

Where Poetry Comes From: Intersectionality and the Poetry of Social Justice



**A STUDY MODULE FOR FIRST YEAR, FIRST
GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS AT A HISPANIC
SERVING INSTITUTION**

BY

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Mount Saint Mary's University, Los Angeles



1. The only women's university in the Los Angeles area.
2. A Liberal Arts known for its nursing program (BSN). (This program admits men as well as women.)
3. A Hispanic-Serving Institution and Majority minority university. The majority of students are low-income first-generation college students.

Purpose of Study Module



1. Introduce the discipline of Literary Studies, through poetry.
2. To empower students to reflect upon and articulate their own identities.
3. To demonstrate the relevance of the Humanities in the undergraduate curriculum.

First Year Seminar (1)



All students take two semesters of First Year Seminar.

Fall Semester: Introduction to navigating the university, including academic, social-emotional, financial, metacognition.

First Year Seminar (2)



Spring Semester: An integrative course combining the study of two modules, taught by two professors who, ideally, represent separate disciplines, and culminating in an integrative paper or project.

For example: Literature and Psychology

What is Poetry? (1)



- **Aristotle (Greek Philosopher, 4th century B.C.E.):**

“... the art which imitates, in words only.”
(paraphrase from The Poetics)

What is Poetry? (2)



- **Emily Dickinson (American poet, 19th century):**

“If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only way I know it. Is there any other way?”

What is Poetry? (3)



- **Robert Frost (American Poet, 20th century):**

“Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words.”

What is Poetry? (4)



- **Salvatore Quasimodo (Italian novelist and poet, 20th century):**

“Poetry is the revelation of a feeling that the poet believes to be interior and personal which the reader recognizes as his own.”

What is Poetry? (5)



- **William Wordsworth (English Poet, late 18th-mid 19th century:**

“... poetry is the *spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings*: it takes its origin from *emotion recollected in tranquility*: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.”

Course of Study



1. Introduction: History and Definitions of Poetry
2. History and Definition of Intersectionality (Kimberle Crenshaw, 1989)
3. Audre Lorde: “Poetry is not a Luxury” (1984) and selected poems from *The Black Unicorn*

Course of Study (2)



4. Adrienne Rich: “Split and the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity” and selected poems, including “Rape”(1973) and “Song”(1971).

5. Claudia Rankine: *Citizen: An American Lyric* (selections)

Supplemental Poems and Videos



1. Video readings and interviews of Lorde, Rich, and Rankine
2. YouTube videos of ordinary people reciting favorite poems, especially those of Lorde and Rich.
3. Spoken-word and Slam poetry addressing race, gender, language, status. (Button Poetry)

Assessments & Assignments for Poetry Module



1. An essay using Audre Lorde “Keywords” drawn from “Poetry is not a Luxury” to illuminate one of the selected Lorde poems.
2. Students write a portfolio of several poems.
3. Final “integrative” paper” includes personal connection to topics.