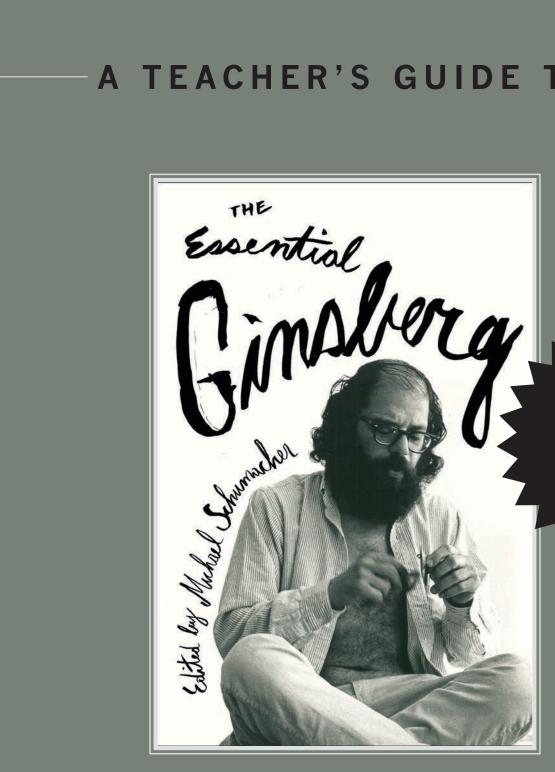
A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO



ALIGNED TO THE COMMON **CORE**

by Joan Lauri Poole

HARPER • PERENNIAL

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Introduction for Teachers

Allen Ginsberg is a distinct, idiosyncratic, and powerful figure in twentieth-century poetry. Like his hero Walt Whitman, Ginsberg exerted an immense influence on the poetry, mores, politics, spiritual practices, and culture of those who came of age during the latter half of his century.

Ginsberg, like Whitman, "contains multitudes." By introducing the man and his work to your students, you will be introducing them to many of the key cultural, literary, political, and spiritual figures and events in this important period of American history.

From the late 1950s through the mid-1980s, the United States went through a time of great unrest and transformation. In Ginsberg's work, your students will get a taste of the excitement and conflicts of an era that included the Beats, McCarthyism, the "hawks" and "doves" of the Vietnam War, flower power, and rock 'n' roll. Ginsberg was an integral part of the sixties counterculture that worshipped both political engagement and altered states. He was also one of the many who turned away from Western thought and religion to study the spiritual wisdoms and religious practices of the East—specifically Buddhism, in his case.

As your students read and listen to Ginsberg, they will gain exposure to a method of writing that is probably new to them and hence somewhat difficult. Ginsberg's unique punctuation, word order, and forms were meant to conform to what he called "thought-speech." It's important to convey to students at the outset that Ginsberg's poems are in some sense recordings of the wild, ecstatic, and associative ways that he spoke to himself in his thoughts. Because the man and his works are chock-full of exotic words and often-obscure references to people, places, ideas, and events, they cannot be compacted into a single reading or lesson. However, because of the passionate forthrightness of Ginsberg's style, the poems presented here clearly convey his feelings and vision, even to readers who don't "get" all the references.

The six lesson plans that follow attempt to provide students with an initial taste of what Ginsberg's essays, poems, and songs have to offer. The hope is that students will be inspired to learn more about the man and his work.

Ginsberg's own keys to the many personal and ephemeral references in the six works presented here can be found at the back of *The Collected Poems*, 1947–1980 (Harper & Row, 1984). Students can be directed to use those notes to find the meanings of obscure references. For additional assistance with Ginsberg's work, you and your students should consult the official website of the Allen Ginsberg estate (allenginsberg.org) and the University of Pennsylvania's archive of Ginsberg's recordings (writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Ginsberg.php).

Joan Lauri Poole is a writer and lifelong New Yorker. At nineteen, she read Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* and became hooked on the strange art of making poems. She has returned to "Howl," "Sunflower Sutra," and "Song" many times and received guidance, inspiration, and solace. Poole's own poems and essays can be found in webzines, reviews, and anthologies, including *Ducts.org, New York Quarterly, Sculpture Review*, and *This Full Green Hour*. In 2012, she published her first book of poems, *Bed of Crimson Joy*, and her second book is forthcoming in 2016.

About the Lesson Plans

This teacher's guide presents six lesson plans, one to accompany the reading of each of the following works in *The Essential Ginsberg*:

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"A Definition of the Beat Generation" (1981), p. 199
"Howl" (1955–1956), p. 14
"To Aunt Rose" (1958), p. 51
"Kaddish" (1957–1959), p. 30
"Wichita Vortex Sutra" (1966), p. 66
"September on Jessore Road" (1971), p. 131
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The lesson plans are in a particular sequence and build somewhat on one another. However, with minor changes, they can be used in whatever order best suits your classroom. If you start with lesson 1 (about the essay "A Definition of the Beat Generation"), students will gain essential background information on the Beats and a context for their understanding of the longer poems, especially "Howl."

For high school teachers, the lesson plans have been loosely aligned to specific English Language Arts (ELA) standards in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language from the Common Core. College instructors may wish to increase the difficulty of certain lessons by extending the activities that involve research, critical thinking, evaluative and argumentative writing, and multimedia presentations.

Before beginning the lessons, you may wish to share with your students some basic biographical details about Allen Ginsberg. Alternatively, you could direct students to locate some biographical details as a homework assignment. You may wish to direct students to the official Allen Ginsberg website as a good starting place.

Lesson Plan 1: "A Definition of the Beat Generation" (p. 199)

BEFORE READING THE ESSAY

Explain to students that they will be reading an essay by the poet Allen Ginsberg on the basic characteristics that defined the Beat Generation, or the Beats. Engage students in a series of prereading activities that activate their prior knowledge about the characteristics of various generations, including the Beats.

WARM UP: BUILDING ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Go quickly around the room and ask students to name various well-known generations, such as the Lost Generation, the Beat Generation, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials.

If students are unfamiliar with the Lost Generation, explain that this was the generation that came of age during and immediately after World War I; the Lost Generation was badly disillusioned by the more than nine million deaths caused by the war. The term is specifically associated with a group of artists and writers (e.g., Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, and F. Scott Fitzgerald) who partied and drank a lot, lived in Paris, and couldn't settle back down to ordinary or "normal" life after the war.

Create a T-chart on the board with the heading "Beats" on the left and "Millennials" on the right. Then have students list some of the traits and behaviors that Millennials are known for. Record students' answers in the appropriate column. Tell students that they will find out some of the characteristics of the Beat Generation when they read Ginsberg's essay.

CCSS Speaking and Listening 9-10.1

ACTIVITY: COLLABORATIVE WRITING

Divide students into small groups and ask each group to work together to write, edit, and polish a one- or two-paragraph definition of the prominent features of Millennials.

Explain that the definition should create a sensory picture of Millennials. Encourage the use of descriptive, concrete details about the generation's outfits, lifestyle, values, musical and artistic tastes, and technological skills.

You might also ask students to include multimedia material—photographs, short video or audio clips, or drawings of their own—alongside their definition of Millennials.

Have groups present their portrait of Millennials to the whole class. Discuss how the definitions are alike and different. Afterward, post the definitions in a prominent location.

CCSS Writing 9-10.6

READING THE ESSAY

Explain that Ginsberg's essay is the poet's attempt many years later to define the Beat Generation, of which Ginsberg was a key figure. Explain some of the difficulties that students may encounter with the concepts and vocabulary in the essay. Reassure students that they will have a chance to read the essay multiple times, research unfamiliar people, places, and ideas, and locate and discuss the meanings of key words that Ginsberg uses in the essay.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- build their reading fluency through multiple readings of the essay;
- identify the five key definitions that Ginsberg gives in the essay;

- analyze the structure of the essay;
- connect their portraits of their own generation to Ginsberg's definition of the Beats;
- express their interpretations, opinions, and queries about the essay;
- identify aspects of the Beat Generation that Ginsberg touches on in the essay (people, places, and creative works) that they would like to research; and
- contribute to a class exhibit on the Beats.

ACTIVITY: SILENT READING AND QUICK FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Ask students to read the essay all the way through without stopping to look up unfamiliar words or names. When they finish, have them break into small groups and describe their first impressions. Tell each group to think about the final sentence of the essay: "Everything belongs to me because I am poor." Ask them to discuss what that unusual sentence might mean in terms of the Beats.

Have students list some of the characteristics of the Beats that they have gleaned from the essay. Add these to the T-chart you started before students read the essay.

CCSS Reading 9-10.10

ACTIVITY: CLOSE READING AND ANALYSIS WITH A PARTNER

Have students work with a partner to analyze and dive more deeply into the essay's language, content, and meaning. Students should work with their partners to reread the essay slowly and carefully. As they perform a second, closer reading, students should identify, list, and look up any unfamiliar words (e.g., beatitude, epithet, illumination) and names (e.g., Jack Kerouac, Herbert Huncke, William Burroughs, Gary Snyder, LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka). They should also record any questions they have about the content of the essay.

CCSS Reading 9-10.4 & 9-10.10

CCSS Speaking and Listening 9-10.1

CCSS Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 9-10.4 & 9-10.5

ACTIVITY: CRITICAL THINKING ABOUT THE ESSAY'S CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

Ginsberg presents five definitions of the Beat Generation in the essay. Have students work in small groups to identify the five definitions on a graphic organizer such as the following informal outline. Ask students to put the definitions into their own words.

THE BEAT GENERATION

Definition 1: [being without money or a place to live]

Definition 2: [exhausted; at the bottom of the world; dark night of the soul; wide open; perceptive/receptive]

Definition 3: [beatitude; beatific; the darkness that precedes opening to the light; religious illumination; egolessness]

Definition 4: [a literary movement and group of people who shared a common perspective]

Definition 5: [influence of literary and artistic activities working in concert, which led to subsequent activities and trends (e.g., the Beatles, Bob Dylan)]

Ask students to reflect on how the essay is structured. Why is a definition essay an effective way to describe the Beat Generation? Have they written definition essays of their own? If so, what did they define? When and for what subjects might this be a good way to structure an essay?

Have students present their group's outline and thoughts to the class.

CCSS Reading 9-10.4 & 9-10.9

CCSS Speaking and Listening 9-10.1 & 9.10.4

ACTIVITY: INTERNET RESEARCH AND EXTENDED WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Have students research and write about a specific aspect of the Beat Generation, related to one of the people or ideas that Ginsberg mentions in the essay. You may want to suggest a few narrowed topics to help students select a focus of their own.

Sample Topics:

- Who was Jack Kerouac and why was he a key figure in the Beat Generation?
- How did the Beat Generation give rise to the antiwar movement in the 1960s and '70s?
- Lawrence Ferlinghetti published Allen Ginsberg's books, including Howl and Kaddish. Who is Ferlinghetti? What book is he most famous for writing? How did he contribute to or take part in the Beat Generation?
- Which musicians, artists, writers, and photographers are associated with the Beats? Research several of these people. Then write a short paper about their work and its relationship to the Beats.

CCSS Writing 9-10.7, 9-10.8 & 9-10.9

ONGOING ACTIVITY: A BEAT GENERATION EXHIBIT

Have the class collaborate on the creation of a "Beats" exhibit in your classroom. The exhibit could display in various formats (print and digital) information about the key figures, artworks, and events associated with the Beats. Encourage students to add their own drawings and writings about the Beats to the display, and to collect and display copies of pictures and writings by the Beats. Allow the exhibit to grow as students read more of Ginsberg's work. Encourage students to make use of various media in the exhibit; they may want to include video and audio clips and copies of some of the original City Lights editions as part of the display.

CCSS Writing 9-10.6

CCSS Speaking and Listening 9-10.5

Lesson Plan 2: "Howl" (p. 14)

BEFORE READING THE POEM

Tell students that "Howl" is a long poem that Ginsberg wrote as a young man in his twenties; the poem broadcast to the world that a radically different voice had come into American poetry. You may want to mention a few other details about the form and background of the poem. For example:

- The poem is written in long lines that reflect Ginsberg's belief in composing in long mind-breaths.
- Ginsberg dedicated the poem to Carl Solomon, a man he had met during a brief stay in a mental institution and for whom he had great sympathy.
- City Lights Books was accused of obscenity for publishing *Howl*. However, the judge presiding over the obscenity trial ruled in favor of the publication of the poem and said that it had "redeeming social importance."

WARM UP: BUILDING ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Write the word **howl** on the board and circle it. Ask students to free-associate whatever comes to mind when they see this word. Record their word associations on the board in a cluster around **howl**.

If possible, you may want to play Hank Williams's song "Howlin' at the Moon." Hearing a friend sing this love song may have given Ginsberg the idea for the title.

CCSS Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 9-10.4 & 9-10.5

READING THE POEM

Students often find it helpful if they set a purpose for reading the poem. Ask them to set their own purpose for reading the poem, or suggest that students read "Howl" to find out:

- what mattered most to the speaker of the poem at this moment in his life;
- · what life was like for Ginsberg and the early Beats; and
- how the poem reflects Ginsberg's characteristics of the Beat Generation, as described by Ginsberg in "A Definition of the Beat Generation."

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- build their reading fluency through multiple readings of the poem;
- experience the freedom and passion of the poem by reading it silently through in one sitting;
- reread the entire poem aloud with their classmates to get closer to and be able to analyze the poem's sound, subject matter, and structure;
- work in small groups to explicate the poem in great detail part by part;
- research and define difficult terms, names, and personal references in the poem; and
- write an original poem in imitation of Ginsberg's long-lined, repeated-base word/phrase method.

ACTIVITY: SILENT READING AND QUICK FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Ask students to read the poem all the way through without stopping to look up unfamiliar words or names. Have them write down their first impressions and what they discovered about their purpose for reading.

CCSS Reading 9-10.10

ACTIVITY: COMMUNITY RAPID RESPONSES

Ask students to describe their gut responses to the poem. Record their impressions on the board near the word associations for **howl.**

Here are some questions you might ask students to help them describe their first impressions:

- How does the poem make you feel?
- What jumps out at you first?
- What do you think about the sound, shape, and subject matter of the poem?
- How are the long lines linked to the poem's subject matter?
- If you had to describe your reaction to the poem with one word or phrase or sound, what would it be?

CCSS Reading 9-10.10

CCSS Speaking and Listening 9.10.4

ACTIVITY: WHOLE-CLASS ORAL READING

Tell students that you are going to read the poem together aloud. Have each student read one of the two-to-five-line segments of the poem ("I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving / hysterical naked") before another student picks up the next segment. Continue until you have finished the entire poem.

Afterward, ask students to discuss how the communal oral reading was different from the individual silent reading. Encourage them to describe whether the oral reading helped increase their understanding and appreciation of the poem. If it did, discuss what was different and why that may be.

If students are not shy about it, you could ask them to make a video or audio recording of the class reading the poem aloud. Alternatively, you could play a recording of Ginsberg reading "Howl."

CCSS Speaking and Listening 9-10.1 & 9-10.5

ACTIVITY: SMALL-GROUP EXPLICATION

Divide the class into three groups. Assign one of the three parts of the poem to each group. Because part 1 is longer than the other two parts, you may want to give that group a few extra members and a bit more time.

Ask each group to reread and discuss their part at length and in detail. Students are to list and research (online or at the library) any unfamiliar words or references that interfere with their understanding of the poem (e.g., the El, Blake-light, odes, Paradise Alley, Fugazzi's, Bellevue, platonic, Zen, Plotinus, Poe, Adonis, Bowery, Absolute Reality, Golgotha, Pilgrim State, Rockland, Greystone, Pater Omnipotens Aeterna Deus, eli eli lamma lamma sabaccthani, Moloch, cloud of ... hydrogen, epiphanies, Utica, the Internationale). Encourage groups to analyze Ginsberg's word choices and how they affect the poem's meaning and tone.

When groups have completed the deep reading of their part, reassemble the class and allow each group to present their part to the class. Encourage students to include their group's thoughts, feelings, likes, dislikes, and discoveries in their presentations.

CCSS Reading 9-10.4, 9-10.5, & 9-10.10

CCSS Speaking and Listening 9-10.1 & 9-10.4

ACTIVITY: EXTENDED CREATIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Have students write their own poems using a method similar to Ginsberg's: "confessing out the soul to conform to the rhythm of thought in his naked and endless head." Suggest that students try to include two clashing images ("images juxtaposed") together in each long-breathed line of their poem. Also, point out the incantatory way that Ginsberg uses repetition in the three parts of "Howl":

Who bared their brains to Heaven under the El...
who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating...

II
Moloch the incomprehensible prison!...
Moloch whose mind is pure machinery!...

III
I'm with you in Rockland
where you're madder than I am
I'm with you in Rockland
where you must feel very strange

Suggest that students adopt this technique by repeating a base word or phrase in a series of lines. Students may want to use some of the same words Ginsberg uses (*who*, *Moloch*, *I'm with you in X*) in their own poems, or they may want to choose other words and phrases to repeat. Your class may enjoy collating their "Howl"-like imitations into a single volume and then publishing the collection in print or digital form to share with their family and friends.

CCSS Writing 9-10.6

Lesson Plan 3: "To Aunt Rose" (p. 51)

BEFORE READING THE POEM

"To Aunt Rose" and "Kaddish" are both elegies that Ginsberg wrote about his literary, political, émigré family and its milieu. You may want to tell students or ask them to research a little about Ginsberg's family in Patterson, New Jersey. The family was engaged with communist and leftist causes, including support of the Loyalist (Republican) anti-Fascists in the Spanish Civil War.

Allen's father, Louis Ginsberg, published two books of lyric poetry (*The Attic of the Past* and *Everlasting Minute*) with Liveright, a well-known publisher of the time. In a 1994 BBC interview, late in Ginsberg's life, the poet said that he had been afraid to show "Howl" to his father because of its many references to taboo subjects. However, Louis Ginsberg praised the poem, calling it "great." He just asked his son why he needed to use all those "blue" words.

WARM UP: BUILDING ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Put the word **elegy** on the board, and ask students to define the word and their associations with it. Students may have read other elegies; if so, ask them to discuss their experiences with this form of writing.

You may want to ask students questions such as the following to get them thinking about the elegy as a poetic form:

- Why would someone write an elegy to a family member?
- What do you suppose an elegy might contain?
- What do you think the mood of an elegiac poem might be like? Why do you think this?
- What subject might you write about if you were composing an elegiac poem?
- Could someone write an elegy for something beyond the human? For example, for a place, an animal, or a way of life? Explain your answer.

CCSS Reading 9-10.9

CCSS Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 9-10.14 & 9-10.5

READING THE POEM

Students may find it helpful if they set a purpose for reading the poem. Ask them to set their own purpose, or suggest that students read "To Aunt Rose" to find out:

- what Aunt Rose was like in the speaker's eyes;
- how the Ginsbergs and their friends lived during the 1930s and '40s;
- what political and historical events had a deep impact on young Allen and his extended family; and
- whether the elegy is a lament for Aunt Rose or for a way of life that has passed away, or something larger.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- build their reading fluency by reading the poem multiple times on their own;
- develop critical thinking skills by analyzing the key subjects in the poem; and
- increase their knowledge of the historical context that figures large in the poem; namely, the Spanish Civil War and what it represented to liberal-minded people during the 1930s and '40s and beyond.

ACTIVITY: SILENT READING AND FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Have students read the poem on their own at least three times. Ask them to write down their thoughts and feelings about the poem after each reading. Encourage students to note questions they might have about the poem and the references in it, especially any that inhibit their understanding.

Return to the purposes that students set for reading "To Aunt Rose." Discuss as a class what they discovered in relation to their purpose. For example:

- What was Aunt Rose like, and (according to the poem) how did she treat young Allen?
- What was life like for the Ginsbergs and their circle of friends?
- What political events and historical figures had a deep impact on Aunt Rose, Allen, and his family?
- Is the poem a lament for Aunt Rose or for an entire way of life, or is it something else?
- Is "To Aunt Rose" a successful elegy in your opinion? Why or why not?

As always with poetry, students should not be made to feel that there is one right answer or meaning to be reached. What is important is that students back up their reactions to and opinions about the poem with solid evidence (e.g., words, phrases, sounds, moods).

CCSS Reading 9-10.9 & 9-10.10 CCSS Speaking and Listening 9.10.1

ACTIVITY: SMALL-GROUP RESEARCH AND CLASS PRESENTATIONS

Divide the class into small groups, and assign each group one topic for further discussion and investigation:

- Hitler, Franco, and their roles in the Spanish Civil War
- Spanish Loyalists (Republicans) and their role in the Spanish Civil War
- the International Brigades (including the Abraham Lincoln Brigade) during the Spanish Civil War
- well-known writers, musicians, and artists (Ernest Hemingway, George Orwell, Pablo Neruda, Pablo Picasso, and Alexander Calder) who opposed Franco and created antiwar pieces of art or literature during the Spanish Civil War

Have each group present its findings to the whole class. Encourage students to use a variety of print and digital media in their presentations. Afterward, discuss how the Spanish Civil War enters into Ginsberg's elegy for his aunt.

CCSS 9-10.7, 9-10.8, 9-10.9 CCSS Speaking and Listening 9-10.5

Lesson Plan 4: "Kaddish" (p. 30)

BEFORE READING THE POEM

Because "Kaddish" is linked in certain ways with "To Aunt Rose"—both are elegies for female family members and evoke the way of life that Ginsberg was part of as a child—you may wish to teach the two poems together or in a sequence. "To Aunt Rose" gives students a bit of a leg up for approaching the poet's longer, more tortured, and complex elegy for his mother, Naomi Ginsberg.

To assist students with their silent reading of the poem, you may wish to present some of the stark facts about Ginsberg's mother.

- Naomi Ginsberg was an immigrant from Russia who came to the United States when she was a girl.
- Russian immigrants were unfamiliar with tomatoes; some thought they were poisonous.
- In her midtwenties, Naomi Ginsberg suffered her first nervous breakdown, and she continued to have bouts of severe mental illness for the rest of her life.
- At a young age, Ginsberg was exposed to his mother's breakdowns, hallucinations, paranoia, and bewildering behavior; in addition, he visited the frightening sanatorium where his mother was forced to live for periods of time.
- Naomi Ginsberg received various therapies in practice at the time, including shock treatments (used in conjunction with insulin and Metrazol) and lobotomy (a surgical treatment that involves severing connections in the brain's prefrontal lobe).
- Later in life, Ginsberg voiced his regret that he had been the one to sign the papers for his mother's lobotomy.

WARM UP: BUILDING ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Write the word **kaddish** on the board. Have students who are familiar with the term explain what it refers to. If knowledge is lacking, explain that **kaddish** is a short Jewish prayer of thanksgiving and praise. One form of the prayer (the mourner's kaddish) is recited when someone dies. However, death and the name of the person who has died are never said during the prayer. Someone who has lost a parent is supposed to recite the mourner's kaddish three times a day for eleven months.

Ask students to mention prayers said for the dead that they may know of from their own cultural backgrounds. Do these prayers mention the names of the dead or death itself? Why or why not?

Discuss the characteristics of a prayer and what it is supposed to achieve.

CCSS Reading 9-10.9

CCSS Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 9-10.4 & 9-10.5

READING THE POEM

"Kaddish" is a difficult poem on many levels. The subject of the poem is heartrending, for one. The people, events, and form of the poem can be hard to comprehend at first because the poem leaps from one moment and image to another. To give students a focal point or organizing principle, ask them to read the poem to find out how Ginsberg's "Kaddish" departs from the traditional mourner's kaddish. (In the poem, Ginsberg most certainly names the person, addresses death, and does a great deal more than give thanks and praise.)

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- build their reading fluency through multiple readings of the poem;
- reread the entire poem aloud with their classmates to get closer to the poem's sound, subject matter, and structure;
- work in small groups to explicate the poem in great detail part by part;

- research and define difficult terms, names, and personal references in the poem; and
- write an essay in which they offer their own critical analysis of "Kaddish."

ACTIVITY: SILENT READING AND QUICK FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Ask students to read the poem all the way through without stopping to look up unfamiliar words or names. Return to the purpose you set for reading the poem, and ask students to think about their first impressions in relation to the following questions:

- In what ways is "Kaddish" a poem of thanksgiving and praise, like the traditional mourner's kaddish?
- In what ways is "Kaddish" radically different from that traditional prayer?

CCSS Reading 9-10.9

ACTIVITY: COMMUNITY RAPID RESPONSES

Ask students to describe their gut reactions to the poem. Here are some questions you might ask students to elicit their first impressions:

- How does the poem's description of Naomi Ginsberg and her son make you feel? What word choices has the poet made that create this feeling in you?
- What strikes you most about Ginsberg's elegy for his mother?
- Does the poem bring Naomi Ginsberg to life in your imagination? Why or why not?
- When Ginsberg writes, "Now I've got to cut through—to talk to you—as I didn't when you had a mouth," (p. 33) how did you react? Did you identify in any way with the speaker at this point? If so, how?
- What is "the Horror" that Ginsberg mentions in the poem? (p. 45)
- What does "The key is in the sunlight at the window in the bars the key is in the sunlight" (p. 47) evoke in you as a reader? Explain.

CCSS Reading 9-10.9

ACTIVITY: WHOLE-CLASS ORAL READING

Tell students that you are going to read the poem together aloud. Have each student read one of the two-to-five-line segments of the poem (e.g., "Strange now to think of you, gone without corsets & eyes, while I / walk on the sunny pavement of Greenwich Village") before another student picks up the next segment. Continue until you have finished the entire poem.

Afterward, ask students to discuss how the communal oral reading was different from the individual silent reading. Encourage them to describe whether the oral reading helped increase their understanding and appreciation of the poem. If it did, discuss why that may be.

If possible, obtain one of the recordings of Ginsberg reading "Kaddish" and have students listen to his way of reading the poem. Students may find it interesting to compare Ginsberg's way of reading with their own way of reading the poem.

CCSS Reading 9-10.4, 9-10.5, & 9-10.10 CCSS Speaking and Listening 9-10.1 & 9-10.4

ACTIVITY: SMALL-GROUP EXPLICATION

Divide the class into five groups, and assign one of the five parts of the poem (pp. 30–33, pp. 33–47, pp. 47–48, pp. 48–49, p. 49) to each group. The poem's parts are uneven in length, so the number of students in each group should reflect the length of the part

they will be explicating. Each group is to reread and discuss their part of the poem at length and in detail. Give them the following questions as a general guide:

- What story does the poem tell about Naomi Ginsberg? What main events does it describe?
- How do you think Ginsberg's mother's mental illness affected him both positively and negatively later in life?
- What do you think about the way the poet exposes his personal life in "Kaddish"?
- How do the repeated words and phrases affect you as a reader? How do these word choices and repetitions affect the poem's meaning and tone?
- What role does structure and sound play in conveying the poem's subject?

Encourage students to list and research (online or at the library) any unfamiliar words or references that prevent understanding—for instance, the significance of Ginsberg's references to Ray Charles, Adonais, the Buddhist Book of Answers, the Lower East Side, Charlie Chaplin, Boris Godunov, Chaliapin at the Met, YPSL, Emily Dickinson's horses, Graf Zeppelin (the Hindenberg), rachitic, Communist fairy book, Sacco and Vanzetti, Norman Thomas, Debs, Little Blue Books, Zhdanov, and Sheol.

After all groups complete their close reading of a part of "Kaddish," reassemble the class and allow each group to present and explicate its part to the class. If a group's members have divergent opinions, the group should present the various viewpoints and disagreements and the reasoning behind each. Allow the class to ask questions or make comments after each group's presentation.

CCSS Reading 9-10.4, 9-10.5, & 9-10.10 CCSS Speaking and Listening 9-10.1 & 9-10.4

ACTIVITY: EXTENDED WRITING ASSIGNMENT—A CRITIQUE

Have students analyze and evaluate "Kaddish" by writing a critical essay about the poem. Tell students to imagine that the poem has just been published. How would they describe the "plot" of the poem? Would they praise it or not? What poem-based evidence would they give to support their perspective on the poem? Encourage students to write at least a two-page critique in which they discuss the features and significance of the poem. They should express their opinions about the poem's method and subject: Is the form appropriate to the subject matter? Is it morally right to write about a family member in such an intimate, revealing way, or is this not an issue at all because the effective tone and emotional sincerity of the poem go beyond the particulars of one person's life?

Help students narrow the focus of their critique and back up their opinions with sufficient evidence, including concrete examples from the poem and other concrete information (e.g., facts about the poem's historical context).

CCSS Writing 9-10.6

Lesson Plan 5: "Wichita Vortex Sutra" (p. 66)

BEFORE READING THE POEM

The writer Rolf Potts wrote an article in 2006 praising Ginsberg's "Wichita Vortex Sutra." He titled his piece "The Last Antiwar Poem," and in it he focuses on Ginsberg's prescience about the dangerous misuse of language in media reports, especially when such reports deal with war, death, and violence. (Potts's article may be found at www.believermag.com/exclusives/?read=article-potts.)

When students read "Wichita Vortex Sutra," they should be able to connect what they know about the wars of today and Ginsberg's experience of the Vietnam War. They should instinctively "get" Ginsberg's jarring juxtapositions between travelogue descriptions of the heartland of America and the barrage of media reports and official misrepresentations about the Vietnam War.

You may wish to give students some background about the poem, such as the following:

- Ginsberg dictated the poem in 1966 to a tape recorder as he traveled by Greyhound and a Volkswagen bus to Kansas.
- Ginsberg said that the poem's pauses reflected the clicking on and off of the tape recorder, and that the lines were "arranged according to their organic time-spacing" (Donald Allen, ed., *Composed on the Tongue: Literary Conversation*, 1967–1977 [San Francisco: Grey Fox, 1980]).
- Although Ginsberg found the Midwest politically conservative and "hawkish" on the war, he also associated the place with something sacred in America, as had his beloved mentor, Walt Whitman.
- In *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman wrote of "chants going forth from the center, from Kansas, and thence equidistant / shooting in pulses of fire ceaseless to vivify all."

WARM UP: BUILDING ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Write the following words on the board, and ask students to tell you what they know about each one: **sutra**, **vortex**, **mantra**, **Vietnam War**.

Before students begin to read and listen to Ginsberg read the poem, they should learn the basic meaning or significance of the following:

- In Buddhism, a sutra is an oral teaching of Gautama Buddha. It includes many repetitions so that it can be easily memorized.
- A vortex is a whirling mass of water or air, such as a whirlpool or a tornado, that sucks things into its center.
- In Buddhism, a mantra is a sound, a word, or a phrase that is repeated frequently during prayer or meditation.
- The Vietnam War took place between 1955 and 1975. The official US stance on the war was that it had to be fought to prevent a communist takeover of South Vietnam. At first, the United States sent in military advisers and small numbers of troops. By 1965, US combat troops were being sent to Vietnam on a regular basis. Many people opposed US involvement in the war, and mass protests occurred between 1962 and 1973.

CCSS Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 9-10.4 & 9-10.5

READING THE POEM

Ask students to pay particular attention to those lines that focus on language and war as they read "Wichita Vortex Sutra." Some examples include the following lines:

- "The war is language, / language abused." (p. 73)
- "almost all our language has been taxed by war." (p. 78)
- "I lift my voice aloud, / make Mantra of American language now, / I here declare the end of the War!" (p. 79)

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- build their reading fluency through multiple readings of the poem;
- read and listen to the poem simultaneously in order to get closer to and analyze the poem's sound, subject matter, and structure;
- work in small groups to explicate the poem in great detail part by part;
- research and define difficult terms, names, and personal references in the poem; and
- write an essay in which they take a stance for or against Shelley's statement, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

ACTIVITY: LISTENING/READING AND FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Play a recording of Ginsberg reading "Wichita Vortex Sutra." Have students read along in their books as they listen to his rendition of the poem. A good recording is available online at Penn Sound's website (writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Ginsberg.php).

When students finish, ask them to reflect on the connection between language and war in the poem.

CCSS Reading 9-10.9

ACTIVITY: SMALL-GROUP EXPLICATION

Divide the class into five groups, and have each group explore in detail a part of the poem (pp. 66–69; pp.70–73 up to "NBCBSU-PAPINSLIFE"; pp. 73–77 up to "I'm an old man"; pp. 77–79 up to "I lift my voice aloud"; pp. 79–82). Tell the groups to reread (and, if possible, to listen again to Ginsberg read) their part of the poem and then discuss it among themselves at length and in detail. Give them the following questions as a general guide to analyzing their part:

- What is the focus of this part of the poem?
- What is the mood like? The tone? Give examples of word choices from the text that create the mood and tone.
- What descriptive details, images, words, and phrases stand out? Why?
- In what way is the speaker making connections between language and the Vietnam War?
- What is the speaker's attitude toward Kansas? The media? People in political power? The Vietnam War? The Vietnamese people?
- Is the poem an effective antiwar poem? Why or why not? Support your response with solid evidence from the poem.

Students are to list and research any unfamiliar words or references that impede their understanding of the poem. These may include the significance of Ginsberg's references to various people, places, and things, such as religious teachers, figures, and texts; politicians during the Vietnam period; place-names in Kansas; and Carry Nation (a temperance agitator).

When students have completed a deep reading of their part of "Wichita Vortex Sutra," reassemble the class and allow each group to present its reading to the class. Encourage students to include their group's understanding of and perspective on that part of the poem. Allow the rest of the class to ask questions after each small group presents a part. The goal is for students to express their thoughts, feelings, likes, dislikes, and discoveries about the poem, and to back up their perspectives with concrete examples and information.

CCSS Reading 9-10.4, 9-10.5, & 9-10.10 CCSS Speaking and Listening 9-10.1 & 9-10.4

ACTIVITY: WRITING AN ARGUMENT

Point out that the speaker in "Wichita Vortex Sutra" seems to believe at points that poets can make something happen, that they can change the world. Ask students to write a short argument for or against Shelley's statement, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." Do they believe that this is true or not? Why? Tell students to draw on what they know about politics today as well as on what Ginsberg's poems say to support their opinion. You may want to put both Shelley's statement and Auden's counterargument ("Poetry makes nothing happen") on the board to help students evaluate both sides of the argument. Encourage students to share their writing with the class in an engaging digital format—for example, students might post their argument online, share it, and ask the rest of the class to post comments in response.

CCSS Writing 9-10.1 & 9-10.6

Lesson Plan 6: "September on Jessore Road" (p. 131)

BEFORE LISTENING TO AND READING THE SONG

Ginsberg's "September on Jessore Road" describes the awful destitution and starvation of Hindu refugees who fled in a mass exodus to Calcutta after the Bangladesh Liberation War with Pakistan in 1971. Unlike the longer poems "Howl," "Kaddish," and "Wichita Vortex Sutra," this song is written in stanzas, meter, and rhyme.

Students will get the most out of the poem if they hear one of Ginsberg's recordings of it, which can be obtained online or purchased.

Ask students to discuss what they know about the protest songs of the 1960s. Possibly play for them some examples by Bob Dylan, such as "Blowin' in the Wind" or "Oxford Town" and John Lennon's "Imagine." Tell them that Ginsberg was very attracted to the folksingers and rock musicians of the 1960s and '70s. In fact, Bob Dylan and John Lennon encouraged Ginsberg to record the song "September on Jessore Road."

WARM UP: BUILDING ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Write the word counterculture on the board, and have students free-associate about what they know about the counterculture of the 1960s—key figures (the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Ravi Shankar, Martin Luther King Jr.,) songs ("Hey Jude," "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," "The Times They Are a-Changin"), movements (civil rights, flower power/hippie, antiwar, Eastern religions, rock 'n' roll, transcendental meditation), events (the March on Washington, Woodstock, Altamont), and so forth.

CCSS Speaking and Listening 9-10.1

CCSS Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 9-10.4 & 9-10.5

LISTENING TO AND READING THE SONG

Play a recording of Ginsberg singing "September on Jessore Road." Ask students to freewrite as they listen, jotting down any thoughts and feelings that come into their heads. Suggest that they focus on the point of view, details, and mood of the song as they write what comes to them.

CCSS Reading 9-10.4, 9-10.5, & 9-10.9

ACTIVITY: SHARING RESPONSES WITH A PARTNER

After listening, ask students to have a dialogue with a partner or a small group in which they discuss the song and its effect on them. Students are likely to touch on the very somber and troubling sound and subject of the song.

Encourage students to compare how this song differs from Ginsberg's longer poems, such as "Howl" and "Kaddish." Students should notice that the lyrics are in a metered, rhymed form, unlike the poems.

Ask each pair or group to describe to the whole class one aspect of the song that they think is significant. Then hold a general discussion about what students found most powerful about the song and whether the song may have encouraged people who heard it in the United States to do something to help the refugees from Bangladesh.

CCSS Reading 9-10.9

CCSS Listening and Speaking 9-10.1 & 9-10.4

ACTIVITY: INTERNET RESEARCH AND PRESENTATIONS ON THE 1971 CONCERTS FOR BANGLADESH

Divide the class into three groups, and have each group research and present the causes and effects of the first aid concerts that George Harrison and Ravi Shankar organized to raise money to help Bangladesh. You might want to assign a particular topic to each group, for instance:

- Where is Bangladesh? What are some highlights in the country's history? What events led up to the Bangladesh Liberation War? How did this lead to the situation that Ginsberg describes in "September on Jessore Road"?
- What provoked George Harrison and Ravi Shankar to organize the concerts in 1971? Who was involved in the concerts? How many people attended? Where were they held? What music was played?
- What immediate effects did the Concerts for Bangladesh have? What long-term effects did they have? In your opinion, are aid concerts an effective way to help people after a natural or political disaster? Why or why not?

Encourage students to use a variety of print and digital media in the presentations.

CCSS Writing 9-10.7, 9-10.8, 9-10.9 CCSS Speaking and Listening 9-10.4