Anchor Text Guidance: Grade 4, Module 1

Poetry, Poets, and Becoming Writers

Texts and authors

Love That Dog by Sharon Creech
Lexile®: 1010

A River of Words by Jen Bryant and illustrated by Melissa Sweet
Lexile®: AD820

Text Overview

EL Education's Grade 4, Module 1 is designed to prompt consideration of these compelling questions:

- What makes a poem a poem?
- What inspires writers to write poetry?

Love That Dog by Sharon Creech is free verse poetry written in diary format. The author drew inspiration for this text from Walter Dean Myers' poem "Love That Boy." *Love That Dog* is told from the perspective of a young boy named Jack who is initially reluctant to learn about and write poetry. In the beginning of the book, Jack hates poems. By the end, he discovers his unique voice and creativity and becomes a poet himself. The book includes an appendix that contains portions of the classic poems that Jack studies in school, inviting readers to accompany Jack on his transformative journey.

A River of Words by Jen Bryant is a picture book biography of William Carlos Williams, a Puerto Rican poet. Williams wrote poems throughout his life (1883–1963) but made his primary living as a pediatrician. He is most recognized for his ability to write poems that reflect ordinary, everyday objects and the lives of people. *A River of Words* features beautiful mixed-media illustrations, by Melissa Sweet, that reflect the historical era of Williams' life while maintaining the theme of intensity that Williams was known for.

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Text Rationale

EL Education is committed to promoting the development of students' efforts to become effective learners and ethical people through the study of poetry to understand what inspires people to write. In the module, students build background knowledge about poetry and prose as they read and analyze *Love That Dog* and poems including "The Red Wheelbarrow" by William Carlos Williams and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost. This novel is intentionally introduced to open an exploration of the value of reading and writing, while acknowledging that, for many, written language can be challenging.

Tracing the change in Jack's attitude toward poetry, students look closely at what eventually inspires Jack to write. The unusual structure and embedded integration of classic poems and poetry make this novel an excellent vehicle for learning about the structural elements of poems (RL.4.5) and determining theme. Because the story is told entirely from a first-person point of view, the main character, Jack, offers a concrete and accessible introduction to analysis based on a character's words, thoughts, and actions. William Carlos Williams wrote the first poem introduced in *Love That Dog*.

In Unit 1, students analyze *Love That Dog* to determine what inspired Jack to write poetry. In Unit 2, in *River of Words*, they read to discover what inspired William Carlos Williams to write poetry. This lays the foundation for students researching the work and source of inspiration of a new poet in expert groups and eventually presenting their own poetry and explaining what inspired them to write in the performance task. After hearing this short biography read aloud, students closely read the author's note at the end of the text in order to connect events and experiences in Williams' life to the style and content of his poetry. The module is intentionally designed to encourage students to embrace a love of literacy and writing as they work to become effective learners and ethical people.

Additional Considerations

Sensitive topics such as loss and death might come up for students who have a connection to the loss of a pet, as experienced by Jack in *Love That Dog*. Therefore, teachers should be mindful that this topic must be carefully and sensitively discussed. EL Education also encourages teachers to be aware of the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and how issues of family separation and death may have played out in the lives of students. Speak with students and families in advance, especially those who may have sensitivity to the topics discussed. Investigate the routines, practices, rituals, beliefs, norms, and experiences that are important to students and their families. Integrate this background into the classroom as students explore poetry by a diverse range of authors.

An ideal context for inclusiveness emerges as students are invited to discuss their knowledge of *Love That Dog* and connected famous poems. Foster inclusive action by creating space for students to express their feelings about sensitive issues embedded in the poetry, recognizing that these discussions may help create inequity, unearth trauma, or both. Be aware that the topic of dogs and pets may be sensitive for some students. It is important to acknowledge students' and families' feelings and experiences with dogs and pets and to know that these feelings and experiences may differ greatly, from positive to neutral to negative. Also, these feelings and experiences may be personal, and students are not required to share them. If concerns arise, discuss them with families, and arrange for alternative instruction if necessary. Consult with a guidance counselor, school social worker, or ESL teacher for further investigation of diversity and inclusion.

EL Education recommends that school leaders and teachers read the texts in advance, with their specific school community in mind, to become familiar with the issues presented so that they can discuss them with students and families as needed.

Examples of sensitive topics that teachers should be prepared to address are detailed below.

1. Loss and Death

Love That Dog is told from the perspective of Jack, a boy who has lost his pet dog, Sky, because of a tragic accident and who learns to use poetry to express his emotions. Jack's entry dated May 14 begins to detail his remembrance of how his dog died. Be aware that pages 68–72 may evoke emotional discomfort for students who have experienced loss of a pet or loved one. Establish and maintain emotional and social safety with the use of community building routines and practices.

2. Gender Bias

Love That Dog begins with Jack expressing his thoughts about poetry, including his thinking that "boys don't write poetry. Girls do." Engage students in an open dialogue whenever possible to combat gender and identity stereotypes, assumptions, or misrepresentations depicted in the text. Encourage productive and equitable conversation with Conversation Cues, which are questions teachers can ask students to help achieve four goals: (Goal 1) encourage all students to talk and be understood, (Goal 2) listen carefully to one another and seek to understand, (Goal 3) deepen thinking, and (Goal 4) think with others to expand the conversation. This will also serve to focus students on working to become ethical people by showing respect, empathy, and compassion if classmates are upset by perspectives in the text. Consult with a guidance counselor, school social worker, or ESL teacher for further investigation of diversity and inclusion.

Tasks

Throughout the module, there are tasks that intentionally or incidentally serve to mitigate possible concerns and support students' enthusiastic, informed, and safe reading.

Unit 2

Lesson 2: In this lesson, students learn that Jack is asked to write a poem about a pet. In the story, Jack is upset because he doesn't have a pet to write about, and he doesn't want to write about the pet he used to have. As discussed earlier, be sensitive to students' feelings and experiences with dogs and pets, and know that these feelings and experiences may differ greatly, from positive to neutral to negative. These feelings and experiences may be personal, and students are not required to share them. Invite students to journal about their emotions, and encourage the use of Conversation Cues to promote respectful, equitable, and productive conversations between students. Monitor reactions during the discussion of powerful emotions, and support students as needed.

Including Families

Families of students working through this module are invited to discuss any concerns they have about the texts with their children and the teacher. Teaching notes throughout the module recommend that teachers speak to families of students who may be particularly affected by the topics encountered. Notes in the homework materials distributed to families recommend that they reach out to teachers with questions or concerns about the texts. These materials also encourage families to talk with their children about the texts they are reading, particularly if any of the topics raised might be sensitive to a particular student.