American Poet Research Project

The Objectives
1. Students will develop an understanding and appreciation of an American poet through studying one specific poet's life, the literary period in which he/she lived, his/her style of writing, and his/her influence on American poetry.
2. Students will continue to learn how to research and to read literary criticism.
3. Students will create an overview document regarding their particular poet.
4. Students will effectively incorporate research and literary criticism into a formal essay.

The Poets:
- Walt Whitman
- Carl Sandburg
- e.e. Cummings
- Langston Hughes
- Robert Frost
- Emily Dickinson
- Edwin Arlington Robinson
- William Carlos Williams
- William Carlos Williams
- Maya Angelou
- Edgar Lee Masters
- Gwendolyn Brooks
- Paul Lawrence Dunbar
- Claude McKay
- Edna St. Vincent Millay
- Nikki Giovanni

The Research: You will need to visit our media center and/or any other nearby library to look for articles and books about your poet as well as his/her poetry itself. Read through as many of the poems as possible and read about the poet's life as well as what other critics have said about his/her work. Then, meet with your group on designated days or whenever you can to discuss the topics and poems and make some decisions on a plan/outline and thesis for your paper. There will be class workdays but certainly not enough for you to complete this research using only these days. Start now!

Sources: These (as well as others) are in our media center; the local libraries may also have additional resources. You may not use a general encyclopedia.
- American Writers (reference set)
- EBSCOHost (media center computers)
- Internet
- Audio- Visual Aids - Videos - Tapes / record

The Research Paper: Your study group will be assigned to research the life and works of a famous American poet. Each group member will write a separate, documented research paper three typed pages minimum with a minimum of three sources on a particular topic related to the author. These topics are listed below. If you find another topic, please clear it with me. Within this paper you will, of course, need references to specific poems and lines that support your thesis or topic.

Topics:
- How the author’s poetry was influenced by BOTH the author’s personal history AND the literary movement of the era.
- The common themes AND styles of the author as reflected in his/her writing.

The Synopsis: You will create a ONE-PAGE document that provides the class with a basic understanding of your poet and his/her work. Be sure to make whatever you do in an easy-to-read format. You do NOT need to include a works cited with this document, since that will be included with both your research paper. Please include the following pieces:
- Picture of the poet
- Biographical information (birth, education, family, death (if deceased))
- Key events of the time period in which the author wrote
- Major themes in writing
- Most famous works
- Literary period – include other famous authors from the same period
To be checked throughout the unit:
¥ Bibliography information (min. 8 sources)
¥ Typed working outline (including working thesis)

To be handed in on the assigned day:
The following must be submitted in a binder.
¥ Final essays (typed)  ¥ Rough drafts with peer editing (typed)
¥ Works cited page for each essay (typed)  ¥ Formal Outline of each essay (typed)
Synopsis (typed)

Working Outline

The outline and thesis: You may follow this working outline while conducting your research. Alter this to fit your specific poet, but make sure you have included and balanced the main portions of the outline, and be sure it is in parallel form. Below is provided a sample working thesis and outline, but you are not limited to this; you may create your own. Do not just research biographical data; there must be three equal portions to your presentation. The final typed outline is due with your speech. Remember, your thesis and outline will evolve as your research and knowledge of the poet increases, so this is a mere starting point. Your final outline should be quite detailed.

THESIS: The poetry of ______________, which was influenced by personal background and by the __________ literary period, has contributed to the American literary heritage.

I. His/Her poetry was influenced by personal background.
   A. People who influenced the writing.
      1. 
      2. 
   B. Events that influenced the writings.
      1. 
      2. 

II. His/Her poetry was influenced by the ________ literary period.
   A. The poems reflected common themes of the period.
      1. 
      2. 
   B. The poems reflected the characteristic style of the period.
      1. 
      2. 

III. Contributions to American Literary Heritage (what do people say this person did for society or for poetry)?

Adapted from Emily Wendt-NRHS