

Lesson Plan – Activist Poet Amanda Gorman: A Call for Captains

Chorus of the Captains

Today we honor our three captains
For their actions and impact in
A time of uncertainty and need.
They've taken the lead,
Exceeding all expectations and limitations
Uplifting their communities and neighbors
As leaders, healers, and educators.

James has felt the wounds of warfare,
But this warrior still shares
His home with at-risk kids.
During Covid, he's event lent a hand,
Live-streaming football for family and fans.

Trimaine is an educator who works nonstop,
Providing his community with hotspots,
Laptops, and tech workshops,
So his students have all the tools
They need to succeed in life and school.

Suzie is the ICU nurse manager at a Tampa Hospital.
Her chronicles prove that even in tragedy, hope is possible.
She lost her grandmothers to the pandemic,
And fights to save other lives in the ICU battle zone,
Defining the frontline heroes risking their lives for our own.

Let us walk with these warriors,
Charge on with these champions,
And carry forth the call of our captains!
We celebrate them by acting
With courage and compassion,
By doing what is right and just.
For while we honor them today,
It is they who every day honor us.

Over 33 million people watched Amanda Gorman recite her poem “[The Hill We Climb](#)” at President Joe Biden’s inauguration ceremony. Just over two weeks later, she shared “Chorus of the Captains” with an audience of over 96 million tuning in to Super Bowl LIV. At 22, Gorman has inspired so many with her advocacy for the power of poetry as well as for social justice and human rights.

- Warm-Up: Engage in a quickwrite for five minutes on the following questions: What are some of the causes you advocate for? How do your values shape your actions? What message do you wish you could share with the people around you?
- Visual Text: The use of the word “captain” goes back to the 14th and 15th centuries to describe first church leaders and then military leaders. Consider this 1820 portrait of Stephen Decatur, the youngest man to reach the rank of captain in the history of the United States Navy. He was also the first person who had not fought in the American Revolution to be recognized in the United States as a military hero. Visit with a partner or in a small group as you explore Decatur’s portrait. What do you notice about his attire? How would you describe his expression, and how does his appearance contribute to the tone of the painting? How do the details in the background establish mood?



- As a class, discuss why we use the term “captain” to describe leaders of sports teams. In what ways do sports replicate not just military campaigns but also challenges we face in everyday life. How do captains of teams guide and support their teammates, especially during challenging times?
- Next, listen to (and even watch) Amanda Gorman [reciting her poem “Chorus of the Captains”](#) while considering how Los Angeles educator Trimaine Davis, Florida nurse

manager Suzie Dorner, and Marine veteran James Martin function as captains in each of their respective fields and how their efforts have guided and supported others not just in the last year but also in a pre-pandemic world.

- After listening to the poem, read it again silently to yourself. Annotate words and phrases that jump out at you. What ideas does Gorman emphasize about each of the people she describes? How does her word choice characterize all of them as captains while highlighting their differences? Discuss your discoveries with a partner or in a small group.

Additional Close Reading Questions

1. In what ways does Gorman use alliteration and assonance to emphasize particular ideas?
2. How do first person plural pronouns affect the tone and mood of the poem?
3. Consider Gorman's use of the word "honor." Why is "honor" especially important given the subject of this poem? In relation to the poem and beyond it, why is "honor" particularly relevant at this time in our nation's history?
4. Interpret the poem's themes based on the first stanza. How does Gorman then develop these themes in stanzas 2-4 with specific details? How does the final stanza contribute to the meaning of the poem from a structural standpoint?

Extensions

- The day of Super Bowl LIV, Gorman sent the tweets below. Write a reflection on whether you believe "poetry at the Super Bowl is a feat for art & our country." Do you think it "means we're thinking imaginatively about human connection even when we feel siloed"? Explain.



Amanda Gorman  @TheAmandaGorman · Feb 7

I also can't reiterate how exciting it is for me that others are excited to see poetry at a football game. What a time to be alive



Amanda Gorman  @TheAmandaGorman · Feb 7

Poetry at the Super Bowl is a feat for art & our country, because it means we're thinking imaginatively about human connection even when we feel siloed. I'll honor 3 heroes who exemplify the best of this effort. Here's to them, to poetry, & to a #SuperBowl like no other 🧡

- Research connections between poetry and football from the past. What evidence is there that poetry as part of the Super Bowl isn't an entirely foreign concept? One place to start could be "[Poetry + Football: It's Not As Strange As It Sounds.](#)"
- Many poets have composed poetry about sports including Edward Hirsch's "[Fast Break](#)," Ernest Lawrence Thayer's "[Casey at the Bat](#)," Yusef Komunyakaa's "[Slam, Dunk, & Hook](#)," Marianne Moore's "[Baseball and Writing](#)," Denice Frohman's "[Lady Jordan](#)," and Jacqueline Woodson's "[football dreams](#)." Using one of these poems or another of your choosing, analyze how the poem conveys a complex understanding of humanity beyond the sport itself.
- Amanda Gorman said in her [2018 Ted Talk](#), "Poetry has never been the language of barriers; it's always been the language of bridges." Watch this NFL video performance of "[Reality vs. Perception](#)," an original poem by the Seattle Seahawks player Tyler Lockett. In the video, other NFL players join Lockett to advocate for shifting our perspectives in pursuit of social justice. How well does this video break down barriers and build bridges?