

Ideas for teaching about Amanda Gorman and “The Hill We Climb”

Introduce the poet and the poem.

- Ask students if they watched the inauguration ceremony on January 20th and saw poet Amanda Gorman reciting a poem she wrote for the event. If so, what were their impressions or feelings while watching?
- Read the *Scope* article “8 Things to Know About Amanda Gorman” as a class. Then discuss:
 - Why do you think some presidents invite poets to speak at their inaugurations? What might poetry add to an important event? *Poets might be invited to speak at inaugural ceremonies to offer words of inspiration for the incoming president and vice president, as well as for all Americans. A poem can express important messages, ideas, and emotions in unique ways. Inviting a poet also shows that we value poetry.*
 - Gorman says that reciting poetry and singing helped her with her speech impediment. How do you think these activities helped her? *Reciting poetry and singing allowed Gorman to practice pronouncing the sounds in words accurately and fluently and in turn, to build confidence.*
 - Gorman says she studied speeches of past leaders to learn how words can be “used for good.” What do you think she means by that? *Gorman likely meant that words can be a powerful influence and she wanted to use her voice to inspire others to make the world a better place.*
- Play the video of Gorman reciting “The Hill We Climb” at the inaugural ceremony. (There are several videos available, including [this one from ABC News](#). Note that there may be ads.)

Discuss the poem.

- Watch the video again and discuss:
 - Were there places in the poem where the sounds of words or lines struck you? What made them interesting, captivating or especially powerful?
 - Which parts of Gorman’s message seem most important to you? Why?
 - Which words or lines do you want to know more about?

Optionally, use some of the questions below for further discussion:

- What is the significance of the poem's title? What is "The Hill We Climb"? What might be at the top of the hill? *Students might offer that the hill stands for difficult times we face in our democracy. At the top of the hill might be better times—but we have to "climb," or make an effort, to get there. "The Hill" also refers to Capitol Hill, the seat of our country's government in Washington, D.C., an actual hill on which the Capitol Building sits.*
- What do you notice about how Gorman begins and ends her poem (beginning: 0:18-0:25; ending: 5:20-5:36)? *Gorman uses morning light as a symbol for goodness, wisdom, and hope—a new day for our country. In the poem's opening she questions where we will find this light. At its close, she asserts that dawn will come when we find the light—or goodness, wisdom, and hope—within ourselves.*
- Choose a line from the poem that really resonated with you and restate it in your own words.
- What does Gorman's poem celebrate? What difficult truths does it acknowledge? *Gorman acknowledges that our country is deeply divided over our differences, citing our history of slavery and the great loss, unrest, and violence we've experienced in recent months. She celebrates that during times of turmoil, we still learn, grow, and strive to make a more just and peaceful country for all. She also celebrates the fact that she, a descendant of enslaved people, is today able to recite her work for the president, have her work celebrated, and dream of becoming the president herself when she's older.*
- What is Gorman's call to action at the poem's close (5:20-5:36)? *Gorman calls on us to be courageous, to find the light in ourselves and our fellow Americans, and to begin a new day of unity for our country.*
- Why do you think Gorman chose to write this particular poem for the inauguration? What were her goals? Do you think she achieved them? Why or why not? *Answers will vary.*
- What can a poem say, make you think about, or make you feel that a speech in prose cannot? Why do you think this is so? *Answers will vary.*

Extension Ideas

- Have students read the other inaugural poems (or excerpts from each) and note common themes, similarities, and differences:
 - ["The Gift Outright" by Robert Frost](#) (1961, John F. Kennedy)
 - ["On the Pulse of Morning" by Maya Angelou](#) (1993, Bill Clinton)
 - ["Of History and Hope" by Miller Williams](#) (1997, Bill Clinton)

- [“Praise Song for the Day” by Elizabeth Alexander](#) (2009, Barack Obama)
- [“One Today” by Richard Blanco](#) (2013, Barack Obama)
- **Invite students to read other poems written by Amanda Gorman, such as [“On a Summer Day’s Pavement.”](#)**
- **Have students write their own poems. Here are three options:**
 - Think about what message you would like to share with President Joe Biden as he starts his term. What do you hope he will accomplish for our country? What do you think our country needs? Turn your message into a poem.
 - In a recent interview, Gorman said, “This is a long, long, faraway goal, but in 2036 I am running for office to be President of the United States. So, you can put that in your iCloud calendar.” Imagine you’ve been hired by the 2036 Inaugural Committee to write the poem for President Amanda Gorman’s inauguration. Write that poem.
 - Pick your favorite line from “The Hill We Climb.” Use it as the title, the first line, or the first line of every stanza in a poem of your own.