

“Invocation” Lesson Plan
High School

Designed by Ariana Brown, Jesús Valles, Saba Khan Vlach, and Gabriel Cortez 1

Poem used: “Invocation” by Ariana Brown

Designed for high school students of color in English I, with emphasis on girls, especially Black girls

One-day unit (90 minute class) or Two-day unit (45 minute class)

TEKS Grade 9 ELA: <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter110/ch110c.html>

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TEKS Objectives (9th Grade ELA)

(b) Knowledge and Skills.

(2) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Theme and Genre. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about theme and genre in different cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to:

- (A) analyze how the genre of texts with similar themes shapes meaning;
- (B) analyze the influence of mythic, classical and traditional literature on 20th and 21st century literature; and
- (C) relate the figurative language of a literary work to its historical and cultural setting.

(8) Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Culture and History. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about the author's purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to explain the controlling idea and specific purpose of an expository text and distinguish the most important from the less important details that support the author's purpose.

(9) Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Expository Text. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about expository text and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to:

- (A) summarize text and distinguish between a summary that captures the main ideas and elements of a text and a critique that takes a position and expresses an opinion;
- (B) differentiate between opinions that are substantiated and unsubstantiated in the text;
- (C) make subtle inferences and draw complex conclusions about the ideas in text and their organizational patterns; and
- (D) synthesize and make logical connections between ideas and details in several texts selected to reflect a range of viewpoints on the same topic and support those findings with textual evidence.

(13) Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text. Students are expected to:

- (A) plan a first draft by selecting the correct genre for conveying the intended meaning to multiple audiences, determining appropriate topics through a range of strategies (e.g., discussion, background reading, personal interests, interviews), and developing a thesis or controlling idea;
- (B) structure ideas in a sustained and persuasive way (e.g., using outlines, note taking, graphic organizers, lists) and develop drafts in timed and open-ended situations that include transitions and the rhetorical devices used to convey meaning;

- (C) revise drafts to improve style, word choice, figurative language, sentence variety, and subtlety of meaning after rethinking how well questions of purpose, audience, and genre have been addressed;
- (D) edit drafts for grammar, mechanics, and spelling; and
- (E) revise final draft in response to feedback from peers and teacher and publish written work for appropriate audiences.

(14) Writing/Literary Texts. Students write literary texts to express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas. Students are responsible for at least two forms of literary writing. Students are expected to:

- (A) write an engaging story with a well-developed conflict and resolution, interesting and believable characters, and a range of literary strategies (e.g., dialogue, suspense) and devices to enhance the plot;
- (B) write a poem using a variety of poetic techniques (e.g., structural elements, figurative language) and a variety of poetic forms (e.g., sonnets, ballads); and
- (C) write a script with an explicit or implicit theme and details that contribute to a definite mood or tone.

(24) Listening and Speaking/Listening. Students will use comprehension skills to listen attentively to others in formal and informal settings. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to:

- (A) listen responsively to a speaker by taking notes that summarize, synthesize, or highlight the speaker's ideas for critical reflection and by asking questions related to the content for clarification and elaboration;
- (B) follow and give complex oral instructions to perform specific tasks, answer questions, solve problems, and complete processes; and
- (C) evaluate the effectiveness of a speaker's main and supporting ideas.

(26) Listening and Speaking/Teamwork. Students work productively with others in teams. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to participate productively in teams, building on the ideas of others, contributing relevant information, developing a plan for consensus-building, and setting ground rules for decision-making.

Invocation

by Ariana Brown

you were once teenage purveyor of the white girl gospel—
zealous pupil of the hot comb, of oily neck and folded ear,
but before that, you were young. you were asked questions
about your dead father and your hair. your first conversation
with god, faithless. child of the singing forehead. child of the
frustrated wrist. your mother yelled because you fell asleep
on your aunt’s pillows and now the whole couch smells of you.
child of amorous pomade. everyone can tell where you’ve been.
even bus windows remember your name. child of the curl that
stole the wind’s fury. how could everything about you not be
bursting? child of the busted chongo. child of the broken brush,
splitting anything weak in half while still blushing for a gentle
hand. you are your own lesson in commitment. child of royalty,
of the silk scarf before bed. defender from the cotton resurrected
each night to steal you back, every pillowcase a looming field of
ghosts. child of the rained out funeral. child of grocery bag protection.
at age twelve, washing your own hair is your first act of humility.
listening to your blackness, your first mode of resistance. child of
the eloquent scalp, which negotiations did you lose today? how many
times did you lift your hands in ceremony to unravel and partition?
tell us how you learned to fix, fluff, and plait; to wind and plow.
how you were late for class and work doing so. how you skipped
breakfast. how you tended. how you greeted a new ancestor in
the mirror and let their moans trickle and slither down the length
of you. how each strand circles back to its own beginning. child
of inheritance, rejecting gravity & its theorems. the eternal resilience.
when the weather catches you unprepared, you curse each
raindrop undoing your labor with its disrespectful weight—but
unlike anything else in the world, when smothered in water,
submerged in a substance thick enough to kill you, nearly
drowned and gasping—you rise, and refusing invisibility,
grow to the size all benevolent gods are.

For a Spanish translation of this poem, please visit www.arianabrown.com/resources.html. Video of this poem is available on YouTube.

To purchase Ariana’s book of poetry, *Sana Sana*, please visit <https://www.gameoverbooks.com/product-page/sana-sana>. For bulk orders, please visit <https://www.spdbooks.org/Products/9781732498686/sana-sana.aspx>.

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1. Warm Up (5-6 minutes)

Have students write their responses in their notebooks. Remind them that no one will read their responses, so anything they write is completely confidential.

1. Write your own definition of the word “beauty.” (2-3 minutes)
2. What are some things about your body you wish you could change? (2 minutes)
3. Why do you wish you could change those things? (2 minutes)

2. Circle check-in (5-10 minutes)

1. Round I. Circle formation: Students check in, “Tell us your name, and then, on a scale of 1-10, tell us how you’re doing today (1 being not too great and 10 being awesome)”
2. Round II. Brainstorm with students: “What does it mean to be confident? How can you tell if someone is confident or not?” (Make a Chart)
3. Round III. Students respond in circle: “What can people tell about you just by looking at you? This can be your race, ethnicity, religion, or your interests, level of confidence, etc.”

3. Bodies and Our Relationships to Them (Lecture and Discussion)

- a. Guiding questions: How does our relationship to our bodies reflect our beliefs about beauty and self-worth? How does our understanding of beauty relate to race and gender stereotypes? What can we learn by embracing the parts of ourselves we do not think are beautiful?

4. Resources to Share on Beauty and Society (30-35 minutes)

Provide copies to read aloud to students. Before reading, plan to share/teach vocabulary from the resources as necessary. As you read and discuss, bring students’ attention back to the three guiding questions.

- a. Read Aloud and Discuss [“4 Ways Our Socially Accepted Beauty Ideals Are Racist”](#) by Rachel Kuo
- b. Watch and Discuss: Video Clip: [“What Dark-Skinned People Will Never Tell You”](#)
- c. Read Aloud and Discuss: [this excerpt](#) from Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*

(If teaching 45 minute classes, end here for Day 1. If teaching 90 minute classes, continue.)

5. **If teaching 45 minute classes, begin Day 2 by having students share their thinking from Day 1 discussion about societal definitions of beauty. Teacher shares what teacher noticed about the conversation on Day 1.**
6. Generative round: In your groups, reflect on and respond to the questions: (5-10 minutes)
 - a. What are some lies you were told about beauty?
 - b. Who decides what is beautiful or attractive?
 - c. Why would someone want you to feel ugly or unattractive?
7. **Watch/Read “Invocation” by Ariana Brown** (15 minutes)
Have students complete the following pre-assessment independently or in partners and record their responses in notebooks.

- I. Can you think of any moments in your life when you were self-conscious about your appearance? Describe how you felt in these moments. (5 minutes)
- II. Have you ever believed that something about your body or appearance was ugly? Why did you feel that way? How do you feel about your body or appearance now? (5 minutes)

Introduce Ariana Brown. Share: <http://www.arianabrown.com/>

Say: *Ariana will become a member of our community of readers, writers, poets, and activists.*

Watch: [Click here to watch “Invocation.”](#)

(Provide a hard copy for each student in English and Spanish. The Spanish poem text is available for download in the Teacher Poems PDF at <http://www.arianabrown.com/resources.html> for \$1 USD.)

Reflection questions/written response on next page.

8. Reflection questions/Written response (20-25 minutes):

- I. What is the poem about? Why do you think the author wanted to write this poem?
- II. This poem is an ode, addressed to the author’s younger self. What does the author want to say about her feelings about her hair?
- III. How would you connect the video and article about beauty ideals, and Toni Morrison’s excerpt about self-love, to Brown’s poem “Invocation”? How do you see the concepts of self-love and affirmation working in all of these texts?
- IV. Write a poem or short story in which you celebrate something about yourself that you think is ugly or unattractive. You can think of this as an ode to yourself (or an ode to your younger self.) Use kind language to affirm the parts of you that others might reject. Try to find the beauty, and/or the resilience, in your own body and appearance. If you want, you can use the refrain “Child of…” like Brown’s poem, or you can include instructions on which parts of yourself to love and why, like Morrison’s excerpt. Grow your work from there.

You may consider adding one more day to the unit for further composition and/or art. I encourage all teachers to make time for students to share their work in some manner with each other.