



VIRTUAL INSTRUCTION GUIDE

Workshop: *Joy Harjo Praise Poem*

Teaching Artist: Eric Elshtain

Learn how to write a praise poem inspired by the work of poet Joy Harjo of the Muscogee (Creek) Tribe and by the praise poetry of Western Africa.



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OBJECTIVES:

You will learn:

- how to compose a poem using the same word or phrase to start each line or every other line (or *anaphora* technique)
- about Joy Harjo, the first poet of Native American descent to be named U.S. Poet Laureate
- about the Muscogee (Creek) Tribe, a self-governed Indigenous American tribe located in Okmulgee, Oklahoma
- how to write a poem inspired by Oríkì praise poetry

MATERIALS:

- a piece of paper
- a writing utensil
- copy of Joy Harjo's "Praise the Rain"



DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING Methods

Instruction is provided in text and video formats, available in both Spanish and English.

You may also work by printing this art-making guide.

YouTube can automatically create closed captions.



Click the [CC] button near the lower right corner of the viewer frame.

Please note: captions are generated by algorithms, so their quality may vary.

Workshop Duration: 25-45 Minutes | ALL LEVELS

A variety of language subtitles are available for each video.



- **Aspects of the poem can be simplified or shortened in its reading.**
- **Instructions for this workshop can be given orally or as a written prompt.** Additionally, a friend or family member can write down your thoughts and ideas for you.
- **This exercise can be limited to five examples or fewer as needed.**



BACKGROUND/RESOURCES

You will be introduced to these artists, art histories, movements and/or concepts:

Joy Harjo: a poet and performer born in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1951, Joy Harjo is the first poet of Native American descent to be named Poet Laureate of the United States. She is a member of the Muscogee (Creek) Tribe.

Muscogee (Creek) Tribe: a self-governed Indigenous American tribe located in Okmulgee, Oklahoma. It is one of the 5 Civilized Tribes and is the fourth largest tribe in the U.S., with 86,100 citizens.


Oríkì: a tradition of oral praise poetry created by indigenous Yórùbá communities of Western Africa. Similar praise poems turn up throughout much of Africa (for example, Zulu izibongo, Basuto lithoko).

Poet Laureate: a poet honored for achievement; in the United States, a Poet Laureate is appointed annually by the U.S. Library of Congress as a consultant and usually involved in promoting poetry across the country.



INSTRUCTION:

Today's Project:
Joy Harjo's Praise Poem



Today we will work together to compose a short poem. You'll be able to do it even if you have never written a poem before.



Artists and poets will often take their inspiration from the art and poetry of others. A young basketball player might imitate her favorite pro ball player, or a person learning to draw might use anime or Disney drawings as reference for their own drawings.



An artist or poet won't copy another work, but will use that work as inspiration for their own composition.



Poet Joy Harjo calls these sparks of inspiration "ancestors." An ancestor could be any type of artist or piece of art, like a poet or a certain poem.



Joy Harjo is the first poet of Native American descent to be named The Poet Laureate of the United States.



A **Poet Laureate** is given the responsibility of overseeing poetry readings and lectures at the Library of Congress.

INSTRUCTION CONTINUED:



© Joy Harjo, photo: Gage Skidmore

Today, we'll use a poem by Joy Harjo as an ancestor of sorts to craft a poem of our own.



© Joy Harjo with Miss Indian World Cheyenne Kippenberger, photo: Beverly Bidney/The Seminole Tribune

Before we begin, here is a little more info about Joy Harjo, her background, and her tribe.



© Flag of the Muscogee Nation, Xasartha, 2014

Joy Harjo is a member of the **Muscogee Tribe** of Native Americans.



©

The original homelands of the Muscogee are in what is now Southern Tennessee, Alabama, Western Georgia, and part of Florida.



© Selocta (or Shelocta), Muscogee Chief in the early and mid-1800s

Most of the Muscogee people were forced from their lands in the 1830s, during the Trail of Tears, to what is now Oklahoma. You may have read about these terrible events in your Social Studies or History class.



©

Joy Harjo, 1975
Photo: LaVerne Harrell Clark, University of Arizona Poetry Center

Joy Harjo said that as a young Muscogee student in university, she came to poetry because she wanted the language of her ancestors to pass through her language and to her life.



INSTRUCTION CONTINUED:

Bebi Notsa Lullaby (Creek)

Bebi notsa, notsa, notsa.
Lutsa hopo kahn, ai yang si
Buxsin no thla thla ga his makito ai yang si
Bebi notsa, notsa, notsa,
Lutsa hopo kahn, ai yang si
Buxsin no thlathla ga his makito ai yang si
Bebi notsa.

Creek Lullaby (Baby Sleep) Lullaby (English)

Baby, sleep, sleep, sleep,
Father has gone to find turtle shells
He said he'll come back tomorrow,
Baby, sleep, sleep, sleep,
Father has gone to find turtle shells
He said he'll come back tomorrow,
Baby, sleep.

Sung by a student known only as Margaret



Here is an example of one of these possible ancestors. This is a Muscogee lullaby that was recorded in the summer of 1943 at The Haskell Institute. Listen for the repetition and use of animal imagery.

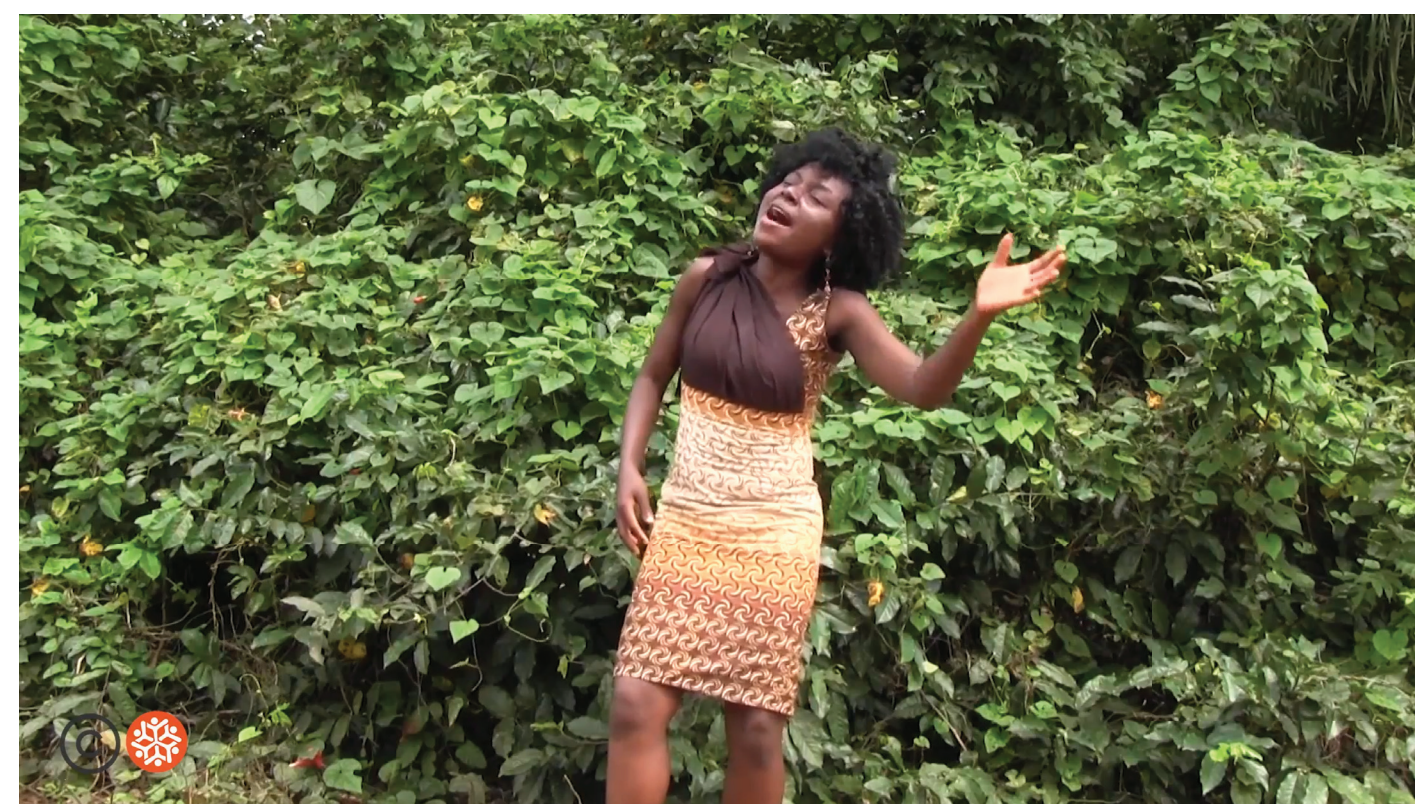


Oriki: oral or spoken praise poetry of the indigenous Yòrùbá communities of Western Africa

Another ancestor for her poem is **Oriki**, the oral or spoken praise poetry of the indigenous Yòrùbá communities of Western Africa.



When Harjo says “ancestor,” she doesn’t mean a literal blood relation. The woman who sang this Muscogee lullaby, known to us only as Margaret, is not literally related to Joy Harjo.



An Oríkì can be about a person, animal, plant, place, or God. It highlights their qualities. This is a Yòrùbá mother praising her newborn son, whose name is Akanni.



Máyòwá Adéyemo performs at World Voice Day 2013, University of Lagos. Photo: Aaron Carter-Ényì

Harjo just means someone from the past that she feels passes through her life and her language as a poet.

Step 1: Read Harjo’s Praise Poem aloud



Now, we’ll read Joy Harjo’s poem. This poem is called “Praise the Rain.”



INSTRUCTION CONTINUED:

Praise the Rain, poem by Joy Harjo

Step 2:
Note the use of repetition



The last eight lines all begin with the phrase "Praise the." Sticking as closely to that format as you'd like, take that phrase "Praise the" and write your own praise poem.



Pay attention to the elements that populate the poem. What type of imagery dominates the poem?



In the first 14 lines of the poem, "Praise the" is repeated every other line, and four things are praised.

Step 3:
Create your own Praise Poem

Praise the _____
Praise the _____
Praise the _____
Praise the _____
Praise the _____
Praise the _____
Praise the _____
Praise the _____
Praise the _____
Praise the _____

Pause the video to write



Praise things, people, ideas, and unusual imagery. Maybe even praise things that we wouldn't think to praise, like "the baby cry" that Harjo praises. Why not baby laughter? Why does she choose cry?



Think about your ancestors. Those people or moments or songs or pictures or movies that define you and your world. Try to write at least 10 lines.



Take as much time as you need. If you get stuck, look around the space where you happen to be. Something in the room may give you an idea.



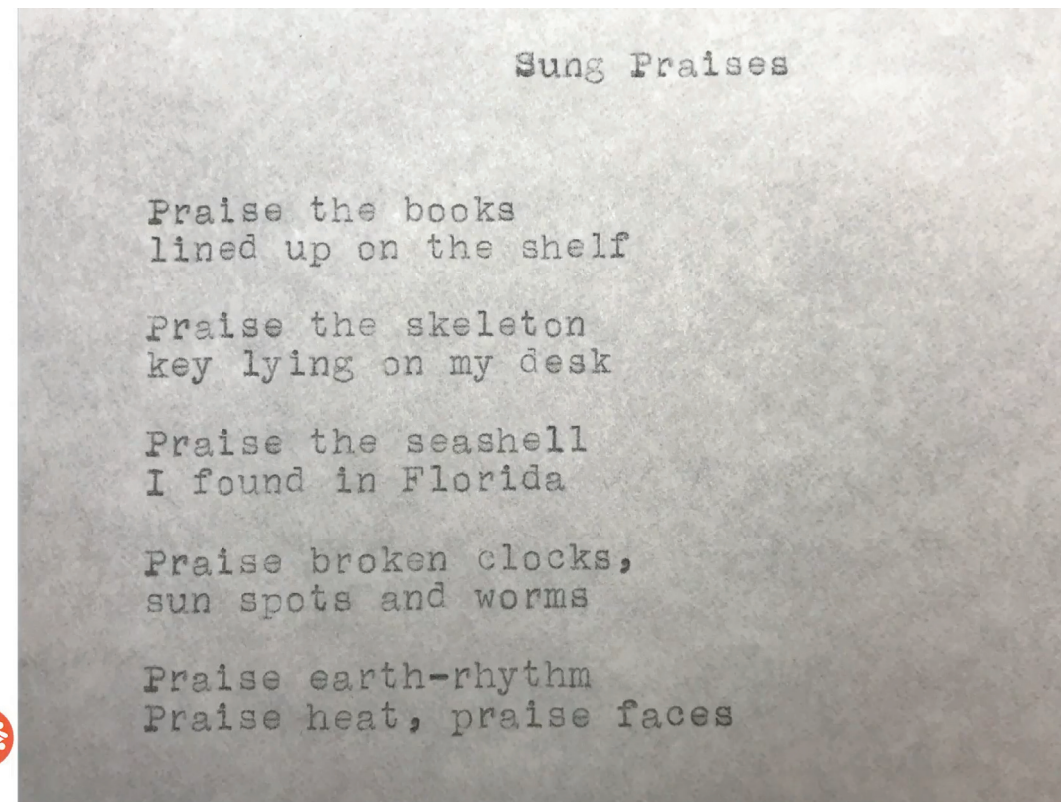
INSTRUCTION CONTINUED:



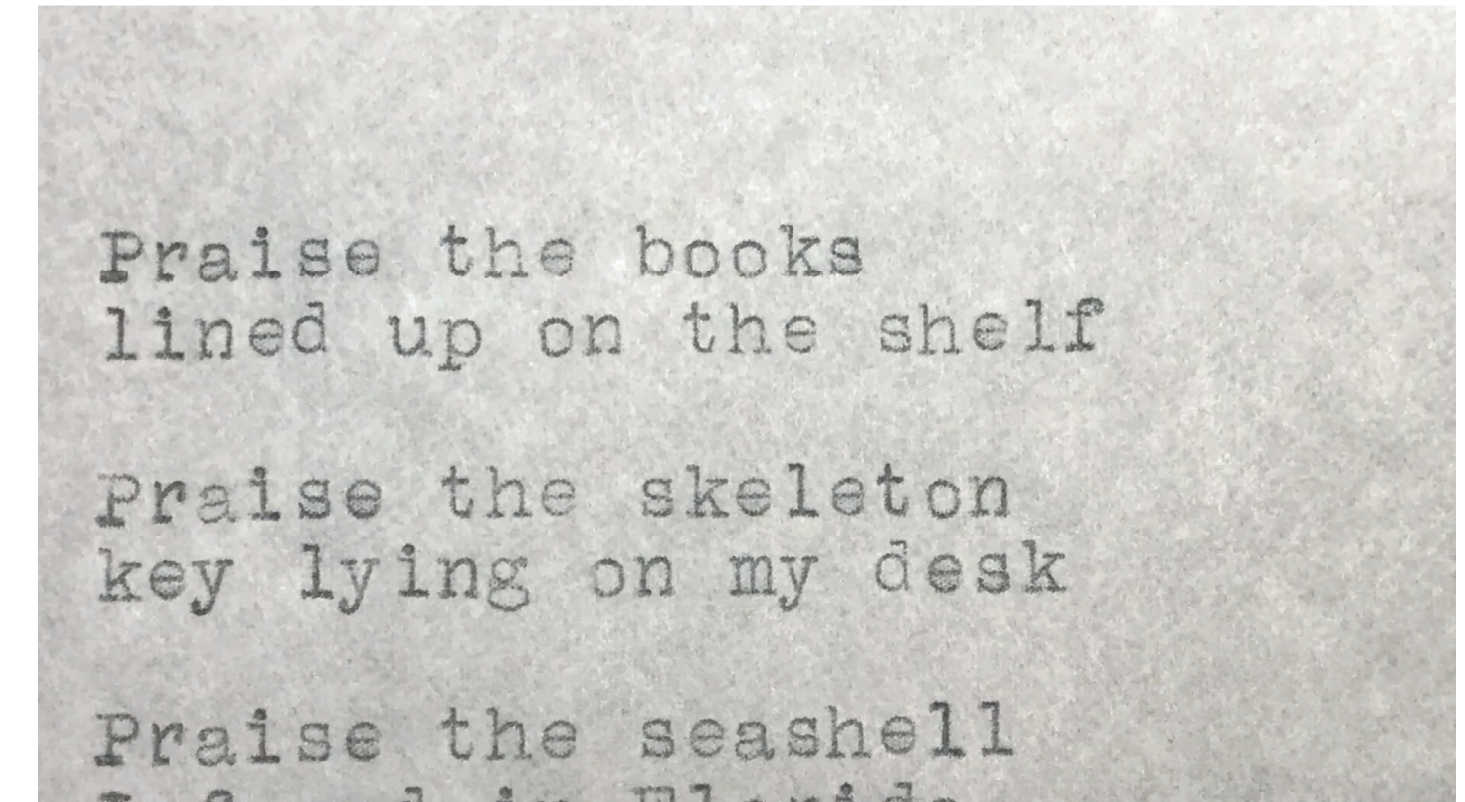
You could also choose a different phrase to begin your lines, like "When I dream..." or even just a single word, like "Remember...:"



Thank you for working with me today! I hope that you choose to work with Snow City Arts again soon.



Here is a 10-line poem that I wrote, using "Praise the..."



If your poem looks nothing like mine, that's totally fine! I hope that you like this idea, and that you'll compose more poems with repetitive phrases.

LEARNING STANDARDS

This workshop is aligned to the following state and national anchor standards. It can be differentiated for learners at every grade level. (For arts performance standard alignments at specific grade levels, feel free to email programs@snowcityarts.org.)

ILLINOIS ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS

Anchor Standards: Creating

- **CR1.** Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- **CR2.** Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standards: Connecting

- **CN10.** Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
- **CN11.** Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards

Reading

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1.** Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4.** Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5.** Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

Language

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.3.** Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.5.** Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Writing

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3.** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4.** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10.** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.





If you are interested in **receiving school credit** for the work you have completed in this workshop or if you would like to **have your artwork displayed** in a Snow City Arts exhibition space or virtual gallery, please visit <https://snowcityarts.org/consent-releases/>

Contact us at programs@snowcityarts.org if you have questions, would like to offer feedback, or would like to continue working with us virtually.





Workshop Duration: 25-45 Minutes | ALL LEVELS



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Snow City Arts inspires and educates children and youth in hospitals through the arts.

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or would like to offer feedback at
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