

Lesson Plan: Phillis Wheatley Peters
By Willeena Booker
Target Grades: 3 – 12

Standards

Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

- L.3.3.a Choose words and phrases for effect. Sort sensory details.
- L.3.3.b Recognize and observe differences between the conventions of spoken and written standard English.

Vocabulary: honor, tribute, homage

Learning Intentions: Today I am learning to use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

Success Criteria

I will know I learned this when I can use words carefully to form an informative piece, a haiku poem, or narrative or free verse poem. I will know I learned this when I can explain the differences in written and spoken words that are chosen for effect. I will be successful when I can do the following:

- a) Introduce a topic and group related information,
- b) Use facts, definitions, and details to develop a point,
- c) Use linking words to connect ideas,
- d) Provide a concluding statement or section

Gradual Release of Responsibility Model

I Do: Teacher shares background information from the Resources Listed here:
<https://www.masshist.org/features/endofslavery/wheatley>

Background Summary: Phillis Wheatley was captured and brought to America at about age 7. She was sold into slavery and bought by the Wheatley Family. Phillis was educated by the prominent family that owned her; as an enslaved person, she was not given the same freedoms as others in this elite family. Phillis endured the cruelty of enslavement while living under laws that did not permit Black people to be free. The Wheatley family's daughter Mary, taught Phillis English and Greek and Latin and Theology, and about the Christian Faith. In her time of solace, Phillis wrote poems. The poems spoke out against slavery but in very discreet and subtle ways since it was customary for women to speak on such matters and even less tolerance for the tabu subject of freedom for a Black woman.

Share: These Acrostic Poems by Willeena Booker

Passionate voice of a poet
Hallowed by enslavement
Indescribable talent

Lifting hearts through the ages
Lighting the path of faith
Indispensable poet of our time
Soul stirring stanzas.

Pride of Africa
Heart of faith
Interdependent on faith and creed
Lifting the charge to hypocrites
Loving Mother, wife, and friend
Illuminating the world in verse
Soul feathered free from her pen.

We Do: Teacher and Students Work Together to create an acrostic poem about Phillis.

You Do: Students are encouraged to write an informative piece, a free verse poem, a haiku, or acrostic poem that honors PWP OR another prominent Woman in history, or their own lives. Students may use other literacy sources to research prominent women in history: Possible Resources <https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/discover/history/general-history/international-womens-day/>

Close The Activity: Have students share their writing. Students respond to the poems or writing that is shared. Students can identify theme, tone, mood, and or message of the work that is shared. Teachers can highlight new information students have found in their research.

Creative Writing Option:

Other Poems To share:

No doubt by Willeena Booker

The doubters the naysayers,
All their chatter brings dismay.
Talking about the witty words written
in my book could
not possibly come from a slave.

The most respectable
men in Boston attested
to the fact that my words were
in fact, my own.

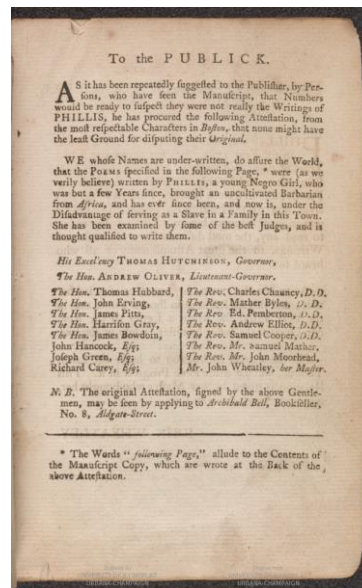
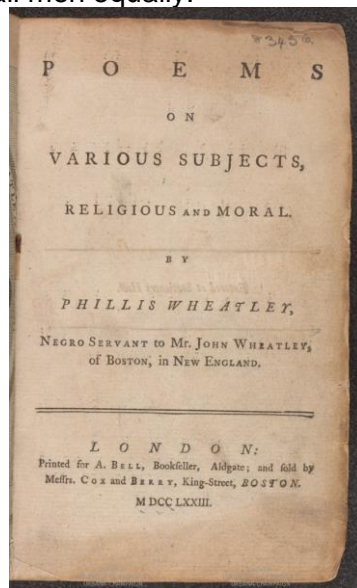
Sixteen men to be exact,
listed their names along the
fore pages of my text
between the peace of heaven and earth
Let the majuscules placed center page,
Now speak my name

Let the written words of my heart do the same,
 P H I L L I S W H E A T L E Y
 Let the angels sing of my born day.
 Birthed a slave, brought over waves
 Oh, Africa sweet land to thee
 I was stolen away my liberty

Snatched away from my Mother's side
 crushed the Apple of my Father's eye
 a captive aboard the ship at sea
 believed a Barbarian is what
 they proclaimed me to be

PHILLIS became the name suited for me
 Let my words now speak to eternity
 Let my words speak eloquently
 Let my words speak of witness and wonder
 Let my muliebrity silently
 attest that I AM
 PHILISS WHEATLEY
 Let my marriage speak of wife I came to be
 PHILISS WHEATLEY PETERS

The woman known today as a
 trailblazer who led the way
 The woman who dared to write of the atrocity
 of slavery so discreetly, so figuratively
 Speaking back to men of hypocrisy
 Declaring from the pen and page,
 Freedom belongs to all men equally.



Title page courtesy of Haithi Trust; testimonials page courtesy of Internet Archive.
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiuc.5618715&seq=9>
<https://archive.org/details/poemsonvariousu00whea/page/n14/mode/1up>



Image courtesy Haithi Trust

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiuc.5618715&seq=8>

Haiku Poetry in Tribute

Gifted poet sings
A hope song sung of freedom
Written word resounds

Pen the page with hope
Speaking of freedom for all
Write by candlelight

Seven years old sold
by the captain of Fitch's
Merchant ship Phillis

Excruciating
Sorrows burden heavy hearts
Parent's pride crushed

Negra girl slave sold
From the docked schooner Phillis
Cheap bargain for cash

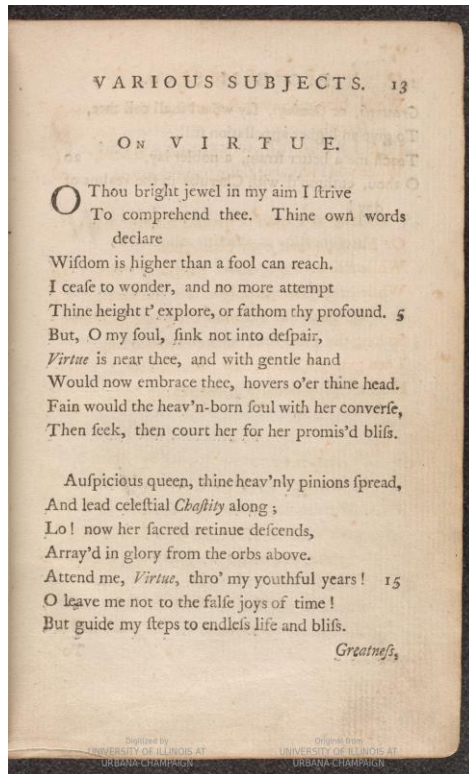


Image courtesy Haithi Trust: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiuc.5618715&seq=21>

Found Poem (Taken from "On Virtue" by PWP)

O gentle soul sink not into despair
Virtue is near thee and bliss is profound
Both are higher than a fool can comprehend,
O leave me not to endless despair
Lo celestial chastity
Descend over false joys of time
Guide my steps to heavenly glory
My heav'n born soul seeks a blissful life
To reach for wisdom array'd in sacred promised bliss
From the orbs above in my youthful years
through the embrace of my lifetime

Poem

My benighted soul sorrows silently
Tears fall for those
Who are slain by the sword of hate
Whose lives are cut down like cane stalks in a barren field.
Families left embracing the air
Praying to a Savior to save them from this
Recurring nightmare

Discussion: Ask students what disappointments, hurts, or upsets they can speak back to in a poem, OR what things in the world would they like to see changed.