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## **ACTIVITY - Reimagine Democracy Poetry, metaphor, and civic responsibility**

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## ACTIVITY

# Reimagine Democracy

## Poetry, metaphor, and civic responsibility

What is the importance of poetry and other forms of art in a democracy? How can poetry help us understand ourselves and each other and imagine new possibilities for democracy?

This activity starts with a panel discussion between the American poets Jane Hirschfield, Juan Felipe Herrera, and Naomi Shihab Nye, talking about the civic responsibility of poets/poetry. It is a thought-provoking discussion for poets and nonpoets alike about the importance of listening, creativity, responding, and witnessing as artists to build our understanding of one another and our shared humanity. Students then consider poems related to democracy, and do some writing to explore their own metaphors for democracy. It works well as a beginning or ending of a term or unit, as a way to prime the pump for new ideas, or reflect on ideas already covered. Note: step 2 can be done as a homework assignment ahead of class time if students don't have access to internet devices in class.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Analyze texts
- Synthesize ideas
- Practice metaphorical/figurative thinking

### MATERIALS

- Paper and writing utensils, magic markers
- Cell phones or other internet-connected device for searching poems
- Tape for hanging up papers

### KEYWORDS

activity, in-class, discussion, civic learning, general education, interdisciplinary, introductory course, creative writing

## Steps

1. As a class watch and discuss the video<sup>1</sup> (clips: #1: 0–11:57, #2: 21:20–24:38, #3: 28:20–end).
2. Have each student choose a poem from the list of [Poems About Democracy on Poets.org](#).
3. Ask students to get into small groups and have each person read their chosen poem out loud, and explain why they chose it.
4. As a large group, discuss any of the themes that arose from their poems/small group discussions that resonate with what the class has learned/done this term (or expects to learn, if this is an early-term activity).
5. Either as an individual freewrite, or as a small group brainstorm, have students create a list of metaphors for democracy, freedom, civic responsibility, or other concept or text from your course. Have them choose one of the metaphors, and write for a couple of minutes to expand and elaborate on it. Encourage them to include drawing or other graphic elements on their paper.

*Example: Democracy is a garden. It grew from seeds borrowed from other nations. It needs pollination of different perspectives to make flowers of new ideas...*

6. Have students post their metaphors on the walls of the room. Students then do a “gallery walk” around the room to read and respond. Alternatively, they can share their work in large or small groups.

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1 Academy of American Poets. 2015. “Civic Responsibility of the Poet in America Today.” Poets.org. Retrieved April 13, 2024, 2024. <https://poets.org/text/video-civic-responsibility-poet-america-today>.