EARLY AMERICAN POETRY:
PHILIP FRENEAU AND
PHILLIS WHEATLEY... OR HOW TO
TEACH NEOCLASSICAL POETRY TO KIDS WHO HAVE NEVER
EVEN HEARD OF CLASSICAL POETRY
Unit Length: Four 90-minute blocks

- Day One: A super-condensed History of Revolutionary America (The white man's version)
- Day Two: The Poetry of Philip Freneau
- Day Three: Revolutionary America through the eyes of a slave
- Day Four: The Poetry of Phillis Wheatley
Unit Essential Questions (DE standards based):

1. What do the poems of Philip Freneau and Phillis Wheatley reveal about diversity in Revolutionary America?
2. To what extent is the information in their poems trustworthy?
3. How do poems about social and political issues affect me?

- Can be easily adapted to other state standards
Required Format: EATS

- Essential Question
- Activating Strategy
- Teaching Strategy
- Summarizing Strategy
- Graphic Organizers!!!
Day One
Anticipation Questions

1. True or False: At least some of our Founding Fathers believed that "all men were created equal" meant that every single man in the United States was entitled to freedom.

2. True or False: The Revolutionary War was fought in order to create a Democracy.

3. Why do so many government buildings have white pillars, and triangular roofs?

4. True or False: Many Americans wanted to make George Washington the King of America.

5. True of False: 18th century Americans could get clothing, food, and other goods from China, just like we do today.
Day One Goal: Understand American Values Around the time of the Revolution

- Value 1: Liberty, Freedom, and Equality
- Value 2: Republican Virtue
- Value 3: Commerce = Yay, Shopping!
- Value 4: The Roman Republic/Empire
- Value 5: Religion (Freedom of?)
Liberty, Freedom, and Equality
What is happening here?
Ralph Earl
Oliver and Abigail Wolcott Ellsworth,
1792 Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, CT
Note the flags at the center
Oil on canvas, 1790-1796
National Gallery of Art, Washington
Commerce
John Singleton Copley, *Paul Revere*
c. 1768-70, Oil on canvas, MFA Boston

English Creamware Teapot, c. 1765
Tea table, 1765–75, Philadelphia, **Mahogany**, MMA

Josiah Austin, Teapot, c. 1745–55. Charlestown, MA. MMA
Engraved with the coat of arms and crest of the Ware family.

**Chinese Export Porcelain Teacups and London Silver**
Tea Cannister, Teapot with stand and burner, and Covered Slop Bowl, spoon rest, all first qtr 18th century. Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Simeon Soumain
**Sugar bowl** c. 1738-45. New York, YUAG.
William Hogarth  
*The Strode Family* c. 1738  
Oil on canvas  
Tate Gallery, London

Richard Collins  
*A Family of Three at Tea*, c. 1727  
Oil on canvas  
Victoria & Albert Museum, London
The Roman Republic/Empire
Why would Colonists want to emulate the Roman Empire?
Reconstruction of the Colossal Statue of Constantine the Great vs Greenough’s Washington
The Pantheon

Monticello
Religion (Freedom of...
Draw a picture using stickfigures in which you illustrate American values around the time of the Revolution.
Day Two: The Poetry of Philip Freneau

Essential Question: How does the poetry of Phillip Freneau reflect the social and cultural values of Revolutionary America? How do these values compare to your own?
What are your personal values? Let’s make a list.
- Your list should include five words
- Values are not physical objects!
Poetry Vocab Review à la Steve Schmidt: Find my Partner

- Invocation
- Personification
- Genre
- Poetry
- Topic
- Theme
- Sensory Images
- Rhyme
- Rhythm
- Alliteration
- Allusion
- Ambiguity
- Audience
- Muse
- Extended Metaphor
- Iambic Pentameter
- Value
- Epithet
For most of Western history, gentlemen received a "Classical Education"

- All students read and translated the greatest Greek and Latin literature. Why?
  - Classical texts were considered the height of culture
  - The Greek and Roman Empires were the Golden Age of Europe, so people wanted to think like Greek and Roman citizens
  - Greek and Roman texts are so useful that people have educated themselves by translating them for centuries

- Let’s meet a self-taught Neo-Classicist!
One of the greatest and most well-paid British poets of his time

Wrote his own poetry

Wrote famous translations of Greek and Roman poetry

Any British or American poet living during the Revolution would have read and copied his poetry.

Let’s read the beginning of his translation of the Iliad!
Achilles' wrath, to **Greece** the direful spring
Of woes unnumber'd, heavenly goddess, sing!
That wrath which hurl'd to Pluto's gloomy reign
The souls of mighty chiefs untimely slain;
Whose **limbs unburied** on the naked shore,
Devouring dogs and hungry vultures tore.41
Since great Achilles and Atrides strove,
Such was the sovereign doom, and such the will
of Jove42
Declare, O Muse! in what ill-fated hour43
Sprung the fierce strife, from what offended
power
Latona's son a dire contagion spread,44
And heap'd the camp with mountains of the
dead;
The king of men his reverent priest defied,45
And for the king's offence the people died.

1. Kids will not understand this.
2. Next half hour spent to decoding this text.
What is the Iliad? Why was it valued? Why is it still valued?
The Neoclassic period lasted from about 1660—1798.

Neoclassical theorists saw man as a flawed creature.

Valued: order, reason, restraint, common sense, and conservatism.

They thought that art should be intellectual rather than emotional.

Drew their inspiration from Ancient Greece and Rome. (Frequently mention the Muses/gods, talked to ideas as if they were people, wrote in iambic pentameter)
Write an eight line poem about one of your values in which you do the following:

- Begin with an invocation (you may invoke a personal value or a God)
- Use iambic pentameter throughout (each line must have ten syllables)
- Use an epithet or an extended metaphor.
Achilles' wrath, to Greece the direful spring
Of woes unnumber'd, heavenly goddess, sing!
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Poetic devices:
- invocation
- iambic pentameter
- cheating
- epithet
- extended metaphor

Gods and goddesses
The Poetry of Phillip Freneau

- The Rising Empire
- On the Death of Benjamin Franklin
- The Dish of Tea
- To His Excellency General Washington
- To a Republican
- Excerpt of Ode to Liberty
Let some in beer place their delight,
O'er bottled porter waste the night,
Or sip the rosy wine:
A dish of Tea more pleases me,
Yields softer joys, provokes less noise,
And breeds no base design.

From China's groves, this present brought,
Enlivens every power of thought,
Riggs many a ship for sea:
Old maids' it warms, young widows charms;
And ladies' men, not one in ten
But courts them for their Tea.

When throbbing pains assail my head,
And dullness o'er my brain is spread,
(The muse no longer kind)
A single sip dispels the hyp :
To chace the gloom, fresh spirits come,
The flood-tide of the mind.
Lesson Essential Question: What emotions do you think a slave would have felt as he or she was brought to America, sold into slavery, converted, and then educated?

I just stole the Old South Church Lesson Plan.
Object Jigsaw

- Group One: The Advertisement section of the Boston Gazette (Sugar, slaves, and furniture)
- Group Two: Images of quill, ink and desk
- Group Three: The attestation confirming that Phillis Wheatley could read and write
- Group Four: Clothing that Colonial women would wear
- Group Five: Colonial money
- Group Six: The bill of sale for an unnamed male Negro

- Students complete worksheets and then share with the group
- I supplement with lecture on the Middle Passage/ clips from Roots
How does this painting conform to our image of Puritans (and the stories we tell about them)?

Augusta Bascombe's Puritan Thanksgiving.
How does this painting conform to our image of Puritans (and the stories we tell about them)?

Augusta Bascombe's Puritan Thanksgiving.
The Middle Passage
Tight Packing vs Loose Packing (no bathroom breaks)
Importance of Religion

Raphaelle Peale
Absalom Jones
1810
Delaware Art Museum
How would you feel if someone kidnapped you, and sold you to another country where they spoke a different language?

How would you feel if you were forced to work without pay for a strange family when you got to the country?

How would you feel if your master decided to teach you to read when none of the other slaves were taught to read?

How would you feel if you were told that even though you were a slave, you would go to Heaven?
Essential Question: How does the poetry of Phillis Wheatley compare to the poetry of Philip Freneau? What does their poetry reveal about their personal values?
Phillis Wheatley Bio

- 1753 – December 5, 1784?
- First Notable African American Poet
- Survived the Middle Passage, sold to the Wheatley Family
- Named after her slaveship
- Taught history, English, and science by the Wheatleys
- Devout Christian
Anticipation Questions

- How do you think Wheatley would have felt when she was first captured... when she learned she was named after the ship that carried her to a life of slavery... moved into the Wheatley house... educated... converted...?

- Do you think Wheatley’s poetry will be similar or different to the poetry of Freneau? Why? How might it be different?
1. How does Freneau’s poetry compare to Wheatley’s? What might account for the similarities or differences?
2. Why do you think Wheatley has more positive things to say about slavery than Freneau?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>FRENEAU</th>
<th>WHEATLEY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Style:</strong> Neo-Classical</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Subject Matter:</strong> Liberty, Empire, the Revolution, Death, Leisure</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Politics:</strong> Pro-Revolution, anti-slavery</td>
<td><strong>Politics:</strong> Pro-Revolution, Pro-slavery?!</td>
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Assessments: Quiz, and Ransom Note Poetry

1. Students complete a quiz on the vocabulary and content acquired during the lesson.

2. Ransom Note Poetry: Students revise their poem according to set guidelines. Their final product will be constructed by cutting out words and letters from a magazine and pasting them to a sheet of paper.