

# Lesson Plan

---

## New York City, Imagination, and Me

*In this poetry lesson, poet and T&W teaching artist [Jay Howard](#) invites students to write about their unique relationships to New York City.*

**Grades Taught:** 7th

**Genre(s) taught:** Prose

**Common Core Standards:** ([Refer to the ELA Standards > Reading Literature > Grade 7](#))

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.5](#)  
Analyze how a drama's or poem's form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning.

### Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

- Reflect on their NYC experience and learn about their classmates' NYC experience;
- Use sensory language in their writing;
- Use their imaginations to create six-word memoirs;
- Engage in free writing and participate in both group and individual exercises that will explore the sights and sounds of the city through poetry, music, and visual art inspired by New York City.

### Guiding Questions:

- How can we use sensory language to create rich images in our writing?
- How can we celebrate our own unique experience of NYC and celebrate other people's experience?

## LESSON

### Warm-Up: Stand Up, Sit Down

Start with this low-risk warm-up to so that students can learn more about one another and discover the range of experience and familiarity students have with different landmarks and sights and sounds of New York City.

Read off the following landmarks from NYC. Offer the following instruction: “Stand up and then sit down if you have been to...”

*LANDMARKS: Statue of Liberty, Empire State Building, Brooklyn Bridge Park, Bronx Zoo, Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, Museum of Natural History, Yankee Stadium, Citi Field, Sunnyside Gardens, etc.”*

“Stand up and then sit down if you have ever...”

*SIGHTS & SOUNDS: SEEN people sitting on a stoop, SMELLED nuts roasting from a street vendor, ever had a New York pretzel with mustard, HEARD the cooing of pigeons in the park or outside on a building ledge, FELT squished into a very crowded subway car, etc.*

Draw students’ attention to the fact that even though we all live in New York City, we all have different experiences of the city because of neighborhood we live in, the family we come from, our interests, and our unique perspectives.

**Introduction:** Place students into small groups and distribute index cards with the following quote by James Baldwin: “*Imagination creates the situation, and then, the situation creates imagination.*”

Invite students to discuss the quote in their small groups and determine the meaning. After a few minutes of discussion, ask each group to share what they think the quote means. Through discussion, guide students to explore the relationship between memory and imagination.

Ask students to recall the five senses, tell them that they can collect hints by thinking back to the warm-up and recalling the images from the “sights and sounds” portion. Tell students that they have the gift of a sixth sense as well: IMAGINATION. Share with them that their imaginations can help everything they write come alive. and that if they practice “turning on” their imaginations they can have access to a well of images beyond memory or experience.

**Main Activity:** Students will use their imaginations to write a six-word memoir about their experience of New York City. Facilitate a conversation about the fact that sometimes what we imagine can contain elements of the truth, or of memory, and that sometimes what we remember can contain imagined elements. Share a six-word memoir with them as a model, here are a few, but feel free to write your own!

*Croissants taste better when pigeons share.*

*Homerun and crowd cheers, “YANKEES RULE!”*

*Rockettes’ glittery precision blows my mind.*

**Closing:** Each student reads his or her six-word memoir aloud.

**Vocabulary:** Sensory Language, Memoir, Imagination

**Multi-Modal Approaches to Learning:** This lesson engages **interpersonal** learners during the group discussion and small group work; **intrapersonal** learners as they write independently; **linguistic** learners in considering Baldwin's quote and determining meaning; **aural** learners, hearing the six-word memoirs read aloud and reading their own memoirs aloud.