

## Rhythm and Music in Poetry, Part I

By: Elizabeth Brown

**Education Level:** Junior High (also Upper level Elementary, High School)

**Genre:** Poetry

**Time frame:** One class period. Can be extended into two.

**Objective:** To think about the music of poetry and write with music in mind

**Prior knowledge and skills:** none

**Required materials:** Writing materials, audio/video player/projector

**Literary model:** Langston Hughes, "[Harlem](#)," "[Dreams](#)," and "[The Dream Keeper](#)." Kim Sowol (Korean, 1902-1834) "[Azaleas](#)." If possible, have students listen to: "[Arirang](#)," Korean folk song

### Sequence of activities:

*Note: This lesson can be taught in one class period, and it can also be extended to two class periods, especially for younger students. The first class using the Langston Hughes poems and worksheet; the second using one of the students' favorite songs to start, then Kim Sowol's "Azaleas," as well as "Arirang" and the "Row, row, row your boat" worksheet.*

### Optional: 5-10 minutes

Ask students, ahead of time, to share with you a few of their favorite songs. I have, in the past, picked one song to start our class. We listen to the song together, and then discuss it: How are song lyrics different from words of a poem? How are they similar? We have listened to NF's "Let You Down," and "Tu Falta de Querer" by Mon Laferte. I've used YouTube as a source. There are "clean versions" of songs available, if needed. This activity has led to increased student engagement.

### 20 minutes:

Hand out (or project) the poems. Introduce Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance. Have a student read "Harlem" out loud to the class, then lead a discussion about the poem. Have another student read "Dreams" and another, "The Dream Keeper." Point out the rhythms and syncopation. How does the form of the poem—in particular, the enjambments—increase the "jazziness" of the sound? (For example, in "The Dream Keeper," note the enjambment of the line "Bring me all of your/Heart melodies.") How does Langston Hughes use repetition, rhyme, alliteration and other techniques to enhance his music?

Then look at Kim Sowol. He wrote poems based on traditional Korean folk songs. He wrote many of these poems as a teenager, and they are beloved in his country, even now. Listen to the traditional song: "Arirang." Then have a student read Kim Sowol's poem, "Azaleas." What emotions do these songs/poems create in you? Are the rhythms different from those of Langston Hughes?

**20 minutes:**

Try to write a poem in the rhythm of a song. Think of a favorite song. Try to write with the rhythm or beat of that song using your own, original words.

Optional: Hand out a paper with this example (students can write whatever they want, but this example can be helpful for some).

**Try to write a poem using the rhythm of a song**

For example: Row, Row, Row Your Boat

Row, row, row your boat,  
gently down the stream,  
merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,  
life is but a dream.

Here's a poem (with different words, same rhythm):

Basketball

Bounce, bounce, throw the ball  
high and low and deep,  
until it swoops into the hoop  
another winning streak.

Use "Row Your Boat" or another song to make a completely different poem.  
There's no right way to do this, just experiment and have fun!

*Optional: If splitting this lesson into two lessons, especially with younger students, use the worksheet below based on Langston Hughes for the first lesson.*

**Write a poem inspired by “The Dream Keeper” by Langston Hughes**

(Use this template only as a way to get started—feel free to experiment and make it your own!)

Bring me your (list something, or a group of things)

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Bring me your

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And I will (what would you do with these things?)

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