

## Treating Senioritis with Poetry: Pause to Reflect on Transitions and Changing Lives

- 1) Fold a sheet of paper vertically down the center.
- 2) On the left side make a list of what you remember doing as a child. (Games, toys, people, popsicles, things you were afraid of ... )
- 3) On the right side make a list of what you do now. (What you eat, where you hang out, teenage toys ... )
- 4) Read Quincy Troupe's *Flying Kites* poem. Talk about it.
- 5) Borrowing the first words of Troupe's two stanzas, "We used to," and "Now we," write your own poem investigating these two eras in your life.
- 6) Have a class senior poetry jam session.

### *Flying Kites*

1 .  
we used to fly rainbow kites  
across skull caps of hours  
holes on blue wings  
of the canvas of sinking suns  
running winged eyes locked to wind  
we'd unwind the kite string up & away  
then run them down blue tapestry  
up the sky again, then down  
until a sinking sun rolled  
down into a swallowing sky

2.  
today, we fly words as kites  
across pages of winds, through skies  
as poems we shape from holy, bloody  
adjectives & nouns  
we loop into sound circles, ringing  
like eclipse, the sun's tongue

--Quincy Troupe

### *Student examples:*

we used to have a bedtime  
sleep was mandatory,  
strictly enforced by parents looking for order  
it was important  
a long night's rest was needed  
to prepare for another long day.  
now we have no curfew  
sleep is secondary  
night time becomes the playground  
parents need not apply  
now a long day's rest is needed  
needed for another long night.

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We used to chase girls across the school  
teachers shouting for us to stop  
playing spin the bottle  
making every girl blush.  
Now we get chased by girls  
our parents telling us to be careful  
phones ringing, cells vibrating, e-mails messaging  
making us blush.

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We used to go to grandma's every day  
listening to her stories, eating her fabulous food  
that would fill our tummies.  
Now we ignore that once-loved grandma  
because she screams at us for  
our hair, our tattoos, our piercings.

--Jason Speciner, Oscar Perez, & Nancy Carrasco

## Treating Senioritis with Poetry: There's More than the Prom

- 1) Read Portia Nelson's *Autobiography in Five Short Chapters* poem. Talk about it.
- 2) Write a poem like Nelson's , in which you use the first four stanzas to describe something about your high school experience from 9th to 12 th grade. Stanza five should show the future.
- 3) Have a class reading or create a senior poetry magazine.

### *Autobiography in Five Short Chapters*

1. I walk down the street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I fall in.  
I am lost. . . I am helpless.  
It isn't my fault.  
It takes me forever to find a way out.

2. I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I pretend I don't see it.  
I fall in again.  
I can't believe I am in the same place  
but, it isn't my fault.  
It still takes a long time to get out.

3. I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I see it is there.  
I still fall in ... it's a habit.  
My eyes are open.  
I know where I am.  
I get out immediately.

4. I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I walk around it.

5. I walk down another street.

--Portia Nelson

### *Student example:*

1 . I enter the cage  
All around me are the flutterings of wings  
Like fireworks  
Where I belong, where I go  
Found a little spot  
Found a little friend  
As I sat with the sparrows  
Talking games

2. I hang on fences with crows  
Dressed in black, singing songs  
Hung with bats, upside down  
With nowhere to go but  
Down

3. I found a cool perch  
Where the parrots like to be  
They were loud and beautiful  
But mostly they were loud

4. I strutted down the sidewalk  
With the pigeons going coo coo coo coo  
A bunch of city birds with nowhere to go  
We always end up almost  
Getting run over by cars

5. Angels  
Over in the corner  
That I didn't see before  
That nobody saw  
The cage is too small, too dark, too loud  
Too dangerous  
We are Lost Angels  
Watch  
We fly away.

--Michael Hilbert

These anti-senioritis lessons are adapted from Carol Jago's *Beyond Standards: Excellence in the High School English Classroom* (Heinemann. Portsmouth, NH. 2001). They are examples of contextualized teaching. In this case, the context is seniors' contemplation of their transition from high school student to whatever comes next. Like Jago, we are wise to harness the energy of students' felt lives today, to encourage reflection, to assist our students in using literacy to think things through.

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