



A Lesson on Gwendolyn Brooks, An African American Poet by Sheena Manescalco

Grade Level: Grade 4

Subject Area: English Language Arts

Lesson Length: 2 hours

Lesson Keywords: reading, writing, african-american, poet, legacy, woman

Lesson Description: The goal of this lesson is to educate students on the history of a great African-American poet and her legacy. Students will use knowledge gained in the passage to answer questions as well as to show understanding of key terms. Students should read and re-read the passage for a deep understanding of the text before starting to answer the questions.

Common Core Standards Covered with This Lesson

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1: Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.1: Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.1b: Provide reasons that are supported by facts and details.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1d: Review the key ideas expressed and explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.4.4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 4 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.4.4a: Use context (e.g., definitions, examples, or restatements in text) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

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Lesson Content: Book/Story/Reading Passage

Instructions: Please read the following reading passage as many times as needed (aloud and silent) before starting to go through other lesson pages. Understanding the content of this passage is very important since the lesson activities will be all about this content. Feel free to print the passage if needed.

Gwendolyn Brooks, An African American Poet

by

Content: Gwendolyn Elizabeth Brooks was an American poet. Her grandfather had been a slave. He was a brave man. He escaped from slavery. Then he fought in the Civil War.

His son married a teacher. They lived in Kansas. When Gwendolyn Brooks was a baby, her family moved to Chicago. Gwendolyn went to Chicago public schools. She grew up in Chicago. She stayed here for the rest of her life. She visited many places. But she always came back to Chicago.

Gwendolyn Brooks enjoyed reading and writing. She wrote about her life. She wrote about Chicago. When she was just thirteen, she wrote a poem for a magazine. Later, she wrote more poems. They were printed in other people's books. When she was older, she wrote books of her own poems. She became a poet. She was well known in the United States. She was also well known in other countries. She won awards for her poetry.

It was not easy to get a job in writing. Gwendolyn worked for a while typing. She typed other people's words. But she wrote her own words, too. She wrote important poems. They were read by many people all over the world. Her poems made them think.

Gwendolyn Brooks was also a teacher. So she helped students think more. She taught college students in the Chicago area. What did she teach them? She taught them how important ideas are in poems. Many people learned from her in those classes.

Gwendolyn Brooks won prizes for her poetry. Every year, more people read them. They loved her poems. She is well known as a great poet. She is an important African American woman.

When she was 83, she became sick with cancer. In just a short time, she died. She died in 2000. She had done so much in her life. Her life is an important part of America's history. She left a great legacy.

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Task 1: Vocabulary

Instructions: Please complete the following vocabulary activity by choosing the correct meaning of each word selected from the passage and use of each word correctly in a sentence.

Q: 1 WordPhrase: escaped **WordPhraseTier:** 2

Question: The author in our story says Gwendolyn's grandfather "escaped from slavery." What does the word "escaped" mean in this sentence?

- A:** to fall down
- B:** to stay
- C:** to break free
- D:** to sleep

Question: Which one of the sentences below uses the word "escaped" correctly?

- A:** John escaped for a long time last night instead of waking up to his alarm clock.
- B:** Susan wanted to go to the store but decided to escape home and keep watching tv.
- C:** Adam escaped over the curb and got a scrape on his knee.
- D:** Jessica escaped from a dog that was chasing her by turning a corner quickly.

Q: 2 WordPhrase: important **WordPhraseTier:** 2

Question: The author in our story says "She wrote many important poems." What does the word "important" mean in this sentence?

- A:** to have serious meaning or worth
- B:** to not be interesting
- C:** to be very noisy
- D:** to have been silly

Question: Which one of the sentences below uses the word "important" correctly?

- A:** Dana is so important that no one ever listens to her.
- B:** Frederick likes to important the car at the car wash.
- C:** Lisa eats ham and cheese important sandwiches.
- D:** Brian wrote an important letter to the mayor about recycling.

Q: 3 WordPhrase: poet **WordPhraseTier:** 3

Question: The author in our story says "she became a poet." Based on the text in the story, what does the word "poet" mean in this sentence?

- A:** one who writes poetry
- B:** one who listens to poetry
- C:** one who talks to others about poetry
- D:** a teacher of poetry

Question: Which one of the sentences below uses the word "poet" correctly?

- A:** Jane walks her dog to the poet tree and back.
- B:** Alex eats poet cereal for breakfast everyday.
- C:** Serena is a poet who enjoys writing down her thoughts.
- D:** Alan goes to school in a poet.

Q: 4 WordPhrase: legacy **WordPhraseTier:** 3

Question: The author in the story says "She left a great legacy." What does the word "legacy" mean in this sentence?

- A:** to pass down information to future generations
- B:** to read a lot of books
- C:** to not share any stories with other people
- D:** to go on a long journey

Question: Which one of the sentences below uses the word "legacy" correctly?

- A:** I go for a walk each day to stretch my legacy and arms out.
- B:** I do not like to talk to anyone about how to eat a legacy.
- C:** I want to leave my children a great legacy to share with their children.
- D:** I find it hard to fish with a legacy attached to my fishing pole.

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Task 2: Forum Discussion

Instructions: This discussion forum will have questions for students to respond. Read the posted questions, and respond to each. Students are responsible for posting one initial and two peer responses for each topic.

1 - Why did the author mention where Gwendolyn was raised?

In the text, the author talked about Gwendolyn being raised in Chicago. Why do you think the author felt that this needed to be mentioned? Why do you think that she always came back to Chicago?

2 - What does it mean that Gwendolyn was known in other countries?

The author talks about how Gwendolyn was well known in the United States, but also mentions other countries. What does it mean that Gwendolyn was known in other countries??

3 - How did people know about Gwendolyn and her poetry?

In the past, there were no computers or cell phones. How do you think people found out about Gwendolyn and what does that say about her poetry?

4 - Why do you think Gwendolyn became a teacher?

Based on the author's passage, why do you think Gwendolyn became a teacher? What do you think the author believes she enjoyed most about teaching?

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Task 3: Writing Activity

Instructions: Gwendolyn Elizabeth Brooks was a great African-American poet who wrote many great books of poetry. What do you think was her greatest accomplishment based on the author's passage? Think about her history starting from when her grandfather escaped slavery to when Gwendolyn died at age 83.

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