



Remembering 9/11 Through Poetry, Drama and Stories

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Grade level: 8-12

Length: 1-2 class periods

Introduction

One way to explore a topic like September 11th is by allowing students to explore their emotions creatively. As demonstrated in this excerpt from the HBO documentary [What Happened on September 11](#), students can create beautiful works of art using sadness, empathy, and hope to express what they have learned in constructive and critical ways.

Watch the [Exploring 9/11 In Creative Arts](#) excerpt, then review this lesson plan to see how your students can explore 9/11 in a creative way.

Objective

To help students of today understand the immediate impact of 9/11 on former students and individuals in the United States.

Common Core Standards

Comprehensive Common Core Alignments at end of lesson plan.

Reading Standards for Informational Text: 1, 2, 5

English Language Arts Standards for Writing: 1

English Language Arts Standards for Speaking & Listening: 1

English Language Arts Standards for History/Social Studies: 1, 3, 5

Resources

- [Exploring 9/11 in Creative Arts Excerpt](#)
- ["What Happened on September 11", HBO](#)
- ["Conducting and Oral History, Teacher Guide and Student Questions," 9/11 Tribute Museum](#)
- [Map of Lower Manhattan](#)
- [9/11 interactive timeline \(view on projector\)](#)
- [With Their Eyes: September 11th, the View from a High School at Ground Zero, ed. Annie Thoms \(selections\)](#)
- ["The Names," Billy Collins](#)
- ["Facing It," Yusef Komunyakaa's poem](#)
- [Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln](#)
- [Principal Ada Dolch's testimony](#)

Preparation

(Time needed: approximately 20 minutes of class time)

- Distribute to students the 9/11 Tribute Museum's "Oral History Activity for Students."
- Review the "Preparation for Conducting an Oral History" from the 9/11 Tribute Museum with the class.
- Review with students the 9/11 Tribute Museum's "Suggestions for Students Conducting an Oral History."
- Ask students to interview a parent/guardian, first responder, teacher or other adult who can recall the events of 9/11/2001 (Give students several days to complete this).

Activity

Share the oral histories and content from the interviews in small groups. Whom did you interview? What did you learn? Branch out to large-group, classroom discussion of the interviews.

Time-line activity:

- Distribute timeline of events on 9/11/2001.
- Play selected recordings from timeline: 8:19 am Betty Ong; 8:24 am Mohammed Atta; 8:46 am WCBS Radio; 9:03 am “We felt and heard a loud noise”; 9:37 am “Do me a favor. For the rest of the day, work beneath your desk.”
- Free-write in response to the timeline recordings. Ask for reactions or if anyone is willing to share.

Dramatic reading:

 Read selections from *With Their Eyes* aloud.

- Discussion/writing prompts for *Act One: Overture*
 1. How do the different characters react to first learning or noticing something bad happened?
 2. Do you notice differences between the students’ reactions and those of the adults?
 3. When the teacher Matthew Polazzo recounts his student saying, “Polazzo, they blew up the World Trade Center again!” what was this student referring to?
 4. What details of these recollections do you find surprising or unexpected?
- Discussion/writing prompts for *Piece of my home*
 1. Why does Ilya describe what he was wearing in such detail? Why is this important for him?
 2. How does Ilya describe the routines of a regular school day and how those events are intermingled with the extraordinary events unfolding before him on that morning?
 3. What do you think of Ilya’s father’s reactions?

Memorializing through poetry:

 Introduce and listen to Billy Collins’ poem “The Names”

- Discussion prompts for analyzing the poem
 1. Start by first having the students either listen to/watch Collins read his poem from the PBS website, or have them read it silently. Then have each student read one line of the poem and explain that the first student will continue after the last student reads if the class is small.
 2. Ask, “How do we memorialize our departed loved ones?” this is best to start with small group sharing, then ask for volunteers to share.
 3. What about fallen soldiers? Ask if any have seen the Washington DC Vietnam Memorial.
 4. Ask students to respond to an image in the poem that strikes them or that they find moving/interesting. Share aloud.
 5. How does Collins use both urban and bucolic imagery in this poem? Why do you think he does this?
 6. How does Collins juxtapose the childlike innocence and the horrific in this poem?
 7. Collins’ imagery goes back and forth between the grand (“pale sky” or “over the earth and out to sea”) to the minute (“yellow petal” or “tip of the tongue”). Why do you think he does this?
 8. Compare ‘The Names’ to other elegies. I recommend Yusef Komunyakaa’s “Facing It” or the; Gettysburg Address’. For each ask, ‘How is it similar? Different?’
 9. Ask “What is the effect of listing names? Why do you think this is so moving?”

Concluding activity: View Principal Ada Dolch’s testimony from the 9/11 Tribute Museum’s *September 11th: Personal Stories of Transformation*. Discussion questions and background information, including a map, are available as part of the Ada Dolch Unit on the 9/11 Tribute Museum website. I have included below a few additional discussion prompts that have worked well for me:

- What did Principal Dolch and her students do to help themselves recover from the traumatic events they faced on 9/11?
- Principal Dolch asks in the film, “How do you put a positive spin on something so ugly?” How does she answer this? How would you answer this?



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Assessment/Reflection

Write a response to Ada Dolch's question of "How do you put a positive spin on something so ugly?" Responses can be shared and should lead to a concluding discussion of what the class has learned.

Common Core Alignments

These alignments were written for the 9th-10th grade level. However, this lesson can easily be adjusted for use in other grades and corresponds to the following Common Core Standards. Student assessments and expectation may vary depending upon grade level and ability.

Reading Standards for Informational Text

Key Ideas and Details

- Standard 1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- Standard 2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Craft and Structure

- Standard 5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

ELA Standards for Writing

Text Types and Purposes

- Standard 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

ELA Standards for Speaking & Listening

Comprehension and Collaboration

- Standard 1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

ELA Standards for History/Social Studies

Key Ideas and Details

- Standard 1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
- Standard 3: Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

Craft and Structure

Standard 5: Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.