

Poems for Two Voices and the Theme of Community  
in *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry  
TRAITS EMPHASIZED: IDEAS & VOICE

This lesson idea is easily adapted to a variety of themes in almost any novel taught at the intermediate, middle school, or high school level. Credit for this lesson goes to Anna Pouliot and Laura Beduhn, Elementary Education majors at Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN who recently taught the lesson with great success to a 6th grade class.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this lesson is for students to examine life their own community and to compare/contrast it with life in the community Lois Lowry created in *The Giver*. They will express their understandings in poems for two voices. Two class periods are recommended to give time for writing poetry drafts.

**Models for poems for two voices include two books by Paul Fleischman:**  
*I Am Phoenix, Poems for Two Voices*, (HarperCollins Publishers, 1985)  
*Joyful Noise, Poems for Two Voices*, (HarperCollins Publishers, 1988)

**Background knowledge:** Students have read chapters 1-7 in *The Giver*, and have had class discussions that include the concept of a Utopian society.

**Part 1:**

1. Ask students to close their eyes and imagine being part of *The Giver* community. To do this effectively, you will need to write a script that includes characteristics of community life, such as nightly ritual of sharing feelings, sharing dreams in the morning, being grouped by age (Sevens, Tens, etc.) why a person might be "released," the Assignment at age 12, etc. At various points, ask students to reflect silently on how they think and feel about life in this community.
2. Ask students to talk for 2-3 minutes with pre-determined partners about what they thought about as they listened to *The Giver* community characteristics.
3. Hold a whole class discussion about their ideas. Ask follow-up questions/probing questions to develop responses. On a T- chart labeled GIVER COMMUNITY & MY COMMUNITY, list characteristics students share under GIVER COMMUNITY.
4. Now ask students to have another 2-3 minute conversation with partners, discussing characteristics of life in their own community (fine to compare and contrast with *The Giver* community.)
5. Hold another whole class discussion about life in their own community. Again, ask follow-up questions/probing questions to develop responses. Record responses on the MY COMMUNITY side of the T-chart.

## Part II:

1. Tell the students that they will be expressing their ideas about the two communities by writing poems for two voices (or "two-voice poems" if you prefer).

2. Model the two-voice poem style by reading from one of Paul Fleischman's books (You will need a partner, or you could invite two students to practice reading the poems in advance so they can demonstrate the technique for reading them.). Then, divide the class in half, one half reading each "voice." Students can also practice in pairs. Use a transparency or handouts of the poems so all students can see the words and the format. Two poems that work well are:

- "Honeybees" (*Joyful Noise*, 29-31) This poem shares the perspectives of a worker bee and a queen bee on "beehood."

- "The Passenger Pigeon" (*I Am Phoenix*, 17-18) This poem recounts the former glory of the passenger pigeon, and is from one point of view.

3. Briefly review what the students have talked about regarding *The Giver* community and their own community, and explain that they will be writing two-voice poems with a partner, expressing differences between the two communities. You may want to model a few lines of a poem as an example. Here are a few lines written by Laura and Anna as a model for their students. Notice that phrases on the same line are read together. Lines alone on the left or right are read independently:

Living in my community...

I have many choices.

I choose my job.

Families in my community

Can be two, three, four, or more people.

Living in my community. . .

I have very few choices

I am given an Assignment.

Families in my community

Always have four people.

4. Some ideas for students to develop might be living in the community, family life, jobs, or being a particular age. Partners can brainstorm ideas to build their poems. Another class period is advised for further drafts and a final copy. Partners can read their poems to the class and/or publish them on a bulletin board.