

Subject Relatedness Pre-Planning:

ELA Field Trip Pre-Prep for the Paterson Poetry Festival

To make the Paterson Poetry Festival a meaningful ELA experience for 10th and 11th graders, pre-trip activities should focus on both the art of poetry and the specific literary context of Paterson. This preparation will equip students with the tools to analyze performances and understand the city's unique role in American literature.

Understanding the Context of "Poetry" and "Paterson"

Before the trip, introduce students to the key figures and concepts that make the city of Paterson a literary landmark.

- Introduce William Carlos Williams: Williams, a doctor and poet from nearby Rutherford, New Jersey, is most famous for his epic poem, "Paterson." Explain that the poem personifies the city as a man, exploring themes of language, industrialism, and the relationship between nature and humanity. Discuss his philosophy of "no ideas but in things" to show how he finds universal meaning in everyday objects and experiences.
- Analyze Key Excerpts: Read and analyze selected excerpts from Williams's "Paterson," such as the opening lines that describe the city as a sleeping giant. You could also use his shorter, more accessible poems like "The Red Wheelbarrow" or "This Is Just to Say" to illustrate his style and use of imagery.
- Connect to Modern Poetry: The Paterson Poetry Festival features contemporary poets, often in the tradition of spoken word or slam poetry. Show students examples of this art form (e.g., performances by Amanda Gorman or Sarah Kay) to highlight how poetry has evolved from the page to the stage. This helps them understand what they might see and hear at the festival.

Core Poetic Analysis Activities

To get students ready to engage with live performances, review and practice essential literary analysis skills.

- Review Poetic Devices: Create a pre-trip packet or a digital scavenger hunt for students to find and define key poetic devices. Focus on terms they will encounter at the festival, such as alliteration, metaphor, simile, personification, imagery, and meter (even in free verse).
- "Blackout" or "Found" Poetry: Using pages from a novel or even a newspaper, have students create "blackout" poems by selecting words and blacking out the rest of the text. This is a hands-on, creative way to demonstrate how poets find new meaning in existing language, much like Williams did with his use of prose in "Paterson."
- Poetry Annotation and Discussion: Provide students with a few modern poems and guide them in a group annotation activity. Use a "think-aloud" method to model how to approach a poem. Ask guiding questions: What are the main images? What is the mood or tone? What is the



central idea or theme? This helps them practice the skills they'll use to process what they hear at the festival.	

Trip Description/Activities:

A field trip to the Paterson Poetry Festival is an immersive experience that goes beyond simply listening to readings. The activities are designed to engage students with the literary arts and the culture of Paterson.

Arrival and Introduction

Upon arrival at the festival, students receive a program or schedule of events. Teachers can use this as a map for the day, highlighting specific poets, workshops, or stages. The festival is often held at multiple locations, such as the Dey Mansion, Paterson Free Public Library, or other historic sites, providing a dynamic setting.

Core Activities

The main part of the field trip is a structured exploration of different poetic forms and events.

- Live Poetry Readings: This is the centerpiece of the trip. Students will attend
 readings by a diverse group of established and emerging poets. The performances
 often include a mix of traditional, academic poetry and dynamic spoken word or slam
 poetry. This allows students to experience poetry not just on a page, but as a live,
 visceral art form.
- Workshops and Master Classes: Many festivals offer hands-on workshops led by professional poets. These sessions allow students to learn about different poetic forms, such as haiku or free verse, and practice their own writing. This is a crucial, interactive component that bridges the gap between observation and creation.
- Open Mic Sessions: Students who feel prepared can participate in open mic sessions, where they can share their own pre-written poetry. This activity builds confidence and provides a sense of community.
- Q&A and Panels: Many poets will hold Q&A sessions after their readings. This is a valuable opportunity for students to ask questions about the creative process, a



- poet's themes, or their career. Panels on topics like "Activism & Poetry" or "How History Informs Our Writing" connect poetry to broader social and historical contexts.
- Cultural and Historical Exploration: Because the festival is rooted in Paterson, some events include guided tours of historic sites like the Dey Mansion or local museums. This adds a valuable interdisciplinary layer, connecting the literary history to the city's broader historical and cultural significance.

Follow-up:

- The "I Am" Poem: As a culminating activity, have students write their own short poem inspired by the city of Paterson, their own experience, or a theme they've studied. This personal writing exercise encourages them to think like a poet and will make them more receptive to the work of others.
- The Follow-Up: Inform students that there will be a post-trip reflection. Ask them to take notes during the festival on their favorite poem or performance, a theme they noticed, or a question they have for a poet. This gives them a clear purpose for attending and a frame for their observation.

NJCCCS:

The field trip to the Paterson Poetry Festival aligns with several key New Jersey Student Learning Standards for English Language Arts (NJSLS-ELA) for 10th and 11th grade. The standards are met through pre-trip preparation, the festival experience itself, and post-trip reflection.

Reading Literature

- RL.9-10.2 / RL.11-12.2: Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text.
 - Connection: Students will analyze and compare themes from poems by William Carlos Williams to the themes explored by contemporary poets at the festival.
 For instance, they can compare themes of industrialism in "Paterson" with modern spoken word on urban life.
- RL.9-10.4 / RL.11-12.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.



- Connection: This is a core function of the trip. Students will practice identifying and interpreting poetic devices like metaphor, simile, and imagery as they listen to live poetry readings. Pre-trip activities on figurative language directly prepare them for this.
- RL.9-10.5 / RL.11-12.5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text or order events within it contribute to its overall meaning and aesthetic effect.
 - Connection: The contrast between Williams's long-form, fragmented poem "Paterson" and the structure of a short-form, rhythmic spoken word poem provides a rich comparative study. Students can analyze how a poet's structural choices affect a live performance.

Speaking & Listening

- SL.9-10.1 / SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
 - Connection: Pre-trip discussions on poetry analysis and post-trip debriefs on the festival experience fulfill this standard. Students will practice active listening and articulating their interpretations of the poems they heard.
- SL.9-10.3 / SL.11-12.3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
 - Connection: At the festival, students will act as critical audience members, analyzing how poets use vocal tone, body language, and rhythm (rhetoric) to deliver their message and convey their point of view.

Writing

- W.9-10.3 / W.11-12.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
 - Connection: A post-trip writing assignment, such as a personal narrative reflecting on the experience or a creative response in the form of their own poem, directly applies this standard. Students are encouraged to use poetic techniques and sensory language they observed at the festival.
- W.9-10.9 / W.11-12.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
 - Connection: This trip provides the foundation for a research project or analytical essay. Students can use their notes and observations from the