

Lesson Plan

The New Testament

By Jericho Brown



Facilitation Notes

By design, we are sentient and immortal beings. We are born to die, some say. This creative writing workshop explores “Another Elegy” by Jericho Brown to understand how we grieve not only death but the absence of a person, place, or thing. This creative writing also discusses domestic abuse, love, and duty.

Elegy

1. What do you fear most: dying or death? And when you speak of death, how do you talk about it? For example, John kicked the bucket; Jane went to Heaven; John ran out of time; Jane passed away.
2. What is a eulogy? What is an elegy? According to the Poetry Foundation, an elegy is a poem that grieves the death of its subject and ends in consolation. This is different than a eulogy because a eulogy is a speech of high praise given usually at a funeral.
3. Read “Another Elegy” by Jericho Brown; analyze and discuss the text before completing the writing prompt.
4. Share.
5. Conclude.



Another Elegy

By: Jericho Brown

Expect death. In every line,
Death is a metaphor that stands
For nothing, represents itself,
No goods for sale. It enters
Whether or not your house
Is dirty. Whether or not
You are clean, you arrive late
Because you don't believe her
When, sobbing as usual, she
Calls to say if you don't stop
Your brother, she will kill him
This time. Why rush? By now,
You think she likes it, his hands
Slapping her seven shades of red.
Besides, your brother is much
Bigger than you—once you tried
Pulling him off the woman he loves
And lost a tooth. Expect to lose
Again as you stand for nothing
Over his body, witness
Or reporter, murderer or kin.

Discussion Questions

1. If you were the speaker whose brother abuses his partner, what would you do in this situation? What does the speaker do to his brother in the poem?
2. "Death is a metaphor that stands / For nothing, represents itself," what do those lines mean? Does it relate to *Macbeth* at all?
3. Why doesn't death discriminate?
4. The woman in the text threatens to kill the speaker's brother, which reflects a common reality for some individuals who suffer from domestic violence and actually kill their partners out of self-defense. However, these individuals become incarcerated for their actions, what do you think about that? Is that fair?
5. If an individual abuses their partner, is that love? Why or why not? What is love?
6. If you love someone, how should you demonstrate your love to them, especially when you're angry at them?
7. "Again as you stand for nothing," what does that mean? Why does the speaker stand for nothing?
8. What is this poem grieving? Does it end with consolation?



Prompt

Write about a person, place, or thing that you lost and miss.
Describe how and why you lost and miss this person, place or thing.

Hint: try to end your piece on a positive note.



Facilitation Notes

In his *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare wrote: “Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them.” This creative writing workshop talks about hard work by focusing on Jericho Brown’s “Labor,” especially highlighting the lessons we learn as a child completing jobs around our neighborhood.

Hard Work

1. What does hard work look like to you? Who is someone that works hard? Is hard work important? Why or why not?
2. Would you rather be good at many things or great at one thing? What are some goals and dreams that you want to accomplish in your life?

Regardless of what you want to accomplish in your life, you will have to work hard, especially if you want to be great at something. Many of the greats in our lives worked hard their entire life to accomplish their goals and dreams.

3. Read “Labor” by Jericho Brown; analyze and discuss the text before completing the writing prompt.
4. Share.
5. Conclude.



Labor

By: Jericho Brown

I spent what light Saturday sent sweating
And learned to cuss cutting grass for women
Kind enough to say they couldn't tell the
damned
Difference between their mowed lawns
And their vacuumed carpets just before
Handing over a five-dollar bill rolled tighter
Than a joint and asking me in to change
A few lightbulbs. I called those women old
Because they wouldn't move out of a chair
Without my help or walk without a hand
At the base of their backs. I called them
Old, and they must have been; they're all dead
Now, dead and in the earth I once tended.
The loneliest people have the earth to love
And not one friend their own age—only
Mothers to baby them and big sisters to boss
Them around, women they want to please
And pray for the chance to say please to.
I don't do that kind of work anymore. My job
Is to look at the childhood I hated and say
I once had something to do with my hands.

Discussion Questions

1. What kind of jobs did you do around your neighborhood growing up?
2. In your definition, what makes someone old? Is age contingent on being old?
3. What did the speaker learn in the poem?
4. "The loneliest people have the earth to love / And not one friend their own age," how do you interpret those lines?
5. Do you have any fears about getting older? If so, what are they? Why?
6. Would you rather be cared for by your family or by nurses in a senior facility?
7. Why do you think the speaker hated his childhood? What are some things that you liked about your childhood?

Prompt

Start your piece with:
I spent what light Saturday sent sweating and learned to:

Then, write about 1 of the jobs you had growing up in your neighborhood.
Include 2-3 lessons you learned from that job.

Hint: you could hate or love this job but consider how it changed you.



Facilitation Notes

In an emergency, we shouldn't have only three options: the police, paramedics, and firefighters. Unfortunately, that's the reality for all Americans when they call 911. This creative writing workshop dives headfirst into this issue, specifically law enforcement officers brutalizing Black and Brown people since their conception. "Multiple Choice" by Jericho Brown captures the tumultuous relationship between the police and People of Color and how metal objects transform their roles as human beings.

Law Enforcement

1. Given the rise in media attention of police brutalizing Black and Brown people, the Black Lives Matter movement has called for defunding the police. Do you agree or disagree? What should law enforcement look like in this country? What should the criminal justice system look like in this country?
2. What percentage of Ohio's total population identifies as White, Black, and Latinx? (81%, 12%, 3%)

What percentage of Ohio's incarcerated population identifies as White, Black, and Latinx? (52%, 43%, 5%)

Why are minorities overrepresented in Ohio's incarcerated population than the majority demographic?

Not only in Ohio but across the nation, our criminal justice system incarcerates more Black and Brown people than their white counterparts.

3. Read "Multiple Choice" by Jericho Brown; analyze and discuss the text before completing the writing prompt.
4. Share.
5. Conclude.



Multiple Choice

By: Jericho Brown

Metal makes for a chemical reaction.
Now that my wrists are cuffed, I am
 Not like a citizen. What touches me
 Claims contamination. What
A shame. A sham. When the police come
They come in steel boots. Precious
 Metal. They want me kicked,
 So kick me they do. I cannot say
They love me. But they seek me out
As a lover would, each with both hands
 Bringing me to my knees, under God,
 Indivisible? I did not have to be born
Here. Men in every nation pray
And some standing and some flat
 On their backs. Pray luscious
 Silver. Pray Christmas. A chain
A chain. Even if it's pretty. Even around
The neck. I cannot say what they love
 Is me with a new bald fist in my mouth.
 Pray platinum teeth. Show me
A man who tells his children
The police will protect them
 And I'll show you the son of a man
 Who taught his children where
To dig. Not me. Couldn't be. Not
On my knees. No citizen begs
 To find anything other than forgiveness.

Discussion Questions

1. What is something metal that you put on your body and it changes you?
2. "Now that my wrists are cuffed, I am / Not like a citizen," how do you interpret those lines?
3. Do you know the words to the Pledge of Allegiance? Why do we Pledge Allegiance to the United States?
4. Show me with your hands how you pray? What do you usually pray about? Why? When do you usually pray? Do you ever receive an answer?
5. In their job descriptions, the police have to serve and protect our communities. Based on your experience, describe what the police do or have done?
6. Why does a man in this poem teach his children where to dig?
7. What's the significance of the poem's title?



Prompt

Describe one of your encounters with the police.
This encounter can be good or bad.

OR

Describe what your parents taught you
about the police.

OR

Describe what you will teach your
children about the police.

Hint: choose one; either way you're writing about your relationships with the police.



Facilitation Notes

Regardless of our differences, we're all the same: human beings. Yet, we still ostracize those who don't meet a certain criterion that we establish, adapt, and employ in our daily lives. This creative writing workshop addresses our prejudices towards 'n'em or them over there, those outsiders by reading Jericho Brown's "N'em."

Them / Those Outsiders

1. What are things you prejudge someone about? Why? Do you ever feel good about yourself when you judge others?
2. What is bias? What is prejudice?

Bias is your preference for or against something. Prejudice is "pre-judging" something usually negatively without reason.

For example, I'm biased that ice cream is the best dessert. However, I'm prejudice toward anyone who looks lactose intolerant.

3. Read "N'em" by Jericho Brown; analyze and discuss the text before completing the writing prompt.
4. Share.
5. Conclude.



'N'em

By: Jericho Brown

They said to say goodnight
And not goodbye, unplugged
The TV when it rained. They hid
Money in mattresses
So to sleep on decisions.
Some of their children
Were not their children. Some
Of their parents had no birthdates.
They could sweat a cold out
Of you. They'd wake without
An alarm telling them to.
Even the short ones reached
Certain shelves. Even the skinny
Cooked animals too quick
To catch. And I don't care
How ugly one of them arrived,
That one got married
To somebody fine. They fed
Families with change and wiped
Their kitchens clean.
Then another century came.
People like me forget their names.

Discussion Questions

1. What does 'n'em mean? Have you heard this before? If so, where?
2. Who are/were the outsiders in your neighborhood? Describe them.
3. What do the outsiders in this poem do?
4. Which one of the descriptions sounds the most ridiculous? Why?
5. Why can't the speaker remember their names? Can you remember the names of those who are/were outsiders in your neighborhood?
6. Is there value in remembering someone's name or someone remembering your name?
7. Are we actually any different from the outsiders we know in our neighborhoods?



Prompt

Write about one of the outsiders
from your neighborhood.

Describe what made them an outsider.

OR

Write about someone you've met
whose name you can't remember but whose actions you can.

Hint: the more ridiculous the descriptions, the better!



Facilitation Notes

Many more kids nowadays assume the responsibilities of an adult, ending their childhood earlier than expected. This creative writing workshop examines the moments that define our childhoods and adulthoods by analyzing “I Corinthians 13:11” by Jericho Brown.

Childhood into Adulthood

1. What are three things you loved most about being a kid? Why? OR Were there any rites of passage that you went through growing up? If so, what were they?
2. As kids, we have to become adults eventually. Although, sometimes kids act more mature than adults, do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? Provide examples.
3. Read “I Corinthians 13:11” by Jericho Brown; analyze and discuss the text before completing the writing prompt.
4. Share.
5. Conclude.



I Corinthians 13:11

By: Jericho Brown

When I was a child, I spoke as a child.
I even had a child's disease. I ran
From the Doberman like all children
On my street, but old men called me
Special. The Doberman caught up,
Chewed my right knee. Limp now
In two places, I carried a child's Bible
Like a football under the arm that didn't
Ache. I was never alone. I owned
My brother's shame of me. I loved
The words *thou* and *thee*. Both meant
My tongue in front of my teeth.
Both meant a someone speaking to me.
So what if I itched. So what if I couldn't
Breathe. I climbed the cyclone fence
Like children on my street and went
First when old men asked for a boy
To pray or to read. Some had it worse—
Nobody whipped me with water hose
Or a phone cord or a leash. Old men
Said I'd grow into my face, and I did.

Discussion Questions

1. Are you familiar with the scripture passage that is this poem's namesake?
2. Do you have a traumatic child experience like being attacked by the neighborhood dog?
3. Why do you think the speaker's brother was ashamed of his younger sibling?
4. Growing up, what responsibilities did you have as a child? What about as a young adult or adult?
5. Were you spanked, whooped, or beat as a child? Are there differences? Will you use the same form of punishment on your child/children? Why?
6. At what point did you lose your childhood innocence? Or do you still have it?
7. Are you an old soul or a new soul? How?

Prompt

Start your piece with:

When I became a [choose man/woman/adult],
I put the ways of [choose childhood/adulthood] behind me.

Then, describe the ways of childhood OR adulthood
by including specific instances that define either.

Hint: consider experiences that made you feel and think like a child or an adult.



Facilitation Notes

This creative writing workshop reverses the roles of our residents and student volunteers to create a conversation about an outsider's perspective of the insider's experience, specifically with the prompt. Jericho Brown's "Hustle" accounts his experience with being "in prison" and allows us to dialogue about incarceration.

Freedom and Incarceration

1. Define hustle. What is a hustle? What does it mean to hustle? What does it take to hustle? Are there good and bad types of hustles?
2. What are some things you wish people on the outside knew about your experience on the inside? Provide examples.

Many of us on the outside want to advocate for change on your behalf, so we appreciate you sharing your experience with us.

3. Read "Hustle" by Jericho Brown; analyze and discuss the text before completing the writing prompt.
4. Share.
5. Conclude.



Hustle

By: Jericho Brown

They lie like stones and dare not shift. Even asleep, everyone hears in prison.
Dwayne Betts deserves more than this dry ink for his teenage years in prison.

In the film we keep watching, Nina takes Darius to a steppers ball.
Lovers hustle, slide, and dip as if none of them has a brother in prison.

I eat with humans who think any book full of black characters is about race.
A book full of white characters examines insanity—but never in prison.

His whole family made a barricade of their bodies at the door to room 403.
He died without the man he wanted. What use is love at home or in prison?

We saw police pull sharks out of the water just to watch them not breathe.
A brother meets members of his family as he passes the mirrors in prison.

Sundays, I washed and dried her clothes after he threw them into the yard.
In the novel I love, Brownfield kills his wife, gets only seven years in prison.

I don't want to point my own sinful finger, so let's use your clean one instead.
Some bright citizen reading this never considered a son's short hair in prison.

In our house lived three men with one name, and all three fought or ran.
I left Nelson Demery iii for Jericho Brown, a name I earned in prison.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the title relate to the poem?
2. What's the general tone of this poem?
3. Who is the "they" in this poem? Who is Dwayne Betts?
4. What's the "film we keep watching" referring to?
5. How do you interpret the third stanza?
6. Who is Brownfield and where is he from?
7. What are some of the names you've earned? Why? What happens to you when you earn a new name? Do you change? If so, how?



Prompt (for residents)

End every second line with:
in society.

Reflect on what freedom feels like.
What does it look like?
Sound like? Smell like? Taste like?

Hint: write about anything but incarceration and
don't forget to end every second line with: in society.

Prompt (for students)

End every other line with:
in prison.

Imagine what incarceration feels like.
What does it look like?
Sound like? Smell like? Taste like?

Hint: write about anything but freedom and
don't forget to end every second line with: in prison.



Facilitation Notes

We will experience many different types of love throughout our lives. Eight types to be exact! “Psalm 150” by Jericho Brown gives us the opportunity to reflect on the types of love we have experienced and want to experience in our lives during this creative writing workshop. This creative writing workshop also centers around prayer.

Love

1. Describe what it means to love someone else, to love yourself, and the earth. How do you demonstrate those three types of love? Are they similar or different in any way?
2. Pick a number from 1-8.

Apparently, there are eight different types of love:

- a. Agape: “This is an altruistic, selfless, unconditional love.”
- b. Eros: “[This is] usually associated with romantic, passionate, and physical love.”
- c. Philia: “[This] is the kind of love that you feel for your friends.”
- d. Philautia: This is self-love.
- e. Storge: “This love is more like a parent-child love.”
- f. Pragma: “[This] is a love that has matured and developed over a long period of time.”
- g. Ludus: This isn’t a full love but a feeling; it’s infatuation.
- h. Mania: This love is obsessive.

Remember these eight loves because I’m going to ask about them later after we read the poem.

3. Read “Psalm 150” by Jericho Brown; analyze and discuss the text before completing the writing prompt.
4. Share.
5. Conclude.



Psalm 150

By: Jericho Brown

Some folks fool themselves into believing,
But I know what I know once, at the height
Of hopeless touching, my man and I hold
Our breaths, certain we can stop time or maybe

Eliminate it from our lives, which are shorter
Since we learned to make love for each other
Rather than doing it to each other. As for praise
And worship, I prefer the latter. Only memory

Makes us kneel, silent and still. Hear me?
Thunder scares. Lightning lets us see. Then,
Heads covered, we wait for rain. Dear Lord,
Let me watch for his arrival and hang my head

And shake it like a man who's lost and lived.
Something keeps trying, but I'm not killed yet.

Discussion Questions

1. Are you familiar with the scripture passage that is this poem's namesake?
2. What kind of love do you wish you had? The one like the speaker's that stops time?
3. "Something keeps trying, but I'm not killed yet," how do you interpret those lines? What has tried to kill you but failed? Which poem does that line refer to?
4. From the eight types of love we talked about, what kind of love is present in the poem?

Prompt

Write a prayer.

You can start with: Praise [fill in the blank with your deity] for/with.

Repeat.

OR

You can start with: Dear [fill in the blank with your deity].

Hint: include what your thankful for, what your sorry for, and what you love or want blessed.



Facilitation Notes

Sometimes our names define us or we define our names; it's pronunciation, its spelling, its histories. This creative writing workshop reviews our names by understanding "Angel" by Jericho Brown. This creative writing workshop also discusses prayer.

Names

1. What does your name mean? Where does it come from? If you don't know, imagine its meaning and origin. How much of an impact does your name have on your life?
2. If you could change your name, what would you change your name to? Why?

Our names represent who we are and embody our identities. Yet, we have the ability to change our names, identities, and ultimately our stories.

3. Read "Angel" by Jericho Brown; analyze and discuss the text before completing the writing prompt.
4. Share.
5. Conclude.



Angel

By: Jericho Brown

I'm nine kinds of beautiful,
And all my hair is mine.
The finest girl in Cedar Grove,
All my hair mine.
My mama jumped in a river,
So I don't mind dying.

Yes, she read the Bible,
Read all about war in heaven.
Mama named me Angel
To spite that war in heaven.
Ask how many fights I won
Before I turned seven.

When you got hips like these,
Men want to take advantage.
He called my hips a pair of shelves.
The fool tried to take advantage.
Police don't ever show until
A bullet does some damage.

A few rules are schoolhouse.
Others you learn in church.
I got one rule for my babies
When a kid steals their lunch:
If anybody hits you, hit him
Back. Never wait to punch.

Mama drowned, but before that,
She taught me how to punch.
She lost a love then killed herself,
But she taught me to punch.
I hear my man laughing above,
I hit back hard, now he won't hush.



Discussion Questions

1. What is an angel? Are there different types of angels?
2. Why doesn't the speaker mind dying? Is there something or someone you can't live without?
3. Why do you think there's repetition in each stanza? Does it strengthen or weaken the poem?
4. Why does the speaker imply that men take advantage of her or of women? Is it appropriate for men to take advantage of women or objectify them?
5. Do you agree or disagree with the speaker's rule that they instructed their child to follow? Why or why not? What rules will you enforce on your child/children?
6. What would you like to teach your child/children to do as a parent?
7. How do you interpret the last two lines of the poem?

Prompt

Write about your name. OR give yourself a new name.
What does it mean? Where did it come from? Why is your name important?

Hint: add as much creativity to your piece as possible, the more the better!