

## ABSTRACT

### Why the Social Studies Needs Her Poets: A Case for Spoken Word Poetry in the Social Studies Classroom

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Spoken word poetry is an art form that has the propensity to engage students in critical thinking and empower them to use voice to represent their perspectives regarding controversial issues. Infusion of spoken word poetry in the social studies classroom serves as a powerful means of self-representation for youth and alternative perspectives at a time when textbooks have become a source of hegemony and Eurocentric language. Until recently, research has focused primarily on spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool in the English classroom. This study looks to address the role spoken word poetry can play as a tool that cultivates meaningful understanding, engagement, and student voice in the social studies classroom.

Keywords: *social studies, spoken word poetry, voice*

Why the Social Studies Needs Her Poets: A Case for Spoken Word Poetry in the Social  
Studies Classroom

by

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A Thesis

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To future Master's students who decide to write a thesis despite the graduate program director recommending you take the composite exams instead: Good luck. I'll send up a prayer for you.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Spoken word poetry is a style of poetry intended for an onstage performance, rather than poetry that is exclusively crafted for the page (Kay, 2011). Often associated with hip-hop culture, spoken word also has strong ties to storytelling, modern poetry, post-modern performance, monologue theatre, as well as several styles of music including jazz, blues, and folk music (Urban Dictionary). Its propinquity and direct relationship with the audience allows this type of poetry to meet the needs of a culturally relevant contemporary audience. Research indicates that poetry, particularly spoken word poetry, is a viable outlet for articulating the obstacles presented by social realities experienced by many youth (Fisher, 2005; Jocson, 2005). As students interact with the art form, they are able to identify generative themes within the curriculum and engage in both a local and global conversation that draws from the lived experiences of the individual (Desai & Marsh, 2005).

The National Council for the Social Studies defines the purpose of social studies as “to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (NCSS, 2010). Social studies curriculum should help students understand their role as citizens in the world around them as well as develop knowledge of civic content and processes, such as seeking out solutions to social issues.

When students study the world with the purpose of addressing and transforming a variety of community and social problems around them, they begin to recognize and

understand complex ideas such as systematic inequalities and injustices, or why certain groups have suffered oppression throughout the course of history (Bryd, 2012).

Unfortunately, the majority of state mandated curriculum standards within the United States indicate that education in the U.S. is nothing more than a “continued tradition of prioritizing and the memorization of historical narratives” (Bryd, 2012, p. 1073).

According to the *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (2010), critical thinking and literacy skills are essential components of high-quality social studies instruction. Presidential education bills *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top* have had the opposite affect on the American classroom (Dee & Jacob, 2010; Knighten, 2003; Onosko, 2011; Ravitch, 2013). Rather than encourage quality, educators, more specifically in the field of social studies, often find themselves hesitant to move away from the standards-based, tested curriculum, often adopting a “teach to the test” mentality, leaving little room for higher level thinking to take place.

These higher levels of thinking include analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Schultz & Overbaugh, n.d.). According to Bloom’s Taxonomy, before a student can understand a concept they have to remember it, before they can apply the concept, they must understand it. Before the student can effectively analyze it, the student must be able to apply it. Before the student can evaluate its impact they must have analyzed it. Before the student can create they must have remembered, understood, applied, analyzed, and evaluated (Churches, 2009). However, this process is an anomaly in the U.S. classroom today (Ravitch, 2012). This study examines the possibility of spoken word poetry as an innovative method to encourage higher level thinking skills by providing students with a method that encourages them to recall prior knowledge and lived experiences, analyze

and synthesize those lived experiences in relation to the curriculum, and create a final product representative of their understanding of the material.

When used in classroom instruction, spoken word poetry can help students build on their prior knowledge as they make connections between the classroom material and their own lives while also giving students the opportunity to digest complex social issues in real world environments. Spoken word poetry promotes social studies and arts integration that honors both content areas and incorporates multiple learning modalities while encouraging critical thinking, discussion, and interpretation (LeCompte & Bauml, 2012). Infusion of spoken word poetry in social studies classroom serves as a powerful means of self-representation and democracy for youth at a time when political leadership is divided and social studies curriculum is standardized. This study investigates spoken word poetry as a culturally relevant and meaningful method for student engagement and learning in the social studies.

Spoken word poetry is an art form that has the propensity to engage students in critical thinking and empower them to use their voice to articulate their perspectives regarding controversial issues. Infusion of spoken word poetry in social studies classroom has the potential to serve as a powerful means of self-representation for youth at a time when political leadership is divided. It can be argued then that as an art form spoken word poetry provides students with the opportunity to reflect on their own lived experiences in relation to the curriculum.

From a constructivist approach, meaningful understanding occurs when the learner constructs meaning from old information and uses it as the foundation for the new information they acquire by linking the new information to that which they already know

(Michael, 2006). According to Michael (2006), the construction of meaning occurs when the student establishes multiple links between the curriculum and their prior knowledge of a subject. Michael (2006) also argues that the process of building multiple models or representation facilitates meaningful learning and understanding. When used in classroom instruction, spoken word poetry can help students build on prior knowledge as they make connections between the material and their own lives while also giving students the opportunity to digest complex social issues in real world environments.

Spoken word poetry provides a way for students to create multiple links with the curriculum through promoting social studies-arts integration that honors both content areas and incorporates multiple learning modalities while encouraging critical thinking, discussion, and interpretation (LeCompte & Bauml, 2012). Students also need to learn skills such as critical and creative thinking, problem solving and decision-making to succeed in any field. Equally important, students need to develop interpersonal relationships and communication skills. All of these objectives can be supported via students' participation in learning experiences centered on spoken word poetry (Christensen & Watson, 2015). This study offers insight on the current state of social studies classroom and the need for culturally relevant methods (Ladson-Billings, 1995), like spoken word poetry, to activate critical components of the social studies learning environment.

A case study design will be used to answer the following research questions to determine whether spoken word poetry can be used as a pedagogical tool in the social studies classroom to engage and connect to students (See Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Case Study Research Questions

Research Questions
1. How does the use of spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool increase student engagement and students' sense of voice in the social studies classroom?
2. Does the inclusion of spoken word poetry into the social studies classroom increase students' understanding of the material being presented?
3. What are students' and teachers' reactions to the use of spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool in the social studies classroom?

Qualitative data was collected along with quantitative data in the pre-study survey and in the post-study survey. The study took place over the course of a one-week unit reviewing the Civil War in Mrs. Smith's 8<sup>th</sup> grade history classroom at a Central Texas middle school. Mrs. Smith was approached for this study because her classroom was identified as a diverse learning environment. 50% of students in Mrs. Smith's classes were Hispanic, 40% were African American, 9% were Caucasian, and 1% were Asian. Furthermore, in Mrs. Smith's classes 13% were SPED identified, meaning the students required some sort of special education and 12 % were identified as being ESL students, students with English as a second language.

Spoken word poetry was integrated as a pedagogical tool through live performances, YouTube videos, and various writing prompts. Student comprehension of the social studies curriculum was measured quantitatively before and after the study using test questions selected from the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) for social studies (See Table 1.2).

Table 1.2: Selected Questions from STAAR Used for Pre-Study and Post-Study Surveys

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State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness Questions

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1. Which of these describes a result of the Thirteenth Amendment?  
**A** African Americans in the North could vote.  
**B** State governments were required to protect individual rights.  
**C** Former Confederate officials were prohibited from holding elected office.  
**D** African Americans in the South could move elsewhere.
  
2. After General Robert E. Lee’s surrender at Appomattox Court House, the main priority of the United States was to —  
**A** elect a new president and vice president  
**B** complete construction of the Capitol  
**C** establish Union forts in the former Confederate states  
**D** implement a plan to bring Confederate states back into the Union
  
3. Which of the following is an accomplishment of Ulysses S. Grant?  
**A** Commanded the U.S. military in the West during the Indian Wars  
**B** Led the Radical Republicans in Congress during Reconstruction  
**C** Was appointed general in chief of the Union army during the Civil War  
**D** Became Andrew Johnson’s vice president after Abraham Lincoln’s assassination
  
4. Which of the following resulted from Eli Whitney’s invention of the cotton gin?  
**A** The demand for slaves increases in the South.  
**B** More textile factories are established in the South.  
**C** The number of European immigrants arriving at southern port cities increases.  
**D** More tobacco and food crops are cultivated on southern plantations.
  
5. The election of Hiram Rhodes Revels in 1870 was significant because he was the first African American to —  
**A** win an election as a member of the Democratic Party  
**B** win a majority of the popular vote in Mississippi  
**C** serve as a member of the U.S. Senate  
**D** run for public office in the South

---

Student engagement data was taken throughout the course of the study on randomly selected students with the purpose of documenting and analyzing student interest in the spoken word infused curriculum.

Implications and success were qualitatively assessed after the study using semi-structured interviews with the teacher, teacher intern, and selected students from the study.

### *Summary*

This study will offer insight on the potential of spoken word poetry as an innovative teaching tool to promote critical thinking skills, student engagement, and culturally relevant pedagogy within a democratic social studies classroom environment. This study will provide a narrative description of the impact spoken word poetry has on student voice in the classroom and how student voice in turn impacts a student's connection to and understanding of the social studies curriculum. Analyzing student engagement data, as well as the semi-structured interviews with both teachers and students, will provide feedback as to if spoken word poetry can be used as a method for educators to revitalize their classroom during a time when the "drill and kill" mentality seems to have plagued the American school system. Overall, this study aims to identify whether or not spoken-word poetry can be used as an alternative approach to teaching social studies that is both culturally relevant and engaging.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

Spoken word poetry is an art form that has the potential to engage students in higher-level critical thinking skills while also empowering them to use voice to represent their perspectives regarding controversial issues. Citizenship, social issues, and civic knowledge have become unaddressed topics of instruction in the social studies classroom in much part due to *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top*. Infusion of spoken word poetry in social studies classroom serves as a powerful means of self-representation and democracy for youth at a time when political leadership is divided and social studies curriculum is standardized.

#### *The Current State of the Social Studies Classroom*

Educational reform movements such as *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* and *Race to the Top* (Ravitch, 2013) were designed to set standards and hold teachers and schools accountable to those standards in hopes of revitalizing and reforming the American educational system. As such, these reform initiatives focused on the use of high-stakes tests to measure the effectiveness of a school and its faculty while focusing primarily on the math and reading as core-tested subjects. However, the heavy focus on math and reading came at the expense of the sciences and social studies (Dee & Jacob, 2010; Knighten, 2003; Onosko, 2011; Ravitch, 2013). Specifically, *NCLB* and *Race to the Top* have impacted the social studies classroom, as teachers are reluctant to deviate from standards-based, tested curriculum and often adopt a “teach to the test” mentality. In turn, teachers are frequently forced to compromise important social studies concepts such as

multiple perspectives, historical inquiry, and active citizenship. Furthermore, the increased emphasis on test results has led to a centralized focus on the student as a test taker rather than the overall social and emotional development of the student outlined by Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg (2004) as being critical components of the learning process.

The National Council for the Social Studies defined the purpose of social studies as “to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (NCSS, 2010). Social studies curriculum should help students understand their role as citizens in the world around them as well as develop knowledge of civic content and processes, such as seeking out solutions to social issues (Blevins & LeCompte, 2015). In other words, the social studies classroom should mimic the outside world in an effort to provide students with the necessary thinking and social skills to be effective and active members of the society they live in. As a result of high stakes testing, social studies classrooms often become spaces for memorization and recitation of obscure facts and dates instead of places where students critically examine the world around them in an effort to become informed and engaged citizens (Byrd, 2012). The pedagogical practices teachers use to teach the standard curriculum often cripples students’ ability to develop social perspectives, cultural appreciations, and critical thinking skills (Onosko, 2011; Ravitch, 2013).

There are several instructional methods that have been implemented into classrooms in an attempt to counter the standardized state-mandated curriculum. Solarz (2015) emphasized the need for a learner-centered classroom and collaborative learning.

Solarz advocates for project centered learning in which the student learns through inquiry and a grading system that is subjective rather than objective. Rubin (2012) argued that the social studies classroom should create an environment in which students are perfecting the skills they will need to be active members of society. As a result, ongoing classroom discussion of current events and social issues should be normal practices of any social studies setting.

A variety of research in the field of social studies education has highlighted the need to move away from test-driven instructional practices and towards pedagogical techniques that are more student-centered, democratic, culturally relevant, and dialogic in order to cultivate meaningful and authentic social studies instruction. In the following section, I examine the research surrounding each of these pedagogical practices and explore how spoken word poetry can be used in the social studies classroom to promote democratic and culturally relevant instruction.

### *Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical framework for this study was derived from the synthesis of several frameworks of understanding (Blythe, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015). When combined, these frameworks provide insight about what types of classroom environments are necessary to promote spoken word poetry as a meaningful pedagogical tool. This framework outlines several characteristics believed to have the potential to create a social studies classroom that fosters a deep and rich understanding of the curriculum (See Figure 1).

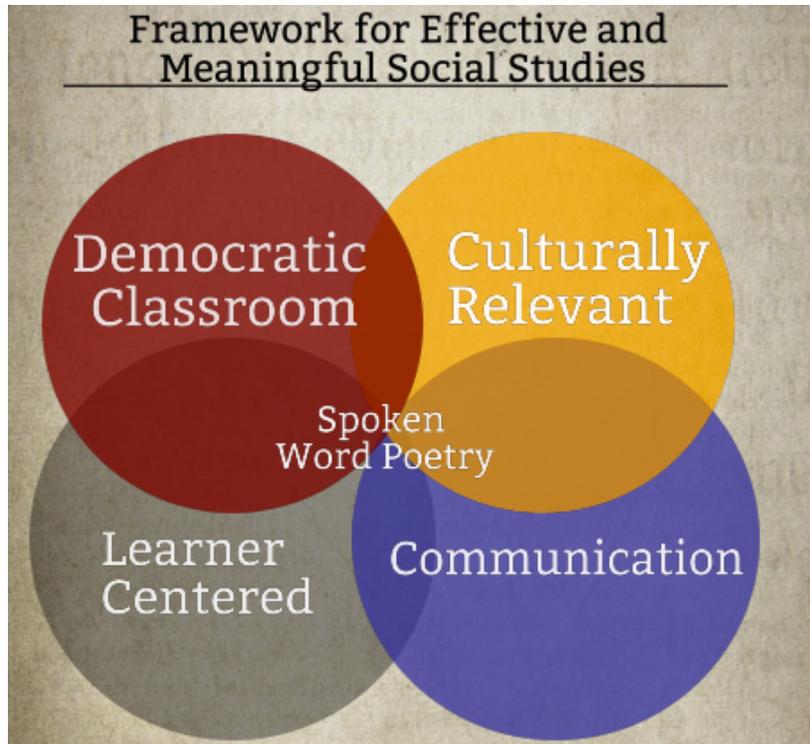


Figure 1: A Framework for Effective and Meaningful Social Studies

The classroom should be learner-centered where the teacher is a facilitator of learning rather than a transmitter of information. In creating such an environment the curriculum should be focused primarily on experienced based learning and cognitive thinking skills that challenge the student to think in the context of real world scenarios (Blythe, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2008; Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015). The classroom environment should also be a democratic one in which the student feels as if they are playing an active role in the decisions being made within the classroom while also taking responsibility for the process of their individual learning experience (Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015).

Additionally, the curriculum should be culturally relevant while also providing situations that mimic the outside world. The teacher must ask himself or herself whether

the material has the ability to connect to a diverse group of students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Finally, communication should be a critical component of any framework. This involves communication from student-to-student, student-to-self, student-to-parent, teacher-to-parent, and most importantly teacher-to-student (Blythe, 1998; Solarz, 2015). The purpose of this thesis is to examine how the use of spoken word poetry in a middle school classroom might engage these four elements of effective and meaningful social studies instruction. When the classroom is learner-centered, democratic, culturally relevant, and makes communication between all parties a priority, meaningful understanding in the social studies can take place.

### *Learner Centered Environment*

Students are naturally curious and as a result the curriculum should be designed to feed into that curiosity (Schiro, 2013; Solarz, 2015). The classroom should cultivate an active experience rather than a passive one. Solarz (2015) found that students learn best when they experience a phenomenon first hand. When the learning experience is active, the students are more likely to cultivate meaning from the curriculum (Blythe, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2008; National Research Council, 2000; Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015). As students reflect on their active learning experiences they are engaging in the metacognitive, continually questioning their level of understanding as well as the direction of their work.

Effective social studies instruction can occur when students complete an activity that investigates a real-life problem, engage in creating a series of products that address a question or problem, work collaboratively with others to address the problem, and utilize a variety of cognitive and analytical skills throughout the process (Darling-Hammond,

2008; Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015). In student-centered classrooms, students are engaged in the act of doing. As a result, students can be hands on with their learning, which not creates new understanding, but improves overall retention and a deeper understanding of the curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 2008; National Research Council, 2000; Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015).

Research has shown that inquiry or Project Based Learning (PBL) is an effective method of engaging students in a learner-centered environment (Bell, 2010; National Research Council, 2000; Helle, Tynjälä, & Olkinuora, 2006). Bell (2010) and Helle, Tynjälä, & Olkinuora (2006) propose project-based learning as an innovative approach to teaching in the twenty-first century to ensure student success. Helle, Tynjälä, & Olkinuora (2006) suggested that when teachers act as transmitters of knowledge and not facilitators of knowledge, their students may know the material without actually understanding it. Meaning students may have memorization without activation. Bell (2010) argued that PBL allows students to activate knowledge as they learn to be self-reliant through project inquiry. Through planning and organization the student takes on responsibility, independence, and discipline.

PBL looks to develop competence in an area of inquiry as students utilize their foundation of factual knowledge and understanding of facts and ideas in the context of a conceptual framework. Students also learn to organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval of prior knowledge and then apply all of this to the task or project at hand (National Research Council, 2000). This type of activity allows students to engage in inquiry based thinking while also building on prior knowledge and lived experiences. As educators, we must always aim to build on the prior knowledge of our students in order to

cultivate meaningful understanding and powerful learning (Blythe, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2008; National Research Council, 2000; Solarz 2015).

I suggest that this framework for PBL is congruent with the process of creating and performing spoken word poetry. Similar to PBL, the students are asked to organize knowledge in a way in which they are given the opportunity to retrieve and build off of prior knowledge. As they organize this knowledge, they are asked to explore a topic and given the freedom to analyze the topic from their own perspective. They are encouraged to use their independent voice and take responsibility for their own learning and understanding. As students develop their individual voice and take responsibility for their own learning they begin to participate in a democratic learning environment.

### *Democratic Classroom*

A democratic classroom is a classroom in which the students are active participants in their learning process, all positions are equally respected without necessarily being equally valued, and where the evaluation of differing positions takes place through critical, informed and knowledgeable dialogue (Wilmer, n.d.). The literature suggests that creating a democratic classroom is essential for effective social studies instruction (Rubin, 2012). The majority of students have encountered a similar experience in their history classroom in which they simply learned the facts and dates that their teacher or the state had mandated as being relevant, usually in a drill in kill environment in which the learner is passively learning rather than actively learning (National Research Council, 2000). The National Council for the Social Studies states that the purpose of social studies is to “help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an

interdependent world” (NCSS, 2010). In other words, if the purpose of social studies is to prepare students to interact in the world, then the social studies classroom should be an environment where students are gaining the tools and skills to do so.

Students need to be in an environment that presents exciting opportunities to understand how history works as a discipline guided by rules of evidence and how certain analytical skills can be both applicable and relevant for understanding events within their own lives (National Research Council, 2000). “Powerful learning occurs when student work resembles that of real writers, scientists, mathematicians, and historians” (Darling-Hammond, 2008, p.198). It is essential then for the classroom to mimic the outside world.

In accordance with these ideals, Rubin (2012) conducted design-based research with three diverse learning environments, taught by teachers with 3-6 years of classroom experience, in order to further investigate the effectiveness of civic education. Rubin (2012) concluded that in a democratic classroom, civic education should build upon students’ own experiences with civic life, provide opportunities for students to consider and discuss key issues and controversies, build students’ discussion, analysis, critique, and research skills, and build students’ knowledge of their rights and responsibilities as citizens in a way that connects directly to their own concerns.

Students should also be able to work collaboratively with other students whose opinions may differ from their own (Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015). As active citizens, students should be able to work and think interdependently, work effectively and respectfully with partners and small groups, use social skills in order to avoid conflict, listen and strongly consider the ideas of others, while also valuing individual contributions from their classmates (Solarz, 2015). Spoken word poetry allows students

to interact with other students who may be able to offer an innovative idea or a fresh perspective on an issue. Darling-Hammond (2008) suggests that peer collaboration also enables mindful engagement to occur as collaborative reasoning allows students to fine-tune their own arguments around “contentious” ideas.

In a democratic classroom, student voice is not only heard but also valued and respected. Furthermore, a democratic classroom centered on civic education is effective in creating active citizens, citizens aware and engaged in the community around them and within the social studies classroom. Engaging students in a democratic setting within the classroom provides students with real world skills that will prepare them to interact with the democratic society they are citizens of.

### *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*

Culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy of opposition, specifically committed not only individual but also collective empowerment (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It serves as a way for educators to acknowledge the home life and culture of the students and integrate their lived experiences, values, and understandings into the classroom curriculum (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Ladson-Billings argued that culturally relevant teachers allow students to maintain their cultural integrity, teach students to be culturally competent, have a critical consciousness, and make connections to their every day lives (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Furthermore, having a culturally relevant classroom environment is essential to helping students develop cultural competence in relation to social justice and equality. By modeling social justice in the classroom, educators are affirming, modeling, and sustaining socially just learning environments for all students

and create a structure for how equitable social relations and behaviors can be achieved in the outside world (Adams, 2016).

However, Au (2014) highlighted that in the times of high stakes testing, a shrinking budget, and increase work loads educators often fail to utilize culturally relevant pedagogy and as a result fail to meet the needs of students from marginalized populations. Textbooks help to perpetuate this issue in social studies classrooms as they often play favor to Eurocentric hegemonic narratives (Hickman & Porfilio, 2012). In short, culturally relevant pedagogy is a call to counter these exclusionary narratives by becoming culturally aware of teaching practices and learning environments. Spoken word poetry looks to fill this gap by providing a safe space for multiple perspectives to engage in meaningful and productive dialogue. Bolton and Latham (2004) concur, suggesting that writing poetry “breaks that ‘silence that had to be overcome’ (Rich 1995:84), allowing memories, thoughts, and reflections on experience to be explored and expressed” (p. 120). By allowing these alternative perspectives and text-to-self connections to enter the classroom, the teacher is creating space for meaningful relationships between teacher and student to take place.

It is important for teachers to establish a relationship with students. It is imperative for educators to recognize that their students each have different social, cultural, and personal identity factors that influence how they engage best with the material (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995). By embracing the individual student, the teacher can organize a curriculum that provides opportunities to embrace their differences and share their unique perspectives to one another (Darling-Hammond, 2008).

Freire's (2000) work also supports the notion for culturally relevant pedagogy in the social studies by suggesting that the past is a means of understanding more clearly what and who a student is so that they can more wisely build the future. Paulo Freire agreed that the curriculum should allow the oppressed to regain sense of humanity and in turn overcome their condition (Freire, 2000). The social studies classroom should be an environment that focuses on real world social issues including racial, socioeconomic, and political injustices while also encouraging students to be active citizens engaged in critical thinking and problem solving within a real world setting (Rubin, 2012). The social studies should be relevant to the students' life, so they can then make connections, and offer solutions to fight and talk back to injustice (Rubin, 2012, Schiro, 2013).

While current events are an effective way for teachers to make the material relevant to students' lives; often times current events are approached in a trivial way (Rubin, 2012). In order for current events to be meaningful, Rubin argues that current events must not be isolated from the curriculum. Current events are a way to connect to important issues happening in the world. Spoken word poetry allows students to bring in current events into the classroom, provide their own perspective while at the same time exploring the perspectives of their classmates.

Social studies material should connect to students' outside world in relation to their daily lives. Bartolome (1994) argued that the material should be humanized and integrated into the everyday lives of the student as student motivation is activated when teachers choose examples and use techniques that establish personal relevance (Darling-Hammond, 2008). Learning in the classroom should connect to the outside world in a way that a student's learning process and quest for understanding does not stop when

they leave the classroom rather it is further explored (Blythe, 1998; National Research Council, 2000; Rubin, 2012; Solarz 2015).

By being culturally relevant the educator creates a space in which all students' voices have the opportunity to be represented. Students are able to engage in a true democracy and in turn connect what they are learning to their everyday lives. As students actively engage and connect the material to their everyday lives, deeper understanding is able to take place and they are empowered to maintain their cultural identity (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

### *Teaching Thematically*

Through thematic teaching, the teacher focuses on generative topics that involve one or more domains or disciplines that are interesting to the student and teacher, accessible, age appropriate, and allow for multiple connections (Blythe, 1998). In the social studies, teaching thematically rather than chronologically allows students to identify patterns and trends throughout the course of history (Rubin, 2012).

For example, when teaching the concept of a turning point in a battle, a teacher might ask students to consider and reflect on turning points in their own life. Has one event significantly changed the course of their life? In this case, teaching thematically provides students the opportunity to build on their prior knowledge of the Revolutionary and Civil War, connect their prior knowledge to lived experiences, and then organize it in a reflective activity. The student can then take their knowledge of revolution and turning points and apply it to other disciplines. When the student is able to apply their knowledge across disciplines true understanding and comprehension of the material is taking place (Blythe, 1998, Darling-Hammond, 2008, Solarz, 2015).

As students write and reflect, there is room for a higher level of thinking involving essential questions to occur around the text. Essential questions are the “big” fundamental and debatable questions that assist students in connecting the past to the present while also engaging them in critical thinking skills (Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015). These essential questions should be directly related to the identified theme as well as the established classroom goals for understanding. These questions should be open ended and create a centralized focus that allows students to deeply synthesize the material (Blythe, 1998). Essential questions are specifically critical when teaching social studies because they allow for multiple perspectives, leaving the story told within the textbooks open for interpretation and further analysis (Rubin, 2012).

Teaching thematically allows the curriculum to expand across disciplines and relate to students with differing cultural backgrounds. It provides space in the curriculum to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy as well as current events that connect to the everyday lives of each of the students. Students are then better equipped with the tools to connect the past to the present and engage in meaningful discussion. As students engage in meaningful discussion they are also developing critical social skills such as communicating and actively listening.

### *Communication*

Communication is another key component of effective social studies instruction. Social studies teachers should make an effort to adequately communicate the learning objectives, understanding goals, and expectations of the classroom to all parties involved in the learning process (Blythe, 1998, Solarz, 2015). It is important to have effective communication student-to-student, student-to-self, student-to-parent, teacher-to-parent,

and teacher-to-student. Each of these communication networks should be reciprocal. For example, communication should consistently involve teacher-to-student and student-to-teacher or parent-to-teacher and teacher-to-parent. In order for effective communication to take place, it is important to create a safe space in the classroom.

A safe space allows students to speak their mind and ask the hard questions. There is the idea that there should be a mutual understanding of respect between the teacher and student as well as student-to-student. At the same time, all parties must feel as if their voice is respected regardless of if another student agrees or disagrees with them. Teachers need to create a space in which they, as facilitators and not transmitters of knowledge, are willing to release control in a way that allows the student's voice to be heard (Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015). When the student's voice is heard, a democratic learning environment takes place and the student is able to take ownership over his or her own learning process.

### *Reflections and Feedback*

Reflections and feedback are important components of communication. The learning process should engage students in metacognitive thinking by allowing students to have multiple opportunities to reflect on their learning goals, assess their progress, and make sense of their learning (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Freire, 2000; National Research Council, 2000; Solarz, 2015). Reflecting on one's own thinking leads to reconstructing ideas and allows for a deeper conceptual understanding (Darling-Hammond, 2008). Students should consistently set learning goals and expectations for themselves and reflect on their progress throughout the process (Solarz, 2015). Feedback between students and teacher can also foster a better learning environment by providing insight on

curriculum and methods that may need to be modified to better suit the individual needs of the classroom. Teachers must also be willing to be learners (National Research Council, 2000; Solarz, 2015).

Students must also be able to provide feedback to their fellow classmates. As mentioned previously, peer collaboration can be a tool that provides students with continuous feedback while also developing their social, communication, and conflict resolution skills (Solarz, 2015). It's a technique that helps unify a classroom through building community, supporting the concept of teamwork, demonstrating cooperation, and creating that safe space necessary for fluid communication. Bell (2010) agreed, stating that when students learn how to receive and give constructive feedback they are equipping themselves with the skills necessary for becoming global members of society.

The ideal social studies classroom prioritizes student voice, involves constant feedback and communication, and incorporates a learner-centered curriculum that connects to the students' everyday life. The teacher acts as a facilitator of the learning experience and gives students space to adequately explore and express themselves throughout the learning process. This study looks to establish spoken word poetry as an unconventional method that addresses each of the components previously established as being part of an effective and meaningful social studies classroom.

### *Poetry as a Pedagogical Tool*

Poetry is an effective teaching tool because it provides students with a natural way to learn, participate, and express themselves (Vardell, 2003). According to Vardell (2003) poetry can be used to introduce a topic of a lesson, to supplement content, or to expand on thematic ideas. Spoken word poetry is also a method that engages students in

essential skills for the social studies. Vardell argues that when poetry is incorporated into the social studies classroom it meets the following objectives outlined by the National Council for the Social Studies in their *Expectation of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for the Social Studies*. These skills have been outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Expectation of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for the Social Studies

Acquiring Information: Reading Skills	Acquiring Information: Vocabulary	Organizing and Using Information: Thinking Skills	Interpersonal Relationships and Social Participation Skills
Reading for literal meaning, main ideas, inferences, opinions, and bias	Sight words, context clues, essential social studies terms	Classifying, interpreting, analyzing, summarizing, synthesizing, and evaluating	Exploring personal convictions, beliefs, feelings; leading, following, cooperating, compromising

Vardell also suggests that these standards can be incorporated in lessons focused on culture, history, geography, identity, institutions, government, economics, technology, global connections, and citizenship. I argue that spoken word can be used as the vehicle to do so.

Spoken word as a pedagogical tool can help to cultivate a culture of conscience by creating a safe space for students to “talk back to injustice” as they discuss and digest contemporary social issues (Christensen & Watson, 2015). When used appropriately, spoken word has the potential to help students address controversial issues in a fresh, innovative, and engaging way while providing a vehicle through which they can construct meaning out of reality by providing students with a chance to move past simply memorizing countless historical facts and move towards synthesizing and analyzing complex concepts.

Through spoken word poetry students are given the opportunity to practice analytical skills, persuasive writing, and critically thinking while engaging in an art form that has ties to the student's own culture and everyday life. Christensen (2000) suggests that the key to reaching a student and building community within the classroom comes from helping students "excavate and reflect on their personal experiences, and [connect] them to the world of language, literature and society (p.8). Darling-Hammond (2008) would agree that social interaction around texts promotes mindful engagement. As students share and reflect on their own poems as well as the poems of their classmates, there is room for questions that stimulate a higher level of thinking.

In accordance with Ladson-Billings (2014) and Lynch (2007), I believe that infusing spoken word poetry allows for all students to link the knowledge and practices of social studies with an understanding and appreciation of not only their own culture but also the culture of their fellow classmates. When used appropriately poetry has the ability to assist in creating a democratic, culturally relevant, student centered environment in which students develop effective communication and social skills.

By incorporating spoken word poetry into the classroom, teachers can create a learning environment that permits both complex and subtle forms of thinking to take place (Eisner, 2002). According to Darts (2004), poetic art can be used as a critical tool to help students participate in important public conversations regarding the social and political relations of art to power, culture, and democratic citizenship. As the students interact with the art form, they are able to identify generative themes within the curriculum and engage in both a local and global conversation that draws from the lived experiences of the individual (Desai & Marsh, 2005). In the process of writing, students

must learn to organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval of prior knowledge and then apply it all to their own spoken word piece. The infusion of spoken word poetry in the classroom is also a type of problem-based learning. (National Research Council, 2000). Bell (2010) states that through PBL students activate their prior knowledge as they learn to be self-reliant through project inquiry which in the case of spoken word poetry comes in the form of investigating an issue, building off prior knowledge, and connecting the material to his or her own lives. In addition, poetry is a highly reflective and individualized art form that can be used to connect citizens to the world around them. When students are placed in a learning setting where they have a high degree of ownership, they tend to have a better overall concept of self, a greater amount of political engagement, and display a greater tolerance for outside groups (Morgan & Streb, 2001).

Spoken word poetry differs from poetry written exclusively for the page because it is poetry that demands to be heard (Kay, 2011). Because it is poetry that demands to be heard, I believe that spoken word poetry emphasizes the importance of each individual student voice in the classroom. Furthermore, a poem's meaning is more clearly communicated when it is performed orally and heard by an audience (Vardell, 2003).

Spoken word is a type of poetry that relies on the art of storytelling and wordplay while also having strong ties to the hip-hop culture (Parmar & Bain, 2007). Research indicates that poetry, particularly spoken word poetry, is a viable outlet for articulating the obstacles presented by social realities experienced by many youth (Fisher, 2005; Jocson, 2005). As the students interact with the art form, they are able to identify generative themes within the curriculum and engage in both a local and global conversation that draws from the lived experiences of the individual (Desai & Marsh,

2005). Spoken word poetry is also a tool that can aid in providing fluid communication while also engaging in culturally relevant pedagogy within a democratic, learner-centered classroom. Jocson (2005) found that spoken word poetry can bridge in school and out of school literacy practices of young people and, in turn, make the material relevant and engaging to the students.

Spoken word poetry offers students the opportunity to share their ideas in a safe space as they speak their mind, ask hard questions, and engage in controversial discussions. Social studies classrooms must be places in which student voice is valued and cultivated. Teachers need to create a space in which they, as facilitators and not transmitters of knowledge, are willing to release control in a way that allows the student's voice to be heard (Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015). The nature of spoken word creates an environment that is both a safe and collective method of sharing ideas. Christensen and Watson (2015) suggest that poetry has the ability to create a safe haven for learning by opening a class up to create a community from a group of strangers and construct understanding across lines that otherwise might divide. "Through poetry, we can mourn our losses, expel our terror, tell our stories, and sing our joys" (Christensen & Watson, 2015, p.183). Poetry as an art form has the power to humanize the otherwise mundane and dry history textbooks and in turn revitalize the learning environment and cultivate an atmosphere where connections from the text to student occur. When student voice is valued and prioritized in the classroom, a democratic learning environment takes place and the student is able to take ownership over his or her own learning process.

Through the power of words, poetry offers a means for alternative voices, voices manipulated or excluded from the textbooks, to reenter the classroom and assist in

rebuilding one's understanding of the literature (Jocson, 2005). The art form allows teachers and students to see education as a social process (Kinloch, 2005). When education becomes a social process, students are more likely to participate because the information becomes relevant to their own reality. They learn how to address complex societal issues such as hate, racism, sexism, and elitism. In her research Kinloch (2005) states:

Such activation, I believe, heightens human awareness of social relationships, civic participation, and citizenship in regards to the interconnectedness of life and the appreciation of differences fostered in school and out-of-school spaces of learning, talking, reading, writing, performing, and being. (p.109)

Bill Moyer writes, "Democracy needs her poets, in all their diversity, precisely because our hope for survival is in recognizing the reality of one another's lives" (Bruce & Davis, 2000). The goal of spoken word poetry is to help people engage in the social issues and narratives of our generation as well as the history of the generations preceding. In other words, spoken word poetry in a way acts as a culturally relevant tool for engaging in oral history as individuals write and share their own lived experiences on the stage. According to Christensen and Watson (2015), poetry gives young people the power to give life to the voices that are often excluded from the textbooks, including their own. Poetry gives students the tools to "meet the real world with a sense of humanity" (p. iii). It allows the classroom environment to become a place where we "tell the untold stories that are often submerged beneath the weight of official curriculum" (Christensen and Watson, 2015, p. 99).

Overall, the literature suggests that spoken word poetry allows students to engage in controversial issues and alternative perspectives to those issues, reflect on the material in relation to their own lives, develop their voice, and develop their own social narrative.

The literature provides evidence that spoken word has the potential to revitalize the classroom environment while promoting student engagement and higher levels of thinking. The following study will provide insight into whether the claims outlined in the literature prove true in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade social studies classroom.

### *Summary*

There is no question that we are living in an era of high stakes testing and increased workloads where educators often fail to utilize culturally relevant pedagogy and meet the needs of students from marginalized populations. The gaps in the curriculum fail to meet the needs of student voice and perspectives that are often underrepresented or excluded from the traditional social studies textbook. It is more important than ever in the field of social studies education to highlight pedagogical techniques that are more student-centered, democratic, culturally relevant, and dialogic in order to cultivate meaningful and authentic social studies instruction. Recognizing the potential of spoken word poetry to meet each of these components, this study integrating spoken word poetry into a one-week re-teach unit over the Civil in an 8<sup>th</sup> grade history classroom. Chapter Three reviews the methodology of this study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

Social issues and civic knowledge have become unaddressed topics of instruction in the social studies classroom in much part due to *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top*. This is largely in part because of teachers who find themselves “teaching to the test” in an effort to cover state standards. Textbooks help to perpetuate this issue in the social studies classroom as they often play favor to Eurocentric hegemonic narratives that leave little room for alternative and diverse perspectives to enter the classroom (Hickman & Porfilio, 2012). Au (2014) highlighted that in the times of high stakes testing, a shrinking budget, and increase work loads educators often fail to utilize culturally relevant pedagogy and as a result fail to meet the needs of students from marginalized populations.

Ladson-Billings (1995) recognized the need for culturally relevant pedagogy to be a part of the classroom as it serves as a method for connecting the curriculum with the student’s outside world and culture. This study aims to make a case for spoken word poetry as a culturally relevant and engaging pedagogical tool for the social studies classroom. In the process, this study will look at the role spoken word poetry plays on creating/maintaining a democratic classroom, how it impacts the students’ perception of voice and engagement in the classroom, as well as the students’ overall understanding of the curriculum being taught.

#### *Overview of Case Study*

Following IRB approval, a single case study was conducted to investigate the potential of spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool in the social studies classroom. The

study was originally intended to be a multiple case study however, there were not any extraneous circumstances or results in any of the class periods that had any unique experiences specific to that one class. When no logical subunits can be identified in the data a single case study is preferred (Yin, 2014). For these reasons, I opted to look at Mrs. Smith's 8<sup>th</sup> grade classes as a single case. The objective of the study was to integrate spoken word poetry into a one-week enrichment unit on the Civil War, observe and analyze the impact of spoken word on student engagement and understanding of the curriculum, and observe student experiences with using spoken word poetry in the classroom.

### *Population and Sample*

All participants were students in Mrs. Smith's 8<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. history class at a Central Texas middle school. Each of Mrs. Smith's six class periods participated in the study. Students at the Central Texas middle school who were not enrolled in Mrs. Smith's 8<sup>th</sup> grade U.S History classes during the 2015-2016 school year were excluded from participation. Each class took place over a 45-minute period of instruction.

Mrs. Smith was approached for this study because her classroom her classroom included a variety of ethnicities, academic levels, and a relatively equal representation of both genders. In Mrs. Smith's classroom 50% of students were Hispanic, 40% were African-American, 9% were Caucasian, and 1% of students were Asian. Of these students, 58% identified as female and 42% identified as male. Academically, 13% of the students were SPED identified, meaning the students required some sort of special education and 12 % were identified as second language learners. The breakdown of demographics was important in accounting for variables, such as prior academic status or

cultural background that may or may not impact student experience and academic success when using spoken word in the classroom. It is not evident whether or not culture or prior academic success impacts one's experience with spoken word poetry. However, I recognized the potential of culture and academic standing impacting a student's overall experience. Furthermore, the selected population, an 8th grade American history classroom, was purposefully selected because the researcher wanted to conduct this study in the classroom of a state-tested subject.

This purposeful sample of 8th grade history students was comprised of 49 students across six class periods of Mrs. Smith's history section. These 49 students provided a holistic representation of the 147 total students in Mrs. Smith's classes. The selection was based on students who turned in both their parent and student assent forms and completed both the pre-study and post-study survey. Since all students were required to complete the survey during class, only students with assent forms who were absent on the days one of the surveys was handed out were excluded from the study.

Demographically, this selected population was representative of the school setting however may not have been representative of other school populations.

Mrs. Smith's classroom was the ideal classroom setting to further investigate whether spoken word poetry can help students meet the state mandated standard while also being culturally relevant and engaging. The students were given five questions from previously released social studies STAAR tests to ensure validity, that the questions were testing what I intended to test, and reliability to ensure the questions could consistently measure understanding (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011). While, I acknowledge that understanding the curriculum may not be fully measured by a set of standardized

questions, this method was selected because it is the method in which the State of Texas measures student understanding and progress in public schools. It was important as a researcher to measure student understanding in a way in which teachers would be held accountable to in their district if this spoken word curriculum was reintroduced as a method of teaching later in the year or in an alternative setting.

Participants were given the student assent forms in class by Mrs. Smith. The assents forms informed the students of the research that was being conducted, the purpose for that research, as well as who would be conducting that research. Additionally, a letter was sent home to participants' parents describing the purpose of the study and description of the spoken word curriculum being used. Parents were given a consent form to sign and were presented with the option of removing their child from the study. These forms were used to gain informed consent by alerting the participants of the nature of the study and to protect them from deception (Yin, 2014). All students signed the assent forms however not all parents returned their consent forms. Ms. Smith communicated which students were to be included in the study. Students who did not have parent permission to be in the study still received the spoken word curriculum. However, their survey results, responses, and artifacts were not included in the data collection. All of the study took place during the regular school day and required no extra time from the student outside of school.

#### *Incorporating Spoken Word Poetry into Mrs. Smith's Classroom*

The study took place in late spring when the scope sequence for Ms. Smith's class indicated that she would be wrapping up the Sectionalism/Civil War and Reconstruction Period in U.S. History. For the purpose of this study, I acted as a guest lecturer in Mrs. Smith's classroom. As a stranger entering the classroom as a guest lecturer, it was

important that Mrs. Smith approved all materials and activities used during the course of the study prior to implementing them into the participants' classroom. Prior to the study, all lesson plans were sent to Mrs. Smith. This ensured that all materials used in the study were reliable and appropriate for the academic and maturity level of the participants and that the materials are usable and manageable in the every day 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom setting. The department head, instructional specialist, and school administration were also given access to these lessons via the school's online database where teachers must upload their lessons each week. These staff members were also welcomed and encouraged to come and observe the classroom setting during the course of the study.

All spoken word materials connected to a social studies standard outlined in the state mandated curriculum. Each lesson aimed to re-teach the civil war using spoken word poetry. During this unit students engaged in classroom performances, constructed a two-voice poem to compare and contrast 19<sup>th</sup> century sectionalism, created visual poetry over historical figures, analyzed the Gettysburg Address from a poetic perspective and compared it to turning points in their own lives, and constructed and performed spoken word over major battles of the Civil War. The lesson plans are provided in Appendix E.

The process of integrating spoken word into the curriculum was used as part of a re-teach time and enrichment week that focused on the ideas the students had already learned about this Era in U.S. History. The curriculum acted as a re-teach for the TEKS not mastered prior to the study and an enrichment time for those who had mastered and would benefit from a higher level of learning. The curriculum also aimed to engage students and increase meaningful understanding of the Civil War through spoken word poetry. The curriculum aimed to meet the TEKS listed in Table 3.1.

The unit also looked to meet the theoretical framework by establishing a safe, democratic, culturally relevant classroom in which communication and feedback were ongoing between student and teacher. In this environment, the teacher needed to create a space in which they, as facilitators and not transmitters of knowledge, were willing to release control in a way that allowed for the student's voice to be heard (Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015). Additionally, students needed to be consistently setting expectations for themselves and reflect on their progress throughout the process (Solarz, 2015). Feedback between students and the teacher and myself helped foster a better learning environment by providing insight on curriculum and methods that needed to be adjusted throughout the week. Finally, this unit drew heavily from student's lived experiences as Rubin (2012) concluded that in a democratic classroom, civic education should build upon students' own experiences with civic life, provide opportunities for students to consider and discuss key issues and controversies and build on the students' discussion skills. The lesson plans and goals are outlined in Table 3.2.

The spoken word curriculum was primarily drawn from *Rhythm and Resistance* (Christensen & Watson, 2015). These lessons included a two-voice poem (Day One) as well as visual poetry (Day Two). Both lessons were adapted to fit the needs of Mrs. Smith's history class. I, as the researcher, designed the templates used for the lessons on Day Three and Day Four. These templates can be found in Chapter Four. Finally, on Day 5 students completed their post-study survey and engaged in an open mic. During this open mic, students shared their pieces of work constructed during the spoken word unit.

Table 3.1: TEKS Selected for Case Study Curriculum

TEKS Selected for Case Study Curriculum	
8.7 History. The student understands how political, economic, and social factors led to the growth of sectionalism and the Civil War. The student is expected to:	(A) analyze the impact of tariff policies on sections of the United States before the Civil War; (B) compare the effects of political, economic, and social factors on slaves and free blacks; (C) analyze the impact of slavery on different sections of the United States;
8.8 History. The student understands individuals, issues, and events of the Civil War. The student is expected to	(A) explain the roles played by significant individuals during the Civil War, including Jefferson Davis, Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, and Abraham Lincoln, and heroes such as congressional Medal of Honor recipients William Carney and Philip Bazaar; (B) explain the causes of the Civil War, including sectionalism, states' rights, and slavery, and significant events of the Civil War, including the firing on Fort Sumter; the battles of Antietam, Gettysburg, and Vicksburg; the announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation; Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House; and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln
8.10 Geography. The student understands the location and characteristics of places and regions of the United States, past and present. The student is expected to:	(A) locate places and regions of importance in the United States during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries
8.11 Geography. The student understands the physical characteristics of North America and how humans adapted to and modified the environment through the mid-19th century. The student is expected to:	(A) analyze how physical characteristics of the environment influenced population distribution, settlement patterns, and economic activities in the United States during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries
8.21 Citizenship. The student understands the importance of the expression of different points of view in a constitutional republic. The student is expected to:	(A) identify different points of view of political parties and interest groups on important historical and contemporary issues; (B) describe the importance of free speech and press in a constitutional republic
8.29 Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:	(B) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions; (D) identify points of view from the historical context surrounding an event and the frame of reference which influenced the participants; (E) support a point of view on a social studies issue or event; (F) identify bias in written, oral, and visual materials.

Table 3.2: Unit Activities

Day	Activity	Purpose and/or Framework Goal
Day 1-Day 5	Spoken Word Poetry Performance	Introduce Spoken Word Poetry; Culturally Relevant Pedagogy; Communication; Multiple Perspectives
Day 1-Day 4	Writing Warm-Up	Communication; Democratic Classroom; Scaffolding; Student Voice
Day 1	Two-Voice Poem Over 19 <sup>th</sup> Century Sectionalism	Multiple Perspectives
Day 2	Visual Poetry Over Historical Figures	Multiple Perspectives; Scaffolding;
Day 3	Gettysburg Address: What's Your Turning Point	Communication; Culturally Relevant; Democratic Classroom; Multiple Perspectives
Day 4	Rap Battles Over Major Civil War Battles	Communication; Culturally Relevant; Democratic Classroom; Multiple Perspectives
Day 5	Poetry Open Mic	Communication; Culturally Relevant; Democratic Classroom; Multiple Perspectives

*Purpose of Study*

The purpose of this study was to identify if spoken word poetry could be used as a teaching tool for engagement and understanding in the social studies classroom. In this unit, spoken word poetry looked to fill the gap between the paragraphs of a textbook and real life scenarios by providing a safe space for multiple perspectives to engage in meaningful and productive dialogue. The study incorporated a unit on sectionalism and the civil that uses spoken word and poetry as a primary teaching tool each day of the unit. A primary teaching tool was identified as a method used for instruction for at least 50%

of the 45-minute class period. This unit used spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool in re-teaching the civil war and sectionalism with Ms. Smith's 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom.

In integrating these activities into Mrs. Smith's classroom, scaffolding was an important component. According to Collins (1996), scaffolding is the process of providing students with guidance and assistance when introducing an unfamiliar or complex problem. In this case many students, while familiar with the social studies material, indicated that they had little to no prior experience with spoken word poetry and were very confused by it. Taking this information and moving forward into designing the lesson plans it was important each day to ease into the primary focus of the day's lesson.

The class began by engaging in a performance of spoken word poetry either via the researcher or via YouTube. This was meant to set the stage for the rest of the day as the performance always connected in some way to the next portion of the lesson. Each day, the students were also introduced to a new style of poetry either through two-voice poems, visual poetry, prose poetry, or through rap/hip-hop. Students were provided with an example to do together as a class and were often given opportunities to develop a personal example as well. For example, in creating visual poetry on Day Two, students were first walked through an example where they created visual poetry about themselves, then engaged in a classroom example of creating one over Abraham Lincoln, and finally were assigned their own historical figure to create visual poetry for. Students were always given the choice to do the activity provided, to alter the instructions to better suit their needs, or to write on another topic all together.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

These lesson plans were taught over a five-day unit on the Civil War. These lessons aimed to enrich students in their understanding of the war as they had already learned about the civil war previously in the semester. Prior to the study, participants completed a pre-study survey analyzing their prior knowledge of the curriculum as well the individual's prior experience with spoken word poetry. Survey questions related to the curriculum and student understanding of the curriculum were pulled from released 8<sup>th</sup> grade history STAAR tests. This was to ensure that the questions were valid and reliable in measuring the students' ability to meet the standards set by the state of Texas. As the researcher, I acknowledge that true understanding of the material may not be able to be entirely measured based on a student's ability to answer a multiple choice question. However, this method was selected because it is the method that measures the standards in for which educators in the state of Texas are held accountable.

The data collection plan was shaped by the research questions, reviews of the literature in regards to a framework for meaningful social studies, and the proposition that spoken word poetry can be used as pedagogical tool for effective social studies and meaningful understanding. This is congruent with one of the four general strategies for analyzing evidence, relying on theoretical propositions, outlined by Yin (2014). For this case study I wanted to establish whether spoken word poetry was engaging and relevant as well as if it was effective in helping students better understand the material as identified by their teacher and the state of Texas. Multiple sources of evidence were collected in the case study in an effort to establish construct validity as identified by Yin

(2014). Table 3.3 breaks down which data collection tools served to answer each research question.

Table 3.3: Research Questions-Assessment Tools

Research Question	Assessment Tool
1. How does the use of spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool increase student engagement and students' sense of voice in the social studies classroom?	Engagement Data Pre-Study/Post Study Surveys Researcher Observations Semi-Structured Interviews
2. Does the inclusion of spoken word poetry into the social studies classroom increase students' understanding of the material being presented?	Pre-Study/Post Study Surveys Semi-Structured Interviews Student Work
3. What are students' and teachers' reactions to the use of spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool in the social studies classroom?	Pre-Study/Post Study Surveys Research Observations Semi-Structured Interviews Student Work

Participants were given the same survey at the conclusion of the study. Their results were compared to the pre-survey responses and their prior and post unit knowledge over the Civil War was quantitatively assessed for descriptive purposes. Additional data was collected using both the engagement data forms and pre-study/post-study surveys. Throughout the course of the five-day unit, an observer recorded engagement data. The engagement data form allows the observer to code the students' engagement during a ten-minute segment of the lesson. See Figure 2.

The data form also allows the observer to code the type of instruction occurring in the classroom at that time and correlate it to student engagement. During the ten-minute segment, if the student is on task and engaged they receive a plus in that time zone.

Candidate \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Observer \_\_\_\_\_ CI/Mentor \_\_\_\_\_

Campus \_\_\_\_\_ Part of lesson \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Engagement: 10-minute sample (10 points for each observation)

	Setting S, G, I	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	Student 5	Student 6	Type of Task	Comments
:30									
1:00									
1:30									
2:00									
2:30									
3:00									
3:30									
4:00									
4:30									
5:00									
5:30									
6:00									
6:30									
7:00									
7:30									
8:00									
8:30									
9:00									
9:30									
10:00									

Every 30 seconds, observe each of six randomly selected students. Observe each student for 5 seconds during the minute.

Codes:

- % \_\_\_\_\_ + = On Task--following directions, looking at teacher
- % \_\_\_\_\_ - = Off Task--not engaged
- % \_\_\_\_\_ W = Waiting--raising hand
- % \_\_\_\_\_ S = Small Group--smaller than whole class
- % \_\_\_\_\_ G = Whole Group
- % \_\_\_\_\_ I = Independent--one student working alone
- % \_\_\_\_\_ H = Hands-on
- % \_\_\_\_\_ P = Paper/pencil
- % \_\_\_\_\_ D = Discussion
- % \_\_\_\_\_ L = Lecture
- % \_\_\_\_\_ O = Other

Student # 1: \_\_\_\_\_ % on task \_\_\_\_\_ % off task  
 Student # 2: \_\_\_\_\_ % on task \_\_\_\_\_ % off task  
 Student # 3: \_\_\_\_\_ % on task \_\_\_\_\_ % off task  
 Student # 4: \_\_\_\_\_ % on task \_\_\_\_\_ % off task  
 Student # 5: \_\_\_\_\_ % on task \_\_\_\_\_ % off task  
 Student # 6: \_\_\_\_\_ % on task \_\_\_\_\_ % off task Total engagement \_\_\_\_\_ % on task; \_\_\_\_\_ % off task

Figure 2: Engagement Data Form

If the student is off task and not engaged the student receives a minus. At the end of the form the observer totals the number of pluses and calculate the percentage of the class a student was engaged. The observer was asked to give a student a minus if the participant

was working on another class, sleeping/laying their head down, distracting other students, and/or not completing the task at hand. This data was analyzed using a simple time series analysis strategy. Yin (2014) states that time series analysis allows the researcher to track a theoretically significant trend specified before the onset of the case study or in this case student engagement with the spoken word curriculum.

Mrs. Smith and her student intern Ms. Morgan were both familiar with the engagement data form prior to the study and agreed to fill out an engagement form over five randomly selected students in each class period every day. The observer remained the same through out each class period during a day's lesson to ensure the engagement data was both consistent and reliable.

Narrative research looks at the experiences expressed in the lived and told stories of individuals (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), the process of implementing this research consists of focusing on the individual, gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting those lived experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences. Qualitative data was obtained through personal semi-structured interviews with participants and their teachers. Semi-structured interviews are an informal and unstructured interviewing strategy that have potential to provide the researcher with reliable, comparable qualitative data while also giving the participant the freedom to express his or her own views and opinions (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Mrs. Smith and Ms. Morgan were interviewed separately in a semi-structured interview regarding their experience with incorporating spoken word into the social studies classroom one week after the unit was taught. Both Mrs. Smith and Ms. Morgan

were also asked to discuss any implications they found with using spoken word poetry in the classroom as well as provide suggestions for how spoken word poetry curriculum can better suit the needs of social studies teachers.

Students whose parents also signed consent forms were asked to participate in an interview based on their responses and experiences from the week. Creswell (2013) suggests that in qualitative research the researcher reports the perspectives of the participants and looks to interpret their multiple meanings. The goal was to interview students who represented a positive experience, a negative experience, or neutral experience with the integrated curriculum and to have them elaborate on ideas they had for further implementation of spoken word in the classroom. Students were encouraged to speak openly and honestly about their experiences. These semi-structured interviews were conducted during regular class time the week following the case study and took no longer than ten minutes. The purpose of these interviews was to shed light on the identities of the individuals and the relationship they had to the spoken word curriculum. No penalty or consequence was given to any student who chose not to participate in the interview. An audio recording was taken of each semi-structured interview and was later transcribed.

Narrative stories are analyzed in a variety of ways (Creswell, 2013). An analysis can be conducted thematically about what was said, the nature in which that story was told, and/or about who the story is directed towards (Riessman, 2008). In this case study, the interviews were analyzed for common themes amongst lived experiences with the spoken word curriculum. The interviews were individually recorded and were transcribed and coded by hand. As the researcher, I outlined common themes and sorted these themes

into subgroups. These subgroups were created based on the emerging themes outlined in the interviews they were later cross referenced with emerging themes found in the student free responses on the post-study survey.

Artifacts of student work were collected with student and parent permission. These artifacts included examples of student poetry and writing responses written during the course of the one-week curriculum. Copies were made of each piece of writing done by participants during the study. Any identifiable information was removed from the artifacts and student work and replaced with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity in the study. These physical artifacts were also beneficial and insightful into the technical operations of this study. In other words, it provided the researcher with evidence of the quality of work the students were producing. Their writing was assessed for themes and a qualitative narrative description was written explaining and reflecting on those identified themes including student perception of their voice in the classroom and student connection to the curriculum. Table 3.4 summarizes how the data was analyzed.

### *Summary*

This chapter introduced the methodology used to investigate the role spoken word poetry played in the history classroom. 49 students in Mrs. Smith's classroom who turned in both a parent and student assent form and completed both the pre-study survey and post-study survey served as participants for this study. However, artifacts were included from more than just those 49 students. This is because artifacts of student work were included from students who turned in both assent forms regardless if they turned in both the pre-study and post-study survey.

Table 3.4: Data Analysis

Step for Data Analysis	Data Source Used
Collecting Data	Engagement Data, Pre-Study/Post Study Surveys, Researcher Observations, Semi-Structured Interviews, and Student Work
Organizing Data	Pre-Study/Post Study Surveys were sorted and scored, Observations and Notes were typed up and compiled from each day, Student Work for each student was sorted, Interviews were transcribed
Coding Data	Color coding was applied to the Pre-study and Post-Study Surveys and notes for each day's class period were typed up
Identifying Themes Descriptive Analysis	Emerging Themes were Identified The data and themes for each day were described in a descriptive narrative

The unit involved a re-teach over the Civil War in which students engaged in classroom performances, constructed a two-voice poem to compare and contrast 19<sup>th</sup> century sectionalism, created visual poetry over historical figures, analyzed the Gettysburg Address from a poetic perspective and compared it to turning points in their own lives, and constructed and performed spoken word over major battles of the Civil War. Throughout the unit, I collected data through observations, pre-study and post-study surveys, analysis of student work, and semi-structured interviews from the participants, teacher, and student intern. These findings are presented in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Data

Incorporating spoken word poetry into the social studies classroom serves as a powerful means for alternative perspectives and active learning to enter the classroom at a time when the curriculum often focuses on a “drill and kill” test taking mentality. Until recently the majority of research around spoken word poetry has focused primarily on spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool in the English classroom. Therefore, this study looks to address this gap in the literature by exploring the role spoken word poetry can play as a culturally relevant pedagogical tool that cultivates meaningful understanding, engagement, and student voice in the social studies classroom.

As such this study seeks to answer the following research questions outlined previously in Table 1.1:

Table 1.1: Case Study Research Questions

Research Questions
1. How does the use of spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool increase student engagement and students' sense of voice in the social studies classroom?
2. Does the inclusion of spoken word poetry into the social studies classroom increase students' understanding of the material being presented?
3. What are students' and teachers' reactions to the use of spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool in the social studies classroom?

To answer these questions this study employed a case study methodology, in which I collected qualitative observations, engagement data, semi-structured interviews, and Likert scale survey responses. The spoken word unit was taught as a one-week re-teach unit over the Civil War. A re-teach unit describes a unit of instruction used to go over material students may not have understood the first time it was taught. During this unit, Mrs. Smith's 8<sup>th</sup> graders engaged in classroom performances, constructed two-voice poems to compare and contrast 19<sup>th</sup> century sectionalism, created visual poetry over historical figures, analyzed the Gettysburg Address from a poetic perspective and compared it to turning points in their own lives, and constructed and performed spoken word over major battles of the Civil War.

Before presenting the data, I will offer insight on Mrs. Smith's 8<sup>th</sup> graders and their prior experiences and background with spoken word poetry. I will then provide a vivid description of the unit, providing vignettes for each day of instruction and highlighting the activities, discussions, and outcomes from each day. Finally, I will provide data to answer each of the three research questions.

#### *Understanding Students' Prior Experiences and Background*

Mrs. Smith had a total 147 students in her classroom over the course of six class periods. Of the students who turned in both their parent and student consent forms only 49 students completed both the pre-study and post-study survey. The following quantitative data is a representation of those 49 students. However, all students who turned in their parent and student consent forms were included in the qualitative analysis of data including semi-structured interviews, qualitative responses, engagement data, and artifacts of student work.

In the pre-study survey, Mrs. Smith's students were asked to acknowledge their prior experience using spoken word poetry. Of the 49 students that completed both their pre and post-survey, 0% identified as having a lot of experience with spoken word poetry, 12% of students said they had some experience with spoken word poetry, 47% said they had no experience with spoken word poetry but were familiar with what it was, and 41% responded with, "What's spoken word poetry?"

The reason for collecting this data was to establish students' prior knowledge of spoken word poetry to eliminate any potential bias of the final results. For example, if every student enjoyed spoken word poetry and improved greatly on his or her scores but had previously had a lot of experience with spoken word poetry then those results were have been skewed. However, the data revealed that the majority of students had little to no interaction with spoken word poetry prior to the case study.

Students were asked to describe how comfortable they were with public speaking. This was to assess how hesitant students may or may not be with sharing their spoken word poetry in front of the class, a critical component of incorporating spoken word poetry into the classroom. Of the students in Mrs. Smith's class, 26.5 % identified with being uncomfortable with public speaking, 53.1 % identified as being somewhat comfortable with public speaking, and 20.4 % of students identified as being very comfortable with public speaking.

### *A Vivid Description of the Unit*

According to Yin (2014), observational evidence is useful in setting the scene and providing additional information about the topic being studied. Yin states that having multiple observers, whether in a formal or informal variety, increases the reliability of the

observational evidence. Both Baylor Assistant Professor Dr. Blevins and myself recorded daily observations and reflections. In addition to survey data and engagement data, I also collected observational data and kept a researcher reflective journal. This data serves to triangulate the findings of the data previously described. Below I describe what happened during each day of the unit. This narrative data is intended to provide a glimpse into what occurred throughout the unit, including my reflections and student responses. Following this overview, I then answer each research question using data collected during the study.

### *Day One*

On the first day of the unit, I began the class with a poem I had written entitled *Pirates vs. Ninjas* (See in Appendix G). From there I explained to the students who I was and why I was a guest lecturer in their class that week, explaining my passion for history as well as spoken word poetry. It was important for the students to feel like they were in a safe space in which they could express themselves. This was made harder by having a stranger enter the room for a week to teach your class.

To enforce the concept of maintaining a democratic classroom, I let each class period select a piece of neon poster board and together we came up with a list of rules and expectations for the classroom. The rules were hung on the back wall and were moved to the front depending on the class period. For example, during first period first period's set of rules were moved and hung on the front wall then switched out when the next class period came. Below in Figure 3 you can see the list of rules and expectations each class period agreed to. It is important to note that because the student voices differed in each class period, the rules and expectations of each class period slightly differed.

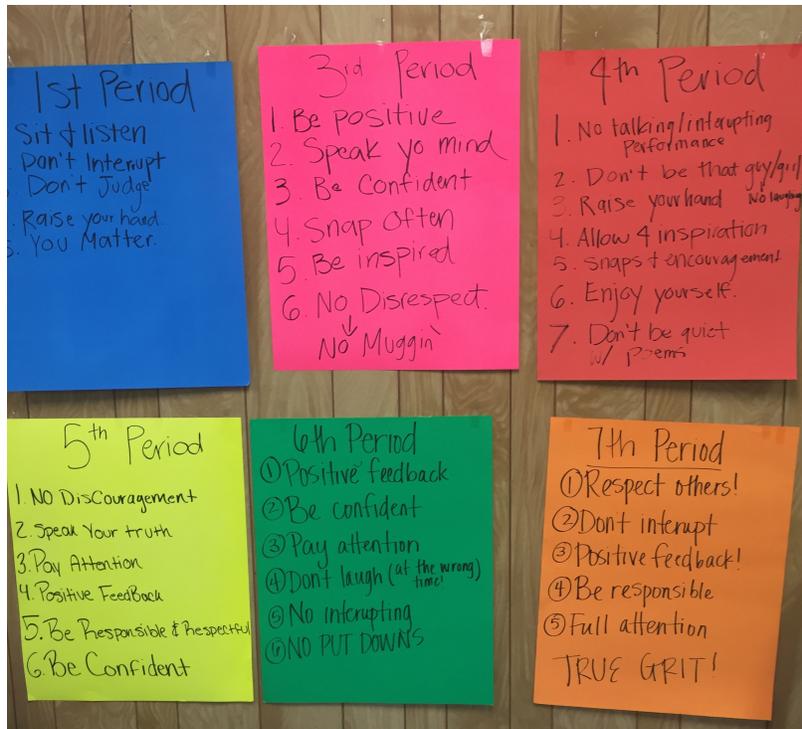


Figure 3: Classroom rules and expectation

On Day One these students were timid and many were afraid to share a simple list they had written during warm-up. In this first activity the students were given the following questions to answer:

I am from....

I Like....

When I am older I will be....

Poetry is....

Students were encouraged to be honest, especially if their opinion of poetry was different from my own. The students then had three minutes to complete their list. This list could be as long or as short as they wanted. Afterwards, a few students were asked to share.

Many students expressed liking sports or certain types of music or wanting to be doctors or teachers when they grew up. The majority of students answered the poetry portion of



contrasting the experiences (Christensen & Watson, 2015, p.116-8). In this poem there are two-voices: the rich women and the poor women, one whose husband owns the factory and one who was born of a man who worked in the factory. Students had a copy of the excerpt in front of them to follow along as we read. This was to give them a visual of the format we were reading. The poem can be found in Appendix H.

After reading the example of the poor and rich woman, we then as a class created a list on the white board of historical perspectives students could write from. For example, these historical perspectives could be from historical leaders during the Civil War like Abraham Lincoln, regions like the Union, people groups like the abolitionists. From this list students then made a list of opposites. For example, Abraham Lincoln would be paired with Jefferson Davis, the Union with the Confederacy, and the abolitionist with the slave owners and so on. The 8<sup>th</sup> graders then created their own two voice poems. The purpose of this writing activity was to challenge students to consider multiple perspectives while also reviewing historical content. Below are a few examples of student work.

Poem 1

A: I am a slave  
B: I am a free person  
A: My color is black  
B: My color is white  
A: I don't matter.  
B: I matter.  
A: I am from the south.  
B: I am from the north.  
A: I don't have rights  
B: I do have rights.  
-Samantha

Poem 2

A: I am the Union  
B: I am the Confederacy  
A: I live in the North  
B: I live in the South  
A: I see factories  
B: I see farms  
A: I'm against slavery  
B: I'm with slavery  
A: Where I live there's rock soil  
B: Where I live there's rich soil  
A: I am Abraham Lincoln  
B: I am Jefferson Davis  
-Tommy

These examples of student work demonstrate how students had to consider several characteristics that influenced sectionalism between the North and the South in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Students then reviewed this historical content by sharing their two voice poems with a partner in front of the class. One partner would read “part a” and the other would read “part b”. As students shared their work, they were exercising their voice in the classroom, communicating their acquired knowledge with their classmates, and taking responsibility for their own learning. While the activity was simple, the two-voice poem provided students with a step-by-step method for engaging in poetry. This activity was critical to scaffolding the students and preparing them for more intricate activities later in the unit.

At the end of Day One it was evident that the students were going to be hesitant to share their work with the class. While a few students were willing to share, many were too timid to want to stand in front of their classmates. As a result, both Mrs. Smith and I agreed that it would be a good idea to include writing warm-ups each day for the students to ease into sharing their longer pieces of writing with the class later on in the week.

### *Day Two*

On the second day I introduced the students to visual poetry. I started by showing the students a poem by a poet named Brandon Wellington entitled “America in Four Minutes” (Wellington, 2012). As a class, we talked about how there were social issues addressed in the poem that were similar to social issues citizens experienced in the 1800’s. These social issues included topics such as addiction, racism, and a poor education system. This discussion lasted about three minutes in each class period. The rules and

expectations students established together on day one were posted on the front board for students to reference.

After the class discussion, I walked the students through visual poetry. Visual poetry is most often a visual you create based on a poem you wrote or read. However, for the sake of history we made the argument that your life is a living and breathing poem and therefore is worthy of creating visual poetry to share your story. While this was not a spoken word activity the idea was that poetry was still a very scary concept for the students and visual poetry is a little less threatening and intimidating.

The students first created one for themselves. They were given the outline of a face. Where the nose would be they put their initials, where their ears would be they put something they listen to (an artist or type of music), where their forehead was they put something they've accomplished, where the neck was they wrote their dreams, and where the eyes were they were instructed to write down four characteristics about themselves, final where their smile was they had to put a phrase, saying, or quote that meant something to them. Figure 5 is an example of a student's visual poetry.

We then created a piece of visual poetry as a class over Abraham Lincoln following the same guidelines. As a class we talked about things President Lincoln might have heard, might of dreamed about accomplishing and things he did accomplish. For his quote we pulled quotes from the Gettysburg Address and Emancipation Proclamation.

After creating an example as a class, I told students to group themselves into groups of three. Each group was then given a folder with quotes, pictures, and biographies on a historical figure they needed to review. Students either received a folder on Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, U.S. Grant, Frederick Douglas, or Hiram Rhodes

Revels. The students had the rest of class to complete a visual poetry piece for their historical figure. If students finished early they were expected to compare their own visual poetry to their historical figure and reflect on any major similarities or differences.

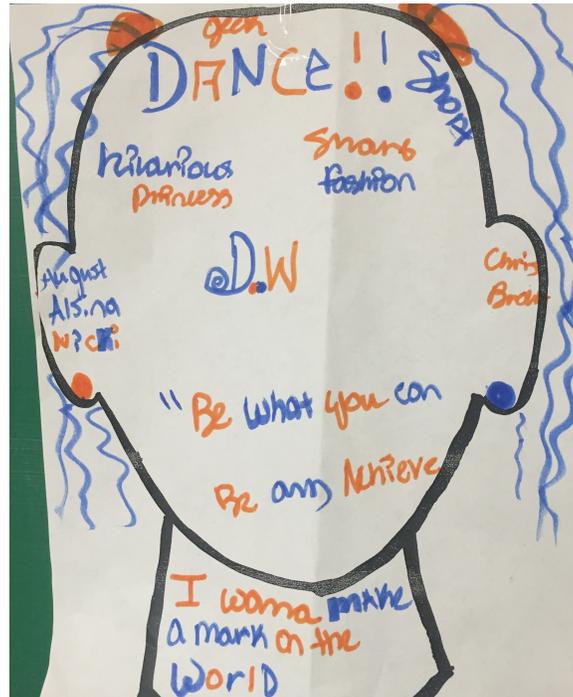


Figure 5: A Student Example of Visual Poetry

The student's visual poetry was hung around the classroom to create a sense of community and to show them that their work had value. Mrs. Smith and I had hoped that by hanging student work the students would be affirmed in their voices as individuals and affirm that the classroom was a safe space for free expression. The visual poetry on historical figures were hung in the hall and on the door so that students would have a visual of these historical figures and their accomplishments each day when they walked into class. An example of this activity is presented in Figure 6.

Students did well with the visual poetry primarily because they were given the opportunity to create a piece of visual poetry for their own life first. The students were scaffolded through the lesson as they began first with an example based on their own life, then an example based on Abraham Lincoln as a class, and then finally they were asked to create a piece of visual poetry on their assigned historical figure. Because each student completed three pieces of visual poetry during the class period they were beginning to note similarities and differences between different historical figures. Many students were noting the difference in the sounds each person might have heard depending on their time period. Students did however struggle with distinguishing the differences between what a person's goals were compared to what that person actually accomplished.

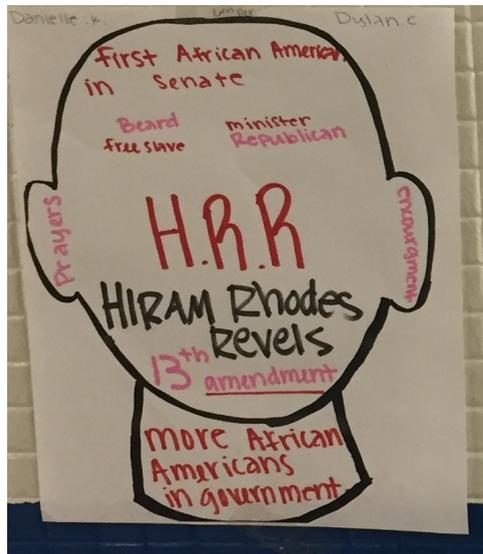


Figure 6: Example of Historical Visual Poetry

Overall, the day was encouraging as students appeared to be engaged and actively participating in the curriculum. The goal of this day was to bridge the gap between the

student perception that poetry was a confusing and intimidating process to being something that was creative and entertaining. Many students were surprised that poetry could come in different forms and be used to communicate different stories. In my opinion, this day was necessary as we transitioned into more in depth work with spoken word poetry on Day Three.

### *Day Three*

On the third day I opened class by showing the students a TED talk by Lemon Anderson in which he performs a cover of the poem “Please Don’t Take My Air Jordans” (Anderson, 2011). The style of this piece was completely different than the other poems the students had encountered in the unit. Students were drawn to the video because it was culturally relevant to their lives outside of school. Many students owned Air Jordans and those who didn’t knew how popular they were. As a result, the content drew them in and the students were engaged.

As a class, we discussed how Lemon’s rap style differed specifically from the poet students watched in “America in 4 minutes” who presented his piece more like a monologue verses a performance. This lead to further discussion about how movement, language, and diction all work together to set the tone for a performance and to better tell a story. These components help the audience feel as if they are experiencing a story first hand.

The students were amazed by how Lemon Anderson could draw you in with his movement and his rhythm. One student was so enthralled that they went home and watched three more of Lemon’s spoken word performances on YouTube. Lemon Anderson was a figure many students could relate too. He didn’t have it easy growing up

in the projects, he was a Puerto-Rican who called two different countries home, and he had successfully written his way out of poverty. Several students were amazed that a character like Lemon was even allowed to enter the classroom environment let alone be someone who was a success story. Lemon was a character whose style drew in students and caused them to reconsider just how “cool” spoken word poetry might be.

Following this discussion, we transitioned into a short writing exercise. The students were given the following prompt on the board:

This is my America.  
Land of the \_\_\_\_\_.  
Home of the \_\_\_\_\_.  
This is my America.

Students were instructed to copy this template down. The only requirement was for students to fill in the blanks with words other than “free” and “brave”. Students were given three minutes for this assignment. If students finished they were encouraged by not forced to keep writing.

During this time many students simply repeated the same style of the template over and over while a few students diverged from the prompt entirely to create their own poem. Students who diverged from the original prompt were not condoned rather encouraged to keep going. The point of the exercise was to get students in the habit of writing.

It was amazing to observe what the students came up with. At the end of the exercise, a couple of students shared their poems. On Day Three, more students volunteered to share than on day one. Once again prior to the performances, we went over the class rules and expectations in an effort to maintain that safe environment.

Below are several examples of student work:

*Poem 1*

This is my America  
Land of the rich and the politics  
Home of the poor and the racists

This is my America  
Land of the future  
Home of the heroes

This is my America  
Land of the government  
Home of the homeless

This is my America  
Land of the beauty  
Home of the strong

This is my America  
Land of popular and pretty  
Home of the geeky and smart

This is my America  
Land of the bystander  
Home of the bullies  
This is my America  
-Malaysia

*Poem 2*

This is my America  
Land of the beat  
Home of the cops  
Who tried to beat me  
This is my America  
Who never can be defeat  
Home of the warriors is who we be  
-Brandon

In these examples of student work, the students are describing what America means to them from their own perspective. This was an excellent exercise to start with because many of the students wrote about a positive happy America while others wrote about an America full of issues and controversy. As a result, several social issues such as bullying,

poverty, and the status quo were brought into conversation. Students also witnessed that not every student had the same perception of America as the other. These specific pieces of writing represent instances where students began to bring their own lived experiences and perceptions into the classroom and share them with the class. Several students had encountered bullying and poverty while other had witnessed more extreme cases of violence. The students were forced to look at America from multiple perspectives and communicate those perspectives to the class. As a result, the students began to connect with one another as a result of similar shared perspectives and experiences with their classmates.

After this exercise, students were then asked to give me a beat. I then rapped the lines from “Hello from the Union Side” that I had previously written for another middle school. The rap can be found in Appendix I. We then transitioned into a discussion about how famous speeches in history sometimes read and sound like poetry, for instance the Battle of Gettysburg. Students were asked to respond to the following questions:

- Who wrote the Gettysburg Address?
- Why was the Battle of Gettysburg significant?
- What does a turning point mean?

I then explained to them what the Battle of Gettysburg meant for the North by relating it to a team being behind in March Madness, gaining momentum and the coach calling a time out in order to give the team a big pep talk. We talked as a class about how this address was the Union’s big pep talk. I then pulled out a copy of the Gettysburg Address and read the address as if I was performing a spoken word piece.

When I finished a few students clapped, some nodded their heads, and others sat in silence. It was important in this instance to use spoken word poetry to help create an active experience for the students as they learned about Gettysburg and the thematic concept of a turning point. As students engage in an active learning process, they are more likely to cultivate meaning from the curriculum (Blythe, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2008; National Research Council, 2000; Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015). The students were told to think about a time that might have been a turning point in their own life. What changed them? What was their Gettysburg?

I had a template on the board. The template was provided for students to use if they felt like they didn't know where to begin. The students did not have to use the template and a few chose not to do so. The template is below:

\_\_\_\_\_ years and \_\_\_\_\_ months ago, something \_\_\_\_\_ happened.  
A turning point like Gettysburg things changed from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.  
\*Describe event in 2-4 lines.  
Old Abe would agree \_\_\_\_\_ changed my history.

Before the students began, Ms. Morgan shared an example with the class in which she talked about a turning point in her life in which something unexpected happened. She said, "A turning point like Gettysburg things changed from boring to exciting!" During this time she led the class through her example in which she describes a turning point in her life in which she got engaged. After Ms. Morgan shared her example, the students had around 15-20 minutes to write their own pieces. The majority of students wrote for the entire time. Dr. Blevins describes this in her observation notes:

Kids did a good job getting started and writing their poems. Kids were frantically writing their poems--they wrote about lots of amazing things, being hospitalized, death of grandparents, death of friends, finding new friends, learning to play guitar, etc.

At the end of the writing period we had time to share. I was surprised to discover that the students had picked some relatively heavy topics to share with the class. Students wrote about death, police brutality, depression, suicide, cutting, deportation, cancer, divorce, and abandonment. Others wrote about things such as video games, soccer, pranks, playing the guitar, and getting their first puppy.

For the first time all week, there were more students who wanted to share than there was time to share. Some of the poems rhymed, some of the poems did not. A few were more like raps, but the majority of the poems were written more like prose. However, every poem was unique and powerful, representing the students' voices and individual perspectives.

What I was not expecting were the tears. There were tears in every class period from girls and boys alike. For some students they were expressing a hardship they had experienced for the first time. For others, they were listening to poems from students who had similar lived experiences to their own. Both Mrs. Smith and Ms. Morgan were amazed to learn about the very adult struggles like addiction, depression, death, police brutality, and violence that some of their students had already experienced at such a young age. Ms. Morgan described this experience in her interview:

I feel that they just learned more about each other so they have more of an appreciation for each other...they realized 'oh we're both going through some really hard times' and they may not speak about it but they have that unspoken understanding.

The tears were not only coming from the students. Mrs. Smith wrote a poem about her son and cried when she read it the first time. Dr. Blevins writes. "Mrs. Smith wrote a poem about her son. It was an emotional experience and there was vulnerable moment in the classroom—very cool experience." In this moment it was important that

Mrs. Smith modeled for her students that she would never ask them to do something she was not willing to do herself. It is important for teachers to establish this kind of relationship with their students. It is imperative for educators to recognize that their students each have different social, cultural, and personal identity factors that influence how they engage best with the material (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995). As the students saw Mrs. Smith grow vulnerable, they were given permission to be vulnerable themselves.

Ms. Morgan was asked by a student to read a poem to the class and she started to tear up while reading it as well. In one class period specifically, there was a basketball player who stood up to read a piece about his uncle's death. This boy was the class clown who had previously been moved to the front table because he was a known distraction to the class. When he asked to share, Mrs. Smith and Ms. Morgan explained that they were not expecting him to have written as much as he had or for the young man to be vulnerable in front of the class.

The student stood up in front of the class to read his poem and started to cry. However, the student wanted to continue finishing his piece. Mrs. Smith stepped in and recruited a few of the young man's friends and teammates to go up and stand with him. These boys stood united together as their teammate read through his piece of writing. Later that day, that same student came back during another class period wanting to talk more about his uncle. He had felt like he had a few things he still needed to talk about and trusted us to listen.

This student was not the only student who came back to Mrs. Smith's classroom throughout the day. Several students came back in to share the poems they had written

outside of class. Not only were they writing but more importantly they were proud of what they were writing. They were taking responsibility for their own writing and pursuing it outside of their 45-minute history class period. While these poems and pieces of writing were mostly about their own stories, a lot of Mrs. Smith's students were telling their stories for the first time.

These students who had little prior experience with spoken word poetry, let alone a willingness to write in class, were writing in their free time. (Later in the week, an English teacher came to observe the unit because so many of her students had been talking about their history writing assignments in their English class.) For several students they had found an outlet to express them that had not been previously known. Their voices were powerful and revealed social issues and lived experiences that I was not expecting an 8<sup>th</sup> grade class to have experienced at this point in their life. The following is a selection from one of my researcher reflections of that day:

Today I left and got in my car and just cried. The weight these kids carry is so heavy. It's crazy how you would have never known that these kids are struggling with these things. One student wrote about how she acts tough but that is only because she had something happen to her that made her afraid to show others how emotional she is on the inside. And you know what?! She shared that tad bit in class. These kids are amazing. I could go on and on about these kids and the amazing things they have done. I cannot begin to tell you how these kids are impacting me. I pray that the next two days are every bit as impactful and meaningful as today. Maybe a little less heavy because today was emotional. Then again, so was Gettysburg. (Researcher Reflection, April 13, 2016)

Here are examples of student work from Day Three. The first example is from a student who chose not to respond to the prompt but instead write his or her own original piece. The other two pieces of student work are examples of students who chose to follow the prompt.

Some say I'm out of control, some say I need patrol.  
Some say I'm a man, some say I'm not a man.  
Some say I'm a shame, I say I'm not the blame.  
People see me as a bad man, I say I'm a lost man.  
People say I need hope, but to me there is no hope.  
As I sit here and stare into space waiting to see a new place.  
They say dreams come true, but not all people dreams come true.  
Most people say it's better to live a good life than a bad life  
But to me they still come to an end.  
As I'm overlooked as a bad man, to me I only see a lost man.  
I'm over looked for the bad I do and not overlooked for the good I do.  
How do you see me am I good man or a bad man  
Or do you see what I see  
Tell the truth no one's judging you.  
From the eyes of a lost man all the blame it's on me  
From now on I will live my life day by day and be what people see me to be  
But to me, I see myself differently.  
-Jose

3 years and a couple of months ago I had to go to the hospital.  
I passed out out of nowhere and my mom and sister rushed me to the hospital. My  
mom said when we got there that she was calling my dad several times and he  
didn't answer. I was at the hospital for about 2 ½ hours and then I woke up. There  
were a lot of people in my hospital room and there were people in the waiting  
room. But my dad was nowhere to be found. I asked my mom where he was and  
she didn't answer. She was crying. I asked her again and my grandmother said he  
he's not here. I couldn't believe it. People I don't know were there for me. People  
I don't like were there and people I haven't spoken [to] or seen were there. I kept  
thinking all these terrible horrible things about dad like "Why doesn't he care  
about me? Why am I not important to him? What did I do for him not to be here?"  
Then the doctor came in and said "Are the parents present?" I looked at him and  
then my mom said only I'm here and then they talked, then then he left. When he  
left I started taking all of the ivs out and unhooking things and walked out of the  
hospital room to look for my dad. I still didn't see him. Say a couple of hours later  
I got released and went home then the next day come to find out my dad had a  
whole other wife and other kids we didn't know about. He was out of town at a  
fun event while I was in the hospital the whole time. My dad got back home and I  
looked at my dad like he he was just a stranger.  
-Leslie

Zero years and 6 months ago  
Something sad happened to me  
A turning point like Gettysburg  
Things changed from hopefully to a smile to a tear  
Grandma in the hospital  
To grandma in the grave

She slowly started to not feel the pain  
From me starting to gain the pain  
She sleeping a lot  
To not eating a lot  
To always hearing it's a matter of time  
But what really hurts is  
When she couldn't even  
Remember my name  
From hey \_\_\_\_\_  
To who is that in the  
Door way  
But on that one night  
Oh on that one night  
I get a call pack  
Your bags your dad's  
Going to stay at the hospital a little longer  
And tears started to fall  
The room starts to get smal  
And the next thing you know  
She gone  
Old Abe would agree  
That my grandmother's death  
Would change me  
-Ricky

It was on Day Three that I realized the true potential this unit had on engaging students in the classroom. What I did not account for was the potential this unit had on engaging students outside of the classroom. Students were active listeners and collaborative learners as they discussed similar and differing lived experiences, both negative and positive, as well as social issues in their classroom. They were given a platform to speak out against the injustices in their life and were affirmed that their voice mattered. This, according to Adams (2016), is effective in modeling social justice in the classroom, as the educator affirmed, modeled, and sustained a socially just learning environments for all students, creating an example for how equitable social relations and behaviors might be achieved in a real world setting. The students were learning how to

interact with voices that differed from their own while also coming together as they shared similar lived experiences.

#### *Day Four*

When students came into class we began by watching a TED performance from Malcolm London called “High School Training Ground” (London, 2013). Students were then asked to write about their own middle school experience for three minutes. The students in first period ended up not having much time to complete their main task for the day, which included writing a rap over a major Civil War battle. So in third period (the second class for the day), we decided to cut the writing prompt all together. While the students were able to spend more time on their raps in third period, they seemed to be having a harder time getting into the writing groove. It also took third period students longer than the first period to get focused and to actually start writing. By fourth period we decided to meet somewhere in the middle. The writing prompt was shortened and students were instructed after the spoken word piece to respond and then share if they were comfortable to:

Middle School Training Ground: Where I’m trained to \_\_\_\_\_.

This allowed students to ease into the next writing assignment.

For Day Four’s writing assignment, students were instructed to write a rap for a major battle of the Civil War and then perform it to the class. Before students were released to write their rap we worked together as a class to review the major battles of the war. Because this unit was a re-teach unit over the Civil War, the students had prior knowledge of each of the major battles.

The following events were the primary areas of focus on during the STAAR review:

- Fort Sumter
- Antietam
- Vicksburg
- Gettysburg
- Appomattox Courthouse

Together as a class Mrs. Smith and the students went over the key characteristics of each battle, the generals who fought in them, and which side won the battle. The students were then instructed to write begin writing their battle rap.

The idea was to engage in “rap battles”. However, the assignment was open ended to allow students to be more comfortable. The students were allowed to use a template I provided in which they filled in the blanks (if they chose this option they had to write one for multiple battles), they could change the lyrics to an existing song (hello from the union side), or they could free write. It could be a rap or poem but did not have to rhyme.

The template looked like the following:

Let’s talk about the \_\_\_\_\_ and the Civil War  
The \_\_\_\_\_ battle came knocking at the door  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ fought hand and hand  
But \_\_\_\_\_ was who won it in the end  
Bro vs. Bro this battle was \_\_\_\_\_ and fierce.  
The Battle of \_\_\_\_\_ we won’t forget what happened here.

The template provided students with a starting point. The majority of students started with the template or popular song because it was within their comfort zone. Students who started with the template typically strayed away from it and begin writing on their own without it. On the other hand, there were some students who stuck to the template the

entire class period. These students were instructed to use the template to create a poem for every battle we discussed.

The students worked on their raps for about 20 minutes of class. At the end of the class students were allowed to share what they had written. However, there were fewer students who volunteered to share compared to the day before. Several students were willing to share when prompted by Mrs. Smith or Mrs. Morgan who suggested that they had a really good rap worth sharing. The following are a few examples of student work from Day Four:

Fort Sumter, firing their shots, ready for people to drop  
Bleeding their lives letting others survive,  
Ready to dive into the Civil War  
This war has gone way too far,  
All the people are scared, bruised and battled  
Shaken and rattled  
It started with [the] Confederates, making people go separate  
From all the hate  
Robert E. Lee ran this confed, watched them go head to head...  
Looking at the red, from the blood, drippin' from their bodies  
Which got shot by the guns  
"Stonewall" was part of this too  
Watching all of this go from good to blue  
All this happened in the south  
Which made us wish they hadn't opened their mouth  
The wrong words came out, that's why these shots were fired  
Soldiers were hired to shoot these people  
The good part was the confederacy stared cold hearted  
The worst was all these people died and cried cause they lost their lives  
Due to this crisis named the Civil War  
-Keegan

Let's talk about Antietam and the Civil War  
The bloodiest battle came knocking at the door  
Ulysses S. Grant and Robert Lee fought hand and hand  
But it was no one who won in the end  
Bro vs. Bro this battle was scary  
The Battle of Antietam we won't forget what happened here.  
-Talía

Rivers of Blood

Boom Boom Pow  
Shots were fired  
From the North to  
The South  
Many died but  
The shots didn't  
Boom Boom Pow  
A Hundred more  
A red river was  
Forming more and  
More. Blood, blood  
Everywhere  
Battle of Antietam  
Was the bloodiest in  
The war  
-Brandon

Of All the Days

On all the field where America soldiers have fought, the most terrible by almost any measure was September 17, 1862. The battle waged on that date, close by Antietam Creek at Sharpsburg in Western Maryland, took a human toll never exceeded on any other single day in the nation's history. So intense and sustained was the violence, a man recalled, that for a moment in his mind's eye the very landscape around hi, turned red.  
-Armando

These examples of student work represent students beginning to use poetry to expand their social studies content knowledge. The activity was learner centered and the students were engaged in culturally relevant pedagogy. Several students enjoyed having the opportunity to take popular song lyrics and change them into their own raps, while other students chose to write their own original pieces all together. The students were quick to ask questions about their specific battles and were seen considering key components of the battle they might have considered before. It provided students with a method of synthesizing the information they had learned as they were asked to put the learned information into their own words using an outlet that was culturally relevant to their own life.

### *Day Five*

The fifth day was my last day to be a guest lecturer in Mrs. Smith's room. We began class by watching a poem performed on Def Jam by Steven Colman entitled "I wanna hear a poem" (Colman, 2012). In this poem Colman talks about all the different types of poems and stories out there and how he's ready for people to tell them. This was to prepare kids for the poetry reading we would be doing today. After we watched the poem we discussed the style and rhythm of the poem just as we had done on the previous days. The students were then given the post-study survey to complete. They were given about 10-15 minutes to do so. After the students passed their surveys up to the class I transitioned to the poetry reading by performing another one of my original pieces entitled "5 Things I know to Be True". A copy of this poem can be found in Appendix J.

After my performance it was time for the students to share. They were allowed to read any piece(s) they had written the past week in their social studies class or any other poems they had written either in English class or outside of school during the week. I was surprised by how many of the students had been talking about the unit outside of class. Students had spread the word about the unique experiences they were encountering and were getting other teachers and school administrators interested in the unit going on in Mrs. Smith's history classroom.

By the last day, two different district instructional specialists, the head of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade social studies department, the assistant principal, the principal, the behavior specialist, an English teacher, a math teacher, and a Baylor professor were all in the room observing the student showcase. The English teacher came to observe because her students had been telling her all about the writing they had been doing in history class

and she wanted to see it for herself. On this final day the room was packed in the back with visitors who were curious as to what exactly was going on in Mrs. Smith's 8<sup>th</sup> grade history class this past week. At one point the class had six visitors. As a result of all the visitors, maintaining a safe and comfortable environment expression proved to be the biggest struggle of Day Five. While the visitors were all members of the faculty who the students were familiar with, they were not a part of the classroom when the safe space had been established earlier in the week and it caused the students to be more hesitant to share or re-share poems they had already shared with the class earlier in the week. However, despite some students being more hesitant to share with the visitors in the room, every class period at least five-ten students volunteer to read their work to the class.

As the students shared it was incredible to see their growth in confidence from Day One to Day Five. Not only did they grow in confidence, each student had produced on average about seven pieces of writing throughout the course of the week. Dr. Brooke Blevins, an assistant professor at Baylor University reflects on what she observed on the final day of the spoken word unit in which students participated in an open mic in the classroom for classmates and invited faculty during their class period. Blevins wrote:

Not only did she teach them about history she provided a space for them to express themselves. In one short week these kids became writers and poets. Today they shared their work and it was amazing. This is what social studies classrooms should look like.

In this case, spoken word poetry proved to be a tool that aided in providing fluid communication while also engaging students in culturally relevant pedagogy and promoting a democratic, learner-centered classroom. Supporting Ladson-Billings (2014) and Lynch (2007), I believe that infusing spoken word poetry into the history classroom

allowed for Mrs. Smith's students to link the knowledge and practices of social studies with an understanding and appreciation of not only their own culture but also the culture of their fellow classmates. In one week these students grew more confident in their writing and more competent in their communication skills. Furthermore, in accordance with Desai & Marsh (2005), as Mrs. Smith's students interacted with the spoken word curriculum, they are able to identify generative themes within the curriculum and engage in both a local and global conversation that drew from the lived experiences of the individual. As this took place, student perception of voice and class engagement were also taken into account. The research questions looked to further investigate the overall experiences of students in Mrs. Smith's class during the spoken word unit.

#### *Addressing the Research Questions*

Research Question 1: How does the use of spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool increase student engagement and students' sense of voice in the social studies classroom?

Students need to be in a learning environment that presents exciting opportunities to understand how history works and how certain analytical skills can be both applicable and relevant for understanding events within their own lives (National Research Council, 2000). The social studies classroom should also be a place where students are able to work and share with other students whose opinions may differ from their own (Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015). As active citizens, students should be able to use social skills in order to avoid conflict, listen and strongly consider the ideas of others, while also valuing individual contributions from their classmates (Solarz, 2015). To evaluate the first research question, "How does the use of spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool increase student engagement and students' sense of voice in the social studies classroom?," I collected engagement data each day in each class period on the first,

second, and third days of the unit (The observer was absent from class on days four and five of instruction so engagement data was not collected. Another observer was not selected because the researcher wanted to ensure these subjective observations remained consistent.)

The observer, Ms. Morgan, recorded engagement data during the same part of instruction each day. Recognizing there were not extraneous circumstances or events occurred in any one class, I decided to combine the data to create one case. As such all engagement data taken over Mrs. Smith’s six class periods was combined as one case and to determine a daily average. The results from the collected engagement data can be seen in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Results from Case Study Engagement Data

Engagement	Day 1 of Unit	Day 2 of Unit	Day 3 of Unit
Percent on Task	88.8%	91.47 %	83.5%
Percent off Task	11.2 %	8.63 %	16.5%

On these three days, 4/5 of the classroom was engaged when the data was taken. Looking back, I wish I had taken a baseline for the engagement data to be compared to but based on the interviews I conducted with Mrs. Smith and Ms. Morgan, the number of students who were engaged were higher than normal on the first two days and around the normal percentage on Day 3. This is because when the material is humanized and integrated into the everyday lives of the student, students are more engaged as personal relevance is established (Bartolome, 1994). Jose commented that with spoken word it was engaging and that “it didn’t have to be in social studies it was just fun. To just talk about stuff and to be a free spirit.” In this case, students were engaged in this unit as the

majority of students were consistently on task when spoken word poetry was incorporated and engagement data was recorded.

### *Student Voice*

Student voice is a critical component of a democratic classroom. The student should always feel as if they are playing an active role in the decisions being made within their classroom while also taking responsibility for the process of their individual learning experiences (Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015). Prior to participating in the study, students were asked to describe various elements of their classroom environment using Likert scale responses. Their responses are displayed in Table 4.2. The data suggests that the majority of students felt like they had a voice in their classroom and that their teacher cared about their opinions. Similarly, the majority of students felt like they had some sort of input in what they were learning and that they felt like they took responsibility of their own learning. All of these characteristics are critical components of an effective social studies classroom outlined in Chapter 2.

Students were given the same Likert scale questions to respond to in their post-study Survey. This was to analyze how integrating spoken word poetry into the curriculum effected the classroom setting and dynamics. The student responses are seen below in Table 4.3.

The change in responses between the pre-study and post-study surveys is represented in Table 4.4. This change represents how students felt about their classroom before the study compared to how they felt about their classroom environment after the study. The increase in the percentage of student responses is indicated by a (+) sign and a

decrease in percentage of student responses is represented by a (-) sign. This data shows that student perception of voice stayed relatively the same.

Table 4.2: Pre-study Likert Scale Responses

Student Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Did Not Answer
I Have a Voice in My Classroom	34.7 %	32.7 %	28.6 %	2%	2%	0%
My Teacher Cares About My Opinions	65.4%	20.4%	10.2%	0%	2%	2%
I Have Input in What I Learn	38.8%	40.8%	14.3 %	2%	4.1%	0%
I Take Responsibility for My Own Learning	55.1%	28.6%	4.1%	0%	6.1%	6.1%

The majority of students felt like they had a voice in their classroom before the study and after the study. Students felt like their teacher cared less about their opinions after the study compared to before the study. This could have been the result of students identifying Mrs. Smith as their teacher in the pre-study and myself, the researcher, as their teacher in the post-study. However, this was not confirmed. Based on the Likert scale students indicated that they believed they had less of an input in the material they were learning after the study compared to before. This could have been the result of a stranger coming into their classroom to teach a unit using a new and unfamiliar method. Finally, the student perception of whether or not they took responsibility for their own learning stayed relatively the same between the pre-study and post-study Likert scale responses.

Students were also asked to respond to a series of free response questions that probed their sense of voice and agency in the classroom. Below are examples of student free responses in which students indicate experiences where their voices were being heard. Based on their free responses, students felt like they had a voice in the classroom when poetry was incorporated into the curriculum. Students were engaged when they were given the opportunity to listen to their classmates' lived experiences and connect them to their own lived experiences. The following are excerpts of student free responses from the post-survey that was handed out at the conclusion of the study:

I really liked it because it was a different form of learning. Also, because I learned more about other people...I learned that if you want to let out anger, sadness, or something like that, poetry is a great thing to do. –Christa

I thought this week was cool, it really gave people the time to talk to the class. –Christian

Sometimes poetry gives you more of a voice –Nolan

I liked it because I learned about social studies and about my classmates” –Morgan

I learned that I can connect with poetry with learning and my life. –Eileen

Table 4.3: Post-Survey Likert Scale Responses

Student Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Did Not Answer
I Have a Voice in My Classroom	49 %	14.28%	22.4%	8.2%	2%	4.1%
My Teacher Cares About My Opinions	59.2%	18.4%	10.2%	2%	6.1%	4.1%
I Have Input in What I Learn	38.8%	28.5%	18.4%	4.1%	4.1%	6.1%
I Take Responsibility for My Own Learning	51%	20.5%	10.2%	2%	6.1%	10.2%

Table 4.4: Change in Percent of Student Responses Pre-Survey to Post Survey

Student Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Did Not Answer
I Have a Voice in My Classroom	+ 14 %	-18.42%	-6.2%	+6.2%	0%	+4.1%
My Teacher Cares About My Opinions	-6.2%	-2%	0%	+2%	+4.1%	+2%
I Have Input in What I Learn	0%	-12.3%	+4.1%	+2.1%	0%	+6.1%
I Take Responsibility for My Own Learning	-4.1%	-8.1%	+6.1%	+2%	0%	+4.1%

These students found that they were able to connect more with their classmates when spoken word poetry was incorporated into the classroom because the material was being humanized. It also helped the students connect to one another. Ryan commented on this experience saying:

Actually, people brought up their life and the hard times. That was hard. I didn't know anything about them. I didn't know they went through hard times" (Ryan).

Similarly, Leslie was asked in an interview if they thought the spoken word unit brought their class together. They responded with the following:

Yes. Because some things [that were shared] some people would have never shared and I would have never have known. And...like I didn't know you did that but you know we're here for you (Leslie).

Here is an example of student writing written on Day Three:

1 year and 4 months ago  
 Something unbelievable happened to me.  
 A turning point like a land after a tornado from not caring how I look  
 To not being confident  
 A look at the blade and a clean arm.  
 That was the beginning of the first cut.  
 More thinking about the pretty girls and how I wanted to be like them,

Equated more cuts.  
More thinking about my family not with me,  
Equaled more self-harm.  
It seemed liked an endless black hole.  
Couldn't get out.  
Couldn't breath.  
Couldn't be me.  
Society of course made it worse.  
At last I stopped and began to recover.  
Old Abe would agree that these scars I see everyday changed my history.  
-Christa

While this student did not necessarily follow the prompt, it was clear that there was something much larger that they felt like they needed to communicate. In this moment the student's lived experiences became more important than the curriculum and as a result many students were able to come together through their similar lived experiences.

As students connected with their classmates, not only were their voices heard but they were engaging in cooperative learning as they were learning how to better interact with one another. This cooperative learning carried over into the following weeks of instruction. Ms. Morgan stated in her interview that spoken word brought a new sense of unity to the classroom. She stated:

I feel that outside of curriculum they grew closer as a class because they shared very personal information and you kind of saw them come together. Even this week in the classroom you see them interacting more and talking more and they're actually working really hard this week together as a group.

Knowing that spoken word poetry helps cultivate cooperative learning and communication, it is important to look into how this impacts the students' understanding and retention of the curriculum.

Research Question 2: Does the inclusion of spoken word poetry into the social studies classroom increase students' understanding of the material being presented?

The second question investigated whether or not spoken word poetry could improve or impact student understanding in an environment that followed my theoretical framework for effective social studies. In a student-centered classroom, students are engaged in active learning and can be hands on with their learning, which not only creates new understanding of the material, but also improves overall retention of the curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 2008; National Research Council, 2000; Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015). The framework I designed consisted of four key components that could be met by incorporating spoken word poetry into the curriculum. The framework consisted of a classroom that was learner centered, democratic, culturally relevant, and offered frequent communication and feedback. The students were asked five STAAR based questions from released standardized social studies tests to assess student knowledge and understanding of the curriculum. The class average on the pre-study questions was 62.86 % and the class average on the post-study was 60.82%. However, when comparing passing rates between the pre-study and post-study scores more students passed the post-study test (49%) than passed the pre-study test (43%). In other words, 6% more students passed the post-study test questions than passed the pre-study questions.

For some students they felt like they were receiving the same information they had already learned. After all, this was an enrichment unit on the Civil War so the students were encountering a re-teach unit rather than hearing the information for the first time. However, some students found that while they did not learn any new information, the spoken word activities allowed them to engage in the material differently and to see it from a different perspective.

Ryan commented:

What they said I already knew but there were some more details.... like what I put in my own poem. Like about brother against brother they actually grew from the [same] mother. (Ryan).

Ms. Morgan added:

I mean, this was a review but I did see some students retain the info better and not memorize it more but they have a better understanding so it's just a new way for them to remember it than reading from a textbook.

Research Question 3: What are students' and teachers' reactions to the use of spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool in the social studies classroom?

Following the case study, students were asked to reflect on their experiences using spoken word poetry in their 8<sup>th</sup> grade history classroom. I was interested in finding out how many students connected with spoken word poetry as a result of the study. First, I was concerned with how many students enjoyed the unit using spoken word poetry in the history classroom. Second, I was interested in finding out how many students not only liked the unit but intended on pursuing it in the future. This was especially important to me because the majority of Mrs. Smith's class indicated that they had no prior experience with spoken or weren't even familiar with the term. Figure 7 shows the results from the post unit survey. The results indicate that 2% of students did not enjoy using spoken word in the classroom and 4% of students neither liked nor disliked using spoken word poetry in their classroom. Overall, 94 % of student indicated that they enjoyed the Civil War unit with spoken word poetry. While 94% of students indicated they enjoyed the unit, 73% of all students indicated that they would like to do more with spoken word poetry in the future.

Students were also asked to reflect on how incorporating spoken word into their unit on the Civil War impacted their ability to connect to the material. Creating an

environment where a diverse population can connect to the material is a critical component of culturally relevant pedagogy outlined by Ladson-Billings (1995). Students were asked whether or not they connected more to the material when spoken word was used as a pedagogical.

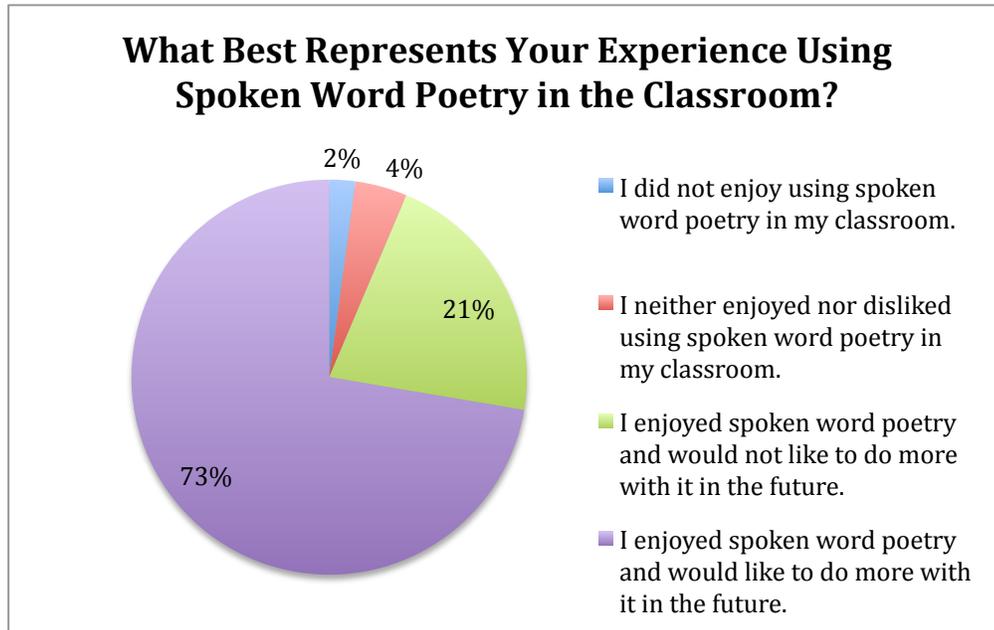


Figure 7: Pie Graph Representation Explaining Student Experience Using Spoken Word Poetry in the Classroom

The results are represented in Figure 8. In response to this question, 4% of students did not answer. 2% of students stated that incorporating spoken word poetry made it difficult for them to connect the material to their own life and 37% of students said they connected to the material no differently than usual. However, 57% of students indicated that they were able to connect the material more to their own life when spoken word poetry was incorporated into their classroom.

Several students mentioned in their student responses how poetry helped them better connect to the material. Others mentioned different historical facts they had learned and retained during the week as a result of the spoken word pedagogy. For several students, spoken word poetry provided an alternative way of learning that was new and innovative to their classroom.

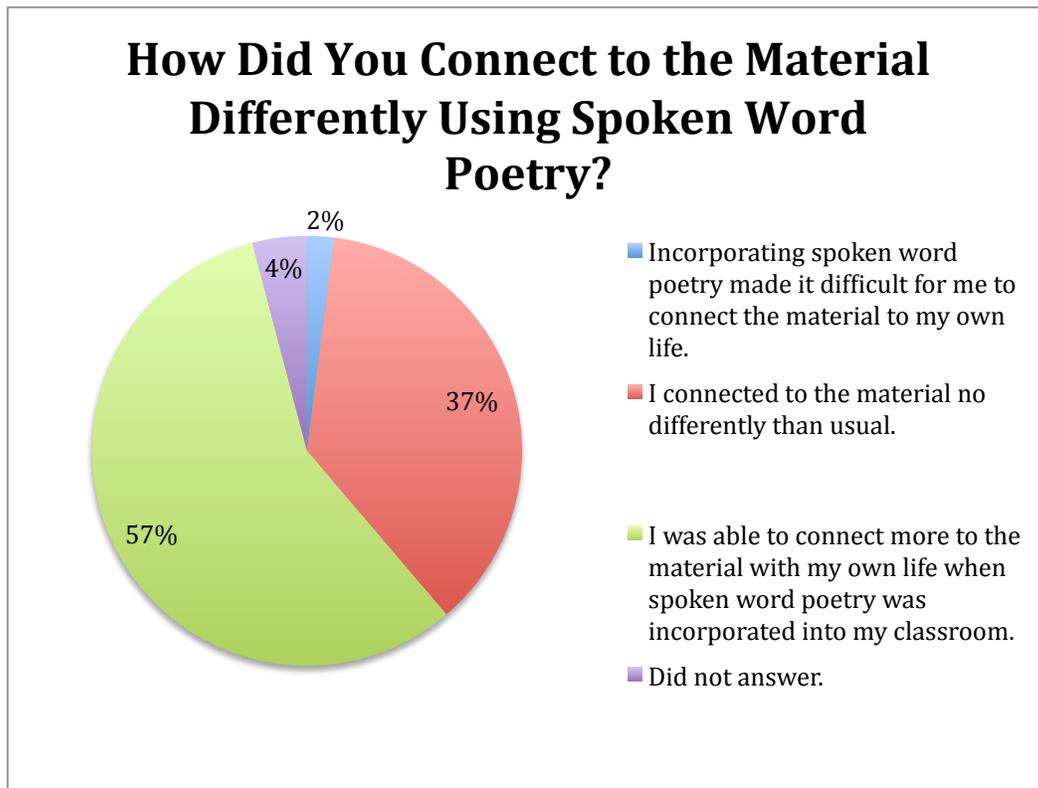


Figure 8: A pie graph representation explaining how students connected to the social studies material when spoken word poetry was incorporated

The following are examples of student responses:

I learned that Abraham Lincoln was for the Union (North) and Jefferson Davis was for the Confederacy (South).” –Jose

[I learned] the events of the Civil War [and] how to do poetry. Poetry helped me for English and history. –Taylor

I like it, it was very fun and I also learned new things. I learned about Hiram Rhodes. I learned which sides Grant and Lee were on.  
-Shannon

I love spoken word poetry and I'd like to continue doing it. Spoken word poetry helped me understand social studies more. It helped me know stuff more easier and visual than just sitting and reading a boring paragraph.” –Leslie

Finally, students were asked in the post-study survey to indicate whether or not they would like their history teacher to use spoken word in their classroom in the future. As seen in Figure 9, 4.1% of students did not answer, 6.1% of students did not want their teacher using spoken word in the classroom again, 61.2% of students did not care whether or not their teacher used spoken word poetry in the history classroom again, and 28.6 % of students stated that they were prefer if their teacher used spoken word poetry as a teaching tool for history in the future.

### *Summary of Findings*

In this sample population of 49 students, none of the students had any substantial prior experience interacting with spoken word poetry and the majority of students had little idea of what spoken word poetry was. Students were exposed to several different forms of poetry including two-voice poems, visual poetry, prose poetry, and rap and were able to explore their voice in relation to the curriculum through those mediums. Throughout the unit, students developed on average seven different pieces of writing with several students bringing in pieces to class that they had written outside of school as well.

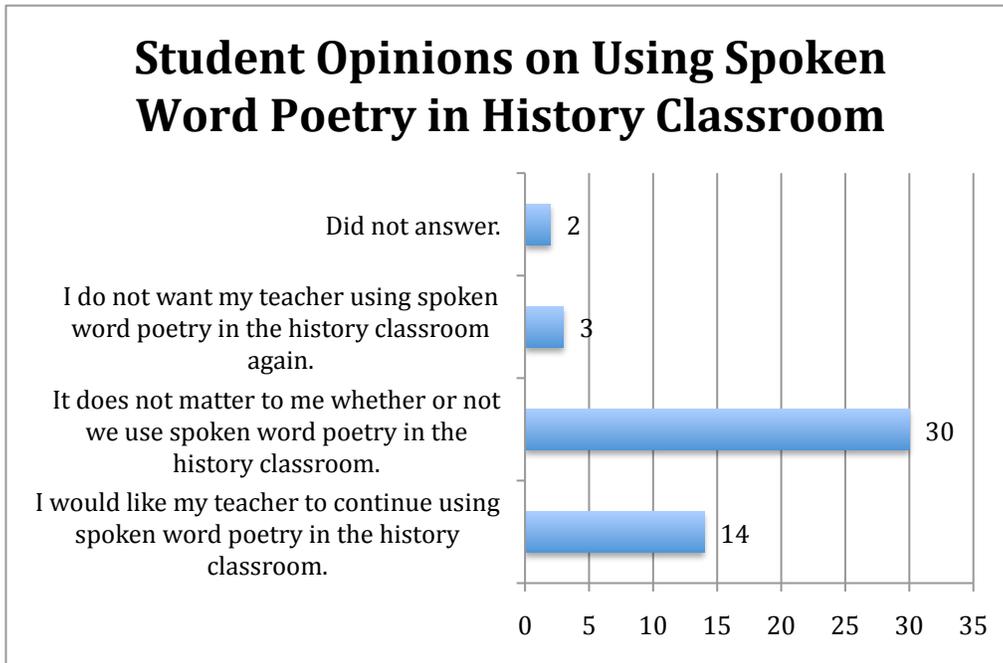


Figure 9: Post-Study Student Opinions of Using Spoken Word Poetry in Their History Classroom

Identifying the cause and effects of battles, characteristics of sectionalism, as well as comparing and contrasting different historical figures were largely a part of this unit. Working with spoken word poetry sparked conversation among students who discovered they had similar lived experiences. The unit seemed to actively engage students in the material while also contributing to students' understanding of the social studies material. It seems that using spoken word poetry in the history classroom can encourage student voice and expression while also contributing to a more unified classroom environment in which students are more understanding and willing to work with one another.

Chapter Five provides further discussion of these conclusions as well as implications of the case study previously discussed in Chapter Four. Limitations and recommendations for further research on integrating spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool in the history classroom are also included.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Summary, Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to determine whether using spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool in the history classroom could be beneficial in establishing a culturally relevant democratic classroom setting in which students are engaged in a meaningful understanding of the curriculum. For this case study spoken word poetry was integrated into a one week re-teach unit over the Civil War in an 8<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. history classroom in Central Texas. The students had previously learned about the Civil War several weeks prior to the study. However, the re-teach unit acted as a method for reinforcing TEKS the students may not have mastered the first time it was taught. The goal of this unit was to encourage the development of student voice and assist students in making connections between the curriculum and their own lived experiences through the expression of spoken word poetry. This chapter focuses on the discussion and implications of the findings presented in chapter four, the limitations of this study, and recommendations for future research in this area of study.

#### *Summary of the Study*

This study took place in a Central Texas middle made up of a largely minority population with 75% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. The school administrators gave the researcher permission to enter Mrs. Smith's 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom as a guest teacher for a one-week period. Mrs. Smith's 147 students were selected to participate in this student. The population was first narrowed down to the students who

turned in both their parent and student assent forms and then 49 students were purposefully selected based on students who completed both their pre-study and post-study survey. Students were introduced to a re-teach unit of the Civil War that integrated spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool and teaching method. This unit was taught during a 45-minute period of daily instruction over the course of five days. Students who selected to not participate in the study still received the spoken word curriculum however these students' results were not included in the data. To the researcher's knowledge, no grades were assigned to the students during the course of this study.

Throughout the course of the one-week unit, students were exposed to a variety of different styles of poetry through the use of live performances from the students, teachers, and researcher, YouTube videos, and writing exercises. These tasks utilized the concepts of a theoretical framework that highlights the need for a culturally relevant, democratic classroom that includes frequent communication and a learner-centered pedagogy. Students were given a pre-study survey to gauge their prior experience with spoken word poetry, assist the researcher in defining the classroom environment prior to the study, and to determine the class's content knowledge of the Civil War. The students were given a post-study survey at the conclusion of the study to determine how the unit impacted their perceptions of their classroom environment as well as to clarify student perception of spoken poetry following their unit.

Engagement data was collected to determine the percentage of students who were on task compared to off task during the unit. Additionally, I took notes on observations of student engagement, attitudes, and experiences using spoken word poetry in social studies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with randomly selected students, the

student intern, and teacher the week following the case study to further identify themes that emerged in the classroom during the unit and to expand on unique experiences students may have encountered as a result of the spoken word unit. At the conclusion of the study, I selected a representative sample of student work from the students who participated in the study. These artifacts were examined individually for evidence of understanding of the curriculum and emerging themes were identified. These students' work were transcribed and discussed in Chapter Four.

### *Research Questions*

The following research questions were examined throughout the course of the study:

1. How does the use of spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool increase student engagement and students' sense of voice in the social studies classroom?
2. Does the inclusion of spoken word poetry into the social studies classroom increase students' understanding of the material being presented?
3. What are students' and teachers' reactions to the use of spoken word poetry as a pedagogical tool in the social studies classroom?

### *Discussion of Emerging Themes*

As established in Chapter Two, a focus on the use of high-stakes test to measure the effectiveness of a school and its faculty have been the result of educational reform movements such as *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* and *Race to the Top*. These assessments were designed to set standards and hold teachers and schools accountable for student achievement (Ravitch, 2013). The pedagogical practices teachers use to teach the standard curriculum often cripples students' ability to develop social perspectives,

cultural appreciations, and critical thinking skills (Byrd, 2012; Onosko, 2011; Ravitch, 2013). Authors suggest that instead the classroom should be an environment that mimics the student's outside world and drives from connecting to student's lived experiences (Bartolome, 1994; Blythe, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995; National Research Council, 2000; Rubin 2012; Solarz, 2015). In addition to these concerns, Paulo Freire suggests that the curriculum should allow the oppressed to regain sense of humanity and in turn overcome their condition (Freire, 2000). In other words the social studies should be relevant to the students' life, so they can then make connections, and offer solutions to fight and talk back to injustice (Rubin, 2012, Schiro, 2013). Some of the major findings and emerging themes of this study suggest that spoken word poetry can be used as a pedagogical tool in the history classroom to meet the needs outlined in the research literature.

The Central Texas middle school, in which the study was conducted, was identified by the district as having 75% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Demographically, in Mrs. Smith's classroom 50% of students were Hispanic, 40% were African-American, 9% were Caucasian, and 1% of students were Asian. Of these students, 58% identified as female and 42% identified as male. Academically, 13% of the students were SPED identified, meaning the students required some sort of special education and 12 % were identified as second language learners.

In regards to major findings, there were several themes that emerged from analyzing the students' work, pre-study/post-study surveys, engagement data, semi-structured interviews, and researcher observation notes. These themes appeared to be concurrent across the multiple data sources and were examined and confirmed by my

mentor. The themes are outlined in Table 5.

These four themes were supported by multiple sources of evidence and responses from students, teachers, and administrators who experienced the spoken word unit over the course of the week. These themes were used to develop conclusions over the data as well as implications for the study. These themes were helpful in evaluating the students' overall perspective of incorporating spoken word poetry into their history classroom.

These four themes are explored in further detail below

Table 5: Emerging Themes

Theme	Description
Establishing Connections With Other People	The students, student intern, teacher, and researcher established connections to one another through the sharing of similar lived experiences.
Sharing of Personal and Vulnerable Stories	Students were sharing vulnerable experiences and stories with their class that they had previously not shared.
Improvements in Content Knowledge	There was improvement in content knowledge of poetry and some improvement in content knowledge of social studies.
Connections Beyond the Classroom	Students were beginning to write outside of class and watch videos of spoken word poetry on their free time.

These four themes were supported by multiple sources of evidence and responses from students, teachers, and administrators who experienced the spoken word unit over the course of the week. These themes were used to develop conclusions over the data as well as implications for the study. These themes were helpful in evaluating the students' overall perspective of incorporating spoken word poetry into their social studies classroom. These four themes are explored in further detail below.

### *Establishing Connections with Other People*

It is important for teachers and students to establish a relationship with one another. Educators should recognize that their students each have different social, cultural, and personal identity factors that influence how they engage best in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Through engagement with spoken word poetry, several students expressed that they were able to connect better with their classmates. Students commented on how difficult, yet important, it was to hear other students share their hardships. Students discussed how prior to the study they knew little about their classmates' personal experiences and lives despite being in the same class with them for almost a year. However, students mentioned that after the study they felt more connected with their classmates because they knew more about who they were as individuals outside of the classroom. For some, it was learning more about others that connected them. For others, it was discovering that others had similar lived experiences to their own. These similar experiences included everything from life with an absent parent, the death of a loved one, battling depression, to something as simple as a love for basketball or a certain video game. As a researcher, one of the most impactful experiences was when a student would write about a significant life experience that they were hesitant to share because they felt as if they were the only one in the class struggling with that experience. These students sat in their desks nervous about sharing their burden with the class, but they quickly discovered after sharing that other students had experienced something similar. Poetry gave these students the opportunity to share their voice and communicate with their classmates about difficult social issues in a safe environment.

Mrs. Smith and Ms. Morgan commented that students were more willing to work collaboratively with groups following the study. They also suggested that their classes were easier to manage after the study. Mrs. Smith attributed this to the spoken word study specifically because she believed that her classes were united in having all recently gone through this fairly vulnerable experience. She commented on the variety of emotions that were expressed in her classroom during the week of the study. As a class, she remarked that they had experienced a week of laughter, confusion, tears, curiosity, and self-expression.

As a researcher I did not originally anticipate connecting to the students in the ways I did in one short week. I entered the classroom with what I considered to be realistic expectations for a guest lecturer entering a classroom of middle school students. I expected that a few students would share some impactful stories, however; I hadn't prepared myself for any emotions I would experience during the study to be experienced as an outside observer. Throughout the study I found myself on multiple occasions running into students outside of the school setting and introducing them to my friends as my students. It only took one week for these students' stories to move me in ways that made me feel like I was a part of their learning experience, that this curriculum was something worth pursuing again, and that I would remember this week for many years to come. If this is what I encountered in one week as a guest lecturer, what implications would this have if I was the full-time teacher and this type of pedagogy took place over a more extended period of time? I would expect to see a classroom in which students' lived experiences became central to the work of my classroom. When the lived experiences and culture of the student are brought into the classroom meaningful understanding occurs

(Blythe, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995; National Research Council, 2000; Solarz 2015). In this case, students were introduced to a broader understanding of what social studies was as they looked past the textbook and developed real world social and communication skills. Students were able to use these communication skills to connect with their classmates by sharing their own histories with one another and then discussing how it related to the curriculum.

### *Sharing of Personal and Vulnerable Stories*

Students also made connections to one another's lives through sharing their stories in class using spoken word poetry. The evidence supports the literature that states that poetry, particularly spoken word poetry, is a viable outlet for communicating the obstacles presented by social realities experienced by youth (Fisher, 2005; Jocson, 2005). The number of students who shared their personal experiences out loud for the first time surprised Mrs. Smith, Ms. Morgan, and me. One day, a student wrote a poem and asked for Ms. Morgan to read it to the class because they were afraid of getting emotional during the class. In this piece the student talked about a family member who had passed away as the result of violence. As the poem was being read to the class, this student began crying, as did Ms. Morgan. The student asked to remain in class after the dismissal to regain his composure. One of his close friends stayed behind so that he didn't have to carry his burden alone. Mrs. Smith comforted the student and told him that when they ready to talk, there were a variety of people with whom to talk to, including herself.

One student shared about going to the hospital for attempting suicide. This student wanted to share her story with the class because she wanted her classmates to know what she had been through and to let them know she was doing better now.

Students became more willing to share their stories because they were given a safe space to share their burdens with one another. This evidence supports claims made by Christensen & Watson (2015) that “through poetry, we can mourn our losses, expel our terror, tell our stories, and sing our joys” (p. 183).

While some students shared on weightier subjects, others shared about how they met their best friends. One young lady shared with the class about how she acted tough and mean on the outside because she had been hurt before. She expressed how her rough exterior was merely a mask to guard her more vulnerable interior.

The spoken word curriculum established a democratic classroom environment allowing students to be active participants in their learning process where student perspectives were equally respected without necessarily being equally valued (Wilmer, n.d). Many students engaged in dialogue and communication with their peers for the first time. As students shared, it was evident that they had a lot to say. This unit just provided them with a classroom to say it in. This is important because when the student’s voice is heard, a democratic learning environment takes place. When a democratic learning environment takes place, the student is able to take ownership over his or her own learning process. When the students are placed in an environment in which they have a high degree of ownership in their learning process, they tend to have a better overall concept of self, a greater amount of political engagement, and a greater tolerance for outside groups that may differ from their own (Morgan & Streb, 2001). Furthermore, when the student takes ownership over their learning process, they tend to have an increase in self-esteem as well as an increase in motivation for inquiry (Knowles, 1975). Solarz (2015) supports this increase in self-esteem and empowerment as it allows

students to become confident risk-takers who make bold decisions. As students become risk-takers they are able to make greater strides towards understanding content knowledge.

### *Improvement in Content Knowledge*

There was some improvement seen in social studies content knowledge as a result of integrating spoken word poetry into the history classroom. As previously stated in Chapters Three and Four, students were asked five STAAR questions drawn from released standardized social studies tests to assess student knowledge and understanding of the curriculum. While the class average on the pre-study questions was about 2% higher than their average on the post-study questions, when comparing passing rates 6% more students passed the post-study test questions than passed the pre-study questions. This indicates that a few students did increase in their understanding of the material based on the standards established by the STAAR test.

While there was some improvement of content knowledge in regards to passing rates, evidence suggests that students began to look at the material from a new perspective as a result of this study. Several students commented in their interviews that while they did not learn any new information in this unit, incorporating spoken word poetry helped them to see the material from a different point of view. One student mentioned that it wasn't until the "battle rap" day that he began to realize what the concept of a civil war actually entailed. He commented that he finally realized that the Civil War was brother verses brother and that the material resonated differently with him for the first time.

Ladson-Billings (1995) would suggest that this understanding of multiple perspectives was the result of culturally relevant pedagogy connecting students' culture and lived experiences to the material. As Ms. Morgan described it, the students made new connections because poetry was an enjoyable experience for them. Darling-Hammond (2008) suggests that these experiences took place because, "powerful learning occurs when student work resembles that of real writers, scientists, mathematicians, and historians" (Darling-Hammond, 2008, p.198). Students engaged in sharing their histories and relating them to the histories of 19<sup>th</sup> century events and historical figures. In summary, the study had less impact on students' academic understanding of the curriculum and more impact on their relationship to the curriculum as both a writer and a historian.

There was also notable improvement in students' knowledge of poetry. During the course of the unit, students were exposed to many different styles of poetry and a variety of writing exercises. As stated in Chapter Four, students had little to no prior experience with spoken word poetry and many expressed in their warm-up on Day One that poetry was a confusing topic for them. However, as the week went on, students began to grow more confident in their own writing and discussing other writers' work as a class. This is critical in creating a social studies environment that mimics the outside world. As active citizens, students should be able to listen and strongly consider the ideas of others, while also valuing individual contributions from their classmates (Solarz, 2015). This unit provided students with a method of participating in such dialogue with their teachers and peers in new ways. Engaging students in a democratic setting within the classroom provided students with real world skills that will prepare them to interact within the

democratic society they are citizens of. In other words, this curriculum prepared the students to establish connections to their learning beyond the classroom.

### *Connections Beyond the Classroom*

The third theme that emerged from the data was the students' connections to the material beyond the data. The research suggests that learning in the classroom should connect to the outside world in a way that a student's learning process and quest for understanding does not stop when they leave the classroom rather it is further explored (Blythe, 1998; National Research Council, 2000; Rubin, 2012; Solarz 2015). As a result of this study, students wrote outside of class and brought their work in to share with Mrs. Smith, Ms. Morgan, and me. Students also spent time during their free time searching YouTube for videos of different artists they had been introduced to in class. One English teacher came and asked to observe a day of the unit simply because her students came to her class, in which they were also learning about poetry, with writing they had produced as a result of the spoken word poetry unit. She was surprised that these students not only wanted to write but that they were also proud of what they were writing.

Rubin (2012) references Thomas Jefferson who once said that every citizen should be able to "calculate for himself, and to express and preserve his ideas, his contracts, and accounts, in writing" (Rubin, 2012, p. 69). At the end of the case study, Mrs. Smith and I provided journals to the students who wished to take one. More than fifty students willingly took a journal at the end of class to continue writing. Several of these students were interviewed one week later to see if they had indeed been writing in their journals. All of the students who were interviewed stated that they had been writing

and a few provided examples of the topics and types of pieces they had been writing on during their free time.

### *Implications*

The themes articulated above regarding student and teacher experiences with the spoken word unit have several implications for the social studies classroom and educational policy at large.

#### *For the Social Studies Classroom*

For instance, although students' social studies content knowledge remained relatively the same, the students enjoyed the unit and wrote for the entire fifteen-twenty minutes. Several students were still not finished and took their work home. Ms. Morgan noted that at any other time, getting students to write just one paragraph was like pulling teeth and these students were writing pages. Similarly, the students were more engaged in the lessons more when they were first given the opportunity to create an example about themselves (e.g. Day Two with visual poetry). Interview and observation data suggest that students were engaged throughout the lesson because they found purpose in the lesson. The classroom environment mimicked one in which they were free to communicate their opinions and ideas. They utilized critical thinking skills, engaged in writing, and discussed their work. Aligning with National Research Council (2000), students were engaged because were in an environment that presented exciting opportunities to understand how history works as a discipline and how certain analytical skills can be both applicable and relevant for understanding events within their own lives.

Mrs. Smith indicated early in her interview that she recognized the potential of spoken word poetry to create a democratic classroom environment in which students had

a safe space to share their perspectives and voices. She suggested that she would continue to use spoken word poetry in her classroom in the future and purchased the book by Christensen & Watson (2015) *Rhythm and Resistance* that was used for several of the lesson plans. Mrs. Smith suggested that she intended to do more with spoken word poetry but over a longer period of time. She mentioned the use of spoken word poetry as a means of reviewing material at the end of each unit.

Mrs. Smith's student intern Ms. Morgan also indicated that she would use spoken word poetry in her classroom in the future. She recognized the students' level of enjoyment with the unit and how impressed she was by the quantity and quality in which they were writing. Differing from Mrs. Smith approach, Ms. Morgan stated that she intended to use spoken word poetry as a method for introducing new information rather than reviewing it. She plans to do further research as an educator in order to better develop her lesson plans to do so.

Implications for my own classroom arose as a result of this study. While I anticipated positive results from this study, I was nervous that a one-week unit would not be enough time for the students to be introduced to spoken word poetry, practice their writing, fall in love with writing, perform their writing, and learn their social studies content in the process. However, the one-week time period was all Mrs. Smith the administration at the Central Texas middle school could allow during their weeks leading up to the STAAR test. In one short week, these students, who were not writers or high achieving academic scholars, became storytellers and oral historians.

Additionally, the data suggests there are benefits for classroom management, collaborative learning, and connections beyond the classroom. Evidence from this study

suggested that creating a classroom that is culturally relevant, democratic and communicative in nature, and learner-centered fosters meaningful understanding of one's self and their relation to the people around them. Students interacted with one another in ways the classroom teachers had not seen prior to the study. Students encouraged one another and provided positive feedback by laughing and crying together and assisting one another in the writing process. As an educator I now recognize the power of poetry to not only engage students but to unite a classroom.

In regards to the classroom at large, spoken word poetry can be used as a method for creating a culturally relevant democratic environment. In this type of environment the students are given a voice and a space to express themselves as individuals and in turn develop important communication skills with others. As students engage in sharing their stories the teacher becomes more aware of the lived experiences of that student and is better able to tie the curriculum back to the students' outside world.

#### *For Educational Policy*

The findings from this study also have several implications for educational policy. First, it is possible to provide space for a culturally relevant democratic classroom within a standardized environment. Mrs. Smith's class was held accountable to the TEKS each day and her students STAAR test scores. The spoken word poetry unit was designed around the TEKS the students were supposed to be learning; however, it also provided students the opportunity to explore these TEKS in nuanced ways. In this unit, students actively engaged in learning social studies content as well as making connections to their own lived experiences. The students went from passively learning from a textbook/worksheet to actively learning through art and poetry. When the lesson engages

students in active learning the material is more likely to resonate with the student as a memorable experience (Solarz, 2015). This conclusion was supported by the engagement data, classroom observations, and interviews and was concurrent with the literature (Blythe, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2008; National Research Council, 2000; Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015). This case study demonstrates that it is possible to provide a space for student voice and expression within a standardized environment. Spoken word poetry is simply one method of accomplishing the goal of creating and maintaining this safe environment. The findings from this study also suggest that students were given a safe space to express their voice. Furthermore, several students commented on how poetry helped them take the information they already knew and see it from a different perspective. And while the scores may have suggested that there was no significant gain in social studies content knowledge, there was also no significant decline in what the students had already learned.

Overall, the students and teachers did not have much prior knowledge as to what spoken word poetry was. The students were not avid writers, the students were not identified as high achieving, and the students were not from affluent communities. Despite what might have appeared as limitations for success, these student characteristics and experiences were well served by the spoken word poetry unit. This suggests that one does not have to be a world acclaimed spoken word poet to make this curriculum work in their classroom. The teacher does not have to have a high achieving class to create an environment in which students develop a love of learning and writing. Spoken word poetry can be used as an alternative to the “drill and kill” mentality often associated as being a necessary method in a low performing classroom environment. As students wrote

and reflected, they were encouraged to engage in higher level thinking around essential questions. These essential questions are the “big” fundamental and debatable questions that assist students in connecting the past to the present while also engaging them in critical thinking skills (Rubin, 2012; Solarz, 2015). These essential questions helped students explore thematic concepts in social studies such as the concept of a turning point or sectionalism. As supported by the literature, by incorporating spoken word into the social studies classroom, a learning environment that permitted both complex and subtle forms of thinking to take place occurred (Eisner, 2002).

These findings beg the question: If there is substantial evidence supporting the benefits of this style of teaching with minimal negative consequences, why not try it? Why not try implementing this style of teaching into the curriculum? This study identified that spoken-word poetry can be used as an alternative approach to teaching social studies that may not have been previously considered by educators. In this method students met the curricular standards while also engaging in self-expression, communication and social skills, and reflection.

#### *Limitations and Recommendations*

The first limitation revolved around time. For this study I was given a one-week time period in Mrs. Smith’s classroom. Because the time period fell during the scope of the districts STAAR review, I was limited in how much of additional time I could take up with the pre-study survey and my post-study interviews. The post-study survey was not an issue because it was completed in class on the fifth day of the unit. I was forced to select lessons that only took up a 45 minute instructional in order to expose students to a variety of different styles of poetry in a short amount of time. The students were also not

given time in class to edit their first drafts. Students were only able to work on their drafts if they chose to take their poems home and work on them outside of class. While a few students did this, I would have liked to have walked students through editing their drafts and shaping their poems into a more complete final product.

Additionally, this study would have been better conducted over a longer period of time. It would be more effective to have been able to track the long-term results of spoken word poetry on student understanding. Without a longitudinal study and without access to the participant's STAAR scores, it is not clear what lasting effects this unit had on the student's long-term retention and understanding of the social studies curriculum.

I believe this study would have been significantly influenced if I had more time to build better rapport with the students. While I felt like I built a relationship with the students during my time in their classroom, I was a guest lecturer who met the students for the first time on Day One of the unit. It was difficult as a guest lecturer to enter a classroom mid year and establish a rapport with students so that they felt comfortable with sharing and discussing in one short week. It did help that Mrs. Smith and Ms. Morgan were present in the classroom assisting me with the curriculum throughout the case study. In a way their presence was necessary for building rapport they helped me figure out how I could better meet the students where they were at despite knowing little about them prior to the study.

Knowing the students better could have potentially impacted the lessons I had chosen for the students to participate in. By embracing the individual student, the teacher can organize a curriculum that provides opportunities to embrace their differences and share their unique perspectives to one another (Darling-Hammond, 2008). The

curriculum could have also been more individualized to meet the needs of students especially students who were identified as English Language Learners. There were two students in particular who were uncomfortable with their English and as a result very hesitant to share their work with me. I tried to cater to their needs by expressing that they could write in English or Spanish however, I think not having a Spanish template for the writing assignments was a hindrance to that process. Instead, the English Language Learners wrote almost entirely in English but did not want to read their work allowed to the class. I wonder had I been their teacher and not a guest lecturer if I would have been better able to create an environment in which they encountered a safer space for expression.

Originally, video and audio recordings were going to be collected as evidence. However, it was evident on day one that the video camera was too invasive for the students and it was removed in an effort to maintain a safe and comfortable environment for expression. As a researcher, I was concerned that the camera may take away from the authenticity of student responses to the curriculum while also creating a barrier in which students felt uncomfortable sharing their work. Audio recordings were not taken because as a one-man researcher and teacher team, I was nervous that by focusing on turning the tape off I would be taking away from valuable class time better spent on teaching the unit. If I were to conduct this study again, I would invite a co-researcher to conduct the video and audio recordings. This would add to the study because the unit was on spoken word poetry and evidence from student work would allow for the recording of their spoken word performances. By recording student performances I could also investigate student confidence with public speaking as well as analyzing the art of the performance itself.

A few students reported that they felt like they had less control over what they learned in the classroom and that their teacher cared less about their opinions post study. It is possible that these perceptions were the result of having me as a researcher enter the classroom as a stranger and a guest lecturer for the week. While the students in their pre-study identified their teacher as Mrs. Smith, it is unclear whether or not they considered their teacher in the post-study to be Mrs. Smith or myself as the guest lecturer. This could have skewed the post-study Likert scale results.

The second predicament with the survey instrument I utilized, was the way the Likert scale survey was written. On the free response questions on the post-study survey students were asked two free response questions:

- What did you think of this week? Did you like it or hate?
- What did you learn?

The most common response I received from students was “I learned about poetry” or “I learned poetry was fun”. If I was going to conduct this study again I would have made the second question more specific and I would make it a two-part question.

- What did you learn in regards to social studies?
- What did you learn in regards to poetry?

This would ensure that I would get a more accurate response as to whether students learned anything new related to the social studies content as well as what types of new connections to material students made as a result of the study. Despite these limitations, the current case study provides additional insights into the benefit of spoken word poetry as a pedagogical practice.

### *Concluding Remarks*

The students in our classrooms are the future of our democracy. In order to meet our students' needs and help them engage as democratic citizens in our global world, I believe that spoken word poetry should be incorporated as a pedagogical tool in the history classroom. Students need to recognize that they have a voice. We need to teach our students how to use that voice. We need to teach our students how to listen to the voices of others. The first step in helping students develop and use their voice, begins by creating an environment in which multiple perspectives are represented and the material is presented in a way that is both engaging and relevant to the students. Evidence from this study suggests that spoken word poetry has the potential to engage student voice, promote dialogue and discussions of social issues, and assist students in establishing connections to both the material and one another. Bill Moyer writes, "Democracy needs her poets, in all their diversity, precisely because our hope for survival is in recognizing the reality of one another's lives" (Bruce & Davis, 2000). The bottom line is that we need to humanize the social studies curriculum (Blevins & Talbert, 2015). This study demonstrates what can occur in classrooms with students when they have the opportunity to share their lived experiences and make connections to social studies content. Students need opportunities to practice making these in the classroom if we want them to develop the citizenship skills necessary to make these connections in the world outside the classroom. Culturally relevant and learner-centered, spoken word poetry deserves a closer look from educators as a way to counter the "drill and kill" mentality that is pervasive in social studies classroom. In an era where standardized testing and restrictive, hegemonic textbooks reign supreme, spoken word poetry provides hopeful pedagogical possibilities

for engaging students in social studies curriculum that leads to greater understanding of themselves, one another, social studies content, and their role as active citizens. It is more evident than ever, that social studies educators need to take a stand for student voice. It is more evident than ever that the social studies desperately needs her poets.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### **Baylor University School of Education STUDENT ASSENT FORM**

**Protocol:** Spoken Word For Social Change: Poetry as a Pedagogical Tool in the Social Studies Classroom

**Principal Investigators:** Lauren Bagwell & Dr. Brooke Blevins

#### **What is a Research Study?**

We want to tell you about a research study we are doing. Research studies help us to learn new things and test new ideas. People who work on research studies are called researchers. During research studies, the researchers collect a lot of information so that they can learn more about something. We are doing this study because we would like to learn more about how students respond to a culturally relevant curriculum and respond to spoken word poetry as a teaching tool.

There are a few things you should know about this study:

- You get to decide if you want to be in the study
- You can say ‘No’ or ‘Yes’
- Whatever you decide is OK
- If you say ‘Yes’ now, you can change your mind and say ‘No’ later
- No one will be upset if you say ‘No’
- You can ask us questions at any time
- We will also get permission from your parent/guardian for you to take part in this study

The people in charge of this study are Ms. Lauren Bagwell and Dr. Brooke Blevins We will refer to them as the “researchers” throughout this form.

#### **What will I do if I am in this research study?**

If you decide to be in this study, we will ask you to:

- Take a pre-survey about your experience in your social studies classroom
- Take a post-survey about your experience after the curriculum unit and spoken word experience
- Allow the research to collect and analyze your journey with your work with spoken word in your history classroom
- Allow the researcher to come observe you while you are participating in class activities and discussion
- Possibly participate in a small group interview lasting no more than 30 minutes during regular class time

We would like to make **an audio and video** recording of interviews and classroom participation during this study. These recordings will be used only for the purpose of collecting and analyzing data. We will store these recordings in a locked cabinet and only the researchers will be able to see them. Audio and visual recording is **optional** for this study. If you do not want to be recorded, you can still be in the study.

**Can anything bad happen to me while I am in this study?**

We do not think that taking part in this study will hurt you.

**What else should I know?**

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to, you will still be required to engage in the curriculum unit and spoken word project as part of your regular classroom activity. Your work will only be analyzed in describing the impact and results of spoken word. It is also ok to say “yes” and change your mind later. You can stop being in the research at any time. If you want to stop, tell the researcher. No one will be mad at you.

**What if I have any questions about this research study?**

You can call us with any concerns or questions about the research.  
Ms. Lauren Bagwell, [Lauren\\_Bagwell@baylor.edu](mailto:Lauren_Bagwell@baylor.edu), 214-862-8987  
Dr. Brooke Blevins, [brooke\\_blevins@baylor.edu](mailto:brooke_blevins@baylor.edu) , 254-710-4581

If you have other questions about the study and want to talk to someone who is not a part of the study, you can call the Baylor University IRB through the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at 254-710-1438.

**Statement of Assent**

If you want to be in the study, write your name below.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all his/her questions. I will give a copy of the signed assent form to the subject and his/her parent/guardian.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## APPENDIX B

### **Baylor University School of Education Parent/Guardian Permission**

**Protocol Title:** Spoken Word For Social Change: Poetry as a Pedagogical Tool in the Social Studies Classroom

**Principal Investigators:** Ms. Lauren Bagwell and Dr. Brooke Blevins

Please read this form carefully. The purpose of this form is to provide you with important information about the research study and what to expect if you allow your child to participate. If any of the statements or words in this form is unclear, please let us know. We would be happy to answer any questions. You have the right to discuss this study with another person who is not part of the research team before making your decision whether or not your child can be in the study. Your child's participation is voluntary. If you decide to let your child take part in this research study, we will ask you to sign this form. We will ask your child to read and sign an assent form if he/she is old enough to understand. Your child can refuse to take part even if you provide permission. We will give you a copy of the signed forms.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how students respond to a culturally relevant curriculum designed to introduce them to new and unique perspectives on the civil war through the use of spoken word poetry. After the unit, students will complete a spoken word project that allows them to investigate *other* voices and perspectives of the civil war that may not be adequately represented in their history textbooks.

#### **How long will my child be involved in the study?**

Your son/daughter will be asked to participate in the study as *part of regular class instruction* for approximately 1 week during April. This study will be part of an enrichment curriculum over the civil war. All of the study will take place during the regular school day and will require no extra time on the part of your student outside of school.

#### **What will happen if my child takes part in this research study?**

We ask permission to use the student work (artifacts) generated by your child during the study for analysis purposes. Artifacts may include essays, spoken word projects, and classroom activities. Students will take pre and post survey that will last approximately 20 minutes each. Interviews will be conducted with small groups of students at the conclusion of the 1-week period. Small group interviews will take no more than 30 minutes. The interviews will be audio taped only for the purpose of data analysis. Audio

recordings will be transcribed without any identifying information and then destroyed. A City View ISD teacher will be present during the interviews. During the course of study, researchers will conduct classroom observations to explore students' interactions with the curriculum and record their dialogue with teachers and fellow students. These observations will be **recorded with video** for the purpose of collecting accurate engagement data. These recordings will not be used outside of data collection purposes and will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. Since the instruction is part of regular instruction all students will receive instruction but the researcher will only have access (as given by the child's teacher) to the student data from students whose parents authorize permission by signing this letter.

### **Are there any risks to my child?**

There are no known physical, psychological, and/or sociological risks involved.

### **Data Storage and Confidentiality:**

All data collected will be completely confidential and coded to insure privacy of the teachers, students and their schools. All identifiers will be disposed of upon completion of the study. Names of participants and schools will remain confidential and will not be cited in the study. All data will be held in the strictest of confidences. Upon receipt of the data the researchers (Ms. Bagwell and Dr. Blevins) will code the names of the students so that research assistants never have access to specific student names. This will ensure confidentiality and privacy. All de-identified data will be kept for at least three years. Every effort will be made to make the observational aspects of the study as unobtrusive as possible so that students are comfortable in their learning environment.

### **Study Participation and Early Withdrawal**

Allowing your child to take part in this study is your choice. You are free not to allow your child to take part or to withdraw your child at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you or your child are entitled. If you decide to withdraw your child from this study, the information that your child has already provided will be kept confidential. You cannot withdraw information collected prior to your child's withdrawal. Your child may choose not to be in the study or to stop being in the study before it is over at any time. This will not affect your child's grades. Your child will not be offered or receive any special consideration if he/she takes part in this research study.

### **What if I have any questions or concerns about this research study?**

You can call us with any concerns or questions about the research. Dr. Brooke Blevins, [brooke\\_blevins@baylor.edu](mailto:brooke_blevins@baylor.edu), 254-710-4581 or Ms. Lauren Bagwell, [Lauren\\_Bagwell@baylor.edu](mailto:Lauren_Bagwell@baylor.edu), 214-862-8987

If you want to speak with someone **not** directly involved in this research study, you may contact the Baylor University IRB through the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at 254-710-1438. You can talk to them about:

- Your child's rights as a research subject
- Your or your child's concerns about the research

- A complaint about the research

I give my permission for my child to take part in this research study and agree to allow his/her information to be used and shared as described above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I have explained the research to the parent(s)/guardian and answered all his/her questions. I will give a copy of the signed permission form to the parent(s)/guardian.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Permission

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



**2. After General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House, the main priority of the United States was to —**

- A elect a new president and vice president
- B complete construction of the Capitol**
- C establish Union forts in the former Confederate states
- D implement a plan to bring Confederate states back into the Union

**3. Which of the following is an accomplishment of Ulysses S. Grant?**

- A Commanded the U.S. military in the West during the Indian Wars
- B Led the Radical Republicans in Congress during Reconstruction**
- C Was appointed general in chief of the Union army during the Civil War
- D Became Andrew Johnson's vice president after Abraham Lincoln's assassination

**4. Which of the following resulted from Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin?**

- A The demand for slaves increases in the South.
- B More textile factories are established in the South.**
- C The number of European immigrants arriving at southern port cities increases.
- D More tobacco and food crops are cultivated on southern plantations.

**5. The election of Hiram Rhodes Revels in 1870 was significant because he was the first African American to —**

- A win an election as a member of the Democratic Party
- B win a majority of the popular vote in Mississippi**
- C serve as a member of the U.S. Senate
- D run for public office in the South

APPENDIX D

**Spoken Word For Social Change: Post-study Survey**

**THIS IS NOT FOR A GRADE.** You have ten minutes to complete this survey. Please **DO NOT** put your name on this survey. This is an anonymous survey so please answer honestly. This survey will be used for data collection of this study. You may elect to say no to this survey. What you decide is ok.

*Please select the number below that best represents how you feel about your social studies classroom environment.*

*1=Strongly Agree; 2=Agree; 3=Undecided; 4=Disagree; 5=Strongly Disagree*

=====

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I have a voice in my classroom.            |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. My teacher cares about my opinions.        |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I have input in what/how I learn.          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |   |   |
| 4. I take responsibility for my own learning. |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**Please circle the answer that best represents your experience with spoken word poetry this week.**

**A** I enjoyed working with spoken word poetry and would like to do more with it in the future.

**B** I enjoyed working with spoken word poetry but would **not** like to do more with it in the future.

**C** I did neither enjoyed or disliked using spoken word poetry in my classroom.

**D** I did **not** enjoy using spoken word in my classroom.

**Please circle the answer that best represents your experience.**

**A** I was able to connect more to the material with my own life when spoken word was incorporated into my classroom.

**B** I connected to the material no differently than usual.

**C** Incorporating spoken word poetry made it difficult for me to connect to the material to my own life.

**Select the option closest to your opinion:**

**A** I would want my teacher to continue using spoken word in the history classroom

**B** It does not matter to me whether or not we use spoken word poetry in the history classroom

**C** I do not want my teacher using spoken word poetry in the history classroom again

**What gender do you identify with?**

**A** Female

**B** Male

*Please circle the best answer to each question.*

**1. Which of these describes a result of the Thirteenth Amendment?**

**A** African Americans in the North could vote.

**B** State governments were required to protect individual rights.

**C** Former Confederate officials were prohibited from holding elected office.

**D** African Americans in the South could move elsewhere.

**2. After General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House, the main priority of the United States was to —**

**A** elect a new president and vice president

**B** complete construction of the Capitol

**C** establish Union forts in the former Confederate states

**D** implement a plan to bring Confederate states back into the Union

**3. Which of the following is an accomplishment of Ulysses S. Grant?**

**A** Commanded the U.S. military in the West during the Indian Wars

**B** Led the Radical Republicans in Congress during Reconstruction

**C** Was appointed general in chief of the Union army during the Civil War

**D** Became Andrew Johnson's vice president after Abraham Lincoln's assassination

**4. One advantage the Confederacy had over the Union during the Civil War was that Confederate forces had —**

**A** numerous factories for producing weapons and ammunition

**B** a larger number of military troops in reserve

**C** an extensive railroad system for moving troops and supplies

**D** knowledge of the terrain where most battles were fought

**5. The election of Hiram Rhodes Revels in 1870 was significant because he was the first African American to —**

**A** win an election as a member of the Democratic Party

**B** win a majority of the popular vote in Mississippi

**C** serve as a member of the U.S. Senate

**D** run for public office in the South

**What did you think of this week? Did you like it or hate?**

**What did you learn?**

## APPENDIX E

### Semi Structured Interview Protocol

*The interviews will be semi-structured and an audio recording will be taken. There will be no identifiable information on the audio tap. Students selected for the interview will have the option of opting out of the interview with no penalty or consequence. Each interview will last about 10 minutes.*

Project: Spoken Word For Social Change: Poetry as a Pedagogical Tool in the Social Studies Classroom

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_

#### Student Questions:

- i. *Describe your experience this past week using spoken word in the classroom.*
- ii. *How was this kind of experience similar or different to your normal classroom setting?*
- iii. *Were there any activities that you specifically enjoyed? Why?*
- iv. *What challenges did you face when spoken word was integrated into your social studies classroom?*
- v. *Would this experience be something you would like to see happen again in your classroom? Why or why not?*
- vi. *Was there anything you did not enjoy about this experience? What did you not like about it?*
- vii. *In what ways if any did using spoken word poetry allows you to connect better to the material?*

#### Teacher Questions:

- i. *Describe your experience this past week using spoken word in the classroom.*
- ii. *How was this kind of experience similar or different to your normal classroom setting?*
- iii. *Were there any activities that you specifically found effective or ineffective?*
- iv. *What challenges did you face or think you could face when spoken word is integrated into your social studies classroom?*

- v. *Would this experience be something you would like to see happen again in your classroom? Why or why not?*
- vi. *Was there anything you did not enjoy about this experience? What did you not like about it?*
- vii. *How did your students' behavior and interaction with the material change when spoken word poetry was use as a pedagogical tool? Or did it not change at all?*
- viii. *How did you feel about student participation and engagement during the study? Were students more or less engaged? In what ways?*
- ix. *What advice would you give other social studies teachers about incorporating spoken word into their classroom? Would you recommend they try it? Why or why not?*

APPENDIX F

**Civil War: Spoken Word Enrichment Unit**  
**Monday Day: 1**

<b>Teaching: Lauren Bagwell</b>
<b>Subject area / course / grade level: 8<sup>th</sup> grade US history</b>
<b>Materials:</b> <b>YouTube</b> <b>Notebook</b> <b>Neon Posters</b> <b>Two-Voice Poem Template</b>
<b>TEKS/SEs (Note: Write out TEKS rather than listing by numbers, include content and skills)</b> (10) Geography. The student understands the location and characteristics of places and regions of the United States, past and present. The student is expected to: (A) locate places and regions of importance in the United States during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries; (B) compare places and regions of the United States in terms of physical and human characteristics; and (C) analyze the effects of physical and human geographic factors on major historical and contemporary events in the United States. (12) Economics. The student understands why various sections of the United States developed different patterns of economic activity. The student is expected to: A) identify economic differences among different regions of the United States; (D) analyze the causes and effects of economic differences among different regions of the United States at selected times in U.S. history. (29) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to: (B) Analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions; (D) Identify points of view from the historical context surrounding an event and the frame of reference which influenced the participants;
<b>Lesson objectives and goals:</b> <b>Students and teacher will establish their expectations for the week.</b> <b>Students will be able to identify the key characteristics of the north and south.</b> <b>Students will be able to compare and contrast defining characteristics of the north and south.</b> <b>Students will be able to analyze how the differences between the north and the south impacted the civil war.</b> <b>Students will be able to engage in writing a two-voice poem comparing and contrasting the north and the south.</b>
<b>ENGAGEMENT</b> <b><u>Describe how you will capture students' interest.</u></b>  The class will begin with a spoken word performance by myself. This will be the first time for the students to meet me. My goal is to catch the students off guard and to engage them with the performance. After the performance, I will formally introduce myself and explain to the students what this week will look in regards to spoken word and social studies. We will discuss the importance of

creating a safe and respectable environment for all students. Each class period will get to pick their own neon poster board and together we will establish expectations and rules that they believe should be in place in order to feel safe sharing the work they create throughout the week with the class.

### **EXPLORATION**

In this first activity the students will be given the following sentences to complete:

I am from \_\_\_\_\_ I Like \_\_\_\_\_ When I am older I will be \_\_\_\_\_ Poetry is \_\_\_\_\_. The students are encouraged to be honest especially if their opinion of poetry is different from my own. Students will have 3 minutes to complete this. They will have the choice to stop there or to keep writing.

Before students share their lists, talk with students about the importance of voice and how each voice matters. Introduced the concept of paper clipping. Remind students changing your voice you can add or take away meaning from the poem. Students will then practice reading their list to the class. This should take no more than 2 minutes. Explain that spoken word is poetry that cannot stay on the page.

After students share lists, pass out two-voice poem handout. The two-voice poem is between a poem about a rich women and a poor women. As a class, begin with looking at the comparison/contrast list of the poor women and the rich women. Then ask students to think about opposite voices during the Civil War. Write list on the white board of opposite perspectives they could write from. From this list, students will pick one pair to use in their two voice poems.

Ideas include but not limited to:

Grant vs Lee

North vs South

Slave vs Freeman

Jefferson Davis vs. Lincoln

Union vs. Confederacy

Students will begin with part one: creating a compare and contrast list.

#### **List “big idea” conceptual/essential questions the teacher will use to encourage and/or focus students’**

##### **exploration**

How were the north and south similar? How were they different?

In what ways does my life compare or differ from there’s?

### **EXPLANATION**

#### **List higher order thinking questions, which teachers will use to solicit student explanations and help them to justify their explanations.**

What characteristics specifically define the north? The south?

How do you think these differences influenced the Civil War?

How did these characteristics influence the region’s economy?

### **ELABORATION: TWO-VOICE POEM**

#### **How will students develop a more sophisticated understanding of the concept?**

Students will then create their own two-voice poem using the template. They are allowed to talk with their neighbors about ideas for their poem and practicing reading their poem out loud with a partner as they finish. Teacher will also be walking around offering feedback and advice to students who need it.

#### **What vocabulary will be introduced and how will it connect to students’ observations?**

Sectionalism

Union/Confederacy

Davis/Lincoln

Grant/Lee  
Industry/Economy

**EVALUATION**

**How will students demonstrate that they have achieved the lesson objective?**

At the end of class, students will have the opportunity to share their two-voice poems with the entire class. As students share, reintroduce the concept of positive feedback in the classroom. In the poetry world this come in the form of snaps when you like a line and claps at the end of a performance. Encourage students to clap after each student shares their poem.

**Civil War: Spoken Word Enrichment  
Tuesday Day: 2**

**Teaching: Lauren Bagwell**

**Subject area / course / grade level: 8<sup>th</sup> grade US history**

**Materials:**

**YouTube**

**Visual Poetry Handouts**

**Folders over Historical Figures**

**Markers**

**Head Outlines for creating visual Poetry**

**TEKS/SEs (Note: Write out TEKS rather than listing by numbers, include content and skills)**

(8) History. The student understands individuals, issues, and events of the Civil War. The student is expected to:

(A) Explain the roles played by significant individuals during the Civil War, including Jefferson Davis, Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, and Abraham Lincoln, and heroes such as congressional Medal of Honor recipients William Carney and Philip Bazaar;

(C) Analyze Abraham Lincoln's ideas about liberty, equality, union, and government as contained in his first and second inaugural addresses and the Gettysburg Address and contrast them with the ideas contained in Jefferson Davis's inaugural address.

(29) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

(B) Analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions;

(D) Identify points of view from the historical context surrounding an event and the frame of reference which influenced the participants;

**Lesson objectives and goals:**

**Students will be able to identify the key characteristics of significant individuals during the civil war.**

**Students will be able to compare and contrast defining characteristics of these historical figures.**

**Students will be able to analyze how these historical figures influenced significant events such as the abolition, secession, and the civil war.**

**Students will be able to engage in creating visual poetry for their historical figure.**

**ENGAGEMENT**

**Describe how you will capture students' interest.**

Begin by showing the students a poem called "America in Four Minutes"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZDNUGMMxLk> . Have students identify how the issues addressed in the poem that were also true back in the 1800's. This issues include but are not limited to addiction, racism, and problems with education. In what ways has the US seen progress? In what areas do we still have work to do?

Go over the rules and expectations we established together the day before were on the front board for them to reference. Walk the students through visual poetry. Visual poetry is most often a visual you create based on a poem you wrote or read. However for the sake of history make the argument that your life is a living and breathing poem and therefore is worthy of creating visual poetry to share your story. While this is not a spoken word activity the idea is to make the concept of writing and creating poetry a less scary concept for the students and visual poetry is a little less threatening and intimidating.

## **EXPLORATION: VISUAL POETRY**

### **Describe in great detail what hands-on/minds-on activities students will be doing**

Students will explore the concept of visual poetry by first going through a should exercise of how they can apply it to their own lives. In this case the students will be making a visual poem that represents their likes and interests.

Students are given an outline of a face. Walk the students through step by step. Where the nose would be they put their initials, where their ears would be they put something they listen to (an artist or type of music), where their forehead was they put something they've accomplished, where the neck was they wrote their dreams, and where the eyes were they were instructed to write down four characteristics about themselves, final where their smile was they had to put a phrase, saying, a song lyric, or quote that meant something to them. Students will use the visual poetry they completed on themselves as their example and comparison later on to their visual poetry over their historical figure.

### **List "big idea" conceptual/essential questions the teacher will use to encourage and/or focus students'**

#### **Exploration**

*From America in 4 Minutes Poem:*

In what ways has the US seen progress? In what areas do we still have work to do?

*From Visual Poetry:*

What were the ideals of your historical figure? How did these ideals impact their actions?

Do you agree with their ideals? Why or why not?

Compare your visual poetry to the one you created on your historical figure. In what ways are you similar or different to your historical figure?

## **EXPLANATION**

### **List higher order thinking questions, which teachers will use to solicit student explanations and help them to justify their explanations.**

Now walk through an historical example of visual poetry with the students. On the board draw an outline of the blank face the students received a copy of. As a class create visual poetry on Abraham Lincoln following the same guidelines. Talk about things Abe might have heard, might of dreamed about accomplishing and things he did accomplish. For his quote talk with the class about different famous speeches Abraham Lincoln might have given.

How did your visual poetry on yourself compare to the visual poetry you created on your historical figure?

What were the ideals of your historical figure? How did these ideals impact their actions?

## **ELABORATION: VISUAL POETRY**

Students are allowed to choose whether they work by themselves, in partners, or in groups of three. Students will be given a folder of different artifacts and quotes that describe their historical figure. The folder will have short biographies on their historical figures, pictures of what they looked like, famous quotes that figure said, along with interesting facts about them. They will use these documents and artifacts to work with a group to create visual poetry. At the end of the period they will present this visual poetry to the class.

### **What vocabulary will be introduced and how will it connect to students' observations?**

The historical figures they have to choose from are:

Frederick Douglas

Hiram Rhodes Revels

Robert E. Lee

U.S. Grant

Stonewall Jackson

As students present they will be asked to compare their historical figure to their own visual poetry. The historical figure visual poetry will be displayed in the hallway as a review for students in the up coming weeks of STAAR review.

#### **EVALUATION**

##### **How will students demonstrate that they have achieved the lesson objective?**

At the end students will present their visual poetry to the class. They will have the chance to explain why chose to include specific quotes and ideals.

**Civil War: Spoken Word Enrichment  
Wednesday Day: 3**

**Teaching: Lauren Bagwell**

**Subject area / course / grade level: 8<sup>th</sup> grade US history**

**Materials:**

**YouTube**

**Copy of Gettysburg Address**

**Paper**

**TEKS/SEs (Note: Write out TEKS rather than listing by numbers, include content and skills)**

(8) History. The student understands individuals, issues, and events of the Civil War. The student is expected to:

(C) Analyze Abraham Lincoln's ideas about liberty, equality, union, and government as contained in his first and second inaugural addresses and the Gettysburg Address and contrast them with the ideas contained in Jefferson Davis's inaugural address.

(29) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

(B) Analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions;

(D) Identify points of view from the historical context surrounding an event and the frame of reference which influenced the participants;

**Lesson objectives and goals:**

**Students will be able to identify significant speeches given by Abraham Lincoln.**

**Students will be able to identify turning points in the Civil War and explain what a turning point is.**

**Students will be able to explain the significance Gettysburg.**

**Students will be able to connect the Gettysburg Address to their own lives.**

**Students will be able to explore these connections and reflect on how these connections impacted their lives.**

**ENGAGEMENT**

**Describe how you will capture students' interest.**

I opened class by showing the students a cover poem of "Please Don't Steal My Air Jordans" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WT7VMrxTPPA> by Lemon Anderson. (Just the first poem). Begin class by talking about how his style is different than the poet shown to them in the poem "America in 4 minutes". Talk about his movement and how that added to his story telling. We also talked about the written details of the poem and how it told a story we felt like we were experiencing first hand.

The class will then be given a writing prompt to ease them into a day of writing and reflecting.

Going back to the poem students heard the day before give them 2-3 minutes to respond to the following prompt. Students are allowed to keep writing, to stop after they finish filling in the blanks or they can keep writing. Encourage them that it does not have to rhyme but that it can be a poem, a letter, a simple response, or a rap. Students were not allowed to use the words "free" or "brave". If students finish early, encourage them to repeat the template over and over with new words in an effort to create a poem out of the prompt. After allow students a chance to share with the class what they wrote. Encourage positive feedback and advice as the students are both writing and sharing.

gave the students the following on the board:

This is my America.  
Land of the \_\_\_\_\_.  
Home of the \_\_\_\_\_.  
This is my America.

### **EXPLORATION**

After this exercise, I will have the students give me a beat. I will then rap the lines from “Hello from the Union Side” that I had previously written for midway.

“I hope you understand the problem at hand. A nation divided brought trouble to the land.

The north had Grant and the rebels had Lee. 61-65 saw so much fighting.

Bro vs. Bro south was sure to win...till Vicksburg, Gettysburg wrecked their plans.

Turning points for the north Lee saw his fall...Appomattox Courthouse ended this brawl.

Lincoln knew this wasn't the end... but we drop the mic where rebuilding begins”

Transition into how famous speeches in history sound like poetry. Talk about Gettysburg. Ask the students who wrote the Gettysburg Address? Why was the battle of Gettysburg significant? What does a turning point mean? Explain to them what this battle meant for the north by relating it to a team being behind in March Madness, gaining momentum and the coach calling a time out in order to give the team a big pep talk. This address was the Union's pep talk. Then read and perform the Gettysburg Address like a spoken word piece.

#### **List “big idea” conceptual/essential questions the teacher will use to encourage and/or focus students’**

##### **Exploration**

Why was Gettysburg significant?

How did the turning point affect the north? The south?

### **EXPLANATION**

#### **List higher order thinking questions, which teachers will use to solicit *student* explanations and help them to justify their explanations.**

What's your Gettysburg? Do you think anyone during the Civil War might have experienced anything similar? Why or why not?

### **ELABORATION: WHAT'S YOUR GETTYSBURG**

#### **How will students develop a more sophisticated understanding of the concept?**

Ask students to think about a time that was a turning point in their own life? What changed them?

What was their Gettysburg? Have a template on the board that students can use to begin their writing if they are stuck. The template is there to encourage students to write who may still feel intimidated or not know where to begin.

The template on the board is as follows:

\_\_\_\_\_ years and \_\_\_\_\_ months ago, something \_\_\_\_\_ happened.

A turning point like Gettysburg things changed from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

\*Describe event in 2-4 lines.

Old Abe would agree \_\_\_\_\_ changed my history.

Have students consider whether or not their poem would read like one from a confederate or union soldier. For example, if things went from really well to bad to good then it would be more similar to the perspective of a union soldier.

Students may need ideas. They can write about losing a loved one, a sibling being born, winning a big game, not making the team, beating a video game, getting a pet and so on.

**What vocabulary will be introduced and how will it connect to students' observations?**

Gettysburg; Turning Point

**EVALUATION**

**How will students demonstrate that they have achieved the lesson objective?**

Some students may write about heavy topics, others may write about silly things. Remember to reinforce the safe space expectations at the front of the classroom. Students do not have to share but as students write encourage students to share as you walk around and monitor what they are writing. Give them feedback and offer help to those who need it. As students share, reinforce positive feedback at the end of every poem.

**Civil War: Spoken Word Enrichment**  
**Thursday Day: 4**

**Teaching: Lauren Bagwell**

**Subject area / course / grade level: 8<sup>th</sup> grade US history**

**Materials:**

**Battle Poem Templates**

**Battle Poem Instructions**

**Notebook**

**TEKS/SEs (Note: Write out TEKS rather than listing by numbers, include content and skills)**

(8) History. The student understands individuals, issues, and events of the Civil War. The student is expected to:

(A) Explain the roles played by significant individuals during the Civil War, including Jefferson Davis, Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, and Abraham Lincoln, and heroes such as congressional Medal of Honor recipients William Carney and Philip Bazaar;

(B) Explain the causes of the Civil War, including sectionalism, states' rights, and slavery, and significant events of the Civil War, including the firing on Fort Sumter; the battles of Antietam, Gettysburg, and Vicksburg; the announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation; Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House; and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln; and

(C) Analyze Abraham Lincoln's ideas about liberty, equality, union, and government as contained in his first and second inaugural addresses and the Gettysburg Address and contrast them with the ideas contained in Jefferson Davis's inaugural address.

(29) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

(B) Analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions;

(D) Identify points of view from the historical context surrounding an event and the frame of reference which influenced the participants;

**Lesson objectives and goals:**

**Students will be able to identify the key characteristics of significant events during the civil war.**

**Students will be able to analyze specific battles that occurred during the civil war.**

**Students will be able to engage in the confederate and union soldier perspective.**

**Students will create a battle poem or song that represents their army and their perspective of battles that occurred during the civil war.**

**ENGAGEMENT**

**Describe how you will capture students' interest.**

“Hello From the Union Side” will be playing as students are walking into class. This is the parody I wrote for Midway Middle School on the Civil War.

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbqFWDH0Soc>**

When class begins start by showing the poem “High School Training Ground”

**[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_I170mlj38o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_I170mlj38o)**

Have students compare this poem and discuss what stuck out to them? How does it relate to their own learning experience. Hand them each a half sheet of paper.

Have students respond to the following prompt:

Middle School Training Ground:

Where I am trained to \_\_\_\_\_.

Give students 2 minutes to write and elaborate on this prompt. Then take two-three minutes to share.

#### **EXPLORATION**

**List “big idea” conceptual/essential questions the teacher will use to encourage and/or focus students’**

##### **Exploration**

From the soldier’s perspective, why are you fighting in the civil war? What do you hope to gain in the end? Which battles were the most memorable to you as a soldier? Why?

#### **EXPLANATION**

**List higher order thinking questions, which teachers will use to solicit student explanations and help them to justify their explanations.**

Before students can write their “rap” battles they must first review the battles. On the board review the major battles of the Civil War: Fort Sumter, Antietam, Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and Appomattox Courthouse. As a class decide the defining characteristic of each battle, the generals who fought on each side, and who came out victorious.

Why was this battle significant? How do you think it impacted the course of the Civil War?

#### **ELABORATION RAP BATTLE**

**How will students develop a more sophisticated understanding of the concept?**

The idea is for students to be doing “Rap Battles” however leave the assignment open ended to allow students to be more comfortable. Students can free write their own rap, write a poem, change the lyrics of an existing song, or just free write. They must include the battle, what happened, the people involved and why it was significant. It can be from the perspective of a civilian, a soldier, a leader, or just an overview of the war. Keep students on task. If they finish early have them try writing about another battle.

**What vocabulary will be introduced and how will it connect to students’ observations?**

Fort Sumter

Antietam

Gettysburg

Vicksburg

Appomattox Courthouse

#### **EVALUATION**

**How will students demonstrate that they have achieved the lesson objective? (Attach diagnostic, formative, or cumulative assessments and associated rubrics to this lesson plan)**

At the end of class students will have the opportunity to share their “rap battles” with the class.

**Civil War: Spoken Word Enrichment  
Friday Day: 5**

**Teaching: Lauren Bagwell**

**Subject area / course / grade level: 8<sup>th</sup> grade US history**

**Materials:  
Battle Poem  
Notebook**

**TEKS/SEs (Note: Write out TEKS rather than listing by numbers, include content and skills)**

(8) History. The student understands individuals, issues, and events of the Civil War. The student is expected to:

(A) Explain the roles played by significant individuals during the Civil War, including Jefferson Davis, Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, and Abraham Lincoln, and heroes such as congressional Medal of Honor recipients William Carney and Philip Bazaar;

(B) Explain the causes of the Civil War, including sectionalism, states' rights, and slavery, and significant events of the Civil War, including the firing on Fort Sumter; the battles of Antietam, Gettysburg, and Vicksburg; the announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation; Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House; and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln; and

(C) Analyze Abraham Lincoln's ideas about liberty, equality, union, and government as contained in his first and second inaugural addresses and the Gettysburg Address and contrast them with the ideas contained in Jefferson Davis's inaugural address.

(29) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

(B) Analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions;

(D) Identify points of view from the historical context surrounding an event and the frame of reference which influenced the participants;

**Lesson objectives and goals:**

**Students will be able to identify the key characteristics of significant events during the civil war.**

**Students will be able to analyze specific battles that occurred during the civil war.**

**Students will be able to engage in the confederate and union soldier perspective.**

**Students will create a battle poem or song that represents their army and their perspective of battles that occurred during the civil war.**

**Students will be able to communicate their ideas and perspectives with students who may have different ideas or perspectives.**

**Students will be able to connect the Civil War to their own lives.**

**ENGAGEMENT**

**Describe how you will capture students' interest.**

At the beginning of class play the poem "I wanna hear a poem".

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRsITgjBsLs>

Have students discuss the style and language of the poem. Have them point out what they liked and what lines were powerful. Connect his literary styles and techniques to what they are reading in English as well as the other poems they have watched this week.

**EXPLORATION**

**Describe in great detail what hands-on/minds-on activities students will be doing**

Students will have ten minutes to clean up and finish their battle poems.

**List “big idea” conceptual/essential questions the teacher will use to encourage and/or focus students’**

**Exploration**

From your soldier’s perspective, why are you fighting in the civil war? What do you hope to gain in the end? Which battles were the most memorable to you as a soldier? Why?

**EXPLANATION**

**List higher order thinking questions, which teachers will use to solicit *student* explanations and help them to justify their explanations.**

Explain to students the concept of a poetry slam. Ask them to consider how they have grown as a writer and a historian during this unit.

**ELABORATION**

Re-establish the safe space expectations. Begin the open mic with the performance of the poem I wrote about learning to love your self and your purpose. Then open it up to the students to share any of the work they have written during the week. They can also choose to have a friend read it for them or with them if it is a two-voice poem. Many students might have written poems outside of class (this is usually the case) encourage all student poems even if it was not one they wrote in social studies.

**EVALUATION**

**How will students demonstrate that they have achieved the lesson objective? (Attach diagnostic, formative, or cumulative assessments and associated rubrics to this lesson plan)**

Students will engage in a poetry open mic where they will have the opportunity to share all they have written during the week.

## APPENDIX G

### *Pirates vs. Ninjas*

The man at church once told me my shoes were beautiful  
I laughed thinking what kind of a public speaker  
Would ever find glory in a muddy old sneaker  
But he persisted with his words

“Your shoes...they’re beautiful”

He said my laces would reach faces of a population in need of transformation  
That a strong foundation comes from a sturdy soul and  
My soles were going places

He said my cleats would reach feet of those you’ll never go  
Play on fields you’ll never go  
I must tie my laces in a bow  
Throw them out a window onto a telephone wire  
Others will look up and might be inspired  
To make that long distance call back to a time when it all made sense  
Every time we would sit there  
Looped laces in tiny hands reciting

Bunny ear  
Bunny ear  
Around the tree  
Under the burrow  
Pull tight and see

It was an era of simplicity  
Back when nighttime fantasies were daytime realities  
Up in the hard core  
Cutthroat streets of Pre-K  
Where back on the battlefields of hopscotch it wasn’t Crips vs. Bloods  
It was pirates vs. ninjas

And at the end of the day it was all okay because well...  
Pirate and Ninja  
They were best buds

Back when true love meant throwing pebbles in your lover’s eyes  
Back when I knew I could go anywhere that I wanted to go  
Cause shoot...  
My shoes were state of the art Velcro

But then we grow up

We trade in our batman light ups  
For penny loafer sign ups

We quit believing the hobo bleeding out his eyes  
Trying to find a lover for his socks  
Pacing through his days  
In the warn-up footsteps  
Of those who passed him by

It's funny though  
Those little shoes were never shy  
Always daring to look him back dead in the eye

The homeless man looked back at the little girl's laces and smiled,  
Whispered

"My child you are going places"

So I dare you to consider a size change  
These jigsaw puzzles need to all rearrange

To no longer slip  
But slide  
Into the rhyme of revolution  
Let us lace up our converse  
And start a retro revolution

Move and a rewind motion to turn all of Wall Street's finest  
Back to ninjas and pirates  
Because you know  
They always did wear  
The sweetest shoes

## APPENDIX H

### *Two-Voice Poem Excerpt*

#### **Two Women**

I am a woman.

*I am a woman.*

I am a woman born of a woman whose man owned a factory.

*I am a woman born of a woman whose man labored in a factory.*

I am a woman whose man wore silk suits, who constantly watched his weight.

*I am a woman whose man wore tattered clothing, whose heart was constantly strangled by hunger.*

I am a woman who watched two babies grow into beautiful children.

*I am a woman who watched two babies die because there was no milk.*

I am a woman who watched twins grow into popular college students with summers abroad.

*I am a woman who watched three children grow, but with bellies stretched from no food.*

But then there was a man;

*But then there was a man;*

And he talked about the peasants getting richer by my family getting poorer.

*And he told me of days that would be better, and he made the days better.*

## APPENDIX I

*Rap Excerpt from "Hello from the Union Side"*

I hope you understand the problem at hand  
A nation divided brought trouble to the land  
The North had Grant  
The Rebels had Lee  
'61-'65 saw so much fighting

Bro vs. Bro the South was sure to win  
Till Vicksburg, Gettysburg wrecked their plans  
Turning points for the North  
Lee saw his fall  
Appomattox Courthouse ended this brawl

Lincoln knew this wasn't the end  
But we drop the mic where rebuilding begins

## APPENDIX J

### *Ten Things I Know to Be True*

5 things I know to be true about mankind:

1. According to genetics, the probability of your individual existence is 1 in 400 quadrillion. That's no misprint, that's brilliant. That's 400 quadrillion reasons why your life was no accident. There is uniqueness in your purpose and purpose in your existence.
2. You are imperfect but you are also beautiful. And I'm no expert in cartography but it seems to me that our personalities, are merely maps tracking our world back to the foundation of human beings. Your body is nothing more than the ends of a means, which means negative self-image can't stand between you and the person you were created to be. There is a difference between seeing and believing. Start believing in the person you see in the mirror.
3. You have autonomy. Which means you are your own power. Individually you have the strength to tower over the opinion of any human who dares to tell you, that you are less than beautiful. Because...
4. You are more than beautiful. And yes I've said it time and again but you are beautiful. You are Joan of Ark, both Lewis **and** Clark destined to show America the art of how far we still have to go. No, being a pioneer is never easy, but you'll soon see that expanding ourselves to new horizons is worth it in the end. Love yourself in a way that never breaks, never bends, embody it from the outside in, you are the start of a revolution.
5. Forget about the right to remain silent. You have the right to be heard. Your feet have the right to stand on the dirt of this earth. Let your stories teach and learn and laugh and cry. Let them seek wisdom for with understanding you'll find that stories are like people. Some are short, some are long, some are whispers, some are songs. But they are all still stories and we are all still people. Encompassed with 400 quadrillion reasons to love.

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