



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

# Center for Middle Eastern Studies

## “Years” by Omar Offendum

Unit Plan  
July, 2019

Tim Flanagan  
Stonington Middle School  
Mystic, Connecticut  
[tflanagan@stoningtonschools.org](mailto:tflanagan@stoningtonschools.org)

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## Unit Plan

### “Years” by Omar Offendum

Rap/Spoken-word

<https://offendum.bandcamp.com/track/years-prod-sa-d>

#### Line of Inquiry

In “Years,” how does Omar Offendum combine lyrics and rhythm to express anger and frustration about a current event?

#### Student Learning Goals

- Use imagery, poetry, and rhythm to express a point of view.
- Identify and analyse multiple perspectives and world views.
- CT Social Studies Frameworks: Examine the diversity and views on human rights of a region.
- CT Social Studies Frameworks: Analyze the migration of people within and beyond a region.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6: Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose.

#### Capacities for Imaginative Thinking

Notice deeply

Empathize

Identify patterns

#### Grade Level

7-12; can be adapted for any grade level

#### Time Needed

Minimum of three class periods to do some pre-activities, view the performance, and one post-activity. This can be extended to ten or more class periods depending on how much time you want to spend on poetry writing and other activities.

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## Pre-Lesson 1: Word Splash and Quotes from “Years”

### Opening

Do Now: Have some musical beats playing as students enter the room. Ask them to think about how the music (rhythm) makes them feel.

### Warm-Up

Journal

What do you do when you are angry or frustrated about something? Write a few sentences and/or draw a picture to show your response.

### Activity 1

Word Splash

1. Display the following words from Omar Offendum’s “Years.” Tell students that these words come from a work of art they will be studying. (Do not say anything else about the work of art.)
  - Exhausting, bodies, lost, lonely, poor, freedom, harshest, begging, smugglers, polluters, bombs, drones, triggers, repugnant, dictators, #BlackLivesMatter, hope, Syrian, cowardly, obliterating, immigrate, unsettling
2. Ask students to brainstorm what they think the work of art will be about. This could be done as a think-pair-share, carousel brainstorm, or another method.
3. Have a brief class discussion about student responses. Follow up student responses with questions such as:
  - What word or words are giving you that idea?
  - Can you give me an example?
  - Can you tell me more about that?
4. Focus on responses where students notice feelings, especially of anger or frustration. If necessary, ask students, “What feelings do these words express? What feelings do you think the artist had while writing these words.”
5. End the activity by asking students what questions these words make them think of. Record the questions on chart paper. Tell students you will return to the work of art at a later time.

### Activity 2

Reading Excerpts from “Years”

1. Hand out excerpts from “Years.” (2-4 lines each) and guide the students through the following activity. (See below for lyrics.)
2. Tell students, “Read your excerpt to yourself. Ask if you have any words you do not know how to pronounce.”

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3. Explain to students that you will be playing some background music (choose a beat without lyrics). When the music is playing, they should walk around the room with their excerpt. Walk without talking to anyone.
4. Have students begin. After 30 seconds or so, stop the music and immediately tell students to make a group of three with the people who are closest to them. Tell them to have each person read their excerpt while their two partners listen. They do not need to comment or discuss the quotes, just read and listen.
5. Begin the music again. Repeat these steps 4-5 times. Ask students to return to their seats.

## **Closing**

### Journal

Reflect on the experience of listening to other people's excerpts. What new understanding do you have about the work of art? What new questions do you have?

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## Pre-Lesson 2: Experimenting with Poetry

### Warm-Up

#### Journal

Write about something in this world that makes you angry or frustrated. Think about what you think is not fair or right about the world. Use words that will convey how you feel.

### Activity 1

#### Analyzing Poetry Techniques

1. Hand out the excerpts given to students yesterday. Make sure students receive the same excerpt.
2. Discuss some techniques the poet used to write these lines. Students may need a lot of guidance depending on their level of knowledge of poetry techniques. Some ideas to elicit from students include:
  - Lengths of lines - some long/some short
  - The use of rhyme
  - Patterns students notice (rhyming, syllables)
  - References to people, events, or places in the world
  - Metaphors and similes
  - Alliteration
  - Strong word choice
3. List examples of each technique on chart paper. Have students add their own examples from the quotes or made-up examples.

### Activity 2

#### Completing a Stanza Using Excerpts from “Years

1. Tell students that they will now try to write a stanza around the excerpt they were given. The excerpt can be placed anywhere in the stanza they write. Give students these additional guidelines:
  - Try to use at least three of the techniques we discussed in your stanza.
  - You are not trying to guess what the poet wrote in his poem. Just use the lines you were given as inspiration to write your own stanza.
  - You are not trying to write a complete poem, just one stanza.
  - This is for practice. Take risks and try something new!
2. Give students about 20 minutes to try writing a stanza. Check in with individual students and provide feedback and further direction as needed.
3. After about 20 minutes, have students sit in a circle. Ask for volunteers to share what they wrote. After each volunteer shares their stanza, ask for comments. Use the following questions as needed:
  - What did you notice about the stanza?

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- What poetry techniques did you hear?
- What words were used to convey a feeling?

### **Closing**

Tell students that in the next class they will see the work of art. Tell them that it is a rap/spoken-word poem by a Syrian-American poet named Omar Offendum. (You may wish to share additional information about Omar or save that for after the visit.)

Contextual information from <https://offendum.bandcamp.com/>

Omar Offendum is a rapper / poet based in Los Angeles. Known for his unique blend of Hip-Hop & Arabic poetry, he has been featured on prominent world news outlets, lectured at a number of prestigious academic institutions, and helped raise millions of dollars for various humanitarian relief groups. Offendum was recently named a Kennedy Center Citizen Artist Fellow for 2018 / 2019.

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## Viewing the Work of Art

If you will have a live performance, take time to review “audience etiquette” and to have students develop a list of questions they can ask Omar. If a live performance is not possible, consider setting up a Skype session with Omar or listen to a recording of the song and emailing questions to the artist.

“Years” (Prod. Saüd)

I wrote this verse at 30,000 feet  
En route to Austin  
Next week Chicago  
Last week exhausting  
Speaking about my people & what 6 years cost them  
Syrian bodies strewn ashore  
Families who've lost them  
Brutality the likes of which  
A child should never see  
Let alone be subjected to  
Lonely, poor & destitute  
Realities the likes of which  
Our voices never free  
Freedom marches  
Across the harshest seas  
Only to be rejected too

I'm appealing to the best of you  
If my mama didn't raise me right  
I wouldn't be addressing you  
I'd be on my knees begging you  
These babies deserve better  
Than blurbs in newsletters  
Or decisions about their futures  
That help arms dealers earn better  
In addition to the smugglers & the looters  
Oil barons & air polluters  
Killer telecommuters  
Shooting bombs off drones  
Offices close enough to home  
To be dozing off by 8pm with little trauma signs shown

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Pundits adding to the drama  
One that flaunts a devil's thumbprint  
But that index pulling triggers isn't charged  
When the body it's connected to is in uniformed garb  
Ain't that something?  
Trust me, they don't hate your freedom  
It's the lies they find repugnant  
It's the wars & the coups  
The propping up of dictators  
Short-term memory  
Long-range missile radius  
& the craziest election rhetoric imaginable  
How we would claim a moral high ground  
Just isn't fathomable ...

The fact that #BlackLivesMatter  
Has to even be said is telling  
Back in '08  
It was 'Hope & Change' selling  
Eight years later  
Some Great Lakes waters were strange smelling  
And Syrian lives shattered  
From a barrel bomb shelling  
On an hourly basis  
While our cowardly faces  
Stared at a camera phone reflection  
Drowned away in disgrace  
Hundreds of thousands  
Were plundered by thundering rounds  
Of obliterating agony  
World leaders would rather lead us to believe  
They were being liberated  
Actually ...

The older I get  
I find the meaning of 'freedom' is relative  
It doesn't even mean the same  
To me & my relatives  
Democracy on a high horse

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Or high off of sedatives?  
Keeping up with the Jones'  
That ain't being competitive  
Now I'm no longer in debt  
But still feel like I'm getting it  
The misuse of my tax dollars  
Getting repetitive  
Meditative retreats  
Were all that kept me from losing it  
Now I look in my son's eyes  
To find what is relevant ...  
Jibran, the best medicine  
But if we had tried to immigrate today  
They wouldn't let us in  
That's unsettling ...  
Yeah ... that's unsettling.

#### **credits**

from [Eye Know Faces](#), released August 4, 2017  
Lyrics written + recorded by Omar Offendum | Cosher Ink, LLC  
Music Produced by Saüd | Brij Entertainment  
Mixed + Mastered by Apollo Fortune

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## Post-Lesson 1: Writing Your Poem

### Warm-Up

Have students write one word on a post-it note that describes how Omar's performance made them feel. Students should post their word on chart paper hanging in the room.

### Activity 1

#### Journal

Reflect on Omar Offendum's performance. Consider one or more of the following questions:

- What stood out to you?
- What inspired you?
- What questions do you have?

Take time to have volunteers share their responses. Make connections between student responses and the poems they are about to write.

### Activity 2

#### Writing Process

Note: This part of the lesson may extend several class periods, depending on the amount of time you want students to work on their poems.

Students will start by choosing a topic (either a current event or something more personal) that elicits a strong emotion for them (anger, frustration). Take time to brainstorm ideas with students if they are having trouble thinking of one.

Suggested guidelines for student poetry writing:

- Teach one mini-lesson per day to focus on a specific poetry-writing skill. This can be done with the whole class or in smaller groups. Possible lesson topics:
  - Using similes and metaphors
  - Figurative language
  - Alliteration
  - Specific word choice
  - Repetition, patterns in poetry
  - Strategies for revising
- Give students a set amount of time for writing silently each day. Encourage them to write as many ideas as possible without worrying about if it sounds good to them or not.
- Allow students to have time to practice any specific skills you have taught.
- Provide checklists and other handouts for revising and editing strategies.
- Allow time for students to share the poem they are working on and get feedback, either with a partner, a small group, or the whole class.
- Write your own poem and model parts of the process for students.

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## Closing

Suggested closing ideas for each writing process class:

- Have one student share his/her poem (or part of it) that demonstrates a skill you have asked the students to work on.
- Ask students to reflect on their progress in their journal.

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## Post-Lesson 2: Putting Your Poem to A Beat

### Warm-Up

#### Gestures

Have some musical beats playing as students enter the room. Divide students into groups of 2-3. Ask students to think of a gesture to reflect how the music makes them feel. When the music stops, have each student show their gesture. Give a minute or two for each group to discuss their gestures and why they chose them. Repeat with another beat sample.

### Activity 1

#### Practicing with Beats

Students should go to one of the online sites listed below, or to any site of your choice, to practice how to make beats/music. Give students “sandbox time” to play around with one or more of these tools and experiment with how to compose a beat.

- Splice: <https://splice.com/sounds/beatmaker>
- Soundtrap (requires teacher 30-day free trial): <https://www.soundtrap.com/edu/>
- BeepBox: <https://www.beepbox.co>
- JamStudio: <http://www.jamstudio.com/Studio/index.htm>
- Mixx: <https://www.mixxx.org/>

After students have had time to practice, ask them to record what they have learned. This can be in the form of a tip or suggestion for others who will use that particular tool. Responses can be collected on chart paper or a [Padlet](#) page.

### Activity 2

#### Putting Your Poem to A Beat

Replay Omar Offendum’s “Years” and ask students to reflect on how he put music to his poem. Consider the choices he made in doing so, such as the tempo, rhythm, and dynamics.

Next, allow students to have time to compose a beat (or use a free beat available online) and practice speaking their poem with the music playing in the background. This can be a quick practice activity, or it could involve several class periods that will eventually lead to students recording their poem and beat. Either way, students should try out their “performance” for a partner at least one time, solicit feedback, and try it again based on the feedback.

### Closing

This lesson could culminate in having volunteers share their performance for the class, or it could evolve into recording and performing for other groups, either live or through sharing online.

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## Assessment

Students can be assessed on the process of working on their poems and beats, as well as on their completed product. The teacher could design a rubric to focus on specific areas to assess for his/her students.

Students can also be assessed with one or more of the following prompts.

- How did you use lyrics and music to convey your feelings about the topic of your poem? Give specific examples of the choices you made with words and music to convey your feelings.
- Assign students to listen to another one of Omar Offendum's raps. Ask students to analyze the lyrics and music to show how they convey the feeling and meaning of the work of art.

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