

The World Begins

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Grade level: High school

Time frame: 1 hour

Objective: Students will use imagery and figurative language to imagine where and how the world began.

Prior knowledge and skills: None required

Required materials: paper, pencil, art supplies (color pencils, markers, construction paper, cardstock, magazines or patterned paper for collage cutting, and/or any supplies available to the class—simple pencil and paper also works!)

Literary model: “Perhaps the World Ends Here” by Joy Harjo

Perhaps the World Ends Here
BY [JOY HARJO](#)

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.

Sequence of activities:

Introductions and Icebreaker (15 minutes):

This part of the class is not mere formality! It's incredibly important in helping students feel more relaxed, open, and vulnerable. Because let's face it, making art and writing require a certain degree of vulnerability. Students should feel comfortable over time to explore their ideas without fear of imperfection. Good writing doesn't flow out instantaneously from our pens. Every class is another opportunity to practice. What we create in the end will be an outcome of just that: practice.

Use the beginning of this class not only to share names but to play a get-to-know-you game or collaborative game. For example, many teens will already be familiar with "2 truths and a lie" wherein each student writes 3 pieces of information about themselves on an index card...but one of these things will be a lie! Students can be paired, or the game can be done as an entire class, depending on class size. Each student shares their 3 pieces of information, careful not to give away the lie through facial expression or a change in voice. The other students must guess which one is a lie. Encourage students to think of things their classmates won't already know: a hobby they don't talk about often, a favorite candy, their least favorite song, a childhood experience, etc.

Read a Poem Together (10 minutes):

Read the literary model aloud twice or ask student volunteers to read. As the poem is read aloud, students should circle at least one phrase/word that captures their attention in some way. They can also circle words they don't recognize so that we can talk about it later.

Class Discussion (10 minutes):

The below questions could be discussed as an entire class or in buddies:

- *What words or phrases did you circle and what made you circle it?
- *Is there any part you find relatable or unrelatable? What happens at your kitchen table?
- *Imagine you could add a line to this poem, what would it be?
- *What makes this a poem?
- *What are some elements of any poem? Emphasize the play of language. Subjects like rhythm, imagery, metaphor, and alliteration might also come up.

*How is reading and writing poetry different from reading or writing essays? The teacher could even pause here to make a collaborative Venn diagram on a white board, if time allows.

Collaborative Writing (15 minutes):

As a class, generate a list of possible first lines. Students can raise their hands to share ideas while the teacher writes them on the board. Ideas for the first line should follow this structure: “The world begins at _____.” Pick one of the ideas from the board and use it to jumpstart the poem.

Pose questions to the class to help them elaborate on the first line and capture their ideas on the board. The instructor should ask more probing questions when an idea needs to be more specific. The instructor might ask: Why do you think the world begins there? What happens there that’s important?

For each line, encourage students to contribute even more detail and images. Encourage them also to be playful. They need not be literal or factual! We don’t have to write about the Big Bang or atoms or the mother’s womb. All wild, crazy, fanciful ideas are on deck.

Then ask for contributions for a last line that ends like so:

“Perhaps the world will end at _____, while _____”
(what will we be doing with this object/place of meaning as the world ends?)

Visual Art (if time):

What might the beginning of the world have looked like? Use your imagination. We aren’t talking about the actual, scientific beginning of Earth as we know it. We’re talking about something that springs from your wild creativity. Use magazines, scissors, glue, and construction paper to portray your beginning of the world.

Sample Poems by High School Students:

1.
The world begins in our head
everything is a simulation
we are souls in bodies
The physical world is not eternal
Our spiritual world is.

2.
The world begins at the jungle
green with trees
blue with water

the trees are umbrellas
the water is shower
perhaps the world will end in the jungle
while we are swimming in water

3.
The world begins in water
High and low tides
Coming from the dark
We see life itself.

4.
My world begins when I hear the
birds fly away
to the rhythm of the wind
I heard singing
That sweet song they sing

5.
My world begins when I step on the field
And it's just me and the ball
Nothing else
My world will end when I'm not able to play

6.
The world begins when the lights turn on. The darkness may try, but I won't give up. I'll
hold in my heart, that sparks.

7.
Youngins
The world begins in the playground
You meet people
We chase each other
around the monkey bars
until we pick who we
will be as a person.