

## “J. OTIS POWELL?: A WRITER’S WRITER. HE WORKED MAGIC AND YOU CAN TOO!”



### YOUR TEACHING ARTIST: LOUIS PORTER II

Louis Porter II, Ed. D., is a longtime writer, multidisciplinary teaching artist and educator. His work has appeared in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, *Star Tribune* and *The Washington Post*. Porter’s short story, *Reminders*, was part of the collection *Blues Vision: African American Writing from Minnesota*.

### OTHER ARTIST(S) AND ARTISTIC MODELS (POEMS, PLAYS, ARTWORKS, PERFORMANCES, ETC.) INCLUDED IN THIS LESSON:

- J. Otis Powell?: “Freedom”
- “Ancient Young Souls
- “Maturation”
- “Tea Party in a Fox Hole”
- “Esoteric”
- “Speaking in Tongues”

J. Otis Powell? (1955-2017) was a powerful, Minneapolis-based poet, spoken word artist and writer who enjoyed blending and mixing genres. J. Otis loved jazz and often incorporated music into his live performances. Throughout his career, he formally and informally mentored writers of all ages. This lesson will help students know who J. Otis was through his work, try out some of his writing style, and develop their own writing.

### LEARNING GOALS:

Students will learn about the Black Arts Movement in the United States, and explore the influences of J. Otis Powell? and Amiri Baraka. Students will learn how to produce a tribute to someone they care about and practice this mode of poetry.

### MEASURING ACHIEVEMENT:

You will be able to measure student achievement based on:

- Completion of their personal tribute poem.
- A clear progression from first draft to final product.
- Increased appreciation, understanding of, and eagerness to write poetry.
- Ability to have a meaningful conversation about their works and the Black Arts Movement.

**GRADE LEVEL(S):** This lesson is designed for high school students, but could be modified for middle school as well.



### COMPAS PRISM PROGRAM

Teaching Artist-designed lesson plans inspired by the work of local and national artists

## LESSON ACTIVITIES

**(COMPLETE THESE ACTIVITIES IN THE ORDER LISTED TO ACHIEVE CLASSROOM LEARNING GOALS)**

- **Introduce students to J. Otis Powell and his work through reading the poems listed above. This can include students reading some of his work aloud.**
- **Use the reference section, to briefly explore the Black Arts Movement in the United States, and take a look at Amiri Baraka, who was Powell's mentor.**
- **Facilitate a discussion of some of the characteristics and attributes of Powell's approach to poetry.**
- **Have students write their own poems, emulating J. Otis's style**
- **Finally, have students write a tribute poem, to be delivered out loud, in which they honor someone who mentored them.**

### HOW TO PREPARE FOR THIS LESSON:

- Students and Teachers can begin by reading some of J. Otis Powell's work online.
- Students can listen to some recordings, such as "Balm", available through Minneapolis Public Library.
- Teachers may view him on Youtube and incorporate those performances when working with students.

### EQUIPMENT/SUPPLIES NEEDED:

- Laptop and Projector
- Paper and writing utensils
- A CD Player or speakers, if planning to listen to "Balm"

### EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ADDRESSED IN THIS LESSON PLAN:

English Language Arts:

9.7.3.3 Write narratives and other creative texts to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

9.7.5.5 Use a writing process to develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, drafting, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

9.7.10.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

### OTHER NOTES FROM YOUR COMPAS TEACHING ARTIST:

Here are links to video resources that may be useful for preparing the lesson:

A reading of J. Otis Powell's "Pieces of Sky" Chapbook. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_fgDRULXSJQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fgDRULXSJQ)

J. Otis Powell reading at Common Good Books. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yf-787WyJ-EU>

J. Otis Powell's honoring at the 2017 Sally Awards, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-sUW9lqUmFE>

**WHAT COULD A COMPAS TEACHING ARTIST HELP YOU ACHIEVE IN YOUR CLASSROOM?**

**Learn more at [COMPAS.org](https://COMPAS.org)**



## REFERENCES

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