour, 30 minutes]</i></p>	<p>Teacher's tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journal Question: Free write. You can write a poem or about something new you learned, something important to you or your favorite part(s) of the book.</li> <li>• Review Jeopardy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Divide the class into groups of 4-5 students.</li> <li>○ One student from each group must stand to answer and cannot receive help from their team to answer. Rotate per question.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• End of book discussion: Did you like the book? Favorite part? On a scale of 1-5, would you recommend it?</li> <li>• post-unit assessment on poetry (types of poetry, components, poets discussed in class), on <i>The Poet X</i>, and on figurative language.</li> <li>• Final journal check</li> </ul>	<p>Students' tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Answer Journal prompt in the composition notebook.</li> <li>• Participate in Review Jeopardy</li> <li>• Participate in class discussion</li> <li>• Complete the post-unit assessment.</li> </ul>
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## **Day 5:**

Write the journal prompt on the board before class begins: *Define the term identity. What are some examples?* Begin the class by asking the students to take out their journals and answer the prompt from the board. Allow the students 5-7 minutes to respond. Ask the students to begin wrapping up their thoughts in 30 seconds. Facilitate a class-wide discussion. First, review class norms about discussion etiquette and respectfulness. Propose the question and call on students to answer aloud. *Define the term identity. What are some examples?* Write some of the students' examples/key terms on the board. (Some terms such as race, religion, and sexuality may come up in a discussion such as this, and it is important to be prepared to lead those discussions in a healthy manner with the students.) Wrap up the discussion and lead into today's presentation.

Call up the presentation on the projector: Where Poetry and Identity Meet. Begin by reviewing devices of figurative language. The Big 7. **Metaphors** apply a word or phrase to an object or action which is not literally related. **Similes**, like metaphors, apply a word or phrase to an object using the words *like* or *as*. **Personification** is attributing a human characteristic to something that is not human. **Hyperbole** is an exaggeration to emphasize a strong feeling or impression. **Symbolism** is using a symbol to represent an idea. **Alliteration** is the occurrence of the same letter or sound in closely connected words. Lastly, **onomatopoeia** is the formation of a word using a sound associated with its name. Go through 10 examples and encourage the students to answer which figurative language device is being used. The presentation should be 20-25 minutes. Introduce group activity.

In this activity the students will be placed into groups of 4. They will each receive a printout of an excerpt from the following three texts: *Lucy 72*, *Heaven Is All Goodbyes*, and *Lo Terciario*. The students should read the poem together and discuss the meaning (annotations are



highly encouraged). Write or display the questions for group discussion: What is the poem about? How does the author show you what the poem means? What devices of figurative language do you notice? Is this poem important? Why/Why not? What identity do you think is being expressed? Encourage the students to use the discussion questions when they get stuck rather than as a checklist. Each member should write a 1-2 sentence summary/ meaning about the poem from their group discussion. Each group should choose one reader and one spokesperson. This activity should be 25 minutes.

Call the classes attention back together. Facilitate a class-wide discussion about the poems. Review class norms if necessary. Going to each group, allow the reader to present their group's poem. Allow the spokesperson to summarize what the group discussed. Allow other students an opportunity to respond/add to the spokesperson's summary. This discussion should be 30 minutes, allowing a minimum of 5 minutes for up to 6 groups.

Remind the students to read and annotate pages 300-357 for homework. Allow the students a moment to debrief and share how their reading is going. Are there any points of confusion? Questions about anything we reviewed today? Check student journals while students complete the exit quiz of the day in the final 5-8 minutes of class.

Exit Quiz: (you are not turning this in, write this in your journal) Recall a memory that is important to you. Using figurative language devices, we discussed, write 2 stanzas of a poem describing that memory. Finish this journal at home if needed.

## Synthesis

My Identity is who I am. As an African American, homosexual male, I have struggled to find balance and confidence in my identities. I have also struggled with understanding *why* I had to struggle. This topic is something I confronted daily. On one hand, I dealt with microaggressions socially, where people were in opposition to me because of my race and sexuality in public places like school and restaurants. On the other hand, I dealt with microaggressions communally, where my family struggled to accept my sexuality due to religious beliefs and past experiences. Growing up, it was challenging to find comfort because whether I was at home or school, I was being judged and ridiculed because of who I am. At a very early age, I used to write as an outlet, because the pages in my journal was where I found safety. I realized there I could be who I was judgement-free. Eventually, my writing evolved, and my writing began to go in a more creative direction. I fell in love with poetry because poems do the same work that novels do, but they do it in a shorter space and time. I had found a community of poets that discussed having similar challenges that I experienced, and when I started to write about my experiences it became more poetic. When I got to CSUMB, I was provided the opportunity to engage with even more poets who discussed the same challenges with identity, and I was able to practice my craft hinging on texts written by people like Tongo Eisen-Martin.

When deciding which capstone course to enroll in, 427: Social Identities, Politics, and Change seemed like the best choice. It was! I had taken a course in the past with Dr. Villaseñor called Latina Life Stories. In that class, we discussed literature written by Latina women who felt compelled to tell their stories in the form of memoirs. I wanted my project to be similar in that respect. I wanted to tell a story that was closely aligned with who I am, and one that would bring

the reader or viewer closer to understanding a diverse perspective. I designed the project to incorporate literary analysis, creative writing, and encourage social action in the form of education. The capstone seminars and discussion aided me in completing this task.

During our class sessions, each pair/group of students led a seminar on the week's text. The students giving the presentation would ask thought-provoking questions, and encourage class discussions where we were able to share personal encounters with issues of identity as it related to the topic of race, sexuality, or the in-/ability to have children to name a few examples. The seminars were very engaging because we were able to form our individual perspectives about the texts and bring that insight to the larger group during discussions. The seminars also provided a deeper understanding of the information in the text because groups would select and define key terms and focus points the text mentioned. Two of the most influential text seminars for me were on the books The Fire Next Time, by James Baldwin, and We Gon' Be Alright, by Jeff Chang.

These Texts were very influential because the authors discuss the topic of race in an articulate way that allowed me to expand my thinking when encountering my own research project. For my project, I decided to do a close analysis of Beloved, by Toni Morrison because the novel creatively shines a light on social discourse as it pertains to race. I specifically wanted to shine a light on how our identities such as race, sexuality, and gender can impact our abilities to make decisions. I also wanted to focus on how our identities limited the options we have in deciding. In writing this essay, I thought it would be of greater value to include a personal narrative that I had researched in the past, which led me to include an excerpt from an oral history interview I had conducted during the fall semester. The conversation was on the identity of race and how it impacts interactions with law enforcement. The seminars conducted in class

served as a reminder, and sometimes an introduction, to events that occurred in the United States that oppressed people because of their identities such as the Charlottesville protest and the shooting of Michael Brown.

The seminars encouraged me to examine all the ways in which I had been oppressed and allowed a level of vulnerability that I may have with my creative pieces. In doing research, I focused my essay on analyzing the novel itself. Beloved is a novel that requires careful examination to fully uncover the social justice tone of the text. It has been a favorite of mine for 6 years now because it tells the story of race relations by including the supernatural force of a ghost. Most of my research and outside sources helped me to write original poetry and design a unit plan. I wanted every element of my project to be personal because identity is personal. When writing the poems, I would read from my resources and allow the texts to inspire me. I first jotted down some ideas or memories that came to mind from the readings, and then I explored them. I used my writing to try and allow the reader to have a glimpse of my experience, and maybe even challenge them to recall personal experiences that they may have to relate with mine. I aimed to connect the essay, the poems, and the unit plan to introduce my individual values and goals for when I become an educator in the future.

The topic of social identity is important and prevalent in our daily lives; however, it is a topic that does not gain the necessary attention it deserves. Taking this capstone allowed me to return to the appreciation I have of diversity, and it allowed me to see the ways and resources available for me to pass this information on to my future students. This project does not end here for me. If there was one lesson I took away from this capstone, it is that identity, politics, and change is in our hands, and in order for them to work together, we, as a society, must create safe

spaces to discuss social discourse with vulnerability, and encourage the inclusion of diverse perspectives in every aspect of our lives.