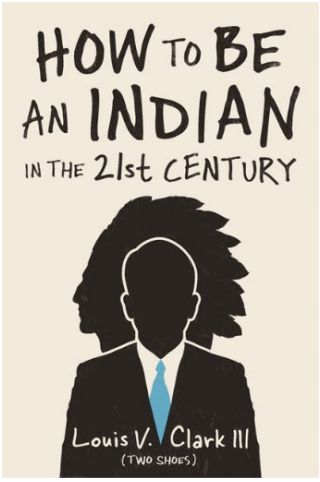
How to Be an Indian in the 21st Century



Cover image from *How to Be an Indian in the 21st Century*

Poetry Lessons

Curriculum materials for Grades: 9-12

WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Contents

Introduction 3
Enduring Understanding 4
Essential Questions 4
Learning Objectives 4
For the Teacher 4
Vocabulary 5
Additional Materials 6
Before You Start 6
STUDENT ACTIVITIES 7
Standards Alignment 19

Introduction

In his poetic memoir *How to Be an Indian in the 21st Century*, Louis V. Clark III explores questions about race, identity, religion, and more, drawing from personal experiences. In this packet, students will discover the different methods and vocabulary inherent in the poetry forms Louis used to tell his story.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS MEMOIR CONTAINS ADULT LANGUAGE AND THEMES. PLEASE REVIEW ALL MATERIALS BEFORE ASSIGNING THEM TO STUDENTS TO ENSURE THEY ARE APPROPRIATE AND TO PROVIDE CONTEXT.

Enduring Understanding

Poetry is a form of personal expression and storytelling. As such, poetic form is an excellent way to explore the nuances of a person's character. A person's character is complex and made up of personality, events, family, community, race, gender, and more that are experienced throughout one's lifetime.

Essential Questions

- What has changed and what has stayed the same for Indigenous people in this country?
- How does poetry allow for greater expression of self?
- What role does race play in how we experience the world?
- What factors such as race, religion, family, community, etc impact identity and daily life?

Learning Objectives

Learners will:

- Analyze free verse poetry
- Understand how a person's intersecting identities impacts the way they live their lives
- Reflect on what impacted the development of their identity
- Identify major elements such as character, characterization, metaphor, simile, personification, etc. in poetry (See vocabulary list for complete details)

For the Teacher

Choose as many or as few of the poems below to explore different ways the poetic form can be used as a means of expressing oneself. Each poetry lesson is self-contained. **Please note** that this memoir contains adult language and themes. Please review all materials before assigning them to students to ensure they are appropriate and to provide context.

Vocabulary

Students should be familiar with the following vocabulary words prior to engaging with the text. Page numbers reference activities using these terms. Terms may be researched in any up-to-date reference dictionary.

Allegory	**p. 13**
Alliteration	**p. 15**
Antagonist	**p. 5**
Character	**p. 11**
Characterization	**p. 8**
Conflict	**p. 9; p. 15**
Connotation	**p. 6**
Denotation	**p. 6**
Factor	**p. 3; p. 4; p. 5**
Figurative language	**p. 10**
Flashback	**p. 9; p. 13**
Free Verse	**p. 3**
Hyperbole	**p. 10; p. 11**
Idiom	**p. 9**
Image	**p. 10; p. 11**
Irony	**p. 8**
Literal language	**p. 10**
Metaphor	**p. 4; p. 11**
Narrative	**p. 9**
Onomatopoeia	**p. 14**
Personification	**p. 4**
Point of View	**p. 7**
Recognition	**p. 5**
Repetition	**p. 14**
Rhyme	**p. 11; p. 14**
Satire	**p. 12**
Simile	**p. 4; p. 11**
Style	**p. 14**
Symbol	**p. 12**
Theme	**p. 4**
Tone	**p. 11; p. 14**
Trait	**p. 3; p. 4; p. 5**
Understatement	**p. 10**

Additional Materials

- Classroom copies of *How to Be an Indian in the 21st Century* should be made available for students.

BEFORE YOU START

Full Class Watch: Louis V Clark III Author Showcase **(first 12 minutes)**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hcBfly01oA

1. List up to ten character **traits** or other **factors** that impact his identity (Indian, Catholic, etc)

2. How does this interview make it clear that Louis values education?

3. Discuss the changes in Louis's college major(s)? Why did he settle on his last major?

4. What factors did Louis have to overcome to become an author?

5. Throughout Louis's life who helped support him as an author and poet?

6. Louis' work is often a form of poetry called "**free verse**." How might this choice of expression affect his message?

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

My Name is Louis Clark p. 5

Read ***My Name is Louis*** and answer the following questions:

- In this opening poem, Louis uses both **metaphor** and **simile** to describe himself and his relationship to the world. Find and define an example of each.
- What does Louis **personify** in this poem? Share examples.
- How are Western and tribal names different? How are they the same? What do you think is the meaning of Louis' tribal name of Two Shoes?
- Looking back at your list from above, what **factors** or **traits** are evident in this poem? What might you add to the list?
- Do you agree or disagree with the final lines of Louis' poem? Why or why not?
- What do you think Louis is trying to say here: "And all good stories are partly truth and partly fiction."

Performance Task:

Write three to four sentences predicting the overall **theme** of Louis' work. You will use this prediction again at the end of the unit.

Self-Assessment

- Who are you?
- Where does your name come from?
- How does race impact your character?
- How does family and community impact your character?
- How will you express your identity?

First Grade Lessons (p. 11-12)

Analyze the following passage (p. 11) and then read the poem ***First Grade Lessons***. What does it tell us about Louis and the times he lived in?

I was given the surname Clark, so for all practical purposes I was white. No one ever told me I was an Indian. The doctor didn't pull the baby out with those salad tongs and holler, "Hey, an Indian." No, this was the 1950s and you really didn't want to be labeled "red."

- Who is the **antagonist** in this poem? Cite a line from the poem as proof.
- Why do you think Louis brings up Jesus and the color of his skin? What point is he trying to make?
- Looking back at your list from above, what **factors** or **traits** are evident in this poem? What might you add to the list?
- What example of **recognition** can be found in this poem? Cite it and explain why you chose that citation.

Performance Task

How do you see yourself? How do others see you? Think back to a time someone told you something about how they saw you. Did it surprise you? Did you already know?

Make a list of positive character traits about yourself. List as many as you like, but no fewer than three. How do these traits help tell the story of who you are?

Momma Cried (p. 18-19)

Analyze the following passage and then read the poem ***Momma Cried***. Look for examples of connotative and denotative language being used to play off each other.

Momma cried alone in the night
Like a burglar stealing jewels
She stole moments to be human
Yet, come the morning, she regressed
This she tried to hide
By anointing herself
With cold water

Performance Task:

Choose a poem about Louis' mother and father. Cite five examples of connotative and denotative language along with its literal and implied meaning.

Connotative Language	Denotative Language	Literal Meaning	Implied Meaning
Like a burglar stealing jewels, She stole moments to be human	stole	to take without asking	unseen, unknown, a hidden act, possibly shameful

Closed Eyes p. 20

When Momma beat my Daddy and my Daddy beat my Mom
The sun kept right on shining, no one said that It was wrong
The only consequence that we came to know
Was an eerie silence in the house we kids were left alone.

Read ***Closed Eyes*** and answer the following questions:

- What does this poem tell us about Louis's identity?
- How does Louis feel about his place in life?
- Whose **point of view** is captured in this poem?
- Is it written in the past, present, or future tense?

What is Louis saying here?
Is Superman an Indian or are his ethics faded

Performance task

Create a poem, rap, or drawing with your eyes closed.
Write a reflection on what his title might mean and how having your eyes closed changes the way you live your life.

Rules (p. 21)

Life on the playground; can be a living hell

Read ***Rules*** and answer the following questions:

- In what way is the title of this poem **ironic**?
- How does Louis **characterize** his mother and father?

What "unwritten rules" can you remember from playground activities?

- Compare this poem to the phrase: "The good old days."
    - What do people mean by that phrase?
    - What might people be forgetting?

Performance Task:

Describe or imagine an event in your life where you had to follow unwritten rules in order to succeed. You may use poetry, prose, or a drawing to describe this event.

Just Your Race (p.46)

But when we're out in public
You have to know your place
It's really not you my friend
It's just your race

Read ***Just Your Race*** and answer the following questions:

- Summarize the **narrative** of *Just Your Race*
- What is the underlying **conflict** in this poem?
- What does the **idiom** "row to hoe" mean? Where do you think it comes from? How is it used in this poem?
- Cite where Louis uses a **flashback** in this poem.

Performance Task

Look up and define **systemic racism**. How is *Just Your Race* an example of systemic racism in action?

Who Ordered Pizza and Men of Honor p.57-60

So manifest your destiny
With William Clark in tow
Andy Johnson snubbed the courts
And raked in lots of dough.
He said let's kill the Redman
And take away his land
There's property in Bighorn
Ripe for a Custer stand.

Read ***Who Ordered Pizza*** **and** ***Men of Honor*** and answer the following questions:

- Which types of **figurative language** did Louis use in "Who Ordered the Pizza"?
- Louis uses **hyperbole** in a lot of his poems. What impact does using an **understatement** here have on the meaning of his historical references?
- Which types of **figurative language** did Louis use in "Men of Honor"?

Standing there with balding heads
bearded chins of white
earning fate within the sun
sometimes wrong, or right
men I knew years ago
accepting what they'd give
hoping that within this poem
their stories will still live.

- Louis's voice changes when he reflects on his poetry on pages 58-59. How does the mixture of **literal** and **figurative language** change your perception of the poems?
- What or who do the **images** of the balding heads and bearded chins of white refer to?

Performance Task

As Louis did, write a short reflection combining **literal** and **figurative language** techniques.

There's a Mouse in the House (p. 72-73)

There's a mouse in the house, our Momma screamed.
There's a mouse in the house, or so it seems,
The world is coming to an end,
There's a mouse in the house, my friend.

Read ***There's a Mouse in the House*** and answer the following questions:

- How does Louis' use of **rhyme** change the **tone** of his poetry?
- How does the **character** of his parents change from earlier poems?
- Cite examples of **hyperbole** from this poem.
- How is the **tone** of this poem different from earlier poems? Why do you think that is?

Performance Task:

Take an **image**, memory, or experience and create a **rhyming** verse about it. Highlight your use of the following (if any): **hyperbole**, **simile**, and **metaphor**. What is the **tone** of your poem?

Indian, I Think and North Dakota Indian (p. 76-78)

Born and raised on the reservation, corn soup in my veins.
Had Fry Bread at my graduation, but I think it kind of strange,
I don't look like what I see when you say you're honoring me.

--

Can't you see I'm honoring you,
'cause you are such a man
Can't you tell by looking at me,
my Grandma was an Indian

Read ***Indian, I Think*** and ***North Dakota Indian*** and answer the following questions:

- How does Louis use **satire** as he describes his struggles with the Indian mascot/logo issue?
    - Who or what is he **satirizing**?
- How is Louis using popular culture's version of an Indian as **symbolic** of the problems with stereotypes?

Performance Task:

Compare and contrast the following names and logos (similarities; differences):

- Washington Redskins (NFL) and the Dallas Cowboys (NFL)
- Chicago Blackhawks (NHL) and the Minnesota Wild (NHL)
- Atlanta Braves (MLB) and the Chicago Cubs (MLB)

Share your thoughts in a class discussion or in small groups. What do you think of these logos? How does popular culture see them? How might Indigenous people view them?

Helpful definitions (Merriam-Webster):

logo: an identifying symbol (as for use in advertising). *The Nike "swoosh" **logo** is recognized worldwide.*
mascot: a person, animal, or object adopted by a group as a symbolic figure especially to bring them good luck. *Our school **mascot** is Bucky Badger.*

Old Men Laugh p. 81-84

Read ***Old Men Laugh***

Watch:

Two opposing views in *Redskins is a Powerful Name* and *Proud to Be*:

http://ftw.usatoday.com/2014/08/redskins-video

Answer the following questions.

What is Louis's opinion on the Mascot debate?

The big-nosed Indian in Cleveland, only Jimmy Durante could do honor to that Injun. The Tomahawk chop and chant in Atlanta, I've never seen or heard such goings-on here in Oneida. Then, the Redskins. White history books neglect to tell about the 1653 proclamation from the New England Trading Company putting out a bounty on our people.

- Can you see both sides of the argument in his poem/song?
- Is this poem **allegorical**?
- Who were the white men in black robes and why did they come?
- Identify a **flashback**.
- What power does Louis's poem with a **flashback** have?
- Did either of the videos use **flashbacks**? Why or why not?
- What source do you think best argues the Mascot issue?

Performance Task

Write a short poem/song/rap about a current debate. Research the debate and using a **flashback** like Louis did, ground that debate in its historical context. As Louis did, deconstruct your poem line-by-line to demonstrate the meaning behind the words and the location of the **flashback**.

A Day with Grandpa p 96-97

Run. Run. Run.
We run all day
Running is fun
And then I say.

Shh, Shh, Shh,
Don't make a peep
Grandpa's babysitting
Fast asleep.

Read ***A Day with Grandpa*** and answer the following questions:

- How does **repetition** change the meaning of this poem?
- Identify an example of **Onomatopoeia.**
- Louis does not **rhyme** in most of his poems. What is the **tone** of this poem?
- How does the **style** of this poem differ from some of his other poems?

Performance Task

Look back on all of your work in this unit. Reflect on the subjects you chose and the **style** you have been using. Choose an entirely different topic and style to create a new reflective piece on something in your life.

I am Torn p. 101-102

I AM TORN

between

the wilderness of my youth

and

the white world we call civilization

Read ***I am Torn*** and answer the following questions:

- What does Louis mean by these words? Why does he write "white world we call civilization"? What does civilization mean? Are all cultures "civilized"?
- Louis is pointing some of the **conflicts** he faces in his identity and in his life. Refer back to the list of identity characteristics and discuss how many of those identities are conflicting in this poem.
- What is Louis's most powerful use of **alliteration** in this poem?

Performance Task

What are some of the **conflicts** in you? Represent the parts of yourself that are in conflict through poetry, rap, or artistic representation.

Standards Alignment

Social Studies (pre-2019)

- History
  - B.12.1 Explain different points of view on the same historical event, using data gathered from various sources, such as letters, journals, diaries, newspapers, government documents, and speeches
  - B.12.12 Analyze the history, culture, tribal sovereignty, and current status of the American Indian tribes and bands in Wisconsin
- Political Science
  - C.12.15 Describe and analyze the origins and consequences of slavery, genocide, and other forms of persecution, including the Holocaust
- Behavioral Sciences
  - E.12.2 Explain how such factors as physical endowment and capabilities, family, gender, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, attitudes, beliefs, work, and motivation contribute to individual identity and development
  - E.12.3 Compare and describe similarities and differences in the ways various cultures define individual rights and responsibilities, including the use of rules, folkways, mores, and taboos
  - E.12.4 Analyze the role of economic, political, educational, familial, and religious institutions as agents of both continuity and change, citing current and past examples
  - E.12.5 Describe the ways cultural and social groups are defined and how they have changed over time
  - E.12.6 Analyze the means by which and extent to which groups and institutions can influence people, events, and cultures in both historical and contemporary settings
  - E.12.8 Analyze issues of cultural assimilation and cultural preservation among ethnic and racial groups in Wisconsin, the United States, and the world
  - E.12.9 Defend a point of view related to an ethical issue such as genetic engineering, declaring conscientious objector status, or restricting immigration
  - E.12.10 Describe a particular culture as an integrated whole and use that understanding to explain its language, literature, arts, traditions, beliefs, values, and behaviors
  - E.12.12 Explain current and past efforts of groups and institutions to eliminate prejudice and discrimination against racial, ethnic, religious, and social groups such as women, children, the elderly, and individuals who are disabled
  - E.12.13 Compare the ways in which a universal theme is expressed artistically in three different world cultures
  - E.12.16 Identify and analyze factors that influence a person's mental health

Reading Standards for Literature (Grades 9-12) (pre-2019)

Key Ideas and Details

- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Craft and Structure

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)
- Analyze a case in which grasping point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 11–CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Reading Standards for Informational Text (Grades 9-12) (pre-2019)

Key Ideas and Details

- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Craft and Structure

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).
- Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 11–CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.