

Giving Poems a Voice Exercise

Note: All of the poems were written by Black queer writers and were published in the 1920s and early 1930s.

Before beginning, take 10 minutes to read through the poems. Choose one poem that you want to spend time with.

Round 1: Each person in the group reads the poem they chose out loud. Read poems in clockwise or counter clockwise order.

Round 2: Read the poem out loud popcorn style. After reading the poem, say why you chose it.

Round 3: Read the poems out loud again popcorn style. What do you notice or wonder about the perspective/POV of the speaker in the poem?

Round 4: Call and response. Read the poem out loud popcorn style. Why did you choose to read your poem after hearing the poem read before yours? Do you find that the poems connect in some way? If so, how?

Round 5: Open discussion. What are some of the major topics and themes in these poems? What do these poems tell us about the historical period? What are some thoughts/questions that arose while reading and listening?

Poem Attributions

- "The Lynching" (1920) by Claude McKay
- "Backwater Blues" (1927) by Bessie Smith
- "Lush Life" (1933) by Billy Strayhorn
- "Prove It On Me" (1928) by Ma Rainey
- "Harlem Night Club" (1925) by Langston Hughes
- "Song for a Banjo Dance" (1925) by Langston Hughes
- "Blues Fantasy" (1925) by Langston Hughes
- "Dream Variation" (1925) by Langston Hughes
- "March Moon" (1925) by Langston Hughes
- "Joy" (1925) by Langston Hughes
- "Lenox Avenue: Midnight" (1925) by Claude McKay
- "The Harlem Dancer" (1922) by Claude McKay