

Duration

One 40-minute class session

Resources

1. Student Handout



2. Teacher Handout



Objectives of Lesson

- To closely read a poem and analyze the details
- To write a claim that requires evidence from the text
- To create a prewrite that outlines key ideas and textual evidence

College Board Objectives from the 2019–20 CED

- **Skill LAN.7.A:** Develop a paragraph that includes 1) a claim that requires defense with evidence from the text, and 2) the evidence itself.
 - **Essential Knowledge: LAN.1.A:** In literary analysis, writers read a text closely to identify detail that, in combination, enables them to make and defend a claim about an aspect of the text.
 - **Essential Knowledge: LAN.1.B:** A claim is a statement that requires defense with evidence from the text.
 - **Essential Knowledge: LAN.1.C:** In literary analysis, the initial components of a paragraph are the claim and textual evidence that defends the claim.

College Board objectives focus on building students' writing skills from the ground up. Beginning with an accessible poem and asking students to write a claim and complete a prewriting activity while pulling relevant evidence from the text, students are building a foundation to build upon in further lessons.

Student Activities

- Students will read the poem "I Have a Rendezvous with Life" closely in order to respond to the given prompt with a defensible claim and textual evidence.

How to Use This Lesson

This lesson is designed to give students a preliminary exploration of poetry with a poem that is relatively accessible to most students. This lesson is intended to be implemented at the beginning of the year so that students have a firm foundation of analysis and writing with textual evidence, because once these skills are developed, they can be expanded on as the year progresses. Skill LAN.7.A first appears in Unit Two of the 2019–2020 Course and Exam Description for AP® English Literature.

When students complete this activity, they should annotate the poem and write on the student handout for the activity. If you are teaching virtually, there are extensions that allow students to write directly onto PDFs, or students can print the documents, handwrite their responses, and then upload pictures of their completed work to you.

This lesson is broken into steps below, and potential responses and helpful annotations are filled in on the Teacher Handout page.

Step One: Preview the vocabulary that students will encounter in this poem that they may not immediately know the meaning of. You can do this by writing the words and definitions on the board as students walk in so that you can discuss them before you read. Or, you can assign these words the night before the lesson and have students research the meanings before they come to school. However you choose to preview them, knowing these words before reading the poem will help students more quickly and fully grasp the meaning.

Rendezvous: a meeting

Ere: before

Dumb: unable to speak

Heralds: messengers

Crown: to top something (a verb)

Step Two: Distribute the Student Handout. Instruct the students to read the poem strictly for pleasure. You can read it to them, a student can read it out loud, or each student can read it silently to him or herself.

Step Three: Instruct students to read the prompt carefully and to underline what their specific task is. The prompt is below the poem on the Student Handout, but it is also reprinted below with the task underlined.

Prompt:

Read Countee Cullen’s poem “I Have a Rendezvous with Life” and then analyze how the author uses poetic elements and techniques to develop the complex feelings the speaker of the poem has towards Life.

COMMON POETIC ELEMENTS TO PREVIEW FOR STUDENTS BEFORE YOU DIVE INTO THE POEM

You may want to put these on the board or on large chart paper before students come in so they can see them and discuss them in reference to the poem they are studying for this lesson:

As students read the text, here’s a partial list of literary elements they can look for. They won’t find all of these elements in every poem, nor is this list exhaustive; it’s just meant to help them get started thinking about how to read a poem.

- **Rhyme:** no need to name the scheme; just note whether the poem rhymes, throughout or just in a particular spot.
- **Meter:** does the poem have a regular meter? Or is it more free-form?
- **Form:** is the poem broken up into stanzas or not?
- **Repetition:** are there particular words, sounds, or phrase structures that are repeated?
- **Symbolism:** are there things in the poem that represent something other than what they are literally?
- **Imagery:** does the poem include descriptive language that appeals to your physical senses?
- **Diction:** how does the author’s word choice contribute to your understanding of the poem?

It is important to remind students that the speaker of the poem may not be the author. The poet might be using a character in the poem, so it is always best to err on the side of caution and refer to the “character” in a poem as the speaker.

Step Four: Since the prompt is asking for the complex feelings the speaker of the poem has towards Life, students will need to be able to define WHAT those complex feelings are. Have students re-read the poem, and this time, annotate every feeling and emotion they can identify within the poem. They should pay attention to shifts in emotions and what those can signify.

Step Five: With the prompt and various emotions in mind, instruct students to write a claim that is defensible in the box on the Student Handout marked “claim.”

Step Six: Have students exchange their claim with a peer sitting near them. Have the peer check to see that the claim 1) is defensible, 2) defines the complex feelings of the speaker, and 3) explains how that complex feeling is created.

Step Seven: Instruct students to write the two “Hows” from their claim into the two boxes on the Student Handout marked “How.”

Step Eight: Normally, if we were preparing students to write an essay, they would need to pull multiple pieces of evidence to support each point in their claim, but since this is a paragraph-writing exercise, ask students to pull only one or two pieces of evidence for each of the “Hows” they selected. Have students write their evidence into the appropriate boxes on the Student Handout.

Step Nine: Write the paragraph. This portion of the lesson plan is optional if you want your students to just practice with pulling the evidence and writing a claim. However, if you want your students to practice writing the actual paragraph, now would be the time for that. This can be completed in class or for homework, whatever time allows for. If you want students to write this paragraph, you might need to remind them how to appropriately incorporate textual evidence. There are many ways to do this, but the information in the side box provides one template students could utilize.

Important: Remind students that this claim should:

- define the complex feeling (not just say that complex feelings exist)
- explain HOW that complex feeling is created
- identify at least two specific poetic techniques or elements that are used to portray the complex emotions

INCORPORATING TEXTUAL EVIDENCE:

Students should never begin a sentence with a quotation. Instead, they should embed a quotation into their sentence with a template such as:

The poet incorporates poetic elements such as _____ in order to fully explore the concept of _____ in this line, “insert short excerpt here.” Then, students should spend another sentence or two explaining why that piece of evidence is important, how it enhances the meaning of the poem, and how it connects back to the overall claim that the student already made.

Elaboration is a skill that will be practiced and refined as the school year progresses. It is beyond the scope of LAN.7.A, but if students are ready to move on and write paragraphs with elaboration, then let them flex their writing muscles. Elaboration and Commentary officially show up in the CED for Unit 3, Skill LAN.7.C.

I Have a Rendezvous With Life

Written by: Countee Cullen

I have a rendezvous with Life,
In days I hope will come,
Ere youth has sped, and strength of mind,
Line Ere voices sweet grow dumb.
5 I have a rendezvous with Life,
When Spring's first heralds hum.
Sure some would cry it's better far
To crown their days with sleep
Than face the road, the wind and rain,
10 To heed the calling deep.
Though wet nor blow nor space I fear,
Yet fear I deeply, too,
Lest Death should meet and claim me ere
I keep Life's rendezvous.

Prompt:

Read Countee Cullen's poem "I Have a Rendezvous with Life" and then analyze how the author uses poetic elements and techniques to develop the complex feelings the speaker of the poem has towards Life.

<p>CLAIM: <i>Write or type your response in this area.</i></p> <p>Countee Cullen, in his poem "I Have a Rendezvous with Life," employs repetition and strategic word choice in order to develop his complex emotions of intense desire and fear towards Life.</p>	
<p>HOW: <i>Write or type your response in this area.</i></p> <p>Repetition</p>	<p>HOW: <i>Write or type your response in this area.</i></p> <p>Specific Word Choices</p>
<p>EVIDENCE: <i>Write or type your response in this area.</i></p> <p>Lines 1 and 5 where the speaker repeats the title of the poem: "I have a rendezvous with Life."</p>	<p>EVIDENCE: <i>Write or type your response in this area.</i></p> <p>"Sure" in line 7.</p>
<p>EVIDENCE: <i>Write or type your response in this area.</i></p> <p>Line 14 where the title and repeated line is altered: "I keep Life's rendezvous."</p>	<p>EVIDENCE: <i>Write or type your response in this area.</i></p> <p>"Rendezvous" (frivolous and fun implications, and yet, still just means "a meeting")</p>

Now, choose one of the HOW columns and write a paragraph that responds to the prompt using textual evidence.

Write or type your response in this area.

Countee Cullen, in his poem "I Have a Rendezvous with Life," employs repetition and strategic word choice in order to develop his complex emotions of intense desire and fear towards Life. He is able to highlight the speaker's intense desire through repetition of the title and line "I have a rendezvous with Life" in lines 1 and 5. This implies that he has an important meeting with a personified entity, one that would be rude to not keep. Since it is a "rendezvous" rather than just a meeting, it implies that this is a fun, almost frivolous meeting, one that the speaker is looking forward to, not dreading. But then, in the last line of the poem, this repetition is broken and Cullen writes that "I keep Life's rendezvous." Here, the repetition is partially present, but the sentence has changed. It shifts from the speaker being the one making the meeting to Life having plans of its own, plans that the speaker is afraid he will not be able to attend because Death may take him too soon. Life, in this final line, is the one calling on the speaker. This indicates that the speaker has a destiny or a purpose to fulfill with Life. Cullen's writing shows that the speaker desires to fulfill this calling, to have a full experience with Life, and yet he fears that he will be called-short through an early death.

I Have a Rendezvous With Life

Written by: Countee Cullen

I have a rendezvous with Life,
In days I hope will come,
Ere youth has sped, and strength of mind,
Line Ere voices sweet grow dumb.
5 I have a rendezvous with Life,
When Spring's first heralds hum.
Sure some would cry it's better far
To crown their days with sleep
Than face the road, the wind and rain,
10 To heed the calling deep.
Though wet nor blow nor space I fear,
Yet fear I deeply, too,
Lest Death should meet and claim me ere
I keep Life's rendezvous.

Prompt:

Read Countee Cullen's poem "I Have a Rendezvous with Life" and then analyze how the author uses poetic elements and techniques to develop the complex feelings the speaker of the poem has towards Life.

CLAIM:	<i>Write or type your response in this area.</i>		
HOW:	<i>Write or type your response in this area.</i>	HOW:	<i>Write or type your response in this area.</i>
EVIDENCE:	<i>Write or type your response in this area.</i>	EVIDENCE:	<i>Write or type your response in this area.</i>
EVIDENCE:	<i>Write or type your response in this area.</i>	EVIDENCE:	<i>Write or type your response in this area.</i>

Now, choose one of the HOW columns and write a paragraph that responds to the prompt using textual evidence.

Write or type your response in this area.