

Workshop Session 8

Critical Pedagogy: Abiodun Oyewole and Lawson Fusao Inada

Video Program Overview

Part I: Cathie Wright-Lewis and her students explore the spoken word tradition and the works of poet Abiodun Oyewole. Part II: Sandra Childs and her students study the history of Japanese American internment through the poetry of Lawson Fusao Inada. The students meet Inada and other members of the Japanese American community who were interned.

Theory Overview

Critical pedagogy teaches students to respond to texts not just as literary critics, but as politically aware members of a community. In order to create this kind of classroom, teachers must begin by encouraging students to read and think critically. Once students develop a means of creative political expression, they can begin to consider how they want their thoughts and words to affect others. As students work to guide their own studies, to critique the political ideologies at work in their communities, and to develop creative dialogues with others, they become active participants in the classroom and the larger world.

Workshop Session (On-Site)

Getting Ready—Part I (15 minutes)

Share your thoughts on the following questions about the poems “On the Subway” and “Jones Comin’ Down”:

- What are some of the political messages in the poems?
- Which words reveal the time period in which the poems were written?
- Who is “the man” in “On the Subway”? What’s happening?
- What is the poem really about?

Watch Part I: Abiodun Oyewole (approximately 30 minutes)

Going Further—Part I (15 minutes)

Discuss as many questions as time permits. You may want to answer more of the questions in your journals at home and share ideas on Channel-Talk.

In the broadest sense, spoken word is a contemporary term describing a range of poetry and performance. To really engage students in spoken word performance structures, teachers can explore the West African griot tradition, participate in language study and language play, read widely in the political arena and work on dramatic readings and analysis. —*Dale Allender, Associate Executive Director, NCTE*

- What are your reactions to Part I of the workshop session and the way in which the teacher used critical pedagogy in her classroom?
- What are some other ways you might engage your students in spoken word?
- How might you incorporate or adapt the strategies for use in your classroom?
- How might you provide opportunities for publishing students’ work?
- What are some next steps to this lesson?

Getting Ready—Part II (15 minutes)

There’s a remoteness to history, and to simply know the facts is not always satisfactory. There’s more to life than that. So you might say I’ve taken matters into my own hands ... taken the camp experience in my hands, stood in the sun, and held it up to the light. —*Lawson Fusao Inada*

- Discuss your reaction to Inada’s poetry and the way in which he has infused historical events and documents into his works.

Watch Part II: Lawson Fusao Inada (approximately 30 minutes)

Workshop Session (On-Site), cont'd.

Going Further—Part II (15 minutes)

Discuss as many questions as time permits. You may want to answer more of the questions in your journals at home and share ideas on Channel-Talk.

- What are your reactions to Part II of the workshop program and the way in which the teacher used critical pedagogy in her lesson?
- How might you create an environment that provides students with a cultural and historical context for the Japanese American Internment during World War II?
- How might you incorporate or adapt the strategies for use in your classroom when teaching about historical events or time periods?
- What are some possible next steps to this lesson?

Wrap Up (On Your Own)

Final Assignment

Go to the Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/hslit and:

- Review Workshop Session 8: read the theory overview, teaching strategies, information about the authors and literature, lesson plans, and resources.

Ongoing Activities

- In your journal, include thoughts, ideas, or questions you might have as you review the online materials and reflect on the workshop session. Make note of how your participation in the session influenced any experiences in your classroom.
- Online, click on Reflection/Interactive Forum, an activity that you can use to interpret poems using the pedagogical approaches covered in this workshop. Read one of the two poems featured and respond to the *critical pedagogy* questions. Share your answers on the discussion board.
- Share ideas on Channel-Talkhslit@learner.org.

Workshop Session 8 Readings

DRAWING THE LINE

For Yosh Kuromiya

I.

Yosh is drawing the line.
It's a good line, on paper,
and a good morning
for just such an endeavor—

and the line seems to find
its own way, flowing
across the white expanse

like a dark, new river . . .

II.

Yes, Yosh is drawing the line.
And you might say he's simply
following his own nature—

he's always had a good eye,
a fine sense of perspective,
and a sure hand, a gift

for making things ring true,
and come clearer into view.

III.

So the line makes its way,
on paper, charting a clear
course like a signature,

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starting from the left
and toward the bottom end,
logically and gradually
and gracefully ascending

to the center, where it takes
a sharp turn upward, straight
toward the top before it
finds itself leveling off
to the right again, descending

slightly for a while before
dropping straight down, coming
to a rest near the bottom,

bending, descending gradually
and gracefully as it began, but

at the other side of the space . . .

IV.

No sooner said than done.
Yosh relaxes for the moment,
blinks his eyes, realizing

his intensity of focus, almost
like prayer, a sunrise meditation.

V.

Ah, another beautiful morning!
Time to move on, see what the day
provides by way of promise . . .

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"Drawing the Line" by Lawson Fusao Inada is reprinted with permission from the publisher of *Drawing the Line* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1997)

Workshop Session 8 Readings, cont'd.

And as for the drawing, well,
the line is drawn, on paper—

other dimensions can come later . . .

VI.

Yosh, although a young man,
a teenager, is naturally
calm and confident by nature.

Thus, when he draws a line,
it tends to stay drawn.

He may make adjustments
but doesn't make mistakes.

That's just the way he is—
trusting his own judgement
as a person, as an artist.

As a result, he is a most
trusted friend, judging
from the many friends who
count on him, rely on him,
respect what he has to say . . .

That's just the way he is—
good-hearted, as they say:
"If you need a favor, ask
Yosh; he'll go out of his way . . ."

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VII.

Still, though, you've got to draw the line
somewhere—and as the saying goes,

so goes Yosh. And his friends know
certain things not to ask of him.

What "everybody does" just may not go
with Yosh, the set of beliefs, the sense
of integrity, values, he got from his folks.

VIII.

As for this drawing in his sketchbook,
you might well ask: "What is it?"

At this stage, it's just a line—
a line that goes sideways, up, over,
down, descending to the other margin.

Is it just a line? An abstract design?
Or might it stand for something?

At first glance, it looks to be a line
charting the progress of something
that goes along slowly, rising
a bit to indicate, oh, maybe a normal
growth rate or business-as-usual,

when all of a sudden it jumps, reflecting
a decisive turn of events which lasts
a while before resuming

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Workshop Session 8 Readings, cont'd.

what might be assumed to be a more
regular course of activity concluding

at what may represent the present
on the journey from the then to the now . . .

That's what graphs show, the flow
of activity, the rise and fall of events
often out of our hands, so it can become
gratifying to simply resume the bottom
line of normalcy again, starting over
at square one, back to the drawing board . . .

That is, it could have been worse.
The line could have been broken, snapped,
or bottomed out into nothing, going
nowhere fast like the slow and steady
line monitoring a silent patient . . .

Or, the line could have turned back
into itself into a dead-end maze,
a meaningless mass of angles and tangles . . .

Ah, but if you asked an observant child,
the answer might be: "Well, it just looks
like the bottom of my baby sister's mouth—
'cause when she smiles, she only has one tooth!"

And if you asked Yosh, he'd simply say,
in his modest way: "Oh, that's just Heart Mountain."

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IX.

Maybe you had to be there.
For if you were, you would not only
not have to ask, but you would
appreciate the profile, the likeness

of what looms large in your life
and mind, as large as life staring
you in the face day by day by day

and so on into night, where it is so
implanted in your sight and mind
that the ancient promontory assures
a prominence in your mildest dream
and even when the dust billows, or
cover it, blowing snow and sleet and

you can't avoid it, you can count on
Heart Mountain. Heart Mountain
is still there. And you're here.

X.

Ah, but it is, after all,
just a mountain—one of many,
actually, in this region,
in this range, and if anything
distinguishes it, it's just
its individual shape and name.

And the fact that it stands
rising up out of the plains
so close you can touch it,
you can almost but not quite

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Workshop Session 8 Readings, cont'd.

get there on a Sunday picnic,
your voices echoing in the ever-
green forest on its slopes . . .

As it stands, it is a remote
monument to, a testament to
something that stands to be
respected from a distance,

accessible only in dreams,
those airy, carefree moments
before the truth comes crashing
home to your home in the camp . . .

XI.

Yosh can take you there, though,
by drawing the line, on paper.

And Yosh, with his own given name,
is somewhat like the mountain—

an individual, certainly, but also
rather common to this region.
He's just so-and-so's kid,
or just another regular teenager
engaged in whatever it takes these days . . .

But this morning, it was different.
He was out there at the crack of dawn,
pacing around over by the fence,
blowing into his hands, rubbing
his hands, slapping, clapping
his hands together as if in preparation

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to undertake something special
instead of doing the nothing he did—

that is, he just got to his knees
and knelt there, facing the mountain.

Knelt there. Knelt there. Is he praying?
But now he's writing. But writing what?

Then, as sunlight struck the mountain,
and the ordinary idle elder
and the regular bored child
approached Yosh, they could tell
from the size of the wide sketchpad
that he was drawing—but drawing
what? Well, that's obvious—but what for?

XII.

Seeing the drawing was its own reward.
Boy, look at that! He's got it right!
You've got to admire him for that.

And, boy, if you really look at it—
in this sunrise light, under this
wide, blue sky—why, it really is
a beautiful sight, that majestic
hunk of rock they call Heart Mountain.

And to top it off, this talented guy
sure accentuates the positive, because
he *didn't* include the posts and wire.

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Workshop Session 8 Readings, cont'd.

XIII.

Yosh, smiling, greeting, is striding toward the barracks. There's a line at the mess hall, a line at the toilets.

Better check in with the folks. Mom's all right, but Dad's never adjusted. I may or may not show him the drawing.

It depends. He likes me to stay active, but this might be the wrong subject. It might rub him wrong, get him in a mountain-mood of reminiscing about California, the mountains of home.

And, heck, those were just hills by comparison, but they've taken on size in his eyes; still, when I fill in the shading, the forest, tonight, maybe he can appreciate it for just what it is:

Heart Mountain, in Wyoming, a drawing by his dutiful son here with the family doing its duties—kitchen duty, latrine duty . . .

I'll do my duties; and I've got my own duty, my right, to do what I can, to see this through . . .

XIV.

The sketchbook drops to the cot. Brrr, better go get some coal. It's the least I can do—not worth much else, me, without a real line

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of work. But this art might get me someplace—maybe even a career in here. Doing portraits of inmates.

But out there is *in here* too, related—it's a matter of perspective, like lines of lineage and history, like the line between me and the fencepost, between

me and the flagpole, between stars, stripes, the searchlight, and the guy on duty in the guardtower, maybe like me, from California, looking up at the airplane making a line of sound in the sky, searching for the right place in a time of peace . . .

Yes, if I had a big enough piece of paper, I'd draw the line tracing the way we came, smooth as tracks clear back to California,

and in the other direction, the line clean out to the city of Philadelphia and the Liberty Bell ringing testimony over Independence Hall and the framing of the Constitution. Yes, it's there, and I can see it, in the right frame of mind . . .

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Workshop Session 8 Readings, cont'd.

xv.

No, you have no right
to imprison my parents.

No, you have no right
to deny us our liberty.

Yes, I have my right
to stand for our justice.

Yes, I have my right
to stand for our freedom.

Eventually arrives
a few sentences
of presidential

pardon, period.
But history
doesn't rest,

as Yosh gives
testimony,
drawing the line,
on paper, again.

xvi.

And this is where Yosh
drew the line—

on paper, on the pages
of the Constitution.

xvii.

The rest is history.
Arrested, judged,
sentenced, imprisoned

for two years
for refusing
induction under

such conditions:
“as long as my
family is in here . . .”

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xviii.

This time, though, he's a free man
with a free mind and a very clear
conscience, having come full circle
to this clear spring at Heart Mountain.

And Heart Mountain, of course,
is still here, timeless and ever-
changing in the seasons, the light,
standing, withstanding the test of time.

And this time Yosh is free to roam
his home range like an antelope,
circling the mountain, seeing all sides
with new visions, wide perspectives:

from here, it comes to a narrow peak;
from here, it presents the profile
of a cherished parent, strong, serene;
from here, yes, it could be a tooth;
and from anywhere, forever, a heart.

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Workshop Session 8 Readings, cont'd.

Yes, that's about the truth of it—
once a heart, always a heart—

a monumental testament under the sky.

This time, though, Yosh is strolling
over a freshly plowed and fenceless field
with that very same sketchbook, searching
through the decades to find that rightful
place in relation to the mountain, wanting
to show his wife where the drawing happened,

where that quiet young man sank to his knees
in reverence for the mountain, in silent
celebration for that vision of beauty
that evoked such wonder, such a sunrise
of inspiration, wisdom, and compassion

that the line drew itself, making its way
with conviction in the direction it knew
to be right across the space, on paper,

and yes, yes, the heart, the eye, the mind
testify this is right, here, Yosh, hold
up the drawing, behold the mountain, trust
the judgement upholding truth through time
as the man, the mountain, the profile make
a perfect fit in this right place and time
for Yosh to kneel again, feel again, raise
his radiant eyes in peace to face the radiant
mountain, Heart Mountain, Heart Mountain—

and begin, again, with confidence, to draw the line!

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Workshop Session 8 Readings, cont'd.

Instructions to All Persons

Let us take
what we can
for the occasion:

Ancestry. (*Ancestry*)
All of that portion. (*Portion*)
With the boundary. (*Boundary*)
Beginning. (*Beginning*)
At the point. (*Point*)
Meets a line. (*Line*)
Following the middle. (*Middle*)
Thence southerly. (*Southerly*)
Following the said line. (*Following*) (*Said*)
Thence westerly. (*Westerly*)
Thence northerly. (*Northerly*)
To the point. (*Point*)
Of beginning. (*Beginning*) (*Ancestry*)

Let us bring
what we need
for the meeting:

Provisions. (*Provisions*)
Permission. (*Permission*)
Commanding. (*Commanding*)
Uniting. (*Uniting*)
Family. (*Family*)

Let us have
what we have
for the gathering:

Civil. (*Civil*)
Ways. (*Ways*)
Services. (*Services*)

Respect. (*Respect*)
Management. (*Management*)
Kinds. (*Kinds*)
Goods. (*Goods*)
For all. (*All*)

Let us take
what we can
for the occasion:

Responsible.

Individual.

Sufficient.

Personal.

Securely.

Civil.

Substantial.

Accepted.

Given.

Authorized.

Let there be
Order.

Let us be
Wise.

Workshop Session 8 Readings, cont'd.

Legends from Camp

PROLOGUE

It began as truth, as fact.
That is, at least the numbers, the statistics,
are there for verification:

10 camps, 7 states,
120,113 residents.

Still, figures can lie: people are born, die.
And as for the names of the places themselves,
these, too, were subject to change:

Denson or Jerome, Arkansas;
Gila or Canal, Arizona;
Tule Lake or Newell, California;
Amache or Granada, Colorado.

As was the War Relocation Authority
with its mention of “camps” or “centers” for:

Assembly,
Concentration,
Detention,
Evacuation,
Internment,
Relocation,—
among others.

“Among others”—that’s important also. Therefore, let’s not forget
contractors, carpenters, plumbers, electricians and architects, sewage
engineers, and all the untold thousands who provided the materials,
decisions, energy, and transportation to make the camps a success,
including, of course, the administrators, clerks, and families who not
only swelled the population but were there to make and keep things

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shipshape according to D.C. directives and people deploying coffee in
the various offices of the WRA, overlooking, overseeing rivers, city-
scapes, bays, whereas in actual camp the troops—excluding, of course,
our aunts and uncles and sisters and brothers and fathers and mothers
serving stateside, in the South Pacific, the European theater—pretty
much had things in order; finally, there were the grandparents, who
since the turn of the century, simply assumed they were living in
America “among others.”

The situation, obviously, was rather confusing.
It obviously confused simple people
who had simply assumed they were friends, neighbors,
colleagues, partners, patients, customers, students,
teachers, of, not so much “aliens” or “non-aliens,”
but likewise simple, unassuming people
who paid taxes as fellow citizens and populated
pews and desks and fields and places
of ordinary American society and commerce.

Rumors flew. Landed. What’s what? Who’s next?

And then, “just like that,” it happened.
And then, “just like that,” it was over.
Sun, moon, stars—they came, and went.

And then, and then, things happened,
and as they ended they kept happening,
and as they happened they ended
and began again, happening, happening,

until the event, the experience, the history,
slowly began to lose its memory,
gradually drifting into a kind of fiction—

a “true story based on fact,”
but nevertheless with “all the elements of fiction”—
and then, and then, sun, moon, stars,
we come, we come, to where we are:
Legend.

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Workshop Session 8 Readings, cont'd.

On the Subway

On the subway
I dug the man digging on me
But the dude was hung up
In a mass of confusion
As to who I was
He thought he was trying to see
But you see, but you see
Me knowing me
Black proud and determined to be free
Could plainly see my enemy yes
Yes, yes I know him
I once slaved for him body and soul
And made him a pile of black gold
Off the sweat of my labor he stole
But his game his game is old
We've broken the mental hold
Things must change
There's no limit to our range
He can never understand
The new black man
Less lone see us every day
Riding the subway
8th Avenue/7th Avenue/6th Avenue
IND/BMT/IRT
He still hasn't dug me
He stares endlessly
Blinking (blink blink)
Blink blink/Blink blink
Blink blink/Blink blink
He's on the brink/About to sink
I ask you
Shall I save him? Can he be saved?
No! No! No!

Next stop
125th Street!

"On the Subway" by Abiodun Oyewole and *The Last Poets*. From the album, "The Last Poets," available on Fuel 2000 Records. Copyright 1970 Douglas Music. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission.

Workshop Session 8 Reading List

Inada, Lawson Fusao. *Legends From Camp: Poems*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press; St. Paul, MN: Available through Consortium Book Sales & Distribution, 1992. ISBN 1566890047

_____. *Drawing the Line: Poems*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1997. ISBN 1566890608

Oyewole, Abiodun, et al. *The Last Poets*. NY: Douglas Recording Co. (available on Fuel 2000 Records), 1970. ISBN 030206122626