

# Knoxville, Tennessee Study Guide

## Knoxville, Tennessee by Nikki Giovanni

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## Introduction

Originally published in the 1968 poetry collection *Black Judgement*, Nikki Giovanni's poem "Knoxville, Tennessee" has had many incarnations. In 1994, it was published as a children's book complete with full-color illustrations by Larry Johnson. A delightful and nostalgic visit to a summertime memory, the poem evokes the voice of a child in the midst of this reverie. The poem is generally not complicated by literary references or stodgy style but leans heavily upon an innate rhythm that seems to rise from the child's own heartbeat. Originally written for an adult, African-American audience, the poem has found a much wider readership. Its simplicity draws readers into a world where the most important decision to make is whether to have more "barbecue" or keep some room for the "homemade ice-cream."



## Author Biography

Giovanni was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1943, but she grew up in Lincoln Heights, Ohio, a predominantly black community. Her happy childhood, spent partly with her grandparents in Tennessee, became a major theme of her poetry. "Nikki Rosa," which recounts Giovanni's contented childhood, is often considered her signature poem. Giovanni received her bachelor's degree in history from Fisk University in 1967. While at Fisk, Giovanni was strongly influenced by a creative writing workshop taught by novelist John Oliver Killens. She also rejected her formerly conservative views in favor of the radicalism she encountered in fellow classmates. *Black Judgement* and *Black Feeling, Black Talk*, her first two volumes of poetry, reflect the anger and enthusiasm of the community of writers and political activists with whom Giovanni became involved. Adopting a revolutionary stance, Giovanni advocated open violence and expressed her impatience for change. In 1969, Giovanni took a teaching position at Rutgers University and gave birth to her son Thomas. During the mid-1970s, her work became more domestic and less angry, alienating her from some of her earlier supporters, though other critics praised her introspection and personal development. In 1971, Giovanni began to experiment with sound recordings of her poetry, and her first album, *Truth Is on Its Way*, was the best selling spoken-word record that year, greatly contributing to her nationwide fame. Although subsequent publications, such as *Cotton Candy on a Rainy Day* (1978) and *Those Who Ride the Night Winds* (1983), depart from her previous stylistic and thematic structures, Giovanni continues to receive the admiration of critics as an important voice in contemporary poetry.



# Plot Summary

## Lines 1-2

In each line of this poem, the speaker identifies something about summer. It is clear by the simplicity of language and affections that this speaker is not an adult but perhaps a child. It seems to be told from the point of view of a young person who is both nostalgic about a past summer spent and also looking forward to the return of summer's delights.

## Lines 3-12

In these lines, the speaker focuses on the taste sensations of summer and the quality of abundance. The presence of the family patriarch is perhaps the only slightly political statement in the whole poem. This poem can be determined as political if one considers the times in which the author was writing this poem and the feeling that black men were under siege. Otherwise, having a "daddy" who has a "garden" could not be more natural to a child's memories.

## Lines 13-17

Now, the speaker evokes a higher sensation, perhaps an almost spiritual quality to the memory by asking the reader to consider the "gospel music" and the tight-knit community centered on the "church." The fact that these lines fall in the center of the poem suggests that perhaps this is the heart and soul of the speaker's memory. The importance of this vision of a "homecoming" cannot be overlooked and can perhaps tell the reader that the speaker is not always in this earthly paradise.

## Lines 18-24

Finally, the speaker makes the connection to the place itself. The place is identified by "mountains," which often represent truth or vision. That the speaker goes to this place with a grandmother re-enforces the idea that wisdom is somehow shared by osmosis. The way that the speaker connects to the time and place is like the feeling of a good dream and perhaps that is why the reader is taken to the end of the day, to "sleep."



# Themes

## Simple Life

"Knoxville, Tennessee" was written at a time when many writers and social critics identified the experience of black Americans with urban problems such as poverty, crime, and race riots. This poem presents a sense of nostalgia for happier and simpler times, which are all related to summer in the mind of the poem's speaker. The first half of the poem centers on vegetables that are eaten in the same place they are grown, cutting away the chain of producers and handlers that comes between most city and suburban dwellers and the vegetables they consume. This phase of the poem gives way to another phase, represented by foods that are only slightly altered from their natural ingredients, such as barbecue, buttermilk, and homemade ice cream. All of these products are common, but their processed versions are far from the simple pleasures that the natural versions evoke in this poem's speaker. In a similar way, gospel music is a type of religious experience that invites participants to involve themselves directly in religion, rather than filtering religion through abstract philosophical thoughts.

## Food

Giovanni uses food to represent life in Knoxville for two reasons. For one thing, it is a powerful cultural indicator. The foods that this poem's speaker associates with Knoxville give readers a clear sense of the people who are discussed here. For instance, "fresh corn" implies that this poem takes place in the country, but not exactly on a farm, since the fresh corn in the poem comes from a garden. "Home made ice cream" similarly implies a rural setting. Several specific vegetables, such as okra and especially greens, are found in the southern part of the country and are strongly associated with the South's culinary tradition. Even though the poem's title makes it possible for readers to locate its setting on a map, these foods help readers experience the culture being discussed.

Frequently mentioning food also makes the poem a powerful experience for readers by appealing to their sense of taste. Poets often try to help readers experience the reality of the world about which they are writing by using images that affect the five senses. As the sense that is least often used in poems, taste is particularly effective in drawing readers into a situation, making them feel reality as the poem's speaker feels it. This poem uses words to remind readers of foods and their particular tastes, rendering the experience of summer in the South.

## Home

The church event mentioned in the poem is not just any gathering: it is referred to in line 17 as a "homecoming." This one word extends the meaning of the church beyond its



natural religious function to a social function, welcoming people back to the community after they have gone on to live in different places. They may attend religious services wherever they move, but, regardless of where they have gone or how long they have been gone, this church identifies Knoxville as their home.

The sense of "home" that runs through "Knoxville, Tennessee" is emphasized even more by the attention given to family. A father is mentioned early, in line 4; traditionally, the father is the head of the family and, in this case, he lives up to tradition by providing nourishment with vegetables he has raised. The addition of a grandmother in line 19 establishes a home that is open beyond the narrowest definitions, a home that includes members of the extended family.

But, the aspect of the poem that most clearly identifies this situation as "home" is the speaker's familiarity with the routine that occurs there. The speaker uses the present tense to speak of eating and listening to music and going to the mountains, indicating that she has done these things often and expects to do them again and again.

## Security and Insecurity

The use of the word "daddy" in line 4 establishes the poem's point of view as that of a child, or at the very least as someone who finds comfort and security in speaking of her father. Throughout the poem there is a tone of security in the rituals and familiar foods the speaker finds in Knoxville. This culminates in the final lines, which identify Knoxville in the summer as a place where one can "be warm / all the time / not only when you go to bed / and sleep." This warmth can literally be the warmth of summer days, in contrast to cold winter days, but warmth can also be used to symbolize a sense of safety, implying that the poem's speaker no longer feels the need to be guarded most of the day.

Using "warmth" as a symbol for security in this poem leads readers to wonder why the poem's speaker sometimes feels insecure. If she only feels secure in her bed or during the summers, when she can wander in nature, then the implication seems to be that insecurity occurs when dealing with other people in society. If such is the case, then "Knoxville, Tennessee" is a true reflection of the experience of many Americans who moved from farms to cities but who only feel comfortable when they return to a country environment.

## Style

Minimally constructed, "Knoxville, Tennessee" depends on the simplicity of its language and rhythm to evoke the language and memories of a child. Giovanni relies on the simple device of singling out phrases and images in each line to crystallize the whole movement of the poem into a tangible time and place. Reading it, one can easily imagine the words spilling from the mouth of a young girl remembering her favorite place on earth.





# Historical Context

Although "Knoxville, Tennessee" does not address any specific issues regarding race, it was published at a time when Giovanni's writing was very much concerned with the question of black identity. Other selections in *Black Judgement*, the volume in which this poem was first published, make affirmative statements about being black (such as "Beautiful Black Men") and about mocking the white males who held political power (such as "Ugly Honkies, or The Election Game and How to Win It"). A prose poem titled "Reflections on April 4, 1968," about the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., begins with the line "What can I, a poor Black woman, do to destroy America?" It goes on to state, "[t]he assassination of Martin Luther King is an act of war. President Johnson, your unfriendly candidate, has declared war on Black people." This book was published during the Civil Rights Movement, a time when black-American writers were struggling to use words to affirm the cultural identity of their people.

Historically, blacks in America have met resistance to attempts to form a cultural identity. From the time the first Africans were brought to the new world as slaves in 1501 to the fall of the Confederacy in 1864, it was in the interest of mainstream culture to view blacks as subhuman, lacking in the mental and emotional capacity to form authentic, significant cultural ties. After the end of the Civil War, it was in the interest of whites, especially those on the lower end of the social strata, to promote the myth that held blacks to be too incompetent to control their own fate through property ownership and voting. Laws were passed to keep the races separate and to keep blacks out of the political process, assuring that organized black voters would not be able to change oppressive laws. These laws, referred to collectively as "Jim Crow laws" (after a foolish black character in minstrel comedies), claimed to offer blacks "separate but equal" facilities, such as schooling and public transportation. In reality, the facilities provided for black citizens were not equal to, rather far worse than, those provided for whites.

The struggle against racial discrimination in America made great strides in the 1950s and early 1960s. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court found the "separate but equal" doctrine to be unconstitutional while ruling on the case of *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. While the case specifically discussed the issue of integrating public schools, its basic principle came to be used to tear down racial barriers in all areas of society. In 1955, Rosa Parks, a Montgomery, Alabama resident, refused to sit in the back of a public bus, as blacks were required to do by law. Her arrest and a subsequent boycott of the Montgomery bus system by blacks served to change the law and showed blacks the power of presenting a united front. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy proposed far-reaching legislation to ensure the rights of black citizens a hundred years after President Lincoln had abolished slavery in America with the Emancipation Proclamation.

The Black Pride movement was both a cause and an effect of the push for civil rights. A major psychological barrier was breached as black Americans became increasingly aware throughout the twentieth century of their own rich culture and of the artificial standards of mainstream culture that associated black traditions and physical

characteristics with shame and ugliness. During the mid-1960s, authors and social critics made a point of emphasizing the beauty of black life. "Black is beautiful" became a popular slogan in the movement for racial equality, along with "Black Power." In this context, Giovanni's inflamed condemnation of the traditionally white power structure in *Black Judgement* was a fairly common claim for the legitimacy blacks had been denied for hundreds of years.

"Knoxville, Tennessee" is not written from a perspective of anger; instead, it affirms black traditions by showing the joy of the speaker, who remembers how much she loved growing up in her situation. The fact that the speaker is black is not mentioned openly, which in itself makes a political point. At a time when black Americans were struggling to show both whites and blacks that black traditions were positive and supportive, Giovanni chose to deemphasize the race of the speaker of the poem, showing readers that black children experience the world in much the same way that white children do. At a time when the black experience was just emerging into the public consciousness, this point would have been much more significant than it would be today.

## Critical Overview

Giovanni first garnered attention as a revolutionary poet with her book *Black Judgement* in 1968. Known then primarily for her angry verse, Giovanni's critics and supporters alike paid more attention to her themes of revolution than her larger themes of family and love. In 1971, Don L. Lee commented in his *Dynamite Voices*, "Nikki writes about the familiar: what she knows, sees, experiences. It is clear why she conveys such urgency in expressing the need for Black awareness, unity, solidarity. She knows how it was. She knows how it is. She knows also that a change can be affected."

Giovanni early on seems to have departed from her political stance with her poem "Knoxville, Tennessee." One senses that beneath the revolutionary is a woman truly at peace with herself and her past. Suzanne Juhasz commented in *Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry by Women, A New Tradition* that "power and love are what are at issue in Nikki Giovanni's poetry and life. In her earlier poems (1968-1970), these issues are for the most part separate. She writes of personal love in poems of private life; of black power and a public love in political poems." In her later work, Giovanni more fully embraces the politics of personal life. Giovanni is perhaps her own most interesting critic and seems to understand very well what she does with her art form. In an interview by Claudia Tate in 1983, Giovanni states of her process, "A poem is a way of capturing a moment. I don't do a lot of revisions because I think if you have to do that then you've got problems with the poem. Rather than polish the words, I take the time to polish the poem."

# Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3



# Critical Essay #1

*Kelly is an instructor of creative writing and literature at Oakton Community College. In this essay, Kelly discusses the childlike voice and nostalgic tone that make Giovanni's poem a work to which people from different societies can relate.*

At the time that "Knoxville, Tennessee" was published in the late 1960s, Nikki Giovanni was gaining public attention for writing angry political poems that contained racial slurs and calls for violence. Other poems from her collection *Black Feeling, Black Talk / Black Judgement* have not withstood the test of time. Lines of poetry like "Blessed be machine guns in Black hands" from her poem "A Litany for Peppe" or her advice to black children to "grow a natural [afro] and practice radicalism" from "Poem for Black Boys" catapulted her to stardom in her twenties, but their significance has faded as the spirit of revolution has, for better or worse, faded from the racial dialog in America. But, for more than thirty years, "Knoxville, Tennessee" has endured, quietly proving itself more powerful than the poems with heated rhetoric and inflammatory ideas. Speaking simply about a simple subject, the poem has insight to offer people across racial, age, and cultural differences.

Often readers who think they are praising a poem by saying they can "relate to it" are actually disrespecting the poet's skill without even knowing it. To say that many people understand something might just mean it is superficial enough to be appreciated without much thought. The most common way to produce something thousands of unrelated strangers will be able to understand would be to offer something that has very little substance. Millions of people relate to television shows that make a point of leaving out anything that might alienate anybody, and critics generally agree that television has less artistic merit than poetry, which alienates just about everyone. Even though there are poems that gain popularity by being shallow, there are also works like "Knoxville, Tennessee," which are able to speak to a wide audience without having to water down its message because it understands the common threads of human existence and is able to address them directly. This poem succeeds because it does not shy away from the task of showing readers one specific situation and relating this situation to something they may have experienced.

One way this poem is able to reach so many readers is its narrative perspective. Giovanni renders this poem in the persona of a child, but subtly, without any condescension. This is a key factor in the reader's ability to relate to the situation she describes because each reader was a child once. Although she makes this narrative stance seem easy, a technique like this is actually a true test of a poet's skill. There is much that could go wrong when writing in a child's voice. The particular details a child would focus on are not the ones that an adult sees, and the language a child would use limits the poet. The poet trying to write in a child's voice risks failure with each line.

Giovanni does not make any pointed reference to the speaker's age; instead, she reveals it through sublime methods, leaving it for the reader to discern. For instance, she works in references to other family members who are older. The fourth line's reference to "daddy" is a clear clue that the speaker at least feels like a child in



reference to her father. The later mention of "grandmother" gives an even stronger sense of the speaker's age, establishing her as young enough to have two living generations around. These two words are probably the most direct indicators that this poem is being told from a young person's perspective.

But, they are only clues and do not, in and of themselves, provide enough evidence to know the poem's speaker. The sense of familiarity that most readers get from this poem comes from Giovanni's ability to write convincingly in a child's voice without making a big issue of the fact that she is doing so. It is a child's voice, but it is not childish. The poem consists of words that are simple, but not too simple, arranged in short lines that generally run for no more than four or five words each. The narrowness of the lines gives the poem's rhythm a jerky, breathless quality, with ideas chopped into short phrases the way they would be by a child who is overenthusiastic, as if the speaker is impatient and finding that words come too slowly. By contrast, a poem with wide, flowing lines that stretch from one side of the page to the other would indicate a speaker who is a smooth and polished orator. The narrator of "Knoxville, Tennessee" seems to be in a rush to discuss all of the things she likes about her favorite season of the year, so impatient to get all of the images in that she can find no better way to express herself than using the simplest connective word: of twenty-four lines in the poem, eleven start with the word "and." This is the way that children tell stories, before they learn more sophisticated methods of tying thoughts together with logical reasoning.

One other stylistic technique worth noting is the poem's use of the word "you." Many contemporary poems use "you," but usually when they do so they create a specific, recognizable character. These poems use "you" often, because each time they do helps readers build a profile of the character being described. Giovanni uses the word in a different way. It does not appear often enough in "Knoxville, Tennessee" to think it is meant to describe a specific "you" character. The few times it is slipped into the poem—in lines 3 and 23, and in line 19 as "your"—read like minor grammatical slips by a speaker who is too unsophisticated to write formally. "You" appears in complex poetry, but it is also a young or simple person's way of telling a story.

While the simple voice of "Knoxville, Tennessee" encourages readers to think like children again, the poem also has a nostalgic tone that serves to remind its readers of all that is lost as one grows. As with the childlike voice, the nostalgic tone could easily, if handled incorrectly, become an embarrassment for the poet, inviting readers' resentment if they feel that the author is trying to manipulate them.

To make the nostalgic experience have the greatest impact on a majority of readers, Giovanni avoids the easy path, which would be to oversimplify everything being discussed and speak in vague terms instead of giving concrete examples. Giovanni provides specific details that readers find meaningful because the poem's speaker finds them meaningful. The title itself, for example, names the place where Giovanni spent her childhood summers, and this invites readers to reflect upon their own lives. Similarly, readers who have never experienced okra, greens, or buttermilk, or who have tried them and do not like them, can share the fondness this poem's speaker has when



thinking about the things of her childhood, and they can relate it to the way they look at their own childhood.

Near the end of the poem, the childlike perspective and nostalgic tone come together in one image, that of being barefooted. Being barefooted, in short, represents the simple life that is the poem's focus, as if it is the sum of all that came before. As much as being barefooted reflects the early part of the poem, it can also be considered a jumping-off point for the poem's last movement, where the good life that Giovanni describes is slightly shaded with the hint of danger.

In the poem's last two lines, there is an insinuation of troubled times. Giovanni steers clear of giving a specific description of what it is like to be warm only when one is in bed, sleeping. Readers are left to imagine a place that is never heated properly in the winter, or a life that is so bad that a child can only find peace or warmth by sleeping. This sinister life is not as important as the fact that the poem manages to mention it at all. Without any acknowledgement of the difficulty of the speaker's life outside of Knoxville, the whole poem would be too kind-hearted to be believed. It is an unfortunate fact that most nostalgic reminiscences of childhood make readers feel happy only by ignoring the problems associated with growing up. In "Knoxville, Tennessee," Giovanni uses restraint to avoid saying much about the scary side of childhood, but she does at least recognize that aspect, to round out the poem.

"Knoxville, Tennessee" is a daring poem that could have gone wrong in any number of ways, but does not. It shows more restraint than Giovanni's other poems of the time, which were full of flash but burned out quickly. It also shows more substance than other poems that pretend to offer warmhearted looks at childhood. Through the use of specific imagery and a good understanding, or memory, of how a young person would talk about the situation, Giovanni is able to make readers from all different backgrounds feel how her poem's narrator feels. It is a triumph of quiet restraint, and a good example of what poetry can do at its best.

**Source:** David Kelly, Critical Essay on "Knoxville, Tennessee," in *Poetry for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.



## Critical Essay #2

*Dell'Amico is a college instructor of English literature and composition. In this essay, Dell'Amico reads Giovanni's poem as a work about a typical childhood experience of summer and, more particularly, as a poem about Giovanni's own childhood summers in Knoxville, Tennessee.*

The distinguished U.S. poet Nikki Giovanni came of age, as a poet, during the Civil Rights era in U.S. history, publishing her first volume of poems in 1968. She is known as a central voice in African-American letters, a poet who has dedicated her career to expressing and documenting the aspirations and cultures of African-American peoples. However, her poetry also addresses topics apart from strictly African-American ones, as well as topics that encompass African-American and other, overlapping concerns simultaneously. For example, Giovanni may write from the point of someone in love, from the point of view of a woman, or from the point of view of a woman who is also an African American. Or, as in the poem "Knoxville, Tennessee," she is writing from the points of view of an individual (or a child), an African-American and Southern child in particular, and *any* child enjoying his or her long, delicious summer holiday.

"Knoxville, Tennessee" is both a personal and a public poem. It is personal in the sense that Giovanni spent most of her childhood summers in Knoxville, and so she is in part remembering her own particular history in this poem (Giovanni was born in Tennessee, moved with her family to Ohio when she was an infant, but, thereafter, returned regularly to her grandparents' home in Knoxville to spend summer vacations and other holidays). In addition to this personal, autobiographical dimension, the poem has a public, broader significance, in that it captures any child's experience of summer. The poem's personal-public doubleness can be seen in the following lines: "you can eat fresh corn / from daddy's garden." The "you" in this first line gestures toward all readers who enjoyed summers like Giovanni's while the words "daddy's garden" points to how Giovanni is thinking of her own childhood in particular, a childhood graced, in part, by a private family garden plot.

The language employed in Giovanni's poem is characteristic of the language employed in her poetry throughout her career. Giovanni favors everyday words, language that is broadly accessible or capable of being understood and enjoyed by any North-American reader, regardless of the reader's education and experience. The combination of accessibility and social commitment that characterizes Giovanni's poetry has led many to call her a "poet of the people," as she demonstrates in these ways that it is necessary and possible to write politically relevant but non-alienating and non-elitist works. It is important to note, in this regard, that Giovanni's employment of everyday words and speech patterns does not mean that the poems are simple or shallow in sense or meaning. On the contrary, Giovanni's poems are as admired by critics as those by poets who prefer more adorned language; Giovanni simply has perfected a means of complex poetic expression that does not require rare or unusual words to communicate.





"Knoxville, Tennessee" is an affectionate ode to childhood and childhood summers, the sort of childhood summers enjoyed by children who can be safely let loose during the summer months to freely roam their neighborhoods or the countryside surrounding the city or town in which they live. This wild freedom is in direct contrast to the rules and regulations under which children live during the school year, when they must follow a strict schedule, obey their teachers in addition to their parents, and fulfill all the tasks that being a student entails. Hence, as the child speaker of this poem asserts—in a typically childish way—she likes summer, of all seasons, "best."

Summer is so wonderful to this poem's child because she is not only free of school-year restrictions, but also because summer is so rich in delights, so full of favorite treats and activities. During the summer months she eats "fresh corn" straight from "daddy's garden," and "okra / and greens / and cabbage / and lots of / barbecue / and buttermilk / and homemade ice-cream." These foods and treats are, clearly, among the child's favorites—but, then again, which child would turn down "homemade ice-cream" or succulent "barbecue"? Indeed, of the poem's twenty-four lines, eleven begin with the word "and," and so the reader understands that wonderful delights are many during summer; they pile up; there is, seemingly, a never-ending supply of them ("lots of" them, as the childish speaker hints).

This poem's very short lines convey the excitement and jam-packed days of summer, days in which one wonderful activity is followed immediately by another. These lines, which can be so rapidly read, which seem to tumble down the page, suggest the headlong progress of busy days during which children are free to run about as much and as wildly as they please. This is an outdoor life, most children's favorite kind of life, as one of the isolated words of poem makes clear: "outside." Further, the poem's middle portion, beginning with the line "at the church picnic," is, essentially, a list of the types of special summer events so enjoyed by children: church picnics, other special church events (the "church / homecoming"), hikes to the "mountains" with one's "grandmother," and running around "barefooted." Although it is understood that special events such as church "picnics" and "homecomings" do not happen on the same day, the idea that summer days are full of any number of wonderful activities is nevertheless conveyed by the length and variety of this list, as well as by Giovanni's choosing to end the poem with the word "sleep." Since each day is full of so much running around and socializing, each summer day's end finds the child happily, thoroughly exhausted, thoroughly ready for rest. The poem's headlong, tumbling rush, then, mimics the exiting pace of a child's typical summer day, a day that will end in deep, satisfied "sleep."

In addition to this idea of summer plenty (whether plenty of favorite foods or activities), this poem conveys the idea that summers are special to children also because they are closely ensconced within the warm embrace of family during this time. Giovanni refers specifically to a "daddy" and a "grandmother" in the poem and speaks of the "warm" weather of summer to suggest how children appreciate not having to leave their family circle for the public space of school during the holiday months. This is a safe, cozy feeling, like snuggling in bed: "and be warm / all the time / not only when you go to bed."



A sense of solid, comforting community is also reinforced by the poem's mention of church events, as one's church community is in some sense an extension of one's immediate family. That Giovanni mentions a "church / homecoming" in particular supports these ideas of an extended church-family, as well as how children feel as if they are, for all their roaming about, comfortably at *home* for the duration of the summer vacation. This mention of a church homecoming also suggests that, even as Giovanni lived most of her life outside of Tennessee, Tennessee is somehow her first and most special home, either because she was born there or perhaps because she was so close to her grandparents, particularly her grandmother, Emma Louvenia Watson.

At the same time that any reader who enjoyed summers like Giovanni's will relate to this poem, the poem presents a picture of summers as they are experienced by many Southern and African-American children in particular. Words such as "fresh corn" and "okra" conjure the U.S. South, as these are regional Southern specialties. A specifically African-American Southern culture is suggested by Giovanni's focus on church events, especially "gospel music," as gospel music is an art form of central importance within U.S. African-American cultures, cultures that have their roots in the South. Further, church events and socials are, both historically and still today, central components of African-American community and public life.

The Civil Rights era in the United States was a fraught time during which many pitched battles were fought. Schools and other public institutions had to be integrated, and African Americans fought for equal opportunity in all areas of contemporary life. For this reason, many of Giovanni's poems, especially from the earlier collections, convey trenchant protest, although some work toward African-American equality simply by documenting the specificity and particularity of African-American lives and cultures. (That is, by documenting the lives and cultures of African Americans, Giovanni writes these ways of living into being and social significance.) However, as Giovanni has made clear—and as she makes clear in "Knoxville, Tennessee"—being political and sometimes angry does not mean being unhappy. As she writes in the autobiographical poem "Nikki-Rosa," for example, (which, like "Knoxville, Tennessee," is from Giovanni's first published collection, the 1968 volume entitled *Black Feeling Black Talk / Black Judgement*),

and I really hope no white person ever has cause  
to write about me  
because they never understand  
Black love is Black wealth and they'll  
probably talk about my hard childhood  
and never understand that  
all the while I was quite happy.

"Knoxville, Tennessee" is a testament to Giovanni's happy childhood, and this and other poems in the poet's long, distinguished career are testaments to the fact that being outraged over inequality and fighting for one's rights is not necessarily an occasion for unhappiness. Being political, Giovanni's writing suggests, is being a complete human, a



person not wholly enwrapped in a small bubble of private concerns but also involved in the events of the larger, surrounding, public world.

**Source:** Carol Dell'Amico, Critical Essay on "Knoxville, Tennessee," in *Poetry for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.



## Critical Essay #3

*In the following excerpt, Cook explores the scope of Giovanni's poetry and her presence as a Southern poet.*

In her first collection of poems, Giovanni expresses themes anticipated by the title *Black Feeling, Black Talk*. But already she demonstrates occasionally her gift for the original, individual image, for example, as she evokes the days and places of childhood in "Poem (For BMC No. 2)":

There were fields where once we walked  
Among the clover and crab grass and those  
Funny little things that look like cotton candy

There were liquids expanding and contracting  
In which we swam with amoebas and other Afro-  
Americans

This poem is a striking contrast to the bestknown poem from this volume, "The True Import of Present Dialogue, Black vs. Negro (For Peppe, Who Will Ultimately Judge Our Efforts)," with its repetition of the lines "Nigger / Can you kill." Like "Nikki-Rosa" and "Knoxville, Tennessee" from her next volume, "Poem (For BMC No. 2)" recalls a time and place that endure in memory, even in the face of violence and hatred.

One of Giovanni's finest poems is set in this homeland of the past. "Knoxville, Tennessee," written at the height of the unrest of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, develops a theme of security, of belonging, through simple yet highly effective images of nature, of family, of religion. Although it is almost imagistic, it builds to an explicit thematic statement:

I always like summer  
best  
you can eat fresh corn  
from daddy's garden  
and okra  
and greens  
and cabbage  
and lots of  
barbecue  
□  
and be warm  
all the time  
not only when you go to bed  
and sleep



The simple diction, the soothing alliteration, the short lines to emphasize each word, all create a feeling of love for this place and these people that transcends topical issues.

Giovanni later wrote a prose description of Christmas in Knoxville using images of winter rather than summer, yet conveying the same feeling of warmth: "Christmas in Knoxville was the smell of turnip greens and fatback, perfume blending with good Kentucky bourbon, cigars and cigarettes, bread rising on the new electric stove, the inexplicable smell of meat hanging in the smokehouse (though we owned no smokehouse), and, somehow, the sweet taste of tasteless snow." As Roger Whitlow notes, though, this kind of warmth is "rare" in Giovanni's early work. Still, Giovanni's use of this Southern place from her past speaks to the same aspects of Southern life as poems by James Dickey or prose by Eudora Welty.

Most of the poems in *Black Judgement* are militant in subject and theme; one of the most effective is "Adulthood (For Claudia)," in which Giovanni catalogs the violence of the decade, the deaths of leaders from Patrice Lumumba to John F. Kennedy to Martin Luther King, Jr., and of lesser-known civil rights workers such as Viola Liuzzo. In another poem from this volume, "For Sandra," Giovanni seems to explain why poems of political rhetoric dominate her first two volumes. The persona speaks of the difficulty of composing poems in revolutionary times; for example,

so i thought  
i'll write a beautiful green tree poem  
peeked from my window  
to check the image  
noticed the schoolyard was covered  
with asphalt  
no green□no trees grow  
in manhattan

She concludes that "perhaps these are not poetic / times / at all." Although the thrust of the poem is toward the civil rights strife of the late 1960s, the reader also senses something of the alienation and displacement of a Southerner in the urban North.

Giovanni uses the South and its people to develop the specific theme of the past in "Alabama Poem" from her next collection, *Re: Creation*. A student at Tuskegee Institute meets an old black man and then an old black woman whose remarks indicate that knowledge must be gained through experience, must be inherited from the past. The persona speculates in conclusion: "if trees would talk / wonder what they'd tell me." Her words do not seem ironic; rather she seems to have learned a valuable lesson in her walk along this Southern country road. Though the images in this poem are sparse, the rural place and its people are seen to be of vital significance to one who seeks knowledge. The theme of the necessity of learning from the past what one needs to live in the present links this poem by Nikki Giovanni to a rich tradition in Southern writing, especially from the Fugitive poets of the 1920s to the present.



A more challenging use of the concreteness of place and the thematic significance of the past can be seen in the complex, ironic poem "Walking Down Park," also from *Re:Creation*. Speculating about the history of New York City, the speaker wonders what a street such as Park Avenue looked like "before it was an avenue," "what grass was like before / they rolled it / into a ball and called / it central park." She even thinks:

ever look south  
on a clear day and not see  
time's squares but see  
tall birch trees with sycamores  
touching hands

Questioning why men destroy their environment, she returns to days of the past, musing, "probably so we would forget / the Iroquois, Algonquin / and Mohicans who could caress / the earth." Possibly this relationship with nature, which characterized the Indians of an earlier time, can be recaptured:

ever think what Harlem would be  
like if our herbs and roots and elephant ears  
grew sending  
a cacophony of sound to us

Here through a complex set of images Giovanni connects the situation of blacks in contemporary America with the past of the American Indian, another oppressed minority group, as well as with their African heritage. "Walking Down Park" thus becomes a statement of a longing for happiness, related in the mind of the speaker not only to life in the past, which allowed for a closeness to nature lost in contemporary urban life, but also to a specific place from the past—Africa.

One of the most important examples of the ways Giovanni employs places in her poetry is her use of houses, both literal and metaphorical, from the past and in the present. In "Housecleaning," another poem from *Re:Creation*, the persona speaks first of her pleasure in ordinary chores essential to maintaining a house, then turns tidying up into a metaphor to describe aptly the chores necessary in human relationships as well. The growing sense of independence and identity in this poem anticipates the major themes of Giovanni's next volume, *My House*.

At this point, in the early 1970s, Giovanni is still using the lowercase "i," which R. Roderick Palmer identifies as a common device in revolutionary poetry, more than the uppercase. Perhaps she intends to symbolize the concept she has often invoked, that one retains qualities of childhood, even when striving for maturity. She uses this device in a poem from *My House* set, as is "Knoxville, Tennessee," in a place that now exists only in memory. In "Mothers," Giovanni depicts a woman remembering her mother sitting in a kitchen at night:

she was sitting on a chair  
the room was bathed in moonlight diffused through



those thousands of panes landlords who rented  
to people with children were prone to put in windows

Recalling a poem her mother taught her on this particular night, the persona determines to teach the same poem to her son, to establish with him the relationship she had with her mother. This relationship is re-created for the reader in the simple description of a place remembered, especially in the quality of light Giovanni uses as the central image of the poem.

In the title poem, Giovanni uses homes and houses to represent the movement toward maturity, symbolized by the movement away from the places, homes, of one's childhood toward establishing a home for oneself, or an identity as a mature person. Like Giovanni's poems about childhood, "My House" is characterized by images of warmth and security, emphasizing that in her house the speaker is in complete control:

i mean it's my house  
and i want to fry pork chops  
and bake sweet potatoes  
and call them yams  
cause i run the kitchen  
and i can stand the heat  
□  
and my windows might be dirty  
but it's my house  
and if i can't see out sometimes they can't see in either

As Suzanne Juhasz emphasizes, the woman speaker "orders experience and controls it" □ She controls not only through need and desire, but through strength, ability □ In contrast to the child persona of "Knoxville, Tennessee," the "i" here has discovered that she is an autonomous being who can shape at least the smaller places of her world to suit her own needs and desires; at the same time, the "i" is willing to take responsibility for her actions, to pay the price for such control □

These examples from Nikki Giovanni's poetry □ and her prose as well □ demonstrate that, for her, place is more than an image, more than a surface used to develop a narrative or a theme, just as place functions in the best poetry of the Southern tradition lying behind her work. Further, the changing sense of place in these poems can be seen to reveal Giovanni's developing sense of herself as a woman and as a poet. Suzanne Juhasz, Anna T. Robinson, and Erlene Stetson all emphasize in their recent critical discussions the growing feminist consciousness they find in Giovanni's work. Her use of place is broader than simply a feminist symbol, though, just as her poetry has developed beyond purely racial themes. The relationships of people to places and the ways people have responded to and tried to control places are important themes for Giovanni, as are the ways places sometimes control people. Greatest in thematic significance are the need to belong to a place or in a place and the necessity of moving beyond physical places to spiritual or metaphysical ones.



Looking at Giovanni's poetry in the context of Southern literature expands rather than limits the possibilities for interpretation and analysis. In fact, this approach reveals that within the body of her work lies a solid core of poems that do not rely on political or personal situations for their success. Rather, they develop universal themes, such as coming to terms with the past and with the present so that one may move into the future—again, themes that have been and continue to be of particular significance in Southern poetry. These themes mark her work as a contribution to the canon not just of Southern poetry, of black poetry, of feminist poetry, but also of contemporary American poetry. However, Giovanni's response to any generalization, any categorization, would probably echo the closing line of her poem "Categories," from *My House*. Emphasizing her uniqueness as an individual, she might well proclaim, "i'm bored with categories."

**Source:** Martha Cook, "Nikki Giovanni: Place and Sense of Place in Her Poetry," in *Southern Women Writers: The New Generation*, University of Alabama Press, 1990, pp. 279-300.



## Adaptations

"Knoxville, Tennessee" is included on a 1976 LP record issued by Folkways Smithsonian Records called *Legacies: The Poetry of Nikki Giovanni*. It was reissued on compact disc in 1997.

The Poetry Center of San Francisco released a videocassette of Nikki Giovanni reading at San Francisco State University in 1984. The title is *Nikki Giovanni*, and it was released on video in 1984.

A videocassette of Nikki Giovanni reading her poetry was released in 1988 by Direct Cinema Limited. It is entitled *Spirit to Spirit* and was produced and directed by Mirra Bank.

Giovanni is one of the poets featured in the four videocassette series *Furious Flower: African American Poetry, 1960-1995*. This collection of conversations with poets was released in 1998 by California Newsreel. Joanne Gabbin was the executive producer, and Judith McCray was the director.



## Topics for Further Study

When this poem was first published in 1969, racial tensions in America were at their height. Explain how you think a white author would have handled the situation described in this poem differently.

The reference to going "to the mountains" in line 18 refers to old spiritual songs. Research African-American spiritual music and find some songs that refer to mountains. Then, explain the significance of this symbol.

The foods that Giovanni lists in this poem are traditional Southern foods. Make a list of things that the poem's speaker would remember fondly if she had spent her childhood summers in some other part of the country.

Write a response poem, using the same voice and style used here, that explains what this poem's speaker does during the winter.



## Compare and Contrast

**1969:** In the wake of the assassination of Reverend Martin Luther King the year before, dozens of cities across the country—including Chicago, New York, Baltimore, Boston, Newark, Kansas City, and Washington, D.C.—experience race riots. Some black communities are completely devastated by the riots.

**Today:** Racial tensions seldom boil over into riots. The last major spate of race riots occurred in 1992, after the verdict was handed down in the trial of the Los Angeles police officers who arrested Rodney King.

**1969:** Americans look nostalgically toward the wholesomeness of country life as an antidote for the violence and corruption of inner city life.

**Today:** "Urban sprawl" has pushed Americans beyond the crowded city into the semi-rural comforts of the suburbs.

**1969:** Only a few black actors are offered recurring roles on network television, most notably Bill Cosby in *I Spy*, Diahann Carroll in *Julia*, and Nichelle Nichols in *Star Trek*.

**Today:** The color lines on television are not as marked as in previous decades. However, there are still fewer leading roles for black actors than white actors, particularly on the major networks.

**1969:** A growing number of Americans oppose America's military involvement in Vietnam.

**Today:** After the destruction of the New York City World Trade Center and an attack on the Pentagon in 2001, Americans are largely supportive of the U.S. military's operations in Afghanistan.

**1969:** Growing awareness of the earth's ecological balance and of humanity's potential to destroy the environment lead to the first International Earth Day in 1970.

**Today:** Earth Day is still celebrated annually. Environment-friendly ideas that once seemed strange, such as emissions testing and recycling programs, are common parts of daily life.

## What Do I Read Next?

*Black Feeling, Black Talk* (Giovanni's first collection of poems) and *Black Judgement* (in which "Knoxville, Tennessee" was published) were combined into one book called *Black Feeling, Black Talk / Black Judgement* in 1970 by the William Morrow Company.

In 1994, the poem "Knoxville, Tennessee" was adapted to a children's book of the same title as the poem, with original illustrations by Larry Johnson. *Knoxville, Tennessee* is published by Scholastic, Inc.

Written around the same time that "Knoxville, Tennessee" was published, Giovanni's book *Gemini* bears the subtitle "An Extended Autobiographical Statement on My First Twenty- Five Years of Being a Black Poet." In it, she describes her life and the state of race relations in America at the time and clearly outlines her views of both. This book was published in 1971 by the Bobbs-Merrill Company.

Poet Gwendolyn Brooks has praised Giovanni's poetry. Many of Brooks's best works can be found in her *Selected Poems*, published in 1999 by HarperCollins.

In 1971, author James Baldwin appeared with Giovanni on a British television program. Their conversation, with slight editing, was transcribed into a book called *A Dialogue: James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni*. It was published in 1973 by J. B. Lippincott Company.

In 1972 and 1973, Giovanni had a series of conversations with esteemed African-American poet Margaret Walker. Their talks were taped, transcribed, and printed in the book *A Poetic Equation: Conversations between Nikki Giovanni and Margaret Walker*. This book was published in 1974 by Howard University Press.

Giovanni wrote the introduction for *The Rose That Grew from Concrete*, a posthumous collection of poems by recording artist Tupac Shakur written between 1989 and 1991, before he became famous. It was published in 1999 by MTV Books.

The sense of displacement and determination that appears in Giovanni's powerful work from the 1960s is evident in the poetry of Naomi Shihab Nye, a Palestinian American living in Texas. Her poems can be found in *Words under the Words: Selected Poems*, which was published in 1995 by Eighth Mountain Press.

One of the most distinctive African-American voices of 1960s literature was that of Amiri Baraka, the poet who formerly went by the name Leroi Jones. His forty-year career as a poet, essayist, playwright, and fiction writer is surveyed in *The Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, published in 1999 by Thunder's Mouth Press.

Giovanni's *Racism 101* (1985) is a collection of essays she has written concerning what it is like to be a "Black American." These essays discuss a wide-range of topics and give

a good perspective on Giovanni's personal feelings about race and race relations in America.

## Further Study

Fowler, Virginia C., *Nikki Giovanni*, Twayne's United States Authors Series, No. 613, Twayne Publishers, 1992.

Fowler, who has been a collaborator with Giovanni (she provided the forward for Giovanni's book *Racism 101*), gives a synopsis of the rise of the poet's career.

Franklin, V. P., *Living Our Stories, Telling Our Truth: Autobiography and the Making of the African-American Intellectual Tradition*, Oxford University Press, 1996.

Franklin examines how the willingness to use their own experience as subject matter enabled important black writers to change the racial dialogue in America.

Jago, Carol, *Nikki Giovanni in the Classroom*, National Council of Teachers of English, 1999.

Jago's book is a slim guide, suggesting ways to introduce students to Giovanni and her work.

Josephson, Judith Pinkerton, *Nikki Giovanni: Poet of the People*, Enslow Publishers, Inc., 2000.

A biography written for students, this book has an entire chapter devoted to Giovanni's childhood in Knoxville and the relationship between her life and the poem.



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□, "Reflections on April 4, 1968," in *Black Feeling, Black Talk / Black Judgement*, William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1970, pp. 54-55.

Giovanni, Nikki, and Claudia Tate, Interview, in *Black Women Writers at Work*, edited by Claudia Tate, Continuum, 1983, pp. 60-78.

Juhasz, Suzanne, "'A Sweet Inspiration . . . of My People': The Poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks and Nikki Giovanni," in *Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry by Women, A New Tradition*, Harper Colophon Books, 1976, pp. 144-76.

Lee, Don L., "Nikki Giovanni," in *Dynamite Voices*, Broadside Press, 1971, pp. 68-74.



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## **Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Book**

The purpose of Poetry for Students (PfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, PfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels



frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of PfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

### Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of PfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

### How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in PfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by PfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

### Other Features

PfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Poetry for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

### Citing Poetry for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Poetry for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from PfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from PfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Poetry for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

### We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Poetry for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: [ForStudentsEditors@gale.com](mailto:ForStudentsEditors@gale.com). Or write to the editor at:

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