



Remembering the Victims of 9/11 on 9/11 Through Poetry, Drama and Stories

Jennifer Suri, Stuyvesant High School, New York City, NY

Grade level: 8 - 12

Number of class periods: 1 - 2

Objective

To help students of today understand the immediate impact of 9/11 on former students and individuals in the United States

- Students will conduct oral histories.
- Students will understand the sequence of events that occurred on September 11, 2001.
- Students will learn of and reflect on accounts of survivors.
- Students will read and discuss poetry related to memorializing the deceased.
- Students will learn about ways the victims' lives have been memorialized and how communities have rebuilt.

Common Core Standards

Comprehensive Common Core Alignments at end of lesson plan.

- Reading Standards for Literature 1, 2, 5, 9, 11
- Reading Standards for Informational Text 3, 7

Resources

- ["Conducting and Oral History, Teacher Guide and Student Questions," 9/11 Tribute Center](#)
- [Map of Lower Manhattan](#)
- [9/11 interactive timeline \(view on projector\)](#)
- [With Their Eyes: September 11th, the View from a High School at Ground Zero, ed. Annie Thoms \(selections\)](#)
- ["The Names," Billy Collins](#)
- ["Facing it," Yusef Komunyakaa](#)
- [Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln](#)
- [September 11th : Personal Stories of Transformation \(Ada Doulich\)](#)

Preparation

(Time needed: approximately 20 minutes of class time)

- Distribute to students the 9/11 Tribute Center's "Oral History Activity for Students".
- Review the "Preparation for Conducting an Oral History" from the 9/11 Tribute Center with the class.
- Review with students the 9/11 Tribute Center's "Suggestions for Students Conducting an Oral History."
- Ask students to interview a parent/guardian, first responder, teacher or other adult who can recall the events of 9-11-2001.
- Give students several days to complete this.



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Activity

Share in small groups your oral histories. Whom did you interview? What did you learn? Share out as a whole class

Time-line activity

- Distribute timeline of events on 9-11-2001 (included in this packet and available at the 9/11 Memorial.org website)
- Play selected recordings from timeline: 8:19am Betty Ong; 8:24am Mohammed Atta; 8:46am WCBS Radio; 9:03 am "We felt and heard a loud noise"; 9:37am "Do me a favor. For the rest of the day, work beneath your desk"

Free write in response to the Timeline recordings. Ask for reactions/sharing.

Dramatic Reading

Read selections from *With Their Eyes* aloud.

- Discussion/writing prompts for *Act One: Overture*
 1. How do the different characters react to first learning or noticing something had happened?
 2. Do you notice differences between the students' reactions and those of the adults?
 3. When the teacher Matthew Polazzo recounts his student saying, "Polazzo, they blew up the World Trade Center again!" what was this student referring to?
 4. What details of these recollections do you find surprising or unexpected?
- Discussion/writing prompts for *Piece of my home*
 1. Why does Ilya describe what he was wearing in such detail? Why is this important for him?
 2. How does Ilya describe the routines of a regular school day and how those events are intermingled with the extraordinary events unfolding before him on that morning?
 3. What do you think of Ilya's father's reactions?

Memorializing through Poetry

Introduce and listen to Billy Collins' poem "The Names"

- Discussion prompts for analyzing the poem
 1. Start by first having the students either listen/watch Collins read his poem from the PBS website, or have them read it silently. (Poet Billy Collins Reflects on 9/11 Victims in 'The Names.'" PBS. n.d. Web. 24 Mar. 2014) Then have each student read one line of the poem and explain that the first student will continue after the last student reads if the class is small
 2. Ask, "How do we memorialize our departed loved ones?" this is best to start with small group sharing, then ask for volunteers to share.
 3. What about fallen soldiers? Ask if any have seen the Washington DC Vietnam Memorial.
 4. Ask students to respond to an image in the poem that strikes them or that they find moving/interesting. Share aloud.
 5. How does Collins use both urban and bucolic imagery in this poem? Why do you think he does this?
 6. How does Collins juxtapose the childlike innocence and the horrific in this poem?
 7. Collins' imagery goes back and forth between the grand ("pale sky" or "over the earth and out to sea") to the minute ("yellow petal" or "tip of the tongue"). Why do you think he does this?
 8. Compare 'The Names' to other elegies. I recommend Yusef Komunyakaa's "Facing it" or the; Gettysburg Address'. For each ask, 'How is it similar? Different?'
 9. Ask "What is the effect of listing names? Why do you think this is so moving?"



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Concluding Activity

View Principal Ada Dolch's testimony from the 9/11 Tribute Center's *September 11th: Personal Stories of Transformation*. Discussion questions and background information, including a map are available as part of the Ada Dolch Unit on the 9/11 Tribute Center website. I have included below a few additional discussion prompts that have worked well for me:

- What did Principal Dolch and her students do to help themselves recover from the traumatic events they faced on 9-11?
- Principal Dolch asks in the film, "How do you put a positive spin on something so ugly?" How does she answer this? How would you answer this?

Assessment/Reflection

Write out responses to the question of how Ada Dolch puts a positive spin on something so ugly. End the lesson on a note of ways we can build hope for the future.

Common Core Alignments

The Following Common Core Alignments are written for the 9th-10th grade complexity level. However, for teachers wishing to adapt this lesson for either middle school or upper level high school, this lesson aligns with the following standards and the activities can be tweaked as appropriate for grade and ability level.

Reading Standards for Literature

Key Ideas and Details

Standard 1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

- Students will be using several different texts and citing evidence from the various texts to answer teacher's questions and develop a substantive and deeper understanding of the literal meaning and underlying themes within each text.

Standard 2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

- Students will be determining themes both within each text they study and central themes that pertain to all the texts.

Craft and Structure

Standard 5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

- Students will be responding to teacher's questions in order to analyze how certain details and choices made within the text influence the effect on the reader.