

WHAT WE CARRY: POETRY AND ART ACTIVITY

Explore themes of community, overcoming adversity, memory, and personal history.

This activity invites students to consider what they might carry in their hearts, minds and memories, when they can't physically keep the tangible things and people that make a home or community.

Students will read a poem by Chinese American poet Wang Ping called “*The Things We Carry on the Sea*,” write their own poems, and create a visual art piece that incorporates their poem.

Materials required: black and white construction paper, markers or crayons, and glue sticks.

SET UP & WRITING

Have students read “The Things We Carry on the Sea” by Wang Ping (available [here at poets.org](http://poets.org))

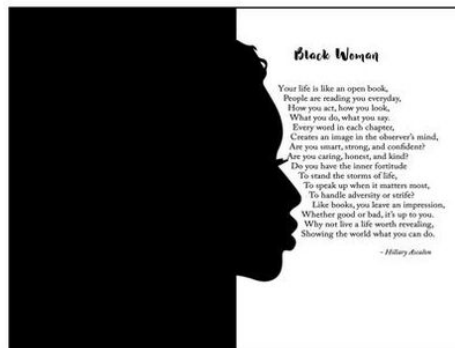
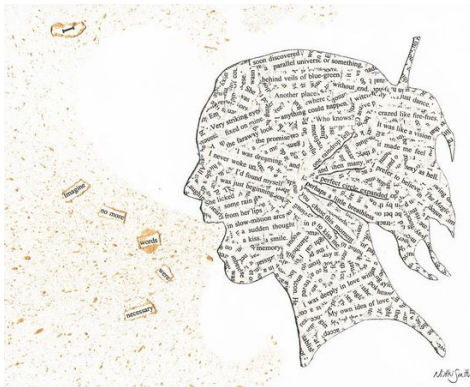
- Discuss what sorts of things the poet includes. What is not included?
- Most lines begin with “We carry...” Consider, who is the “we” in this poem?
- Ask students to brainstorm either as a group or individually, what they carry in themselves. What knowledge, attributes, experiences or memories do they already have? Look for both specific details and universal ideas.
- Ask each student to write their own poem, using the words “we carry.”

VISUAL REPRESENTATION

Share the images below for inspiration, and discuss. What do they have in common? How are they different?

For those that feature musical notes, imagine how they could be replaced with words.

Notice that all the images are black and white, or feature just one accent color.



CREATE

Using any of these as inspiration, students should cut out or draw a silhouette or shape that represents themselves—a profile, a hand, a head—and either fill it with the words of the poem (as in the top 3 images) or surround it with the words of their poem.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS

- Where and how big should the shape/silhouette be? Could there be more than one?
- How much of the poem to include—the whole thing or only selected words/phrases?
- How big or small should the words be, and how should they be arranged inside or around the shape?
- What's the one accent color? How does it represent or enhance the ideas in the poem?

WORKS IN PROGRESS

Below are some images of student work at various stages of this project. As in any creative pursuit, there is no “right way.” There are many individual interpretations of the same concept, even within the same classroom.

