

This week, we will learn *and write* different forms of poetry! We will also sink our teeth into beefs between rappers. Finally, we will tell our own stories by writing the last paragraphs of our biographies.

Sonnet 18

Translate William Shakespeare's poem "Sonnet 18."

<p>Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate: Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, And summer's lease hath all too short a date; Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines, And often is his gold complexion dimm'd; And every fair from fair sometime declines, By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd; But thy eternal summer shall not fade, Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st; Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade, When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st: So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.</p>	
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Four Forms

In your notebooks or on a separate sheet of paper, complete the following activities:

1. A Rose Grew from Concrete: Create a concrete poem.
2. Footloose: Write a free verse poem.
3. Four Seasons: Write four haikus, one on each of the four seasons.
4. Sonnet 155: Write a Shakespearean sonnet.

Once you have completed writing your poems, exchange them a peer and evaluate each others' using the rubric below:

Free Verse	Concrete	Haikus	Sonnet
<i>Strengths</i>			
<i>Suggestions</i>			

All Rhymes Are (Not) Created Equal

Read the article “Is Rap Poetry?” by Micah Mattix.

“Is Rap Poetry?” by Micah Mattix

The short answer is “no,” of course. To state the obvious, things can share certain attributes and not be the same sort of thing, and asking whether rap is poetry has always struck me as a useless question. Both rap and poetry use literary devices like assonance and alliteration. Both use words. Both are spoken. But rap is a musical-verbal art and poetry is a verbal-musical-typographical one. So why make the comparison?

Well, as David Caplan points out in his intriguing *Rhyme’s Challenge: Hip Hop, Poetry, and Contemporary Rhyming Culture* (Oxford, 2014), it can be a way of both elevating (or highlighting, depending on your view) rap’s artistry and defending poetry against its apparent decline.

John McWhorter provides an example of this over at *The Daily Beast*. In “Americans Have Never Loved Poetry More—But They Call It Rap,” McWhorter argues that rap is poetry because:

It rhymes, often even internally. Its authors work hard on the lyrics. The subject matter is certainly artistically heightened, occasioning long-standing debates over whether the depictions of violence and misogyny in some of it are sincere. And then, that “gangsta” style is just one, and less dominant than it once was. Rap, considered as a literature rather than its top-selling hits, addresses a wide-range of topics, even including science fiction. Rap is now decades old, having evolved over time and being increasingly curated by experts. In what sense is this not a “real” anything?

The only reason it is not considered “real” poetry, McWhorter argues, channeling his inner Derrida, is that Western culture has long valued written language over speech:

The only reason rap may seem to nevertheless not be “real” poetry is a skewed take on language typical of modern, literate societies: that spoken language is merely a sloppy version of written language. “English,” under this analysis, is what’s on a page, with punctuation and fonts

and whoms and such. Speech is “just talking.”

Also, rap is often profane and can seem less serious.

David Caplan’s study focuses on detailing the literary elements of hip hop and rap, which is different from claiming that rap is poetry. I don’t want to review the book here, but Caplan does make a similar point to McWhorter in his introduction. Too often, Caplan writes, “critics treat the term ‘poetry’ as if it retains a stable definition across cultures, times periods, and genres. The history of poetics, however, records much more contestation than consensus.” Caplan goes on to cite Wordsworth’s remark that poetry is the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” and discusses poets who have taken issue with this statement as proof that poetry’s definition is unstable.

But while what counts as poetry changes over time and differs across cultures, Caplan is too quick to suggest that poetry has no stable generic characteristics. One important one—and one that distinguishes it from both hip-hop and rap—is that the musicality and typography of poetry reside *in the words themselves alone*. In both formal and free verse, the musicality of a poem, whether it is created by end-rhymes, assonance, alliteration, repetition or other forms of internal rhyming, does not exist external to the poem.

In hop-hop and rap, while some musicians are more talented than others, and while rap lyrics do possess musicality (repetition, assonance, alliteration), that musicality is *incomplete* without the beat and notes of the sampled music. Caplan provides a number of examples of rap lyrics, and some are rather good, but even the best don’t stand on their own as pieces of *great* artistry for the simple reason that they were not written to do so. They were crafted to go with external rhythm and notes. So, it seems to me, the only sense in which rap is poetry is as incomplete poetry, which doesn’t do either rap or poetry any favors.

That said, it is interesting that poetry’s decline has taken place in a culture that is “rhyme-drenched,” as Caplan rightly notes. I am not a connoisseur of rap (I listen to little beyond standard white guy favorites—Rage against the Machine, Beastie Boys, Run DMC), but I have a number of friends who have a high view of rap’s artistry. Caplan, for one, makes a strong case that there is more to hip-hop in terms of artistry than is often granted, even if I think he oversells it. There is no such thing as high or low culture. There is *interesting* culture and *boring* culture. There are works of art that show great skill and those that don’t.

So by all means, defend hip-hop or rap or poetry, but let’s avoid defending them by association. Let the songs or poems speak for themselves.

5. In your notebooks or on a separate sheet of paper, write what the arguments are for and against rap being regarded as poetry. It may be helpful to create a chart similar to the below.

For	Against

J Cole vs. Kendrick Lamar

Listen to the clean version of “Neighbors” by J. Cole (youtube.com/watch?v=jPe80mktTbQ) and “Alright” by Kendrick Lamar (youtube.com/watch?v=GGWA5yuXVrU).

<p>“Neighbors” by J. Cole</p> <p>I guess the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope, sellin' dope Yeah the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope, sellin' dope Sellin' dope, sellin' dope, sellin' dope</p> <p>I don't want no picture with the president I just wanna talk to the man Speak for the boys in the bando And my — never walkin' again Apologized if I'm harpin' again I know these things happen often But I'm back on the scene I was lost in a dream as I write this A teen down in Austin I been buildin' me a house back home in the south Ma Won't believe what it's costin' And it's fit for a king, right?</p>	<p>“Alright” by Kendrick Lamar</p> <p>Alls my life I has to fight, hittas Alls my life I... Hard times like, "Yeah!" Bad trips like, "Yeah!" Nazareth, I'm on one Homie you on one But if God got us Then we gon' be alright</p> <p>We gon' be alright We gon' be alright We gon' be alright Do you hear me, do you feel me? We gon' be alright We gon' be alright Huh? We gon' be alright We gon' be alright</p>
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Or a — that could sing
 And explain all the pain that it cost him
 My sixteen should've came with a coffin
 — the fame and the fortune, well, maybe not the fortune
 But one thing is for sure though, the fame is exhaustin'
 That's why I moved away, I needed privacy
 Surrounded by the trees and Ivy League
 Students that's recruited highly
 Thinkin' you do you and I do me
 Crib has got a big 'ol backyard
 My — stand outside and pass cigars
 Filled with marijuana, laughin' hard
 Thankful that they friend's a platinum star
 In the driveway there's no rapper cars
 Just some — to get from back and forth
 Just some — to get from back and forth
 Welcome to the shelter, this is pure
 We'll help you if you've felt too insecure
 To be the star you always knew you were
 Wait, I think police is at the door
 Okay, the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope
 Hm, I guess the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope sellin' dope
 The neighbors think I'm, neighbors think I'm
 I think the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope (Don't follow me, don't follow me)
 I guess the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope, sellin' dope
 Sellin' dope, sellin' dope, sellin' dope
 Well — , I am
 Some things you can't escape
 Death, taxes, NRA
 It's this society that make
 Every — feel like a candidate
 For a Trayvon kinda fate
 Even when your crib sit on a lake
 Even when your plaques hang on a wall
 Even when the president jam your tape
 Took a little break just to annotate
 How I feel, damn it's late
 I can't sleep 'cause I'm paranoid
 Black in a white man territory

Do you hear me, do you feel me? We gon' be alright
 Uh, and when I wake up
 I recognize you're lookin' at me for the pay cut
 But homicide be lookin' at you from the face down
 What Mac-I I even boom with the bass down
 Schemin', and let me tell you 'bout my life
 Painkillers only put me in the twilight
 Where pretty uh, uh is the highlight
 Now tell my momma I love her but this what I like, Lord knows
 20 of 'em in my Chevy, tell 'em all to come and get me
 Everything I sow, so my karma come
 And heaven no preliminary hearing, so my record
 Tell the world I know it's too late
 Boys and girls, I think I gone cray
 Drown inside my vices all day
 Won't you please believe when I say?

Wouldn't you know
 We been hurt, been down before
 Hitta, when our pride was low
 Lookin' at the world like, "Where do we go?"
 Hitta, and we hate po-po
 Wanna kill us dead in the street fo' sho'
 Hitta, I'm at the preacher's door
 My knees gettin' weak, and my gun might blow
 But we gon' be alright

We gon' be alright
 We gon' be alright
 We gon' be alright
 Do you hear me, do you feel me? We gon' be alright
 We gon' be alright
 Huh? We gon' be alright
 We gon' be alright
 Do you hear me, do you feel me? We gon' be alright

What you want, you a house, you a car?
 A piano, a guitar?
 Anything, see my name is Lucy, I'm your dog
 Look, you can live at the mall
 I can see the evil, I can tell it, I know it's illegal

Cops bust in with the army guns
 No evidence of the harm we done
 Just a couple neighbors that assume we slang
 Only time they see us we be on the news in chains, damn
 Don't follow me, don't follow me
 Don't follow me, don't follow me

Okay, the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope
 I guess the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope sellin' dope
 The neighbors think I'm, neighbors think I'm
 I think the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope (Don't follow me, don't follow me)
 I guess the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope, sellin' dope
 Sellin' dope, sellin' dope, sellin' dope
 Well — , I am

I am, I am, I am, I am
 Well — I am
 I think the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope
 I am, I am, I am
 Well — I am
 So much for integration
 Don't know what I was thinkin'
 I'm movin' back to Southside
 So much for integration
 Don't know what I was thinkin'
 I'm movin' back to Southside

I don't think about it, I deposit every little zero
 Thinkin' of my partner, put the candy, paint it on the Regal
 Diggin' in my pocket, ain't a profit big enough to feed you
 Everyday my logic, get another dollar just to keep you
 In the presence of your chico... ah!
 I don't talk about it, be about it, everyday I sequel
 If I got it then you know you got it, heaven, I can reach you
 Pet dog, pet dog, pet dog, my dog, that's all
 Pick back and chat, I trap the back for y'all
 I rap, I black on track so rest assured
 I right my wrongs; I write 'til I'm right with God

Get back
 Look I started from the bottom, at the very bottom
 Mixin' Hen with similac my momma knew I had a problem
 I was jibbing for a bottom, putting quarter pieces in the black caprice and make it holla (Alright)
 No releasing me, I got the piece in me, I gotta
 Keep the decency and make them TNT my product
 I'm a C-O-M-P-T-O-innovator, energizer
 Inner-city bullet fly 'til that thing on auto pilot (Alright)
 I don't really care about the care abouts
 All I care about is wearing out your upper body
 When I catch ya, when I catch ya, walking out your parents house (Alright)
 Fourteen years old sound so raw making plays home boy
 Big K's and my big dogs
 Never, ever, went straight home, boy
 (Alright)

“Fun” facts: Kendrick Lamar’s “Alright” became the unofficial anthem of the Black Lives Matter Movement (bit.ly/2MUNfGL) “Alright” was nominated for Song of the Year at the 58th Grammy Award. Although Kendrick Lamar was not awarded Song of the Year for “Alright,” he would go on to win the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Music for his album “DAMN” (bit.ly/36gIBt2). “DAMN” was the first non-classical and non-jazz album to win the Pulitzer Prize for Music.

Based on these two tracks, which rapper do you prefer? Write comments on each rapper's vocals, lyrics, and music.

	Vocals	Lyrics	Music
J. Cole			
Kendrick Lamar			

6. In your notebooks or on a separate sheet of paper, write an entry on who you prefer as a rapper, J.Cole or Kendrick Lamar.

Rough Draft of Assignment 2—Last Paragraphs of My Autobiography

For homework, we will be writing the last 2 paragraphs of our biographies. Begin writing a rough draft on a separate sheet of paper. Attach your rough draft to your homework for potential bonus marks!