

Poetry of Witness, Research Journalism Initiative

Unit Title: Poetry of Witness (in partnership with the Research Journalism Initiative [RJI])

Teacher and School: Jennifer Klein, St. Mary's Academy

Course and Grade Level: Creative Writing, grades 6-12

Approximate Length: 1-2 weeks

RJI Resources: Falastine's poetry and Mohammad Faraj's photographic portfolios (An Najah University, Palestine); one short film on life in the West Bank (RJI); Taking IT Global/RJI virtual classroom (rji.tiged.org).

Big Ideas: Poetry and photography as a means to bear witness, poetry and photography as the expression of personal experience, poetry as dialogue, literature's capacity to simultaneously participate in and transcend politics.

Enduring Understandings:

- Real politics is about people and their actual individual lives, daily experiences, etc.
- Poetry and photography can serve as a way to bear witness to personal experiences
- Literature allows readers access to personal experiences in global regions of conflict which are typically difficult to discuss
- Photography and film allow viewers access to personal experiences in regions of conflict via visual nuances
- Because literature transcends politics and shares personal experience, it can help readers develop an authentic, compassionate understanding of different global experiences, thus participating in the formation of cross-cultural global empathy

Essential Questions:

- What are the nuances to life in Palestine expressed by Falastine's poems and Faraj's photographs?
- Can we enter someone else's life authentically through literature and photography?
- How might the arts provide a means of communication between cultures? Does artistic expression allow the discussion of difficult regions and political climates better than other means of communication?
- How does cross-cultural artistic exchange change the way we think or feel about the world and other people's experiences?

Activities: *Students will...*

- View photographic portfolios of Mohammad Faraj
- View one short RJI film on life in the West Bank
- Read the poems of Falastine
- Choose one of Faraj's photos and write a response poem
- Choose one of Falastine's poems and write a response poem
- Write a poem which bears witness to an experience in your own life/world.

Skills: *Students will gain competency in...*

- Photographic analysis (visual literacy, including analysis of expression, gesture, background/setting, clothing and props)
- Poetic analysis (poetic literacy, including analysis of visual imagery, symbolism and metaphor, language choices, rhythmic techniques and other poetic devices)
- Authentic cultural and political exploration via artistic work
- Poetry writing

Authentic Assessment: Students will develop and demonstrate proficiency in...

- Verbal poetic analysis
- Verbal photographic analysis
- Writing poetry in response to Palestinian poetry and photography
- Writing poetry to bear witness to experiences of their own generation

Final Assessment: Students will produce a final "show" (either in published, online or gallery form) of student poems with the Palestinian pieces which inspired them