

# Poems For Black History Month

## A PLACE IN THE COUNTRY

BY TOI DERRICOTTE

We like the houses here.  
We circle the lake turning  
into dark cleavages, dense-packed gleamings.  
We could live here, we say.  
We're smiling, but thinking  
of the houses at the last resort:  
The real estate agent looked surprised  
when she saw Bruce's face; then flipped  
quickly through the glossy pictures—  
I'm sure you won't like this one;  
I can tell it's not your kind.  
Our house in Essex Fells  
took a year to sell and sold  
to a black family. A friend explained,  
once a house is owned  
by black people, they're the only ones  
they'll show it to. Do we want to live  
some place with a view  
overlooking the politics?  
When we pass  
an exit named "Negro Mountain,"  
Bruce smiles and jerks the wheel  
as if we almost missed our turn.  
Why must everything we want  
come by stealth? Why is every road  
in this bright country furnished  
with its history of hatred? Yet  
we keep smiling, driven  
by a desire beyond the logic  
of if we can afford it,  
and whether we would love  
or hate it if we did buy.

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**Poems for Black History Month** serve as a poignant reminder of the struggles, achievements, and rich cultural heritage of the African American community. Each February, as we commemorate Black History Month, poetry emerges as a powerful medium to express the complexities of the Black experience in America. Through verse, poets articulate the pain of oppression, the joy of resilience, and the beauty of identity. This article delves into the

significance of poetry during this month, highlights notable poets, and offers a selection of impactful poems to inspire reflection and understanding.

## The Importance of Poetry in Black History Month

Poetry has long been a vital form of expression within the African American community. It serves several important purposes during Black History Month:

- **Preservation of History:** Poetry captures the experiences, struggles, and triumphs of Black individuals and communities, preserving them for future generations.
- **Promotion of Awareness:** Poems can illuminate the injustices faced by African Americans, fostering empathy and understanding among diverse audiences.
- **Celebration of Culture:** Through rhythm, rhyme, and imagery, poets celebrate African American culture, highlighting its richness and vibrancy.
- **Inspiration for Activism:** Many poems motivate individuals to take action against social injustices, encouraging readers to engage in activism and advocacy.

## Notable Poets to Explore

Throughout history, numerous poets have contributed to the rich tapestry of African American literature. Here are a few notable figures whose works resonate deeply during Black History Month:

### 1. Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes was a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance, known for his profound insights into the African American experience. His poem "I, Too" serves as a powerful assertion of equality and resilience, emphasizing the strength of the Black identity.

### 2. Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou's poetry often reflects themes of struggle, triumph, and self-acceptance. Her poem "Still I Rise" is an empowering anthem that speaks to the unbreakable spirit of Black women.

### 3. Gwendolyn Brooks

As the first Black woman to win a Pulitzer Prize, Gwendolyn Brooks' work often highlights the lives of everyday African Americans. Her poem "We Real

Cool" captures the essence of youth and rebellion.

#### **4. Nikki Giovanni**

Nikki Giovanni's poetry is known for its boldness and authenticity. In her piece "Ego Tripping," she celebrates Black womanhood and individuality, showcasing the beauty of self-love.

#### **5. Claude McKay**

A prominent figure in the Harlem Renaissance, Claude McKay's poem "If We Must Die" is a rallying cry against oppression, urging individuals to fight back in the face of adversity.

### **Impactful Poems for Reflection**

To honor Black History Month, consider reading and reflecting on the following poems, each of which encapsulates important themes relevant to the African American experience:

#### **1. "I, Too" by Langston Hughes**

This poem speaks to the resilience of the Black community, asserting that despite oppression, they will rise and claim their rightful place in society.

#### **2. "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou**

Angelou's powerful verses celebrate the strength and tenacity of Black women, affirming that they will rise against adversity with grace and dignity.

#### **3. "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks**

Brooks' poem captures the essence of youthful rebellion and the challenges faced by Black youth, providing a snapshot of their experiences and struggles.

#### **4. "Ego Tripping" by Nikki Giovanni**

In this poem, Giovanni celebrates her identity and the historical contributions of Black women, emphasizing the importance of self-empowerment.

#### **5. "If We Must Die" by Claude McKay**

McKay's work is a call to action, urging the oppressed to stand up against injustice and fight for their rights with dignity.

# How to Use Poetry for Black History Month

Incorporating poetry into Black History Month celebrations can enrich understanding and appreciation of African American culture. Here are some suggestions for using poetry in meaningful ways:

1. **Host a Poetry Reading:** Organize a gathering where individuals can share their favorite poems by Black poets, fostering discussion and reflection.
2. **Incorporate Poetry in Education:** Educators can introduce students to important poets and their works, encouraging analysis and creative responses.
3. **Create a Poetry Wall:** Set up a display featuring influential poems and quotes from Black poets, allowing people to engage with the material throughout the month.
4. **Write Original Poems:** Encourage individuals to write their own poems reflecting on their experiences or thoughts related to Black history and culture.
5. **Utilize Social Media:** Share poems or lines from notable works on social media platforms, sparking conversations and increasing awareness.

## Conclusion

**Poems for Black History Month** serve as a powerful testament to the strength, resilience, and beauty of the African American experience. By engaging with the works of notable poets and reflecting on their messages, we can deepen our understanding of the struggles and triumphs that have shaped Black history. Poetry not only preserves the past but also inspires hope for the future, reminding us that the fight for equality and justice continues. As we celebrate Black History Month, let us honor the voices of those who have come before us and commit to amplifying the narratives that deserve to be heard.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What themes are commonly explored in poems for Black History Month?

Common themes include resilience, identity, heritage, social justice, and the celebration of black culture and history.

### Can you recommend a famous poem that embodies the spirit of Black History Month?

One iconic poem is 'Still I Rise' by Maya Angelou, which powerfully conveys themes of strength and perseverance against oppression.

## How can poetry be used as a tool for education during Black History Month?

Poetry can illuminate historical experiences, provoke critical thinking, and inspire discussions on race, identity, and equality.

## Are there contemporary poets whose work focuses on Black history and culture?

Yes, poets like Claudia Rankine, Jericho Brown, and Amanda Gorman write impactful poetry that addresses contemporary issues within the Black experience.

## What role does spoken word play in the celebration of Black History Month?

Spoken word poetry serves as a dynamic form of expression that engages audiences, often addressing social issues and personal narratives relevant to Black history.

## How can schools incorporate poetry into their Black History Month curriculum?

Schools can host poetry readings, analyze significant works, encourage students to write their own poems, and create projects that explore the impact of Black poets.

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