

EXTENSION 10.2.1

Supplement to Lesson 2

Introduction

The 1619 Project, inaugurated with a special issue of *The New York Times Magazine*, challenges us to reframe U.S. history by marking the year when the first enslaved Africans arrived on Virginia soil as our nation’s foundational date.

The magazine includes poems by Rita Dove and Camille T. Dungy about the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church. The bombing, which happened in Birmingham, Alabama, on Sunday, September 15, 1963, was a major event during the Civil Rights era. The church was one of the places where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke many times in the 1960s, and the bombing led to federal involvement in the struggle for civil rights.

The activities below should be used in conjunction with 10.2.1, especially around the time when the class does Lesson 2. The activities can be used to unpack the cultural impact and creative features of the works or to tie the poems to “Letter from Birmingham Jail” and allow readers to investigate each poem with active reading questions. After doing the lesson introduction, teachers can choose to do activity 1 or 2 based on which they feel would be more beneficial for students.

Standards

Standard(s)

RL.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RL.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

RL.3 Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

RL.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone

RL.5 Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
<p>Standards & Text:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards: RL.1, RL.2, RL.3, RL.4, RL.5 Text: Poems about 16TH Street Baptist Church Bombing by Rita Dove and Camille T. Dungy. (found at end of this documents) or on p. 78 of the 1619 Project Full Text <p>Learning Sequence:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of Lesson Agenda Activity Idea 1 or 2 (choose one) 	<p>1. 20%</p> <p>2. 80%</p>

Materials

- Poems by Rita Dove and Camille T. Dungy on the 16TH Street Baptist Church Bombing

Learning Sequence

How to Use the Learning Sequence	
Symbol	Type of Text & Interpretation of the Symbol
10%	Percentage indicates the percentage of lesson time each activity should take.
no symbol	Plain text indicates teacher action.
	Bold text indicates questions for the teacher to ask students.
	<i>Italicized text indicates a vocabulary word.</i>
▶	Indicates student action(s).
☞	Indicates possible student response(s) to teacher questions.
ⓘ	Indicates instructional notes for the teacher.

Introduction of Lesson Agenda

20%

- This introduction is designed to provide contextual knowledge about the bombing. Connections will be made between the poems and “Letter from Birmingham Jail” through discussion questions and guided reading. Review standards **RL.1, RL.2, RL.3, RL.4, and RL.5**.
- Hand out the text of the 16TH Street Baptist Church bombing poems by Rita Dove and Camille T. Dungy (found at end of this documents) or on p. 78 of the [1619 Project Full Text](#)
 - Read and discuss the introduction to the poems from the 1619 Project:
 - Sept. 15, 1963: A group of Ku Klux Klansmen bomb the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., a center of the civil rights movement. Four young girls are killed, and*

at least 14 people are injured. Years later, three of the four conspirators are brought to trial and convicted; the fourth dies before he is tried.

- Show students the [video on the 16th Street Church Bombings from Biography](https://youtu.be/K5KqCMsHlq0) (<https://youtu.be/K5KqCMsHlq0>) (3 min 16 sec)

Choose Activity 1 OR 2

Activity 1: Reading and Discussion Idea 1

80%

Read the poems aloud or in groups. Discuss questions below. Consider assigning students questions using Jigsaw Protocol.

Introduce vocabulary based on class needs.

Possible terms to teach: *brevity, congregation, registering*

Possible terms to define: *magpie, pulpit, greyscale*

From NYT Reading Guide for The 1619 Project Creative Works

- What words and phrases stand out, and why?
- What emotional reactions do you have, and why?
- How do the authors use creative writing to address historical events?
- How do the authors use form and language to communicate a point of view?

Questions for either poem. Use specific examples to support your analysis.

- How is the author's cultural experience reflected in the poem?
- What is the overall tone of the poem? How does the author create that tone?
- How does the author's word choice contribute to the poem's sense of time and place?
- What is the cumulative impact of the author's specific word choices on the poem's tone?
- What is the cumulative impact of the author's specific word choices on the poem's meaning?

Activity 2: Reading and Discussion Idea 2

80%

1. Read the poems aloud or in groups. Discuss questions below. Consider assigning students questions using Jigsaw Protocol.
2. Introduce vocabulary. (Based on class, determine the vocabulary to be used).
 - Possible terms to teach: *brevity, congregation, registering*
 - Possible terms to define: *magpie, pulpit, greyscale*
3. Answer the questions for both poems. Use specific examples to support your analysis.

Questions for poem #1 by Rita Dove

How does Love's use of hyphens add to the tension of the poem?

Possible answer: The hyphens are sharp breaks in the text that can be seen as breaks foreshadowing the bomb about to explode. As the poem jumps through a series of scenes, the reader sees life one moment and death the next. The hyphens also create a series of images that give the reader a glimpse into the beauty and innocence of the scene prior to the pending bombing.

How does the use of the phrase "All in white like angels, /they'll be sighing when we appear at the pulpit" impact the tone of the scene the author is creating?

Possible answer: The tone of the poem is cheerful on the surface. However, the reader who understands the historical context can assign a different meaning to these words. The girls look like angels, but will also soon become angels, as their deaths are imminent. The sighing of the congregation at their beauty also foreshadows the sadness of the congregation as they deal with the untimely deaths of the four girls.

In line 13, the speaker recalls the Reverend's use of the word *ethereal*. What is the meaning of "ethereal"? Why is this a fitting word with which to end the poem?

Possible answer: *Ethereal* means heavenly or too good for this world. The girls are said to look ethereal in their finery. The girls and their white church outfits are "too perfect for this world," which presages their untimely deaths.

Questions for poem #2 by Camille T. Dungy

How does the use of the phrase "rocks me awake" set the tone the poet is creating?

Possible answer: The phrase sets a fearful tone for the reader. The word "rocks" brings to mind the explosions that kill the girls. The speaker wakes violently, moved by the nightmare.

Describe the connection between the speaker's daughter and the bombing victims. What is the significance of the phrase "three of the girls would be 70, the other 67. Somebody's babies"?

Possible answer: The speaker's daughter is at the beginning of her hopefully long and prosperous life, full of potential, a stark contrast to the young victims' brief lives, cut short by the attack. The speaker notes that the victims would be elderly if they had lived, but they are frozen in time, and she remembers them as someone else's babies. The image of the speaker's daughter brings a sense of fragility and innocence to the poem.

What is the significance of the word "brevity," and why is it repeated in the poem?

Possible answer: Brevity means "stated in few words" and also "lasting a short time." The news of the account comprises only fourteen words of the poem, a brief summary for an historically significant event. The poem, too, is brief but powerful. The word also refers to their brief lives and

untimely end. Repetition of a word in such a short poem serves as a reminder to the reader that, while their lives were brief, they had a lasting impact.

Questions for both poems

Dr. King spoke at the 16th St. Baptist Church many times. How do the poems connect to “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” and place Birmingham at the center of the Civil Rights Movement?

Possible answer: The poems show the devastating effects of segregation in Birmingham. They support Dr. King’s point that bombings and other atrocities in Birmingham are ongoing and uninvestigated. He writes, “There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any other city in the nation. These are the hard, brutal facts of the case. On the basis of these conditions, Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the latter consistently refused to engage in good faith negotiation.” The events in the poem also reinforce the importance of the Birmingham demonstrations and King’s presence there.

In “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” King states, “One day the South will recognize its real heroes.” How might the victims of the church bombings be considered heroes?

Possible answer: In his letter, King refers to the non-violent demonstrators as heroes. The girls are like the demonstrators in that their deaths called attention to the cause of racial justice. In Camille Dungy’s poem, the speaker imagines how old the girls would be now, and she reflects on their lasting relevance to her and her young daughter. The four victims continue to be an inspiration to the speaker and teach her to not take the “brevity” of life for granted.

● Sept. 15, 1963: A group of Ku Klux Klansmen bomb the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., a center of the civil rights movement. Four young girls are killed, and at least 14 people are injured. Years later, three of the four conspirators are brought to trial and convicted; the fourth dies before he is tried.



This morning's already good — summer's cooling, Addie chattering like a magpie — but today we are leading the congregation. Ain't *that* a fine thing! All in white *like angels*, they'll be sighing when we appear at the pulpit and proclaim "Open your hymnals —" Addie, what's the page number again? Never mind, it'll be posted. I think. I hope. Hold still, Carole, or else this sash will never sit right! There. Now you do mine. Almost eleven. I'm ready. My, don't we look — what's that word the Reverend used in last Sunday's sermon? Oh, I got it: *ethereal*.

By Rita Dove

My daughter's three months old. A nightmare rocks me awake, and then fourteen words: *Brevity*.

As in four girls; Sunday dresses: bone, ash, bone, ash, bone. The end. 1963, but still burning. My darkening girl

lies beside me, her tiny chest barely registering breath. Had they lived beyond that morning, all the other explosions

shattering Birmingham — even some who called it home called it Bombingham — three of the girls would be 70,

the other 67. Somebody's babies. The sentences I rescue from that nightmare, I make a poem. Four names,

grayscale at the bottom of the page:

Addie Mae Collins. Cynthia Wesley. Carole Robertson. Denise McNair.

Revision is a struggle toward truth. In my book I won't keep, *The end*.

For such terrible brevity — dear black girls! sweet babies — there's been no end.

By Camille T. Dungy