

3. What is the significance of her use of a frog simile in this poem? (Think of the symbolism of frogs)

XLVII

(#47)

HEART, we will forget him!
You and I, to-night!
You may forget the warmth he gave,
I will forget the light.

When you have done, pray tell me, ⁵
That I my thoughts may dim;
Haste! lest while you're lagging,
I may remember him!

Discussion Questions:

1. What poetic writing tool is used in this poem? What kind of imagery does it create?
2. What kind of emotions are going through the writer's head in this poem? List a few.
3. What is the conflict in this poem? (Who/what does it involve?)

4. What similarities are there between poems #27 & #47? (Think about who Dickinson is speaking to or addressing?) What could we conclude about her personality?

XCIX

(#99)

There is no frigate like a book
To take us lands away,
Nor any coursers like a page
Of prancing poetry.

This traverse may the poorest take 5
Without oppress of toll;
How frugal is the chariot
That bears a human soul!

5. Judging from this poem and knowing a bit about her life, what does Dickinson use books (and learning) for?
6. What does Dickinson say about books (and learning) in the second stanza (particularly lines 5-6)? How does this idea still apply today?

Say What?! *Slant Rhymes Across the Years: Dickinson & Rap*

Slant rhyme (or off rhyme, half rhyme, near rhyme) differs from perfect rhyme because the vowels and consonants within words do not rhyme precisely. Assonance and consonance are often used to achieve a sound effect. Some examples include: heat, heart; Tim, skin; dry, died; love, fluff. Historically, slant rhyme was looked down upon for not being correct or proper, but through the admired work of poets such as W.B. Yeats and Emily Dickinson, the technique became more accepted.

Directions: Read each poem carefully below, annotating with any interesting comments or questions in the margins and *highlighting slant rhymes*. Answer discussion questions that follow.

Emily Dickinson



XI

(#11)

MUCH madness is divinest sense
To a discerning eye;
Much sense the starkest madness.
'T is the majority
In this, as all, prevails.
Assent, and you are sane;
Demur,—you 're straightway dangerous,

And handled with a chain.

1. Based on her lifestyle and personality, Emily Dickinson was dubbed a bit crazy by some critics. She speaks to the idea of “madness” in this poem. What does she seem to say about madness and sanity here? How could we relate this nonconformist identity back to Henry David Thoreau?
2. What does the image in the last line of this poem suggest?
3. Why do you think the majority might view dissenters as troublemakers?
4. Where is the slant rhyme in this poem? Please circle/highlight examples.
5. How does Dickinson’s use of imperfect rhyme relate to the poem’s message? (In other words, why do you think she chose to use imperfect rhyme?)

XXIV

(#24)

THE DIFFERENCE between despair
And fear, is like the one
Between the instant of a wreck,
And when the wreck has been.

The mind is smooth,—no motion—⁵
Contented as the eye
Upon the forehead of a Bust,
That knows it cannot see.

Discussion Questions:

1. There is a clear difference in terms of the passing of time in the first stanza. In your own words, explain the difference between fear and despair as described in the first stanza. Hint: Think about the before and after aspects of an event.
2. Group Discussion Question: If you were faced with an impending disaster (be creative and think of one), consider these three ideas when pondering your situation. (And by consider I mean jot down informal responses).
 - How the events transpire from good to bad to worse
 - The actual moment things take a turn for the worse
 - Whether the worst could have been avoided

How would thinking about these things make the situation harder?

3. Do you agree with the statement that “fear is born out of despair”? Or vice versa?

Fast-Forward: 1800s → 1990s



You might be thinking “Ok, so slant rhyme is used in poetry. What’s so great about that?” Slant rhyme is found frequently in contemporary music too. Let’s take a look at Eric B & Rakim & Talib Kweli, three AWESOME rap artists and see what they do with it.

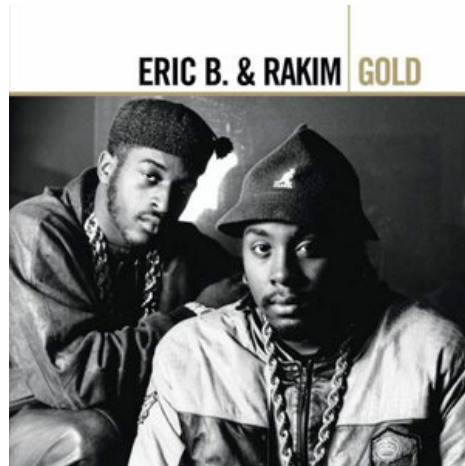
Note: If you would like, you may work with **one** other person for this section.

Pre-Listening Question:

1. How do you think the hip-hop world received slant rhyme? Do you think rappers today would be as unwilling to use slant rhyme as traditional poets were? Why or why not?

Directions: With a partner (or not, if you so choose), read through Eric B & Rakim’s song “I Know You Got Soul”. Highlight all examples of slant (imperfect) rhyme.

Eric B & Rakim “I Know You Got Soul”



It's been a long time, I shouldn't have left you
Without a strong rhyme to step to
Think of how many weak shows you slept through
Time's up, I'm sorry I kept you
Thinking of this, you keep repeating you miss
The rhymes from the microphone soloist
And you sit by the radio, hand on the dial, soon
As you hear it, pump up the volume
Dance wit the speaker 'till you hear it blow,
Then plug in the headphone 'cause here it go
It's a 4 letter word when it's heard, it control
your body to dance (You got it) soul,
Ditects the tempo like a red alert

Reaches your reflex, so let it work
When this is playing, you can't get stuck wit
The steps, so get set and I'm a still come up wit
A gift to be swift, follow the leader, the rhyme will go
Def wit the record that was mixed a long time ago
It can be done but only I can do it
For those that can dance and clap your hands to it
I start to think and then I sink
Into the paper like I was ink
When I'm writing, I'm trapped in between the lines,
I escape when I finish the rhyme...
I got soul

You got it (4x)
I know you got soul

Picture a mic, the stage is empty
A beat like this might tempt me
To pose, show my rings and my fat gold chain
Grab the mic like I'm on Soul Train
But I'll wait 'cause I mastered this
Let the others go first so the brothers don't miss
Eric B. break the sticks (you got it)
Rakim will begin when you make the mix
I'll experiment like a scientist
You wanna rhyme, you gotta sign my list
'Cause I'm a manifest and bless the mic I hold
You want it next? then you gotta have soul
'Cause if you ain't got it, I'm a make an encore
Take the mic, make the people respond for
The R, 'cause that's the way it'll have to be
If you wanna get on after me

Think about it, wait, erase your rhyme

Forget it and don't waste your time
'Cause I'll be in the crowd if you ain't controlling it
Drop the mic, you shouldn't be holding it
This is how it should be done
This style is identical to none
Some try to make it sound like this but you're getting me
So upset that I'm wet 'cause you're sweating me
I drip steam like a microphone fiend
Eager to MC is my theme
I get hype when I hear a drum roll
Rakim is on the mic and you know I got soul

You got it (5x)

I got soul (you got it) that's why I came
To teach those who can't say my name
First of all, I'm the soloist, the soul controller
Rakim gets stronger as I get older
Constant elevation causes expansion
I write my rhyme while I cool in my mansion
Then put it on tape and in the city I test it
Then on the radio the R's requested
You listen to it, the concept might break you
'Cause almost anyone can relate to...
Whoever's out of hand, I'm give him handles
Light 'em up, blow 'em out like candles
Or should I just let him melt?
Then give him a hand so they can see how it felt
I'm not bold just cuz I rock gold
Rakim is on the mic and you know I got soul

You got it (4x)

Now I'm a stop to see what you got
Get off the mic before I get too hot
I want to see which posse can dance the best
It should be easy 'cause the beat is fresh
Now if your from Uptown, Brooklyn- bound,
The Bronx, Queens, or Long Island Sound,
Even other states come right and exact,
It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at
Since you came here, you have to show and prove
And do that dance until it don't move
'Cause all you need is soul self-esteem will release,
The rest is up to you, Rakim 'll say peace.

1. What are the speakers saying in this poem? (In other words, what do you think the song's main message is?)
2. Explain the last 5 lines of the first stanza in your own words. Think of the theme and form of the poem. How can this apply to us and how we write?
3. What role does the soul play for the speakers and the art they produce?

4. How do the speakers address up-and-coming rap artists? Give specific examples of encouragement and criticism. Why do you think there is both positive and negative commentary toward others?

Talib Kweli “Memories Live”



[talking]

Yo yo, you know what we need to do, man, we need to get a whole CD. You know what I'm sayin'? Get a collection of all the music and everything we've ever done man.

[woman singing]

Bringing back sweet memories (3x)

Life, living in Flatbush and going to house parties
Red lights, bumping, life is what you make it, then sorry
In my lifetime, ain't too many things better
than watching your first son put his sentences together
Yo, it kinda make me think of way back when
I was the portrait of the artist as a young man
All them teenage dreams of rapping
Writing rhymes on napkins
Was really visualization
Making this here actually happen
It's like something comin through me

That truly just consume me
Speaking through the voices of the spirits speaking to me
I think back in the day, I absorbed everything like a sponge
Took a plunge into my past to share with my son

Bringing back sweet memories (3x)

Like thoughts out the back of your mind
Going back in some time
Like when you used to cut and had to go to the back of the line
Look back and you find
Tracks that make you relax and recline
Now cats rap about packing a nine
When they lacking divine
Inspiration
Running out of topics in conversation
While I drop it in the pocket cause rock is my occupation
I do it remarkably, spark up a leaf
And possibly
You could follow me
Tap into your chi
Utilize your spiritual faculty accurately
Use your memory to help you see clearly, then get back to me
Actually, nothing's new under the sun
So when life be stressing me
My remedy is 'bringing back sweet memories'
Like the faces that are woven in the fabric of my consciousness
From cities where making 21's a big accomplishment
Like when my people understood their prominence
And my past life visions of the continent
Like the first time I saw KRS live, rockin' it
Or heard Resurrection by Common Sense
Dominant in my psyche
I chose my direction like Spike Lee
To speak my life through mics, and I never take it lightly
It might be something you did to bring you down when you were high

Yo that karma's a bitch, you steady asking God why
Like when my parents first split up
Yo, I was illin'
Seems like some years they was together for the sake of the children
And I love them for that
I don't know if they saw that
So I'ma say it, and convey it when the world play it (3x)

Bringing back sweet memories (3x)

Like black is beautiful, names from the seventies
Let me tap into your energy
Fields of dreams become my property
When I reach my destiny like a prophecy
Especially when I 'm 'bringing back sweet memories'
I dive deep into my mind, see I got a treasury
That float through my head like a sweet melody
What you telling me?
Reflection is a collection of memories
Definitely, this is how hiphop is meant to be
Eventually, I knew I'd run into Hi-Teknology
It was only a matter of time like centuries
Check the recipe or technique to how it sound so sweet
I freak with word power, my man speak with beats
If I could make it in New York, I figured anywhere I'd make it
Came to Cincinnati linked with Mood, and we did Sacred
Hi-Tek beats became my favorite
Hussle on the Side was the cut
We started puttin songs together like 'What!'
Travelled the world, came back to the crib
And hit the motherland yet
This year we put in work and got some other plans
Bet, that's where I'll take the fam
when the Reflection joint is done
By the time you hear this, I'll be basking in African sun
Like Wow!

We made it
We here

1. What is this song by Talib Kweli about? What are the big ideas?
2. What does Kweli mean by “utilize your spiritual faculty accurately”? How can you do this in your own life?
3. What does Kweli refer to repeatedly as a source of inspiration for his writing? Do you find that this is the same for you?
4. Explain the line “nothing’s new under the sun”. Thinking in the context of this poem, what elements of life might be repeated over and over and seen everyday?
5. What does Kweli mean by “From cities where making 21’s a big accomplishment”? What does this say about the environment he grew up in? How is this different from the environment you are a part of?
6. What does Kweli say hip-hop is meant to be?

7. What power does Kweli have? (Give specific quote and line reference).

8. How does Kweli's power relate to this quote from your recent Transcendentalism test?
"A man's conviction (willpower) is stronger than a flame or bullet or a rock".

9. What is the tone at the end of this song? How are you left feeling? Explain.

Bonus: What is the literary reference in the first stanza? Identify and explain.

Tying It All Together...

Despite hundreds of years of separation, Emily Dickinson and the contemporary rap artists that we have examined use poetry for common reasons. Respond to the following.

1. How can stylistic choice to use slant rhyme while writing poetry be a reflection of the story told within a poem or reflect elements of a poet's life?

2. Sometimes people cringe when they hear perfect rhyme because they think it's cheesy. (Roses are red/violets are blue/I love puppies/and you do too). Apart from being extremely lame, that is an example of how adhering to a rhyme scheme can be limiting. Slant rhyme is appealing because it does what for writers? Speaking from experience (yes, you're a writer if you've written anything) how important is that element?

3. What is a common experience described in both the Rakim and Kweli songs? How can this apply to you as a high school student sitting in English class in Manassas, Virginia?

4. Think back to "The Learn'd Astronomer" by Walt Whitman and the debate within that poem about science vs. poetry and self-expression. What would happen to the ideas and messages within the Dickinson poems and rap songs if they were explained through charts? Would they be the same or have the same effect on us as readers?

5. Of the 5 Ws in life (why, where, when, who, how), which are answered through poetry?

Application



Slant rhyme gives a poet the opportunity to be creative without having to rhyme perfectly. There are quite a few words in the English language that have no exact rhyming partner. (Ex: orange, silver, purple, month, angst, sixth, wolf, napkin, monster, marathon). Imagine if you spent time trying to rhyme perfectly with one of these!

Your Task: Choose one of the following song excerpts and rewrite it using only perfect rhyme. Although you may change the words, you cannot change the meaning.

Excerpt A:

“I got so many rhymes I don’t think I’m too sane,
Life is parallel to Hell but I must maintain,
and be prosperous, though we live dangerous,

cops could just arrest me, blaming us, we're held like hostages.”

- Nas “NY State of Mind”

Rewrite with Perfect Rhyme:

Excerpt B:

“Yo it kind of made me think of way back when,
I was a portrait of the artist as a young man,
All those teenage dreams of rapping,
Writing rhymes on napkins,
Was really visualization, making this here actually happen.”

- Talib Kweli “Memories Live”

Rewrite with Perfect Rhyme:

Was this easy? Is the meaning still the same?