

BOOKNOTES

educators guide

NOVELS IN VERSE



Exposed

Kimberly Marcus

Sixteen-year-old Liz is Photogirl—sharp, focused, and confident in what she sees through her camera lens. Confident that she and Kate will be best friends forever. But everything changes in one blurry night.

Grades 7 up
HC: 978-0-375-86693-7 • GLB: 978-0-375-96693-4
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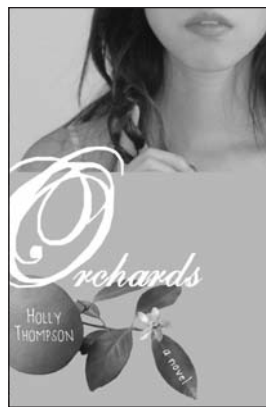


Kaleidoscope Eyes

Jen Bryant

In a tale inspired by a true story of buried treasure, Jen Bryant weaves an emotional and suspenseful novel in poems, all set against the backdrop of the Vietnam War during a pivotal year in U.S. history.

Grades 4-7
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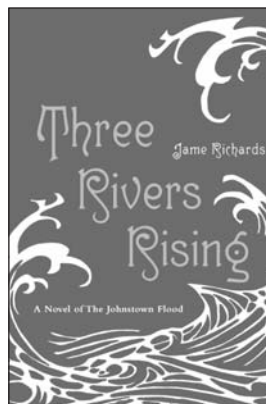


Orchards

Holly Thompson

After a classmate commits suicide, Kana Goldberg—a half-Japanese, half-Jewish American—wonders who is responsible. She and her cliquey friends said some thoughtless things to the girl. Hoping that Kana will reflect on her behavior, her parents pack her off to her mother's ancestral home in Japan for the summer.

Grades 7 up
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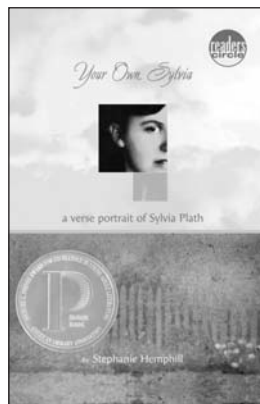


Three Rivers Rising: A Novel of the Johnstown Flood

Jame Richards

This searing novel in poems explores a cross-class romance—and a tragic event in U.S. history when a dam fails, unleashing 20 million tons of water onto Johnstown, Pennsylvania, in the valley below.

Grades 7 up
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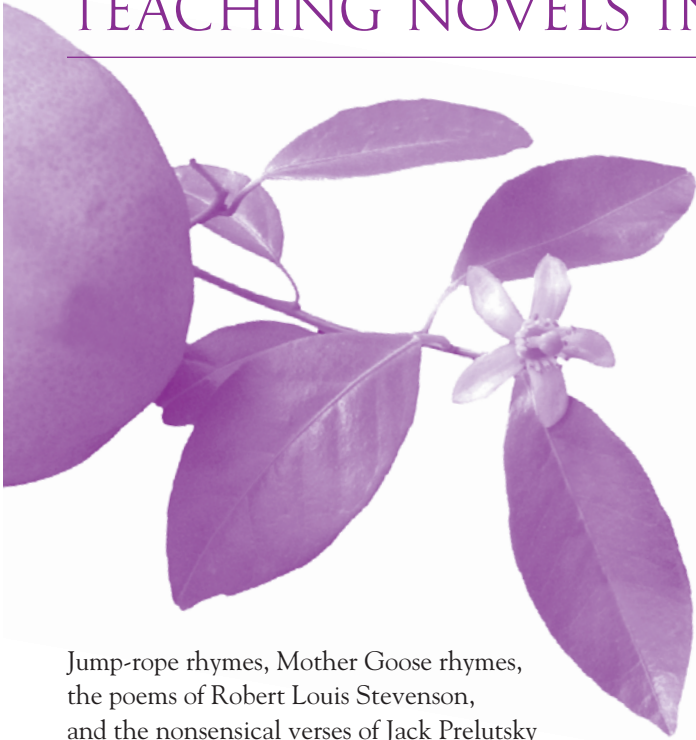
Your Own, Sylvia: A Verse Portrait of Sylvia Plath

Stephanie Hemphill

On a bleak February day in 1963, a young American poet died by her own hand, and passed into a myth that has since imprinted itself on the hearts and minds of millions. She was and is Sylvia Plath and *Your Own, Sylvia* is a portrait of her life, told in poems.

Grades 9 up
PB: 978-0-440-23968-0
HC: 978-0-375-83799-9 • GLB: 978-0-375-93799-6
Ebook : 978-0-307-49359-0

TEACHING NOVELS IN VERSE



Jump-rope rhymes, Mother Goose rhymes, the poems of Robert Louis Stevenson, and the nonsensical verses of Jack Prelutsky are among children's first experiences with poetry. They respond to the rhyming language, and even enjoy committing the rhymes to memory. Beyond this stage, poetry isn't always popular with young readers. Perhaps it's because there is so much emphasis on reading comprehension in the elementary grades that there is little time spent on reading for meaning. Students do study figurative language in the primary grades, but it is usually in the context of prose. By the time they enter middle and high school, they have had very little experience reading poetry, and almost no practice analyzing it. For this reason, students often groan at the idea of a poetry unit. Poetry is difficult for many students because it forces them to use all senses, to read between the lines, and to think in an abstract way. However, some instinctively have great insight into the symbolic language of poetry and welcome the opportunity to analyze, interpret, and even apply it to their own lives.

The relatively new trend of "novels in verse" opens up a new reading experience for students. All of the elements of story are there for them to embrace. Yet, the poetic form in which these novels are written calls upon the reader to

participate in a much more intimate way than when they are reading prose. For example, young adults who are struggling with the poetry of Sylvia Plath may find great insight into her work by reading *Your Own, Sylvia: A Verse Portrait of Sylvia Plath*. This sketch of her life, written in eloquent verse by Stephanie Hemphill, may be read side-by-side with Plath's works to give students the ultimate poetry experience. There are novels in verse that deal with historical events like the Johnstown Flood of 1889 and the 1925 Scopes Trial. These novels allow readers moment-by-moment views through the eyes of a number of characters, fictional and real, that were personally involved in the events. Then there are novels in verse that deal with adolescent concerns of love and loss, courage and despair, and dreams—haunted and unfulfilled. Using novels in verse with young adults is an excellent prelude to the study of traditional poetry. Once students are comfortable with the free verse form that appeals to their own senses, then they are more ready to explore the language of more conventional styles of poetry.



PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Discuss the following types of poetry: ballad, blues, elegy, & ode. Then have students use sites on the Internet or books in the library to locate examples of these types of poetry. Have an "open mic" session where students read the poems that they found. Ask them to introduce each poem by giving background information on the poet, and a summary of the story that poem tells. Then introduce the concept of free verse. Read examples to the class, and discuss the genre of novels in verse.

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

- Discuss the vocabulary of poetry. How do poets use metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, symbol, irony, and imagery to express new ways of looking at things beyond the literal meaning? Ask students to find examples of each of these poetic forms of language in the five novels in verse. What is symbolic about the titles *Kaleidoscope Eyes*, *Exposed*, and *Orchards*? Poets often use their art form to express what is inside each of us. How do the poets of these five novels in verse convey emotion, passion, opinions, beauty, anger, hopes, dreams, and fears? Have students cite specific examples from the novels to support their answers.

- Ask students to analyze Lyza in *Kaleidoscope Eyes*. How is reading the novel like reading Lyza's diary? Discuss how Jen Bryant uses poetry to successfully weave all the elements of story—character, setting, point of view, theme, and conflict. Explain how the buried treasure changes the lives of a number of people in this small New Jersey town. Divide the class into small groups, and assign each group a section of the book. Ask each group to select 8–10 poems from the assigned section to perform either as choral readings or as dramatic monologues. The novel is set during the Vietnam War. There were many songs of that era that told the story of war. Dixon, Malcolm's brother is in Vietnam. Select music from that era to introduce each section of the book.



Illustration © 2009 by CSA Images

- A verse novel requires readers to use their imagination. Unlike prose, not all details are told. Readers must read between the lines, fill in the blanks, and understand that the white space is as meaningful as what is written. Sometimes the poet actually uses the white space to give the readers a moment to collect themselves. Find specific examples in *Exposed* where the reader needs a moment to take a breath, to be relieved of tension. Ask students to discuss if they have a hint of why Kate leaves Liz's house on the morning of the sleepover. Explain the words of Annie Leibovitz on the last page of *Exposed*:

*When you trust your point of view,
That's when you start taking pictures.*

How does Liz's point of view change from the beginning of the novel to the end? What do you think Liz says to Kate on p. 254?

- In *Your Own, Sylvia*, Stephanie Hemphill presents the life of Sylvia Plath in free verse. How do her notes at the end of many of the poems help the reader further connect to Plath's life? Ask students to research the life and work of one poet and then have them write three free verse poems that reveal a particular period in the poet's life. Have them make notes at the bottom of each poem as Hemphill did in some of her poems.

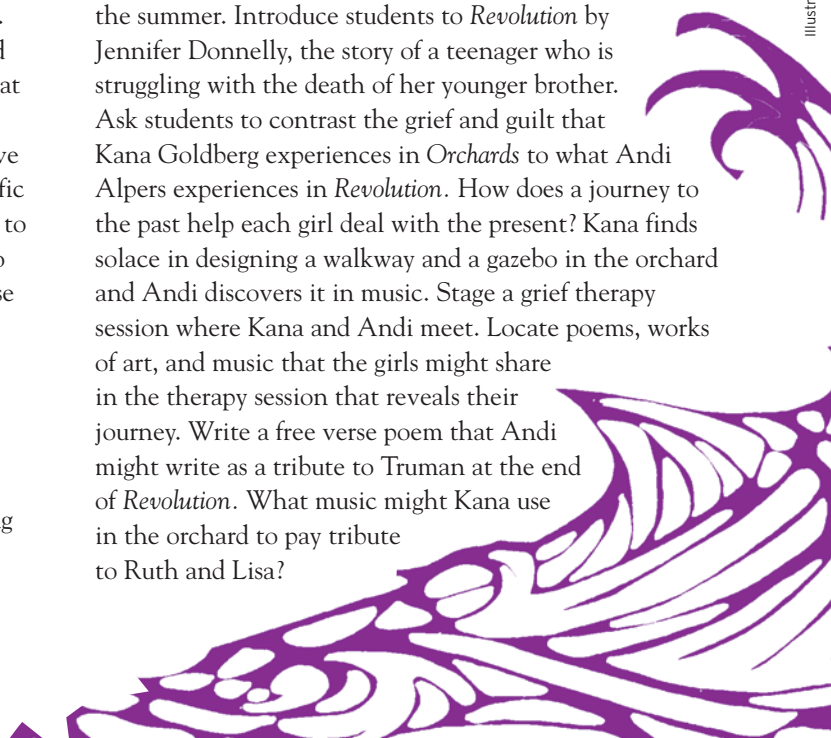


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- *Three Rivers Rising: A Novel of the Johnstown Flood* deals with the 1889 Johnstown flood. Brainstorm with the class all of the historical material that is presented in the novel—including social customs and behavior. Divide the class into small groups and ask them to think of an historical event that includes at least five different people—for example, signing of the Constitution, the civil rights movement, or the women's suffrage movement. Ask them to use resources in the library or sites on the Internet to thoroughly research the event. Then have each group write free verse poems from the point of view of five different people who witnessed or participated in the event. Sponsor a poetry reading where the class shares their work with other classes.

- The novel *Orchards* deals with the suicide of a classmate. Girls that the dead girl knew are left with lingering guilt; several of them have families that don't know how to handle their young teens except to send them away for the summer. Introduce students to *Revolution* by Jennifer Donnelly, the story of a teenager who is struggling with the death of her younger brother. Ask students to contrast the grief and guilt that Kana Goldberg experiences in *Orchards* to what Andi Alpers experiences in *Revolution*. How does a journey to the past help each girl deal with the present? Kana finds solace in designing a walkway and a gazebo in the orchard and Andi discovers it in music. Stage a grief therapy session where Kana and Andi meet. Locate poems, works of art, and music that the girls might share in the therapy session that reveals their journey. Write a free verse poem that Andi might write as a tribute to Truman at the end of *Revolution*. What music might Kana use in the orchard to pay tribute to Ruth and Lisa?

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INTERNET RESOURCES

Types of Poetry

www.types-of-poetry.org.uk

This site gives the definition of different types of poetry.

Poetry.org

www.poetry.org

This poetry resource site for poetry and poets discusses the history, meaning and types of poetry, and terms often used when reading and studying poetry.

KidsHealth

kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/suicide.html

This site discusses issues related to teen suicide and may be linked to *Orchards*.

kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/relationships/date_rape.html

This site discusses date rape and may be useful in discussing *Exposed*.

Johnstown Flood Museum

www.jaha.org/FloodMuseum/history.html

This is the official site of the Johnstown Flood Museum, and may be used with *Three Rivers Rising*.

Janis Joplin

www.officialjanis.com

This is the official Janis Joplin site, and may be used with *Kaleidoscope Eyes*.

A Celebration, This Is

www.sylviaplath.info/index2.html

This site offers photos, biography, and a discussion of the writings of Sylvia Plath.

ON THE WEB

For bios, teachers guides, and more, visit our FREE online site:



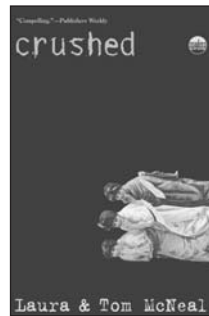
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Connect to ORCHARDS

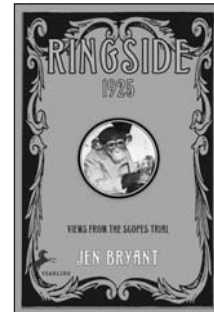


Revolution

Jennifer Donnelly

Grades 7 up
HC: 978-0-385-73763-0
Death • Grief

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